

# FOUNDATIONS

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# FOUNDATIONS

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# FOUNDATIONS

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**Foundations** is published by the **British Evangelical Council** in May and November; its aim is to cover contemporary theological issues by articles and reviews, taking in exegesis, biblical theology, church history and apologetics – and to indicate their relevance to pastoral ministry; its policy gives particular attention to the theology of evangelical churches which are outside pluralist ecumenical bodies.

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## Editor's Notes

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**A**s I have an article this issue I will keep my notes brief and to the point. For various reasons this issue has only a few articles, two of which are longer than is usual. I decided to include a Mark Karlberg's review article of Robert Reymond's *Systematic Theology* because of the way it gives not only an assessment of this important work, but also because of the way it is something of a refresher course on systematic theology. While readers will not agree with everything Karlberg says, they will find his overview stimulating and thought provoking.

Philip Eveson again gives us his survey of Old Testament literature. From the responses I have had, readers find these surveys very helpful. I have decided to include two more in future issues. In addition to the Old Testament and New Testament surveys there will also be surveys of systematic and historical theology. These surveys will each appear on a biennial basis and will cover the literature appearing in that two year period. Books reviews have always been a problem for *Foundations* since the journal contains relatively few pages and appears only twice a year. It is difficult to review the range of theological books adequately. I have opted for this survey approach as a way of highlighting key works that ministers and others should know about and to leave reviewing of specific books to journals such as *Themelios*, *Churchman* and *Evangelical Quarterly*.

Finally let me draw a few books to your attention. In the last issue I highlighted a number of books related to pastoral ministry. One that arrived too late to be included was **Peter Hicks's** *What could I say?* (IVP 2000). This book is a simple handbook for those who seek to help others facing difficult problems. It is aimed at ordinary church members, but I am sure that, like me, many ministers will find it an invaluable resource. Part 1 is an introduction to caring for each other in the body of Christ and part 2 is a series of short chapters covering everything from abortion to work issues. I recommend this book very highly.

All of us need to stay close to the Lord. The second volume of **Don Carson's** *For the Love of God* (IVP 1999) is just as good as the first volume. In this volume he takes the second series of readings in Robert Murray M'Cheyne's Bible Reading Calendar and gives a meditation for each day of the year. Some of the meditations are superb, others less so, but all are refreshing and stimulating. As well as helping us meditate on Scripture for ourselves these pieces are also very suggestive for sermons. Of a similar nature, although from an earlier generation, is **Robert Law's** *Daily Prayer and Praise* (Two volumes, Banner of Truth 2000). Each short chapter takes us through the psalms and helps us to meditate upon them. For devotional reading I would recommend **Octavius Winslow's** *Help Heavenward* (Banner of Truth 2000). I am a great fan of Winslow. Winslow was a well-known minister in the 19th century who was able to distil Puritan theology and spirituality in his books. This one, which is subtitled 'Guidance and strength for the Christian's life-journey', is a series of meditations on the Christian life as it makes its way to heaven. This is a real tonic for the soul. Also helpful is **D.M. Lloyd-Jones's** *Heirs of Salvation – studies in biblical assurance* (Bryntirion Press 2000). These sermons on several key figures in Hebrews 11 are most encouraging.

A brief but very stimulating book is Carl Trueman's *Reformation: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow* (Bryntirion 2000). Originally delivered as lectures at the Evangelical Theological College of Wales, this book reminds us of what the Reformation was essentially about and its relevance for us today. The lessons that Trueman highlights – among them the necessity of doctrine and the centrality of the cross – need to be reaffirmed by evangelicals today. A far bigger book, but one that also addresses some key issues facing evangelicals today, is **Douglas Groothuis's *Truth Decay*** (IVP 2000). Groothuis looks at the post-modern challenge to the very idea of truth and how this is affecting evangelicalism. As well as engaging a number of theologians such as Alister McGrath, Stanley Grenz and Leslie Newbiggin, Groothuis also makes a good case for the historic evangelical understanding of propositional truth. This is where some evangelicals are weak as they try to take account of the post-modern challenge. If you want a book that will give you a good overview of one of the key theological battlefields today then this is it.

Finally I would like to recommend two books on revival. Recently some healthy, biblical thinking has been undertaken in relation to the biblical basis for revival. Much writing on revival is of an historical nature and begs the question of its biblical basis. **Ian Murray** has made a significant contribution to this debate in his fine book *Pentecost Today?* (Banner of Truth) which I mentioned in a previous issue. In *Can We Pray for Revival?* (Evangelical Press 2001) **Brian Edwards** continues to explore the biblical basis of revival. He questions Murray's thesis that strictly speaking revival has only happened after Pentecost and seeks to establish that revival also happened in all its essentials in the Old Testament. If it didn't then a number of key passages that have been understood to warrant an expectation of revival would be taken away. After exploring what revival is, Edwards considers whether it happened in the Old Testament. He looks at the work of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament as well as examples of revival, the experience of revival and the expectation of revival. Finally he looks at the New Testament and answers the question of whether we should pray for revival. His answer is yes. Edwards doesn't see the difference between the Old and New Testament experiences of revival as 'one of kind or quality or, strictly speaking, of degree and measure', but rather of 'extent and purpose' (p. 67). In particular Edwards sees revival in the New Testament for the purpose of witness and extending to all God's people. Edwards makes a good case that revival happened in the Old Testament, but I am not convinced that he has sufficiently taken into account the discontinuity between the covenants and the significance of Pentecost. In spite of acknowledging the danger of flattening out the contours of redemptive history I think Edwards has a tendency to do just that. Surely a passage such as John 7:37-39 indicates that the experience of the Holy Spirit in the new covenant is one of quality, degree and measure and not only of extent and purpose. The same can be said for passages in Paul's letters that describe Christian experience. While revival in the sense of a significant advance of God's kingdom happened in the Old Testament there was something deeper and richer that happened after Pentecost. I have no difficulty in finding revival in the Old Testament, but I think what God's people experience under the new covenant is something greater and better.

*Continued on page 16*

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# Robert and James Haldane and the Quest for Evangelical Union

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*Kenneth Brownell*

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At their best Protestant evangelicals have always dreamed of union and worked to see it realised, but tragically it has remained an elusive dream in spite of good intentions and hard work. Already at the Reformation the danger of fragmentation was recognised and leaders such as John Calvin sought unity among the forces of Protestantism. This unitive thrust within Protestantism has appeared in subsequent generations, especially in times of revival and renewal. In the 17th century men such as Richard Baxter, John Dury and Amos Comenius worked long and hard for the visible unity of God's people. In the wake of the revivals of the 18th century in Britain and America there was a similar desire on the part of many Protestants for evangelical union. It seems that when the central concerns of the gospel are pre-eminent there is a hunger on the part of God's people to unite as far as possible in its interests.

The purpose of this article is to explore this tension between unity and division as seen in the lives of those remarkable Scottish brothers, Robert and James Haldane. The Haldanes lived at a time of significant spiritual awakening in Protestant churches in Britain. Born in the 1760s and converted in the 1790s, the Haldanes lived and worked at a time when Protestant evangelicalism was expanding rapidly in the wake of the Great Awakening of the mid-18th century. Both brothers were actively involved in many of the evangelical enterprises that emerged in this period and characterised it. They were both leading officers in the great evangelical army that was transforming so much of British society. Across denominations evangelicals united together to advance the kingdom of Jesus Christ. Yet active as they were in what has been called, to change the metaphor, "the evangelical empire", the Haldanes also contributed to its fragmentation. In many ways they exemplified the centrifugal and centripetal forces at work in late 18th and early 19th century evangelicalism, forces that at the same time united it and threatened its fragmentation. The Haldane legacy is an ambiguous one that shows both the union that evangelicals long for but also the divisions to which evangelicals are too often prone. For this reason I think that the Haldanes have much to teach evangelicals today.

By any standard the Haldane brothers are remarkable for what they were able to achieve in the course of their full and active lives. They were born (Robert in 1764 and James in 1768) into a wealthy family with aristocratic connections. The family estate, Airthrey, was what is today the location of Gleneagles Hotel in Perthshire. After being privately educated both brothers entered naval service, Robert with the Royal Navy and James with the East India Company in which he became a captain. After leaving the navy in 1783 Robert studied at Edinburgh University and then spent the next ten years attending to the family estate as a country gentleman. After a short flirtation with scepticism and radical politics (inspired by the French Revolution), Robert was

converted as was James shortly afterwards. David Bogue, the well-known Independent minister in Gosport in Hampshire, was instrumental in James's conversion and had a profound influence on both the brothers. The robust, experimental Calvinistic evangelicalism that characterised Bogue came also to characterise the Haldanes.

After their conversions the brothers sought to go to Bengal as missionaries along with several other like-minded men. Robert was particularly inspired by the example of William Carey and was willing to sell his estate and devote his life and fortune to this enterprise. Unfortunately the East India Company was unwilling to grant them permission to enter India, in spite of the pulling of many strings in high places. The Haldanes saw this disappointment as a providential indication that they were to focus their evangelistic concern on Scotland. From 1796 to 1800 the brothers undertook six evangelistic tours of the Highlands, Orkney, the west coast and the Borders. On several of these trips they were accompanied by such prominent English evangelicals as Charles Simeon and Rowland Hill. They preached in the open air and in whatever churches would welcome them. Wherever they went they had a significant impact, with many people being converted and a number of Sunday schools being established. They also met considerable opposition from moderate ministers in the Church of Scotland. They did not help themselves in this by occasionally criticising the non-evangelical preaching they often heard, and not surprisingly they were the object of a Pastoral Admonition passed by the General Assembly over Evangelical objections in 1799.

In order to facilitate their home evangelism the Haldane brothers established the Society for Propagating the Gospel at Home in 1797. Soon afterwards they were establishing new churches where there were significant numbers of converts and they began to train evangelists. The principal church was at the Circus in Edinburgh where James became pastor. Founded in 1798 the church moved in 1801 to a purpose built Tabernacle on Leith Walk that seated 3,000 people. Until the founding of the Circus church the Haldanes remained loyal if somewhat critical members of the Church of Scotland. Even afterwards they did not see themselves as opposed to the Established Church, but only as supplementing its ministry and trying to reach people without Christ. Nevertheless the founding of the SPGH and what became known as the "tabernacle" churches was effectively the beginning of the Congregational denomination in Scotland. The Haldanes themselves also began to develop a number of distinctive views of their own, culminating in their conversion to what was then called the anti-paedobaptist position. Their conversion split their movement and was a boost to the emerging Baptist denomination in Scotland.

Beyond Scotland Robert Haldane was particularly active. He sat on the committees of a number of key evangelical societies and like his brother he was a prolific author and did not shy from controversy, as we will see. He had a sharp theological mind that was put to good use when he visited Geneva in 1816-17 during an extended tour of the continent. There he lectured privately on Romans to a number of theological students who were wonderfully converted, to the chagrin of their rationalistic professors. Among these students were men who would subsequently become leaders in a revival of the Reformed churches in Switzerland and France – men such as Merle D'Aubigne, Frederic Monod, Cesar Malan, Henri Pictet and others.<sup>1</sup> Robert was particularly involved in the Apocrypha controversy that wracked the Bible Society in the 1820s. James also was involved in controversy, especially about his views on church



government and, towards the end of his life, on the atonement. Robert died in 1842 and James in 1851.

This brief biographical sketch gives us some idea of the significance of the Haldane brothers for understanding both the promise and the pitfalls of the quest for evangelical union. Using their lives as an illustration I would like us to go on to consider first the noble ideal of evangelical union, then the attempted realisation of evangelical union and finally the tragic failure of evangelical union. I trust that the result will shed some light on our own quest for evangelical unity today.

## **The noble ideal of evangelical union as illustrated by the Haldane brothers**

By the end of the 18th century the ideal of evangelical unity was widespread. In the wake of the Great Awakening earlier in the century there was a desire for evangelicals to unite together to advance the gospel. In many ways George Whitefield epitomised this ideal in his willingness to associate with people from many denominations and his lack of concern for the particulars of church order. Although he had a considerable following he had no desire to establish a new denomination. These quotes illustrate his attitude:

I truly love all that love the glorious Emmanuel, and though I cannot depart from the principles which I believe are clearly revealed in the book of God, yet I can cheerfully associate with those that differ from me, if I have reason to think they are united to our common head.

Let my name be forgotten, let me be trodden under the feet of all men, if Jesus may thereby be glorified. Let my name die everywhere, let even my friends forget me, if by that means the cause of the Christ Jesus may be promoted. I want to bring souls not a party ... but to a sense of their undone condition by nature, and to true faith in Jesus Christ. But what is Calvin, or what is Luther? Let us look above names and parties; let Jesus be all in all. – So that he be preached ... I care not who is uppermost. I know my place ... even to be the servant of all; I want not to have a people called after my name.<sup>2</sup>

Or here is William Seward, one of Whitefield's closest associates, reporting on the revival in Wales:

I told them that I did not desire them to leave [their] church but to attend it closely – and that I only wanted to bring them to Jesus Christ and then if they were fully persuaded in their own mind let each remain in the communion in which he was called. If he was called a Churchman let him remain; if a Quaker, a Baptist, or Presbyterian let him remain so.<sup>3</sup>

This was the sentiment that animated many evangelicals in Britain. Even where there was strong denominational loyalty and theological convictions there was often a warm-hearted affection for fellow evangelicals. In spite of his theological differences with Whitefield and his dislike of Dissenters, John Wesley advocated “a catholic spirit” in relationships between Christians. This unity was not easy to maintain and there were bitter theological controversies. The differences between Whitefield and Wesley split the Methodist movement and the Calvinist-Arminian controversy of the 1770s and 80s was very bitter. Within all denominations there were people who were very wary of the suspected compromises involved in associating too closely with people outside their



camp. Nevertheless there was still a strong evangelical consensus. People spoke of “the Gospel World”, a world which, in the words of RH Martin, “for all its bickerings, was a cultural and ideological entity, rather like the ‘left’ in the modern political world”.<sup>4</sup> Fundamental to this was a broad body of shared Protestant doctrine and an evangelical experience. With the obvious exception of the Wesleyan Methodists, most other evangelicals were broadly Calvinistic in their theology.

This was the world in which Robert and James Haldane moved after their conversions. In practice and in large measure in principle they were committed to the Whitefieldian evangelical ideal. They had a wide network of evangelical friends and acquaintances with whom they cordially worked. I have already noted the influence of David Bogue who himself epitomised the catholic evangelicalism of many Congregationalists. It was Bogue who pronounced the death of bigotry at the first meeting of the London Missionary Society in 1795. He said on that occasion:

We have now before us a pleasing spectacle, Christians of different denominations, although differing on points of church government, united in forming a society for propagating the Gospel among the heathen. This is a new thing in the Christian church ... Here are Episcopalians, Methodists, Presbyterians, and Independents, all united in one society, all joining to form its laws, to regulate its institutions, and manage its various concerns. Behold us here assembled with one accord to attend the funeral of bigotry: and may she be buried so deep that not a particle of her dust may ever be thrown up on the face of the earth.<sup>5</sup>

Sharing the same outlook, it is not surprising to find the Haldanes going on preaching tours with Charles Simeon and Rowland Hill, corresponding with William Wilberforce and other members of the Clapham Sect, and fraternising with evangelicals in the Church of Scotland and in the Secession and Relief Churches. Andrew Fuller and other English Baptists were welcome guests at Airthrey when on deputation in Scotland for the Baptist Missionary Society. Indeed until Robert sold it, his home at Airthrey became something of a meeting point for evangelical leaders.<sup>6</sup> As we will see, in their extensive activities they operated across a broad evangelical front and not in a narrowly sectarian corner.

Behind their pan-evangelical activities was a principle of evangelical unity that both brothers maintained throughout their lives. In 1805 James stated that his aim in writing a book was “to promote love and union amongst Christians and consequently the success of the gospel in the world”. He went on to say that: “we ought to love the image of Christ wherever we see it; and if we confine our love to our own party, we deceive ourselves. If we love the Lord Jesus we must love those who are guided by his Spirit”.<sup>7</sup>

Fifteen years later he wrote in a similar strain concerning the basis of fellowship in churches:

Into these societies believers only are to be received and from these societies (if they obey the Scriptures) no believer is to be excluded. The bond of union is the faith of Jesus and everyone who gives evidence of having received this precious faith is entitled to the privileges of Christian fellowship, although imperfectly instructed in many particulars... A church of Christ is a free school of *all his disciples*, and no man is warranted to exclude even the weakest and most ignorant.<sup>8</sup>

Robert makes the same point in his commentary on *Romans* when dealing with chapter 15, verse 7: “Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God”. He wrote: “The manner in which Christians are to receive one another to church fellowship is as Christ received them... Christ receives those who are ignorant of many things – indeed of everything but faith in him. ... If Christ receives his people notwithstanding their ignorance of many parts of his will, ought they to reject those whom He hath received?”<sup>9</sup> Robert was dealing here with the issue of church fellowship, but this was the principle upon which he and his brother sought to operate in all their activities. Towards the end of his life and long after he had adopted baptistic views, he turned down a request to support a Baptist cause on the grounds that it was too denominational. As his biographer and nephew wrote, “he altogether disapproved of any external ordinance being made a bond of union instead of faith in Christ and sound doctrine”.<sup>10</sup>

## **The attempted realisation of evangelical union as illustrated by the Haldane brothers**

The world of late 18th and early 19th century evangelicalism was characterised by a massive array of interdenominational activity, societies and institutions for almost every conceivable purpose. Committed as they were to the ideal of evangelical unity, the Haldane brothers actively sought to realise this ideal in practical ways. I would like to highlight four areas where the Haldanes tried to realise evangelical unity.

### **Foreign missions**

Considering their original intention of going to India as missionaries it is not surprising that one of the societies with which the Haldanes were associated was the London Missionary Society, founded in 1795. Robert served as one of its directors from 1796 to 1804. Two years before its formation, the Baptist Missionary Society had been founded in 1793 as a denominational agency, but there were a number of Anglican and Dissenting ministers who felt that an interdenominational missionary society was needed. One of these was Melville Horne who articulated this pan-evangelical vision in his book *Letters on Mission*, published in 1794 after his return from a visit to Sierra Leone. In advocating foreign missions Horne called on missionaries to cooperate without sacrificing their convictions:

I would not have him indifferent to his own peculiarities, whether they respect the doctrines he receives as truth, or the points of ecclesiastical polity he considers most friendly to religion; but I would have him thoroughly sensible, that the success of his ministry rests not on points of separation, but on those wherein all godly men are united.

Missionaries had to be “far removed from bigotry, and possess a spirit truly catholic”. He went on:

It is not Calvinism; it is not Arminianism, but Christianity that he is to teach. It is not the hierarchy of the Church of England; it is not the principles of the Protestant Dissenters that he has in view to propagate. His object is to serve the Church Universal.<sup>11</sup>

In the course of 1794 what was initially called simply “The Missionary Society” was formed. The founding committee included Anglicans, Independents, Presbyterians, and Calvinistic Methodists. At its inaugural meeting in September 1795 David Bogue

preached the “Funeral of Bigotry” sermon that we have already noted. His appeal for evangelical unity was greeted, according to the *Evangelical Magazine*, with a shout for joy. While the Haldanes were not involved in these proceedings they were enthusiastic supporters of the LMS and of its sister body, the Edinburgh Missionary Society. Robert was also particularly concerned with the state of Protestantism on the continent where he made several preaching tours. He supported the work of the Continental Society founded by Henry Drummond.

### **Home missions and church planting**

Another pan-evangelical activity that engaged the interest of the Haldanes was itinerant preaching. In the late 18th century there was an upsurge of itinerant preaching in Britain. Whitefield and Wesley had established the pattern and there were many that followed in their train. When James Haldane founded the Society for Propagating the Gospel at Home in 1798 with John Aikman and Joseph Rate he was clear as to its nondenominational character. The founding address said that “it is not our design to form or to extend the influence of any sect. Our sole intention is to make known the everlasting gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ”. The new society was to be “composed of persons of every denomination, holding unity of faith in the leading doctrines of Christianity”. Those involved in the SPGH would be required “to endeavour to strengthen the hands of all faithful ministers of Jesus Christ of whatever denomination, and as far as they [could] discourage all bitter party spirit, wherever they discover[ed] it among Christians”.<sup>12</sup> In practice the Haldanes worked with a wide variety of like-minded evangelicals.

When it came to establishing churches they did so on a non-sectarian basis. There were in England at the time a number of what RH Martin calls “borderland churches” which inhabited the border between the Church of England and Dissent. Examples are Rowland Hill’s Surrey Chapel, Union Chapel in Islington, the two Whitefield tabernacles at Spa Fields and Tottenham Court Road and those churches in the Countess of Huntingdon’s Connexion. A number of these churches eventually became Congregational. In Edinburgh Lady Glenorchy’s Chapel had a similar broad Calvinistic evangelical ethos even though it was attached to the Church of Scotland. The churches that were planted as a result of the work of the SPGH evangelists initially were established on this basis. They were intended to be preaching centres from which evangelism would be done in a town or district. There was no thought, initially at least, of competing with the established churches. As Deryck Lovegrove has written:

Though the new buildings soon acquired a quasi-denominational character, serving as homes for congregations of “tabernacle people”, their existence, especially in the early stages of the movement, represented a genuine expression of the undenominational spirit. The substance of the message preached from their pulpits, as in the open air, was biblical and conversionary, and as such devoted little thought to the weightier matters of church order. [The tabernacles provided] a visible focus of unity and achievement.<sup>13</sup>

Nevertheless, in spite of their intentions, or perhaps because of them, the Haldane movement was not looked upon favourably by the “moderates” in the Church of Scotland. The rise of itinerancy, and with it lay preaching, threatened the tradition of an educated ministry as well as impugning the spiritual condition of the national Church. Their fears seemed confirmed when the Haldanes established a seminary for training

itinerant evangelists and when James was ordained as minister of the Circus church in Edinburgh. Some senior evangelical figures, such as John Erskine, shared some of the moderates' concerns. This was the background to the Pastoral Admonition and Declaratory Act of the General Assembly in 1799 warning congregations about the SPGH and forbidding its evangelists to preach in parish churches.

### **Literature publication and distribution**

From the beginning the Haldanes were concerned about the publication and distribution of Christian literature. Their itinerant tours of Scotland had revealed the desperate need for the distribution of cheap Christian literature and not least of Bibles. Initially they published their own literature, but with the establishment of the Religious Tract Society in 1799 and the British and Foreign Bible Society in 1804 the Haldanes could join forces with other evangelicals in making Christian literature widely available. In many ways the Bible Society was the pan-evangelical society *par excellence*. The simplicity of its aim of circulating the Bible to as many as possible commended itself to a wide range of people. Whereas denominational concerns prevented some Anglican evangelicals and Baptists from involvement in the LMS, the Bible Society was supported by people from all denominations. Robert Haldane sat on the committee of the Bible Society until the split over the Apocrypha and thereafter sat on the committee of the Edinburgh Bible Society.

### **The tragic failure of evangelical union as illustrated by the Haldane brothers**

Noble as the ideal of evangelical union was, and hard as the Haldanes worked to see it realised, in the end they failed. They were not alone. By the 1830s it was becoming apparent that earlier enthusiasm for evangelical union was waning. The Dissenters in England were agitating for their civil liberties. In 1828 the Test and Corporations Acts were repealed, but that was only the beginning of a long process of redressing English Nonconformist grievances. Not surprisingly, among Congregationalists in particular, there was a growing sense of denominational identity and the establishment of a number of denominational institutions, not least the Congregational Union in 1833. Independent churches on the borderland of the Church of England and Dissent became more distinctively Congregationalist, as did interdenominational agencies such as the London Missionary Society, the Village Itinerancy Society and the Home Missionary Society. In Scotland Dissenters challenged the advocates of the establishment principle in what became known as the Voluntary Controversy. In both England and Scotland clergy in the established churches responded to this recrudescence of Nonconformity by reaffirming their own distinctive principles. It was noted at the time that Anglican evangelical clergymen were distancing themselves from their Dissenting brethren. It was not until the founding of the Evangelical Alliance in 1841 that a measure of cordiality was restored to relationships between evangelicals inside and outside the established churches. But the unity promoted by the Alliance was both more modest and negative than that of a few decades before. It was more modest in that it did not seek the visible union of churches and it was more negative because it was reactive to the growing threat of Catholicism, both of the Roman and Anglican varieties. The

Haldanes were not immune to these developments. There are four areas where we can see tensions that led to the failure of their dream of evangelical union being realised.

### ***Political tensions***

In spite of sharing so much in common theologically and spiritually, many British evangelicals were divided on politics. In the early 1790s they had very differing views on the French Revolution. Someone like David Bogue initially welcomed the Revolution as a great boost for religious as well as political liberty, as did Robert Haldane.<sup>14</sup> Anglican evangelicals and to a lesser extent Church of Scotland evangelicals saw the French Revolution and radical politics as deeply subversive to the established order of which they were part. Writing to William Wilberforce in 1792, Thomas Robinson, the vicar of St Mary's, Leicester, said:

I am sorry to observe that among the numerous class of dissenters, whose aim is to abolish every national establishment of religion among us, there are many of real piety. I know not how they can reconcile their conduct with the Scripture injunction to obey the magistrates & follow after peace ... [T]hey seem to think, that while they are opposing our Church they are doing God service and promoting the cause of his truth.<sup>15</sup>

Even the revered John Newton who had many close Nonconformist friends, among them the Haldanes, thought that "all the Dissenters, even the orthodox not excepted, are republicans and enemies of government".<sup>16</sup> Not surprisingly many evangelical Anglicans were somewhat wary of associating too closely with Dissenters in pan-evangelical enterprises. Later in the 1820s and 30s when the established position of the Church of England and the Church of Scotland was being challenged, political tensions again undermined evangelical union.

The Haldane brothers, particularly Robert, were affected by the climate of political suspicion. Before his conversion Robert Haldane had flirted with radical politics, but after his conversion it seems that what political views he held were kept to himself. However, this did not prevent his opponents from using his former radicalism against him. When with his brother he applied to the East India Company for permission to go to India as missionaries, his politics were one of the reasons his application was rejected. At the time it was feared that missionaries were subversive to civil order. One leading moderate minister in Glasgow wrote to Lord Dundas, the Lord Advocate, saying "that the whole of this missionary business grows from a democratical root". This was the light in which the Haldanes' home missionary efforts were viewed as well.<sup>17</sup> It was against this background that Robert Haldane sought to answer his critics on this point by protesting that he had never entertained the idea of subverting the established church, and avowing his submission to the state as commanded by Scripture.<sup>18</sup> While evangelicals within the established churches supported the right of the Haldanes and others to engage in itinerant preaching, some were nervous about their politics and less than enthusiastic in their co-operation.

### ***Ecclesiastical tensions***

It was in the realm of church life that the Haldanes' attempt to realise evangelical union came to nought. In spite of their desire to establish churches that were simply evangelical and non-denominational, the Haldanes ended up establishing a new denomination and dividing their own church. The problem was that, as they sought to

make the church as biblical as they could, they inevitably alienated those who disagreed with them. What they saw as a sincere pursuit of an apostolic ideal of church life was seen by others as a restless love of novelty and innovation for its own sake.

When the Circus church was established in 1799 its pattern of church life was similar to that with which most Scots were familiar. As the minister James Haldane's position in the church was comparable to that of the minister in Presbyterian churches. The church was Congregational in polity for largely but not entirely pragmatic reasons. At this point there is not much evidence that Haldanes' had very distinct views on church polity except that they, with the other organisers, were concerned that the new church take church discipline seriously.<sup>19</sup> One of the lessons learned from their itinerant tours around Scotland seems to have been that discipline was too lax in the Church of Scotland. Other than that and the monthly observance of the Lord's Supper, the Circus church was not all that unusual. As I have already indicated it was basically intended to be an Edinburgh version of the Whitefieldian churches in England. The Haldanes' biographer sums up the situation in this way:

For a long time after the formation of the Tabernacle Church, questions of ecclesiastical [order] never seemed to impede the hallowed object to which its pastor had consecrated his life. To use his own language, "It was, in fact, no separation from the Establishment. It was merely another place of worship for preaching the gospel without regard to *forms* of external arrangement or Church order, and where the pastor and many of the members showed their catholic spirit by going to the Sacrament of the Established Church. Add to this that the preaching was almost entirely addressed to the people of the world."<sup>20</sup>

That is how the church began, but whatever the original intention I suggest that the concern for church discipline indicated that the seeds of a more distinctive church polity had been planted and in time would begin to grow.

The first area in which James Haldane began to develop a more distinct ecclesiology was in relation to the Lord's Supper. By 1802 he was advocating the weekly observance of the Lord's Supper. Considering that at the time in Scotland the Lord's Supper was observed in many churches only annually, this was quite an innovation. Haldane had already concluded that the Lord's Supper was not a sacrament, but he had not altered its monthly observance at the Tabernacle. When weekly observance was introduced it met with considerable opposition. In a pamphlet on the subject Haldane said that:

From the time of the formation of the church, I should have esteemed it a privilege to have shewed forth [our Lord's] death as often as I commemorated his resurrection. I thought, however, this would have been inexpedient.<sup>21</sup>

Some accused Haldane of having kept his views secret, but he protested his integrity. A further development in James' thinking that proved more divisive was in regard to eldership. Influenced by reading the works of the 18th century separatists Glas and Sandeman, James persuaded the church in 1806 to adopt a plural eldership. These elders were understood not to be ruling elders in the Presbyterian sense, but rather as fellow pastors with James. This innovation was not appreciated by many and it was noted ruefully by some critics that when James was not preaching the attendance dropped considerably.<sup>22</sup>

But these developments were relatively minor compared to what happened over the issues of mutual exhortation and believers' baptism. In 1808 James had come to the

conclusion that Christians should have the opportunity in the regular worship meetings of the church to mutually exhort one another. Until then there had been mutual exhortation in some midweek meetings, but its introduction into the Sunday services caused a storm. Many people left the church over this. Many of those who stayed considered what was often said unedifying. But James was adamant. His convictions on mutual exhortation were closely related to his views on preaching and Christian ministry. Having repudiated the clergy/laity distinction he believed that every member of the church, or at least the male members, should have opportunity to speak for the edification of other members. In this way those who had a particular gift for preaching could be recognised and set a part for training and ministry.<sup>23</sup> Many of the Haldanes' associates who disagreed with them on this issue considered it, in the words of one of them, John Aikman, "destructive, both of the pastoral office and of all order in the house of God".<sup>24</sup> If that is how some in the Haldane circle felt it is not difficult to think what fellow evangelicals in the Presbyterian churches felt.

It was the issue of believers' baptism that finally split the Haldane movement and destroyed any pretence of evangelical union. Hard on the heels of the mutual exhortation controversy was first James' and then Robert's change of view on baptism. In a letter to his friend John Campbell, the minister successively of Whitefield's Tottenham Court Road Chapel and Kingsland Chapel in London, James confessed to having for some time entertained doubts about infant baptism. It was when asked to baptise a child in 1808 that he felt he could not conscientiously do so, even though he had not at that point come to clear conclusions. James did not want the issue of baptism to divide the church, but in fact it did. About 200 people agreed with James and stayed with him while many others departed to other churches.<sup>25</sup> The division at the Tabernacle spread through the Haldane movement with most churches choosing to maintain the practice of infant baptism. This was in effect the beginning of the Congregational denomination in Scotland.

On all these issues both brothers said that they did not intend to divide the church or the movement. Perhaps because he was a pastor James was seemingly the more flexible of the two in the application of their convictions. As their biographer says, James's views "were never intended by him to have been prematurely forced into practice at the risk of fomenting division". But that is what happened. Somewhat naively both brothers believed that they should be able to state their views plainly and then work through their application in the life of the church. Writing to John Campbell, James said:

If we are all acting on conviction and both desiring to know the will of Jesus in this and in all other respects, I have no apprehension of disunion. Of one thing I am sure, that all who love the Lord Jesus should, so far as they are agreed, walk by the same rule and mind the same things; and if it be improper for Baptists to be in fellowship in the same Church, it must be equally improper to have occasional fellowship in private.<sup>26</sup>

But this ideal did not work out in the life of the Tabernacle or in the wider Haldane movement. Perhaps the reason for this was in part the inability of both brothers to see that in churches there will always be loose ends. In his book *A View on Social Worship* in which he propounded some of his convictions on the nature of the church, James made these revealing comments:



The religion of Jesus in its doctrines, precepts and institutions, is one connected whole; in proportion as one part is overlooked, the force of all is weakened ... The genuine and sincere union is absolutely impracticable while professors neglect to inquire, to understand and to practise the directions of God's word respecting social worship... The apostles were most anxious to promote unity of sentiment as well as of affection in all the saints.<sup>27</sup>

James then went on to propound his views, hoping that his readers would agree with him but warning them of the danger of resisting the conviction of truth. Such an approach to changing the church is not calculated to maintain harmony and keep people on board. For the Haldanes the issues were black and white and had to be accepted in total or not at all. In an article on the Haldanes, Deryck Lovegrove describes well the difficulty of their approach to changing the church while maintaining its unity:

In their quest for purity of order the innovators showed that they were prepared to jettison any realistic chance of harmony for the sake of adherence to the letter of Scripture. Still more destructive was the missionary zeal with which they pursued that goal. In spite of their awareness of the dangers of Glasite intolerance, the Haldanes failed to apply to their own context the historical lesson it offered concerning obsession with detail, and the resulting sequence of strife, debility, and ultimate irrelevance.<sup>28</sup>

That said, it is interesting to note that there were limits to the Haldanes' innovations. For example, they opposed the novel ideas about the restoration of the miraculous charismata propounded by Edward Irving, as well as the premillennialism that was gaining acceptance in some circles.

### **Theological tensions**

However much the Tabernacle was divided on church practises, it was united in its essential evangelical doctrine. This was not the case in the wider evangelical movement in Great Britain nor even within the Haldane movement itself. There were two doctrinal issues that the Haldanes were particularly concerned about which made them, depending on your views, either unhelpful dividers or stalwart defenders of evangelicalism. Either way the involvement of the Haldanes in theological controversy was the cause of some tensions that strained the unity of the movement.

In the 1820s Robert Haldane was at the centre of a massive controversy within the British and Foreign Bible Society concerning the Apocrypha. The details of the controversy need not concern us, except to say that it involved objections by Robert and other Scottish members of the Society to the inclusion of the Apocrypha in continental editions of the Society's Bibles. Robert had discovered this when in France in copies of the French Bible of which he had actually underwritten the costs of publication. The argument of the London committee was that the Society's Bibles would only be acceptable in predominantly Roman Catholic countries if they included the Apocrypha. Robert and others thought that this was an unwarranted compromise that God could not bless. Moreover it contravened the fundamental principle of the Society that said it existed for the circulation of the Scriptures alone. Since the Bible Society was the evangelical society *par excellence*, Robert's protests were seen by some as unnecessarily dividing evangelicals, but by others as defending a fundamental pillar of evangelicalism. Robert himself saw his stand as a necessary one against a false liberality that tolerated departures from the truth in the name of love. As he put it:

Bigotry has had a long and gloomy reign, and over the greatest part of the world is still enthroned, but among Protestants it has in most cases lost its sway, and is daily declining in influence. Its rival has mounted the throne and in the opposite direction threatens to do equal mischief. A spurious liberality has succeeded to intolerance, and aims at promoting to propagation of divine truth by compromising its distinguishing attributes.<sup>29</sup>

It seems to me that Robert Haldane was justified in his behaviour and as John Macleod pointed out, it was largely because of him that the Apocrypha is not in our English Bibles.<sup>30</sup>

The other theological issue that attracted the attention of the Haldanes was the doctrine of the atonement. Towards the end of his life James Haldane was involved in a controversy over the doctrine of limited or definite atonement. Like his brother, James was a thorough going Calvinist all his life. By the 1830s there was a considerable shift taking place in British evangelicalism away from the Calvinism that had characterised non-Wesleyan evangelicalism to a highly modified Calvinism. Among other things the traditional understanding of limited atonement was being challenged, not least within the Congregational churches that had emerged from the Haldane movement. In a series of pamphlets and books James locked horns with a number of antagonists, including the eminent Glasgow Congregationalist Ralph Wardlaw. Again our concern is not with the details of the controversy, but with the fact that James thought he had to do battle on this point. While he rejoiced that true Christians united in evangelistic efforts and missions, he regretted that sometimes the “promoting of union among believers” was “at the expense of zeal for the truth”. While no doubt many saw James as a troubler in Israel, he saw himself as a defender the historic doctrine of the atonement against theological innovators.<sup>31</sup>

### ***Personal tensions***

Whatever the rights and wrongs of the positions that the Haldanes took, it must be said that there were personal tensions between them and those around them that did nothing to help the maintenance of unity. James was warmly liked by many, but Robert seems not to have been the easiest person to work with. Certainly some of his associates were pretty bitter after falling out with him. After the split in the Tabernacle over baptism Robert closed the Glasgow seminary and withdrew his financial support from many of the churches he had built. Greville Ewing – the seminary tutor, an early associate and later a leading Congregational minister in Glasgow – fell out with the brothers and was never again on good terms with them. Even more to the point, his daughter, Janet Matheson, mentioned the way her father had been treated in her biography of him<sup>32</sup> which drew a response from James. William Orme, later an eminent Congregational minister in London, likewise complained about the high-handed way the Haldanes had treated him.<sup>33</sup> The problem seems in part due to Robert’s authoritarian personality and in part due to the way he financed and really controlled what happened in many of the tabernacles. This abrasive tendency can also be seen in the way in which, in controversy on some of the issues mentioned above, Robert would get very personal in his criticisms. For example, in the Apocrypha controversy he attacked the integrity of Daniel Wilson, a leading evangelical Anglican who later became the first bishop of Calcutta.<sup>34</sup> Needless to say this approach to personal relationships did not help to build evangelical unity.

There is always something inspiring about the story of a movement of God, however imperfect the instruments he uses. It is a reminder that God can move today in different circumstances and yet accomplish the same purpose of extending his kingdom. The story of the Haldanes is one such story that is largely forgotten today, but is worthy of being retold. But the story of the Haldanes has some important lessons to teach us, particularly that evangelical union is a noble ideal which every Christian should strive to see realised. When God is at work advancing his kingdom many of our differences seem relatively minor. Within churches and between churches Christians should accept one another as Christ has accepted them and so bring praise to God. While on many issues we must have our convictions, on the big issues of the gospel – righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit – we can be one as we strive together for the faith of the gospel. But the story of the Haldanes also teaches us that there are many pitfalls to avoid. We must guard against an obsession with the relatively minor issues of church order. We must not expect complete agreement on everything in the life of the church. We must maintain good relationships with brothers and sisters who disagree with us. We must beware of a love of controversy for its own sake. We must remember that Christians are at different levels of understanding and maturity. We must discern on what issues it is worth taking a stand and then contend for the faith in love and with a generosity of spirit. Like Robert and James Haldane we are very fallible human beings, but also like them we can be used by God to advance the kingdom of his Son.

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*Editor's Notes continued from page 2*

The other book on revival is one that everyone should run out and buy. In ***Revival Sent By God*** (IVP 2000) **Raymond Ortlund** contends that revival can be found in the Old Testament as well as the New. While in the technical sense the Bible does not have a word for revival, Ortlund says that the 'Bible's ideas are full of revival theology', but accepts that much more biblical work needs to be done on the subject. Ortlund defines revival as 'a season in the life of the church when God causes the normal ministry of the gospel to surge forward with extraordinary spiritual power' (p. 7). After the introduction the book falls into two parts. In the Part One ('What God can do') he expounds the classic Old Testament passages on revival (Isa.64; Psalms 85 and 126, Hosea 14, Joel 2, and Ezekiel 37) and what expositions these are! In very fine prose Ortlund explains these passages with sharp exegetical insight as well as applying their message with in a fresh and relevant way. He has a firm grasp of systematic and biblical theology and illustrates and confirms his points from a wide range of historical and contemporary authors. For ministers who are growing weary and are tempted to give up I would warmly commend the exposition of Psalm 126 where he powerfully applies to preachers and workers the imperative of sowing with tears so that we can bring in the harvest with joy. In Part Two ('What we must do') Ortlund addresses the issues of repentance, prayer and humility. The book ends with an appendix containing an address by Francis Schaeffer entitled 'The Persistence of Compassion' in which he appeals for Christians in times of declension not to become shrill and angry, but rather to persistently display love and compassion to others. Every Christian and every minister of the gospel would benefit greatly from meditating deeply on these chapters. This is a book that will not only help you better to understand what revival is and to pray for it, but also to help you persevere in the tough environment in which we find ourselves today.

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# A Biblical Case for an Inconsistent Position on Baptism

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Christopher Bennett

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I would like to share some thoughts on the subject of baptism policy in evangelical churches. I have not come across these ideas in books, and it seems to me that most of the churches I know of either have lots of reasons for their baptism policy and end up far from the approach I advocate, or else they follow something like my approach but don't apparently have a rationale for it other than that it works. Whether what I am going to say is original is for you to judge, as is the more important question of whether it is right and true.

## The Problem

What should we do about the fact that some Christians are convinced of the baptist position on baptism – its subjects and mode – and others are convinced paedobaptists – on subjects and mode, even if some of them agree with B.B. Warfield that *any* mode will do that involves applying water to the body?

What has been done? Most paedobaptist churches have said, and do say, that anyone who has been baptised at any point in the past cannot be baptised again within their life and worship, or under their jurisdiction, no matter how convinced the individual is that the previous baptism is invalid and therefore Christ wants them to be baptised (again). They might wink, or not take any strong action, if the person goes and gets baptised somewhere else one day and comes back, but “not under our roof” is the attitude. In some cases paedobaptist churches even say that a baptist cannot hold office in the church – where a full-scale confession of faith is held by the church and is not simply confessed, as what the church as a whole believes, but also used as a test for admission to office. One even hears reports of Presbyterian churches which in practice, if not in theory – I find it hard to believe they have actually signed up for such an historically un- Presbyterian idea – prevent baptists from becoming members of their churches.

On the other side, of course baptist churches do not allow infant baptisms to take place in their meetings or under their jurisdiction – we would not define them as baptists if they did! – even if some of them will grant the validity of the baptism of a professing believer who has only had water poured on him; and a few may even *practise* such affusions rather than immersions for special reasons. A good number of baptist churches will not allow a paedobaptist, especially if he was actually only baptised as a child, into church office – certainly it is difficult to become a pastor of a baptist church if you are a paedobaptist who has only been baptised in infancy, as I myself discovered when I tried becoming one the other month (I jest not). Indeed a smaller percentage of baptist churches will now allow those unbaptised (in their view) into membership. And some – notably those who used to be called Strict Baptists – will not let the likes of John Calvin and me to the Lord's table.

What a confusing situation. What a mess and a muddle, and, worse than that, what a lot of division in the Christian church, in the evangelical, Bible-believing, in many cases Reformed Christian church! What is to be done?

## Responses

- 1 We can fondly imagine that we will be able to convince nearly anyone from the other side who comes near our church or wants to join or become a leader in it that their view is wrong – “we can convert them, or most of them, to our way of thinking.” Oh, the naivety of youth!
- 2 We (or at least “you”, if you are a baptist in England or a paedobaptist in Scotland) can bury our head in the sand and kid ourselves that, because in our country or circle there are not a large percentage of “the other lot”, they are all dying out, the few remaining ones are just a few dinosaurs left over, they can be ignored, they are the exception that proves the rule. “We may let them into the membership of the church but we don’t need to pay any real attention to them. The tide is against them.” Oh, the temptation to act like an ostrich when things in the little part of the world you occupy are going your way!
- 3 We can settle for the status quo and mumble about real unity being spiritual and invisible anyway – as long as we ignore any parts of the Bible that talk about people seeing our oneness in Christ!
- 4 Or you could of course do a fudge, and maintain baptist and paedobaptist policies in the same church and be disgustingly pragmatic; you could adopt what I am calling the “dual practice position.”

## A Solution?

Or is it so disgustingly pragmatic? Some of the people who adopt it do admittedly seem a fairly pragmatic bunch, and they do not usually appear to have a complex Biblical rationale worked out for what they do; but does that necessarily mean it is unprincipled? I trow not; in fact I’m convinced not, and I would like to argue now for dual practice in the local church on baptism. And in case there is any remaining confusion, I mean by this that it is a valid, principled, Biblical option to have some elders in a church who are baptists and others who are paedobaptists, and if someone is converted who has been baptised as an infant, one elder gently, respectfully and not at great length tells them they should be baptised and why, and another elder tells them in a similar manner that they don’t need to get baptised (again) and why; and the person goes away and decides which they believe before God to be right; and the church accepts their conclusion, and if this means they are to be baptised, the baptist elders arrange it and perform it in the church, with the paedobaptist elders sitting there in supportive disagreement. And the same kind of the things happens (in dual practice baptism) when a baby is born: the parents decide what they believe to be right and the church respects it and carries it out, and it’s sometimes the turn of the baptist elders to be extra gracious. And of course this also means that you may even get a situation where a 16 or 18 year old, who has been baptised in the church as a baby, decides they need to be baptised on profession of their faith; and the church does this too, hence the word inconsistent in the title of this article.

Now you may be feeling that I will need to perform a remarkable feat of theological escapology to get anywhere near justifying such procedures other than on a pragmatic

basis; but I don't think my task is as hard as you may believe, at least to get you near, even if I don't convert you. I adduce four principles which I hold to be Biblical:

## **The Rationale**

### **1 The real nature of eldership and spiritual leadership**

Elders have responsibility for the flock and rule over it. But does this mean that we are to decide everything for the people under us? The main way in which we care for the flock is by teaching and feeding it. A survey of 1 Timothy 4 should soon convince us of that. Even as an apostle Paul does not lay down that all the weak vegetarians, teetotallers and holy-day-keepers in Romans 14 must loosen up. Elders and pastors are putting Christians more and more in touch with God and his word by teaching it, so that they can respond to God.

Only this understanding of spiritual oversight as mainly teaching, rather than telling everyone exactly what to do all the time, fits in with the truth of "the right of private judgment", rediscovered at the Reformation. What is the difference between the priest telling the faithful to believe and do what the church teaches without understanding why, and the high-powered pastor or elder telling the convert to get rebaptised, or to refrain from doing so, "because it is God's will for you to submit to us in the Lord, even if you don't understand the whys and wherefores on baptism"? Not a lot. Of course the elders have the right to say, "The morning service starts at 11am; please arrive then, not half an hour later"; but in a matter of direct and personal covenanting with Christ, such as baptism, does the principle of submission to leadership apply in exactly the same way? Surely not. That would smack far too much of the Romish definition of faith as believing whatever the church teaches.

We may not force someone to do what we say on baptism, but just keep them "helpfully" ignorant. But is keeping a new convert, or a fairly new Christian who has just had a baby, entirely in the dark about the fact that millions of their fellow believers around the world would take a different view from the eldership on baptism – is this very different from spiritual authoritarianism? I don't think so. It is certainly out of keeping with the fundamental instructing, teaching function of the undershepherd. Ignorance is not, after all, the mother of devotion. Rather, we must enable people as best we can to see things straight and make the right decision, instead of hoodwinking or browbeating them into doing what we have decided to be the right thing.

Putting it practically, should we hide from Christians the "other view" on baptism? No, unless we can justify treating them as children. But then the moment we expose them to the other view, there is the possibility that they may embrace it – and then, if we are strict in baptism policy, they may not be able to join our church or at least become officers in it. Is this good? Can this God's will?

### **2 The enormous importance of visible, expressed unity in the church**

The New Testament puts repeated and massive emphasis on the importance of visible unity in the church. And there is not the slightest hint that the visible unity sought for is merely among those who agree on everything, or nearly everything. We must agree in the Lord even when we don't agree on all points. Euodia and Syntyche in Philippians



3 pretty obviously disagreed about something and had no doubt talked about the issue; but they are bidden to agree in the Lord, which must mean to agree to disagree on the basis that they were one in Christ.

“Oh, but unity is only in truth.” Yes but No. In other words, how much truth? Infralapsarianism? The traducionist view of the origin of the soul? The church as the company of visible saints? Your view of baptism? Mine?? One way or another, using one terminology or another, we have got to acknowledge that some issues are “1 Corinthians 5-type” issues (a man was having an affair with his stepmother and this was not to be tolerated by the church; fundamental, unmistakable morality was at stake; if we waffle and fudge and do nothing here, it is very difficult to maintain our hold on Christ who is holy). Over these we cannot compromise or maintain unity because of pragmatic considerations. On the other hand we must grant that some issues are “Romans 14-type” issues, where it is entirely understandable that, given the fallen, imperfectly sanctified nature of Christians and the less clear nature of some Biblical teachings (cf 2 Peter 3:16), real believers differ. In this latter kind of case, we should maintain unity despite muddle and disagreement concerning truth. And if there is one thing that the history of the church to this day shouts at us loud and clear it is that baptism is a “Romans 14-type” issue. So we should act accordingly.

Is the matter of a tidy, well-worked out government, a set of rules telling every Christian exactly what to do about baptism, rebaptism, infants, etc as important as the visible unity of the church? If you are inclined to say Yes, I would ask you, “Where in the Bible do we get any indication that having a razor sharp policy on contentious issues is more important than unity?” I cannot see it. And if church unity is more important than having a very tidy church constitution, how can we be right to act in a way that guarantees the existence of two evangelical churches in every village and urban area, just for the sake of having everything tidy? For that is what anything other than a dual practice baptism policy tends to promote: even if we admit “the other side” into membership, once we stop them becoming church officers we lead any who have leadership gifts and a right desire to exercise them into looking for another church, or even setting one up. In other words we promote the visible disunity of the church.

### **3 The kingdom has come yet the kingdom has not yet fully come**

We are in the period of tension between the *already* and the *not yet* of the coming of the kingdom of God. The believer is imperfectly sanctified and so is the church. So why should we try and have a perfect constitution with a policy on everything in the church? I can understand people feeling that it is terribly inconsistent for the same local church to baptise a baby and then baptise the same person 18 years later; or to have one elder advising someone to have their baby baptised and another elder advising them against it. I plead guilty; but have we removed inconsistency by passing a law that one of these godly men cannot be an elder or cannot say what he believes when asked? What good does that do? It is just papering over the cracks. The fact is that the evangelical church on earth and in Britain has not decided on baptism. We – corporately – do not know. Therefore let us acknowledge this in the local church and have an honest, humble, non-perfectionist “Biblical inconsistent” position. This is fully consonant with confessing our sins and our spiritual blindness and the fact that we do

not know everything, as well as with the provisional nature of the kingdom of God at present. If we have a limp, let's limp by God's grace to heaven and not pretend we have everything sorted out. I am tempted to use the phrase "perfectionist doctrine of the church" but will try to refrain. I will however quote Ralph Waldo Emerson who said, "A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds." What is wrong with an inconsistent position on baptism, if we can only have a consistent one by excluding from church leadership, possibly even from membership, people who belong in it? An inconsistent baptism policy appropriately reflects the church's present imperfect enlightenment.

It may be objected, "Peter gave a clear, authoritative answer to the question 'What must we do to be saved' in Acts 2, and that answer involved baptism; so why shouldn't elders today tell people authoritatively exactly what to do in this area?" Because Peter was an apostle, and there was then no New Testament, and he was talking presumably to rational, comprehending adults who had never received Christian baptism of any kind. We are not apostles, the New Testament has been written but we don't fully understand everything written in it, it is a major part of our task to teach the Bible and enable Christians to see what it means and how it applies to them; and the subject of baptism is a difficult one to understand and teach. Furthermore the people who come to us have sometimes been baptised after a fashion already; and sometimes they are asking us what to do with their children. So all in all it is a totally different situation and "circumstances alter cases."

Now if our security at the end of the day – our assurance that God is with us and that we are accepted and that he will answer our prayers and establish the work of our hands upon us – is based on God's love for us, on Christ's death for our sins, and on justification by faith alone, then I think we will be able to handle some sanctified muddle and Biblical inconsistency, especially when we not only have free justification in Christ but when the Spirit is with us to enlighten us, and we know that if on some point we are mistaken and really need to change, "that too God will make clear to you" (Phil. 3:15, NIV). However, if our security before God and in the church is to some significant extent based on getting everything right, having everything worked out and knowing all the time exactly where we stand – on having a thought through policy on everything – then we will certainly not want any so-called sanctified muddle. But isn't this more religious than authentically Christian? Haven't we got to be content, after a fashion, to be, as Luther put it, *simul iustus et peccator*, at the same time justified and yet a sinner?

#### **4 The gospel is for propagating, not just protecting**

It is possible, I would like to suggest, to emphasize the need for guarding the gospel at the expense of propagating it. Paul says more to Timothy about preaching, teaching and spreading it than he does about guarding it.

This point overlaps somewhat with my first point; it is at least implied in what I said about the primacy of teaching over discipline in the elder's function. Is Paul saying in 2 Tim.1:14 that we must guard not only the gospel but our entire constitutional position, even when this includes all kinds of views on secondary matters (the Romans 14-type ones of point 2)? And that we must regard any loss of constitutional position or of church clarity on secondaries such as baptism as sinful, even when it may lead to

more people hearing the gospel and more people being taught what we believe on secondary matters? I don't think so – Paul says “Guard the gospel” not “Guard the line on eating meat.” Are we really guarding the Reformed faith, let alone the gospel, when we refuse to let a “4-point Calvinist” into church leadership, even though he is godly, fervent and gifted? What is likely to be the result? Either that he will simply do less for the Lord and that the faith, Calvinistic or nearly Calvinistic, will spread less through the church; or he will move to another church and become an elder there. The church that is treating maintenance of the full constitutional position as a *sine qua non* of its life will quite possibly still teach exactly the same things in 100 years time, but how many potential elders and, quite likely, members will it have lost or never had, and, much worse, how many non-Christians that could have been reached will have remained untouched by the gospel? If on the other hand the man is allowed onto the eldership, and if he is a very vigorous leader and teacher of the faith, then one of the *worst* case scenarios is that the church will end more 4-point Calvinist than 5. And on that I cannot do better than quote John Newton, as Josiah Bull quotes him on p. 212 of the biography recently reprinted by the Banner of Truth Trust: “If I thought a man feared sin, loved the word of God, and was seeking after Jesus, I would not walk the length of my study to proselytise him to the Calvinistic doctrines.”

In other words, there is the danger, if we try preserving too much, that an ever-decreasing number of people hold to the full position and God uses other Christians altogether to reach the world. Propagating the gospel leads to preserving it every bit as much as preserving it leads to propagating it.

## The Last Blast

Am I seriously saying it is wrong to be in a Strict Baptist or strict Presbyterian or strict Congregational church? No, not if doing otherwise in the short-term will cause dishonour to Christ, disunity to the church, and a general lessening of the propagation of the gospel. But I am very seriously suggesting that in this imperfect phase of the kingdom we should not even *aim* at having a form of church constitution that answers every question and provides totally neat and tidy solutions to every problem; and that church leaders should focus mainly on teaching and propagating the faith (you don't make more Calvinists or Baptists or paedobaptists, let alone Christians by stopping godly and gifted people from getting into office in the church); and that visible unity despite theological differences is far more important in God's eyes than many anti-ecumenical Christians realise; and in a word **that some kinds of muddle can be sanctified and that inconsistency on baptism is Biblical**. Not only so, but I believed this long before I (a presbyterian) received and accepted a call to be minister of a Brethren Assembly that is being replanted, through the substantial assistance of an Anglican church, as an Independent Evangelical church!

See his Shorter Writings, vol. 2, pp. 329-350: “It is much understating the matter to say that it [the New Testament] does not prescribe a mode of baptism. It does not even suggest one mode as preferable perhaps to another.” p. 335.

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# A (New) Systematic Theology For Our Times: A Review Article\*

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Mark W. Karlberg

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It is always an occasion for celebration when the Reformed world is treated to a comprehensive statement of what the church – reformed according to the Scriptures – confesses. The work under review, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* by author Robert L. Reymond, is the culmination of nearly three decades of instruction at two institutions, Covenant Theological Seminary in the early years and Knox Theological Seminary in the latter. It is unquestionably a helpful addition to Reformed dogmatics, a valuable compendium of Calvinistic teaching.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, however, the appropriateness of the title of the work under review can be fairly questioned. Does this work truly set forth a *new* systematics? If so, what is really new about the method or the content? As for originality, there are only isolated places in the text where the author breaks from tradition. Essentially, this handbook in dogmatics relies heavily upon the exegetical and theological formulations of others, notably that of Charles Hodge, B. B. Warfield, Louis Berkhof, and John Murray. What Reymond offers his readers is a repristination of Old School Presbyterianism (nineteenth to mid-twentieth century): for this reason it is difficult for this reviewer to regard Reymond's work as saying something truly new for Reformed Christianity at the turn of the millennium. Nevertheless, the study does have its place and it does helpfully interact with the current scene.

With reference to the theological encyclopedia, the present volume is properly classified as a study in confessional dogmatics. Reymond's outline and discussion highlight the *Westminster Confession of Faith* and *Catechisms*, and the purpose of this handbook is to defend and explicate that system of doctrine for the present generation. In light of this it is surprising that Reymond does not address the matter of confessionalism, what is itself an important and vital component of Christian (i.e., church) doctrine. And closely related to confessionalism is the discipline of historical theology. It would have been helpful to the reader if Reymond had focused greater attention upon the historical nature of the theological enterprise, and to have elucidated his own work more fully in terms of that historical-ecclesiastical stream to which he belongs. Of course, no comprehensive dogmatics (such as that produced by Reymond) can be expected to provide all the required exegetical work. It is in the nature of a dogmatics to summarize the fruits of a particular exegetical-theological tradition. Nonetheless, this consideration makes the historical element all the more important in dogmatic exposition. No Christian theologian can work independently of churchly doctrine; every interpreter of the Bible approaches his/her task from a specific theological vantage point. In the case of Reymond, there is no doubt where he stands. The reader of *A New Systematic Theology* will readily discern that its author is an exponent of Reformed Puritanism, a doctrinal system summarily, yet comprehensively, set forth in the Westminster standards.<sup>2</sup> For the most part, Reymond sees it as his task

to defend that system of doctrine against modern attacks. In establishing his case the author might also have given further attention to the topic of hermeneutics.<sup>3</sup> Needless to say, in contemporary theology issues of hermeneutical methodology have come under intense, critical scrutiny. Other competing theologies (and methodologies) on the contemporary scene – such as neoorthodoxy, contextualization, liberation theology, and feminism – receive little or no attention in this compendium. Their inclusion would have been highly instructive in a restatement and defense of the historic Christian faith.<sup>4</sup>

The purpose of this review is to engage in a critically constructive analysis of Reymond's *magnum opus*. My questions and comments hopefully will generate further discussion and debate. (Space restraints necessitate that my remarks be selective and suggestive.) Reymond's special interests over the course of his teaching career have been principally two: Reformed epistemology and the person and work of Jesus Christ. What detracts from an otherwise insightful exposition of Reformed theology, however, is the author's extreme supralapsarianism. (More on this below.)

## I Theological Prolegomena: The Stance of Faith

For an understanding of the author's theological convictions and orientation, we must turn to the "Preface." There we are told that Reymond writes from a "Reformed perspective," but that he has not "slavishly followed the established pattern of 'orthodox' or 'Reformed' thought when it did not commend itself to me because of its failure to conform in some way to what I perceive to be the teaching of Holy Scripture."<sup>5</sup> Rightly, the Word of God is regarded by the author to be the final rule of faith and life; the creedal statements of the Reformed churches, by implication, are secondary norms. As a confessional dogmatician, Reymond takes up the theological task as an unabased presuppositionalist, applying the reformational principle of the analogy of Scripture (whereby Scripture is understood to be its own best interpreter). But there is more to biblical presuppositionalism than this, as subsequent discussion will indicate. The author's "Reformed perspective" is further described as follows: "the distinctive nature, richness, and beauty of the Reformed faith [is] the teaching of Holy Scripture, and [is] interpreted, expounded, and exhibited in John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* and the great national Reformed confessions, particularly the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Westminster Assembly's Catechism, Larger and Shorter."<sup>6</sup> This, in sum, is "the established pattern" of Reformed orthodoxy.<sup>7</sup> Each chapter and section of the dogmatics open with a citation from the Westminster standards. Clearly, the reader is to understand that Reymond is not a free thinker, but rather one who stands squarely in the tradition of post-Reformation, Puritan-Reformed orthodoxy (i.e., Westminster Calvinism).

What is the justification for theological study? Who needs theology? Theologian and social critic David Wells in his three volume jeremiad castigates modern-day evangelicalism for its doctrinal shallowness and moral indecisiveness.<sup>8</sup> Significantly, Reymond's prolegomenon addresses both the necessity and warrant for theology as an *intellectual* (as well as moral) discipline. In the words of Anselm, Christian faith is a faith that seeks understanding. Reymond begins by addressing the nature and necessity of divine revelation. Humankind as created by God was to become a race of peoples enjoying covenant fellowship and communion with God as Creator and Lord. Adam and Eve, our first parents, were God's image-bearers. All nature revealed the power and

goodness of God, but general revelation could not be rightly interpreted apart from special, supernatural revelation. Subsequent to the Fall, personal renewal (regeneration and illumination) by the Spirit of God became necessary for true knowledge of God and humanity.

Concerning the Word incarnated and the Word inscripturated Reymond explains that, contrary to the teaching of neoorthodoxy,

It is still biblical to insist that Jesus Christ is the incarnate Word of God, the supreme revelation of God, and not a vague "event" that occurs in a nonverbal personal encounter. And it is still appropriate to teach that the Bible is the written (propositional) Word of God, divinely inspired and therefore infallible. And the Holy Spirit both inspired the Bible and creates saving faith in the redeemed, illuminating them with respect both to the nature of Scripture itself and to Scripture's message to them.<sup>9</sup>

Human language as a gift of God is the appropriate vehicle of God's Word-revelation, even though God *accommodates himself to human capacity*. Modernist language philosophy wrongly regards the infinite distance between God (the unknowable One) and the finite creature as implying the inability of human language to serve as a vehicle of divine communication. God's revelation, according to this viewpoint, is *supratemporal*, beyond all rational comprehension. (There is no place in this philosophy for "propositional truth" as that contained in the sacred writings. Accordingly, the Bible is understood to be merely an account of the human community's religious experience of the Ineffible.) Reymond correctly points out the weaknesses in this modernist philosophical attempt to undermine the Bible's inspiration and authority. However, Reymond's conception of the eternity of the Word of God leads him to view the Bible mistakenly as a collection of "timeless truths." He writes that "despite the 'occasional' or *ad hoc* character of its many literary parts, the Scripture's doctrine of Scripture binds us to view its teachings as timeless truths intended 'for our instruction, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness.'"<sup>10</sup> Neither the analogical character of human knowledge of God nor the historico-covenantal nature of divine revelation is given its proper due. With respect to the latter, the author fails to draw together adequately the various biblico-theological and systematic threads.

Just how does Reymond understand the relation between knowledge in the mind of God and knowledge in the mind of man? Is there an identity of content? Reymond lays out the three alternative positions, namely, that the relationship is univocal, equivocal, or analogical, and then opts for the first of these three. There is, Reymond maintains, an *identity of content*, although human knowledge is not as exhaustive as God's.<sup>11</sup> Here Reymond takes vigorous exception to the views of the twentieth-century's greatest Reformed apologist and presuppositionalist, Cornelius Van Til, who espoused the analogical understanding of human knowledge. Reymond attempts to undercut Van Til's teaching by referring to the views of John Frame, one of Van Til's students who "attempted to extricate [his] revered mentor from the serious difficulty in which he has ensnared himself."<sup>12</sup> But Reymond rightly proceeds to speak of the problem in Frame's own theological method, what is called multiperspectivalism. This methodology causes Frame to misread Scripture and the Reformed tradition, including the writings of Van Til. At the foundation of Van Til's thought is acknowledgement of the Creator/creature

distinction, one which underscores the infinite distance between God and humanity. Although the knowledge that God imparts to humanity is true and genuine, such knowledge is never identical with God's knowledge. Nor is any aspect of humanity's being identical with God's. God is wholly other than his creation. Reformed epistemology must reckon with the analogical character of human understanding – man thinks God's thoughts after him.<sup>13</sup>

As a student of Van Til, I recall well his insistence upon the paradoxical nature of *all* biblical doctrine (the term he used was “hyperdox”). Truth as it exists in the mind of God is beyond finite, human understanding: God's truth is inexhaustive, something the creature can never fully (i.e., exhaustively) comprehend. Contrary to Reymond's reasoning, to know truth (or some truths) *as God knows it* would imply that the creature was equal with God. Divine mystery is resolved only in the exhaustively rational mind of God. Reymond's analysis entails the faulty equation of biblical “paradox” with genuinely contradictory teaching. The two are not the same: to the finite mind divine truth merely gives the *appearance of contradiction*. It is the nature of faith to take God at his word. But Reymond urges students of the Bible to “be solicitous to interpret the Scriptures in a noncontradictory way,” and commends to them the practice of biblical harmonization.<sup>14</sup> (This recommendation is quite different from the reformational principle of comparing Scripture with Scripture.)

The largest portion of Reymond's prolegomena is devoted to setting out the evangelical and Reformed doctrine of the Word as the infallible, inerrant revelation of God. According to Reformed orthodoxy, the authority of the Scriptures is self-attesting. In this *locus*, as elsewhere, Reymond favors a collage of biblical passages, rather than detailed exegetical argument. Concerning the process of canonization, Reymond correctly favors the position of Herman Ridderbos. “In sum,” observes Reymond, “the formation of the twenty-seven-book New Testament canon, after all is said and done, appears ultimately to have been the work, not of men, not even of the church, but of God's Spirit alone.”<sup>15</sup> In an appendix he adds: “the Christian must and will rest confidently in the assumption that God led His church in those first four centuries to recognize what He had intended should be included in the New Testament canon.”<sup>16</sup>

## 2 Theology: God and Humanity

John Calvin in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* states that knowledge of God is inseparable from man's knowledge of himself.<sup>17</sup> From this same conviction Reymond in his “Introduction to the Doctrine of God” offers his personal reasons for belief in God against the backdrop of the classical theistic proofs (which he rejects). He explains that “my faith as a Christian in the Christian God and the self-attesting Christ of the New Testament is the result of the regenerating work of the Spirit of God which he wrought in my heart by and with the objective, revealed truth of the self-evidencing, self-validating Word of God.”<sup>18</sup> In this compact statement of faith the author summarizes the Calvinistic doctrine of the Word and the Spirit as divine interpreter. It serves as a fitting link between the opening prolegomena and the theological exposition that ensues. Although the existence and divinity of the true God are known by all men and women, saving knowledge after the Fall is imparted only to the elect. That knowledge is dependent upon God's special, supernatural revelation, which in divine providence God was pleased to preserve in the pages of the inscripturated Word, itself the product



of human authors inspired by the Holy Spirit. (Unlike any other literature the sacred writings are both human and divine.) God's revelation has been made known in nature and in Scripture. True knowledge of God is, accordingly, dependent upon general and special revelation. Reymond's assertion that Christian faith (i.e., church doctrine) is the product of the self-attesting Christ speaking through the Scriptures and of the illumination of the Holy Spirit fails to reckon with the fallible, human component in the interpretive process. If the apprehension of Christian faith is simply the result of God's working in the human heart, why do genuine believers differ in their interpretation of the Bible? Why do not all believers share the *same* doctrinal understanding? (And why the plethora of Protestant denominations?) The answer lies in the interplay between Scripture and tradition in the act of interpretation. Theology finds expression in the community of faith, resulting in dogmatic statements which bind a particular confessing body to the teachings of Scripture as interpreted by its ministers (more broadly, the ruling bodies). These statements of faith function as subordinate standards within the life of the church(es); they comprise a collection of writings that, unlike the Word of God, are always open to revision and correction. Ultimately, God the Spirit is the final interpreter of his Word. We are reminded once again that the church of Christ is to be reformed and ever reforming in light of the teachings of Scripture.

Reymond begins his exposition of theology proper by considering two aspects of God's self-revelation, his name and his nature. The church confesses the triune God of the Bible to be the only true God, the creator, redeemer, and sustainer. Christians commonly identify God as "spirit," Jn 4:24 serving as the classic proof-text. According to Reymond, "when we say that God is "spirit," we are only using theological shorthand for saying that God is personal and noncorporeal – two of his other attributes."<sup>19</sup> On the matter of God's eternality, Reymond takes exception to the Augustinian position. He contends that this attribute of God must not be viewed in terms of "timelessness." Returning to the question of knowledge as it exists in the mind of God, Reymond queries whether there is any "consciousness of successive duration in his mind." Denial of such, argues Reymond, results in "much theological mischief."<sup>20</sup> The danger, as I see it, lies in attempting to probe the divine mind from the standpoint of finite human reason. God's supratemporal existence ("timelessness") is *sui generis*. This divine attribute does not prevent or impede God's rule over and governance of his creatures in history, nor does it imply that God is somehow incapable of entering into the "real" world of space and time. Contrary to Reymond's contention, God's existence transcends time. What weighs heavily in Reymond's discussion is his insistence upon a univocal relation between divine and human knowledge (including the epistemological aspect concerning *how* one knows).

The first indication of the trinity of God in the OT, states Reymond, is found in Gen 1:26. The reader is not apprised of other interpretations of this divine pronouncement ("Let us make man"). Preferable is the view that the (angelic) sons of God are summoned in the creation of man after God's image, an image likewise borne by the angelic host. The Spirit of God (the theophanic Presence) brooding over the unformed earth is also identified in Scripture with the Son in whom all things were created.<sup>21</sup> The economic distinctions within the Godhead, the unique operations of the three Persons in creation history and in redemption, become increasingly apparent with the progressive unfolding of the history of salvation. With respect to the opening

chapter of Paul's letter to the Romans (vss. 3,4), Reymond is persuaded that the apostle contrasts the eternal, divine Sonship of Christ with his humanity. Hence "Spirit" in this passage is understood to refer to Christ's divine nature. However, redemptive-historical interpretation of this text, as Reymond notes, sees a contrast between Christ's prior state of humiliation (his incarnation) and his subsequent exaltation in eschatological glory (his resurrection and ascension into heaven). The consensus of Reformed opinion now appears to favor the latter view. Other important texts relating to Christ's role in creation and redemption include the opening chapters of John's Gospel (vvs. 1-5), Colossians (vvs. 15-20), and Hebrews (vss. 2,3). It would have been helpful if Reymond interacted more fully with the exegesis presented by those in the salvation-historical school of interpretation on these and other biblical texts.<sup>22</sup>

Reymond rejects the trinitarian formulation advanced by the ancient church fathers at Nicea, notably, the assertion that the Son was "begotten out of the Father." He maintains that "these Fathers taught that the Son derives his essential being or existence as God from the Father (see their 'out of the being of the Father') through an 'always continuing and yet ever complete' act of begetting on the Father's part. In sum, the Father alone has being from himself; the Son eternally derives his being from the Father."<sup>23</sup> Although Reymond turns to Calvin and to Gerald Bray (a modern-day interpreter of Calvin) for support, the case against Nicea has not been fully established. Better is Warfield's reading cited by Reymond. To be sure, defining precisely the distinguishing properties of the Father, Son, and Spirit is difficult. Reymond concedes:

I do not intend to deny that the three Persons of the Godhead do have distinguishing, incommunicable properties which are real, eternal, and necessary. Indeed, without them there would be no Trinity. The distinguishing property of the Father is paternity (*paternitas*) from which flow "economical" activities in which the Son and Spirit do not share; the Son's is filiation (*filiatio*) from which flow "economical" activities in which the Father and Spirit do not share; and the Holy Spirit's is spiration (*spiratio*) from which flow "economical" activities in which the Father and the Son do not share, all descriptions which can be justified by Scripture.<sup>24</sup>

Reymond's argument is unclear and inconsistent. I doubt that twentieth-century theologians have attained the philosophico-linguistic tools lacking in the early church. Ancient and modern attempts to explain what it means that the Son, in the words of the *Westminster Confession*, is "eternally begotten of the Father" (whereby the unique property of the second Person of the Trinity is filiation) and that the Spirit "eternally proceeds from the Father and Son" (whereby the unique property of the third Person is spiration) are justified and necessary. There is no evidence that the Westminster divines intended to distance themselves from the formulations of Nicea. If the confessions of the evangelical and Reformed churches can be improved upon, Reymond has not convincingly shown the way.

In the section on the decrees of God, including both election and reprobation, Reymond's chief disputant is Clark Pinnock. Calvinism does not contradictorily teach that whereas God determines (i.e., foreordains) all things that come to pass in history, man freely chooses to act of his own will. Man (male and female) as a creature of God, God's image-bearer, is not autonomous – the human will is exercised only in the context of the sovereign, all-determinative will and purpose of God. In regards to the

evil performed by humanity and angels Reymond correctly refutes the notion of “bare permission” on God’s part. God foreordains whatsoever comes to pass. “Divine *permission* and human *freedom* simply do not resolve the difficulties which Pinnock presumes that they do.”<sup>25</sup> Reymond speculates that if Adam had sustained the probationary test, all humankind

would have needed gratefully to look to Adam, still living among us, as our “Savior” from sin and death and as “our righteousness.” God would then have been required eternally to share his glory with the creature, and his own beloved Son would have been denied the mediatorial role which led to his messianic lordship over men and to his Father’s glory which followed (see Phil 2:6-11).<sup>26</sup>

Reymond reasons that God decreed Adam’s fall into sin in order to magnify the surpassing grace revealed in Jesus Christ. Adam’s transgression, on this view, becomes merely the means to an end. Two comments are offered by way of response. Firstly, does not this formulation detract from the integrity of Adam’s original knowledge, righteousness, and holiness? The implication is given that Adam was somehow dependent upon the (mediatorial) strength and merit of Christ’s righteousness in order to accomplish the “one act of righteousness” (Rom 5). It is simply wrong to suggest that Adam functioned as a savior from sin. Salvation from sin was not in any sense applicable to the original state of Adam. Secondly, Reymond fails to discern the mediatorial role of the Son in creation. The Son’s mediation was not an aspect of his incarnation exclusively. In the eternal counsel of God, the so-called “Covenant of Redemption” between the Father and the Son, Christ’s messianic office was (is) founded upon the Father’s determination to save the elect.

The Reformed world of scholarship has become increasingly divided over the interpretation of the days of creation. Reymond unhesitatingly favors the teaching found in the Westminster standards concerning the literal six days (“in the space of six days”). The question arises whether Reymond would advocate strict adherence to these confessional statements as the means of securing peace and unity in the Reformed communions? If so, what does this say of his endorsement of the reformational principle of *sola scriptura*? Is he prepared to allow diversity of opinion on matters that do not undermine the system of doctrine nor jeopardize the fundamentals of the faith? Reymond boldly asserts: “I can discern no reason, either from Scripture or from the human sciences, for departing from the view that the days of Genesis were ordinary twenty-four-hour days.”<sup>27</sup> While Reymond is free to express (and teach) his opinion, can he and the six-day creationists extend the same freedom to those who think otherwise? On the question of the age of the universe Reymond shows greater reserve. Although he and I favor “a relative young earth and a relative short history of man to date,” neither of us are dogmatic on the issue.<sup>28</sup>

Concerning God’s design of the universe, Reymond views redemption as the purpose for creation. John Murray, on the other hand, sees redemption as God’s purpose for the *postlapsarian* world. Murray’s position, in my judgment, distinguishes more carefully between the historical epochs of creation and redemption, each having its own particular purpose and design.<sup>29</sup> (One aim of recreation is to bring the original goal of creation, viz., eschatological consummation, to fulfillment by means of the reconciling work of Jesus Christ.) The doctrine of the decree(s) of God must not obscure the

historical diversity associated with God's planning for the sake of its ultimate unity. Unfortunately, differences among Reformed dogmaticians on these issues resulted in the unnecessary division between infra- and supralapsarians.<sup>30</sup>

Moving on to what is viewed in the Westminster standards as God's special work of providence, namely, the Covenant of Works between God and Adam prior to the Fall, the reader is introduced to some of the problems and complexities in scholastic Reformed orthodoxy. At the time the Westminster divines worked on their confession and catechisms, a new Protestant scholasticism was emerging. Some of the scholastic definitions and terminology recovered from a former period in the history of Christian doctrine were helpful, others were not. Great care must be exercised in the study of Reformed dogmatics, perhaps nowhere more so than in its doctrine of the covenants. For example, reintroduction of the Thomistic nature/grace scheme unknowingly undermined teaching pertaining to the covenantal relationship between God and humankind at creation. Contrary to Reymond's assertion, the natural state of Adam was not distinct from the covenantal – human obligation to obey God was natural as it was covenantal. There were not two stages or orders of creation, one natural and the other covenantal. The dichotomy between an initial state of nature and a subsequent covenantal order is unbiblical; it is wholly speculative in origin.<sup>31</sup> Equally unacceptable is the notion that the Covenant of Works, though broken, remains perpetually in effect after the Fall. Contrary to Reymond, the legal principle ("do this and live") is no longer operative, not even hypothetically. The original Covenant of Works has forever been abrogated. Under the Covenant of Grace, which extends from the Fall to the Consummation, the legal principle was reinstituted on the earthly, *temporal* level during the period from Moses to Christ, the time when the Israelites were subject to the stipulations and sanctions of the legal covenant made at Sinai. Prosperity and blessing in the land of Canaan was contingent upon Israel's own obedience to the law of Moses. Wherever there is covenant based on works, there is simultaneously a period of probationary testing. Such was the case at the beginning with Adam in the Garden of Eden, later under the Mosaic economy, and finally in conjunction with the messianic task of Christ, the second Adam.<sup>32</sup>

These criticisms aside, Reymond defends traditional Reformed teaching on the covenants against its detractors, particularly revisionists like Norman Shepherd and Daniel Fuller. He agrees with those who maintain that Adam's successful completion of the probationary assignment would have meant that he *merited* the covenantal reward of confirmation in righteousness and, ultimately, entrance into eschatological glory at the consummation of history. The theological term "grace" pertains *exclusively* to the redemptive era, in that it speaks of the saving beneficence of God extended to sinners (in spite of their *demerit*). Hence the term "grace" is not applicable to the preredemptive epoch of creation history. The reward promised to Adam for faithful obedience to God was a matter of justice, not grace. (The discussion in this section should lead Reymond to reconsider his interpretation of Adam's probationary task and the mediatorial role of the Son in creation noted earlier.) Reymond's discussion of the divine covenants has a direct and immediate bearing upon the biblical doctrine of justification by faith ("apart from the works of the law"), the subject of another *locus* in Christian dogmatics.

### 3 Soteriology: The Doctrine of Christ and His Spirit

This section opens with a discussion of the “plan of salvation.” Here one finds a strictly logical presentation of God’s decree(s), the occasion for probing into “the rational mind” of God. Starting from the end and proceeding to the means necessary for its accomplishment, Reymond claims that “The rational [human] mind recognizes that only in this way is each element of the plan purposive and contributory to the coherence of the entire plan.”<sup>33</sup> Here again, Reymond’s supralapsarianism says more than is warranted from the text of Scripture (on the basis of exegesis and what the author calls “legitimate ‘sanctified’ deductions”).

What is uniquely distinctive in Reformed theology is the doctrine of the covenants. With respect to the progressive unfolding of biblical revelation the divine covenants provide the structural framework for the history of creation and redemption. The redemptive epoch is the subject of Reymond’s chapter on “The Unity of the Covenant of Grace.” While summarizing the Reformed (federalist) position, Reymond offers a critical analysis of the teachings of dispensationalism, which he fairly examines in terms of both its earlier and its later exponents. To be sure, contemporary dispensationalism manifests a wide range of thinking. The so-called “progressive dispensationalists” of recent years have adopted many features of Reformed covenant thinking, the chief exceptions being (1) its understanding of the relation between Israel and the church, and (2) its strict adherence to premillennial eschatology. Another aspect of this debate is the question concerning the nature and content of saving faith in the Old and New Testaments. Reymond observes: “It is difficult to conceive of two evangelical perspectives on Old Testament faith differing more radically.” He concludes that “these two theological systems are mutually exclusive.” In dispensationalism there are “*at least two* different plans of salvation in Scripture.”<sup>34</sup> Reymond identifies these doctrinal peculiarities as the “soteriological discontinuities and difficulties of the dispensational system.”<sup>35</sup> In his elaboration of covenant theology Reymond at the same time appears oblivious to what is mainstream Reformed interpretation of the Mosaic Covenant. It was largely through the teaching of John Murray that contemporary Reformed orthodoxy was diverted from the classic position. Little did Murray realize that (independently of his work) the revolution which was to take place in historical and biblical studies at the close of the twentieth century – especially the contentious debate over Paul’s understanding of the Mosaic law – would radically transform the theological landscape less than five hundred years after the Protestant Reformation.<sup>36</sup> (So significant is this development that the future of evangelicalism itself remains uncertain.)

The next place in the theological system where these issues converge is the teaching on substitutionary atonement. Reformed theology maintains that Christ, born under the law, fulfilled all righteousness for the sake of God’s elect. By means of his active obedience Christ satisfied the legal demands of the original Covenant of Works, and by means of his passive obedience he exhausted its penalty and curse. Supralapsarian speculation leads Reymond to question the doctrine of the *consequent* absolute necessity of Christ’s atonement. Problematic here is Reymond’s understanding of God’s aseity and the eternal decrees as they exist in the mind of God. Reymond fails to recognize that God was not obliged to save the elect any more than he was obliged to

create the world. The decree(s) to create and to redeem is external to God's essential being. After treating the topic of the accomplishment of redemption on the basis Christ's atoning sacrifice, attention turns to the application of redemption by the Holy Spirit, who in the economy of redemption is the Spirit of Christ. Reymond upholds the Calvinistic interpretation over against the unstable and inconsistent position of Moise Amyraldus (the view that came to be known as "Amyraldianism"). According to Amyraldus, Christ's atoning death was universal in extent (i.e., unlimited), while the Spirit's efficacious application of salvation was restricted to the elect alone. Consistent Calvinism teaches the doctrine of Christ's limited atonement and its effectual application by the Holy Spirit to those chosen in Christ.<sup>37</sup>

Reymond follows the traditional *ordo salutis* (order of salvation). In recent years questions have been raised concerning this formulation. Reymond observes that "the divine application of salvation is not 'one simple and indivisible act' but rather comprises a 'series of acts and processes' [and follows] a very definite order."<sup>38</sup> The several benefits, though distinct, are nevertheless inseparable – the believer united to Christ in his death and resurrection does not possess one without possessing all of these saving benefits.<sup>39</sup> Agreeing that union with Christ has two foci (one in eternity and one in time), Reymond maintains that the former refers to *being* in Christ from all eternity and the latter to *becoming* actually ingrafted into Christ. Reymond's distinction between "being" and "becoming" is confusing. Murray's view, with which Reymond differs, does greater justice to the historical dimension of union with Christ, without in any way detracting from the truth of God's eternal predestination of those elected in Christ.<sup>40</sup> The doctrine of justification by faith is formulated along precise Calvinistic lines, emphasizing the sole instrumentality of faith in the appropriation of Christ's perfect righteousness, the (alien) righteousness imputed to the believer. Good works, though necessary as evidence of justifying faith, are what have been prepared in advance by God for believers; they exemplify the power of the gospel to transform the believer into a new creation. The imputed righteousness of Christ, however, ever remains the exclusive basis of salvation. Final justification, i.e., judgment according to works (but not on the *ground* of works), is God's vindication and approbation of the saints who walk in true righteousness and holiness.<sup>41</sup> Recent assaults upon the confessional Reformed teaching have arisen in some very unexpected places and among some of the most distinguished voices in Reformed theology. Reymond rightly opposes a statement drawn up in the 1990s, entitled "Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium."<sup>42</sup> Reymond also takes vigorous exception to the argument of John Gerstner claiming that Aquinas held a Protestant understanding of the doctrine of justification.<sup>43</sup> Disappointingly, however, Reymond only makes passing reference to the highly important debate among contemporary biblical theologians and exegetes regarding Paul's interpretation of the Mosaic law. Surely this controversy deserves more analysis and critique than is offered in *A New Systematic Theology*.<sup>44</sup>

The remainder of this section takes up the subject of sanctification. Although the sinner redeemed by God's grace has been delivered from the curse of the law, he is called to be perfect just as his Father in heaven is perfect. (In Reformed theology the "third use of the law" has reference to the commandments of God which are normative for godly living.) The ethics of the kingdom of Christ are laid out in the canonical

documents of the New Covenant. Reymond regards the Decalogue, what is presented in the Bible as a summary of the Mosaic law, to be an ethical code for Christian living. Of particular importance to Reymond is the (Puritan) doctrine of the sabbath, as enunciated in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* and *Catechisms*. However, one must not lose sight of the fact that since the time of the Reformation onwards, the doctrine of the sabbath has proven to be one of the major points of contention among Reformed interpreters.<sup>45</sup> Whereas the reality of the Christian's struggle with sin remains uncontested, differences of opinion arise in the interpretation of this ongoing spiritual battle. Departing from the Augustinian position on Rom 7, what has been the dominant view among Reformed exegetes, Reymond construes Rom 7:14-25 as a description of the apostle's struggle with sin when he was yet unconverted. (Reymond devotes an entire appendix to this Pauline text.) With respect to the filling of the Spirit Reymond correctly states: "The Spirit's filling activity follows upon the Spirit's sealing work, is ongoing in the life of the Christian, and is involved in and is an aspect of the Christian's progressive sanctification." He adds: "To be filled with the Spirit is to be indwelt by the word of Christ; to be indwelt by the word of Christ is to be filled with the Spirit."<sup>46</sup> God who sovereignly initiates the work of salvation in the life of the believer will see it to completion. Salvation both begins and ends with God. Bringing to a close Reymond's discussion of the application of salvation by the Spirit of Christ to God's elect, the author reiterates the judgment of John Murray and J. I. Packer that adoption (i.e., sonship) is the "apex of redemptive grace and privilege."<sup>47</sup> What greater blessing can one experience or conceive than the enjoyment of being a son of the Most High, a member of God's family having the privilege of intimate fellowship and communion with God. These are only some of the many gems that Reymond has gleaned from the treasury of Reformed soteriology.

#### **4 Ecclesiology: The Church Reformed and Reforming**

Some would argue that the real test of the church's doctrine lies in the ecclesiastical ordering of the life (and faith) of God's covenant people. Agreeably, this stands as a biblical objective or standard by which to measure the health of the church. In the presbyterian and Reformed communions the local church is governed by elders who are committed to rule God's household according to the doctrines and principles of the faith delivered once-for-all to the saints. But sin, in both its individual and corporate dimensions, impedes the perfect attainment of this goal. Even so, the church must ever strive after (perfect) holiness and righteousness. In the Reformed tradition the marks of the true church include the preaching of the Word and the proper administration of the sacraments. Important also – some would say essential – for the spiritual well-being of the household of faith is ecclesiastical discipline.

The people of God, called the church, are those who by God's sovereign good pleasure are called out of the world to bear God's name among the nations. Beginning in the Garden of Eden after the Fall God established his Covenant of Grace with faithful sons and daughters, those confessing his name and walking in his commandments. This covenant was not restricted to the elect seed (those chosen from all eternity to be the heirs of everlasting life), though the *proper purpose* of redemptive covenant is sovereign election and grace. "The church of God in Old Testament times," observes Reymond, "was not equivalent to the nation of Israel *per se*, for there were always some



– and sometimes many, if not most – within that nation who were never more than the physical seed of Abraham.”<sup>48</sup> After surveying the history of the church in the Old and New Testaments, Reymond concentrates on the church after Pentecost, the New Covenant people of God.<sup>49</sup> (The spiritual core is the seed of election.)

Worship in the Reformed tradition is conducted in accordance with the “regulative principle.” God’s people worship their Creator and Redeemer not according to their own desires or inclinations, but according to the dictates of Scripture. The elements of worship (i.e., singing, the reading of the Scriptures, prayer, the presentation of offerings, the exposition of the Word) are set forth in the pages of the New Testament; nothing more and nothing less is appropriate or legitimate in corporate, public worship on the Lord’s Day. Reformed churches, however, have not been able to agree fully on the *application* of this principle. Among the divisive issues is the use of instrumental accompaniment and “special music” by choir or vocalists. Some congregations observe exclusive psalm-singing. More recently, debates have arisen over “contemporary worship,” including the legitimacy of drama, dance, and Scripture songs in place of (or alongside of) the traditional hymns of the church. Controversy also surrounds the use of “church-growth” methodologies in worship, missions and evangelism, a controversy which reflects in part differences between Old School and New School Presbyterianism in the nineteenth century. According to the regulative principle, explains Reymond, “true worship may include only those matters which God has either expressly commanded in Scripture or which may be deduced from Scripture by good and necessary consequence.”<sup>50</sup> Reymond urges that worship be “biblical, spiritual, simple, weighty, and reverent.”<sup>51</sup> Even though his application of the Reformed principle of worship is somewhat wooden, Reymond’s discussion is highly instructive for evangelical and Reformed churches at the close of the twentieth century. I maintain that there is room for (cultural) diversity as reflected in music and in liturgical forms and practices, be they “formal” or “informal.”

With regard to the doctrinal and confessional life of the church Reymond rightly contends that “the church must reflect deeply on the truth of God’s Word and frame what it finds there in symbols and confessions in order better to engender in its members a clear conception of their faith and to convey to outsiders a definite understanding of its doctrines.”<sup>52</sup> This responsibility cannot be emphasized enough. One of the pressing needs among the Reformed churches today is a modern creedal statement formulated in the context of present-day challenges and controversies.<sup>53</sup> Evangelical Reformed Christianity will not survive this new millennium unless it takes seriously its obligation to know, love, and revere God’s Word. (Were this to take place, doubtless, many of the lesser problems facing the church would dissipate.) Central to the church’s fulfillment of the Great Commission is the establishment of learning centers as part of the educational ministry and missionary outreach of the church throughout the world.<sup>54</sup> Here lies the biblical formula for genuine church growth. Reymond sadly notes: “Even the evangelical church shows signs of losing confidence in the convincing and converting power of the gospel message. ... The winning message, it seems, is the one that helps people to solve their temporal problems, improves their self-esteem and makes them feel good about themselves.”<sup>55</sup>

Preaching to the heart and to the mind remains the God-ordained method of building the kingdom of Christ. By his sovereign and powerful working through the preaching

of the Word and the faithful administration of the sacraments God is establishing his everlasting kingdom of life and righteousness.

The basis of admission into the church of Christ is a credible, sincere profession of faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. While catechetical instruction is both advisable and necessary (in order for those converted to the faith to make a *credible* profession of faith), growth in Christian doctrine and life takes place over a lifetime. The presbyterian directory or book of church order describes the government of the church from the lowest judicatory to the highest (from session to presbytery to general assembly). In this system of church government the bond which unites individual churches is twofold: (1) a shared confession of faith; and (2) the book of order. Apostolicity, one of the attributes of the true church, brings into view the requirement for doctrinal purity among the churches.<sup>56</sup> The chief responsibility of the elders is the spiritual nurture and protection of Christ's flock. Church discipline, exercised in truth and in love, is a matter of moral suasion, not physical coercion.

The second ecclesiastical office in presbyterianism is that of the deacons, those appointed to attend to the temporal needs of the congregation (thus freeing the elders to devote their time and energies to spiritual oversight). Here also, Reformed congregations have manifested divergent understandings of the church's diaconal responsibilities. Properly conceived, "the work of Christian benevolence [has] reference to all the church's needy."<sup>57</sup> Reymond views this duty of the congregation in caring for the needy within her own walls, however, as merely one of priority. Included in the ministry of the diaconate, he argues, is care for the needy in the community and in the world at large. This all-too-common (mis)understanding confuses the cultic and cultural institutions as established by God after the Fall. Church and state are two distinct and separate realms. By common grace, Christians and nonChristians work and live together; in their civic affairs they are governed by rules and policies laid down by the ministers of the state. One of the responsibilities of civil servants is the protection and care for the poor, the distressed, and the needy within the commonwealth. Beyond this, God has made special provision for the saints by ordaining the office of the deacon as part of the institutional governance of the church. What is required of Christians is the prayerful and responsible allocation of time and talent, finances and other resources, to these cultic and cultural tasks respectively. The church of Christ is not a social organization serving the needs of the secular community; its task is wholly different from that of the state. The church is the communion of the saints gathered for worship and service; its task is to declare God's message of mercy and grace to those who are perishing. Apart from faith in Christ, sinners remain under God's wrath and condemnation.

Until recent years the ecclesiastical offices of elder and deacon had been restricted to men. That policy is now rapidly changing in both evangelical and Reformed communions. There are many ramifications of this debate for the Christian church. For instance, Reymond's understanding of the teaching of Scripture precludes women from having any voice whatsoever in public worship. Presumably, his view would exclude women from ushering, praying, reading Scripture, or rendering musical solos. And what about women serving on committees of the session or assisting in the diaconal work? While Reymond encourages women "to engage in the intellectual discipline of theological study," can that education be put to good use in the church and in the

seminary? Much hard thinking is yet to be done in this area. Reymond points out: “the world of the Old Testament was a patriarchal world. Originally its patriarchy was a perfect patriarchy reflecting the federal headship of the male in the pre-Fall Edenic condition.” The fact that the Fall had introduced injustices and abuses in the male/female relationship (both in the marriage institution and in society as a whole) explains why God was willing in OT times “to recognize and adapt himself to a *sinful* patriarchal culture.”<sup>68</sup> Such recognition, however, makes it all the more necessary for the New Covenant people of God – those who enjoy the status of full sonship and who are the recipients of the complete revelation of God in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments – to dismantle those barriers which prevent women from exercising their God-given talents and abilities.

## 5 Eschatology: The Consummation of History

“This area of theology,” writes Reymond, “is the capstone of systematic theology, with every other locus of theology finding its resolution in it.”<sup>58</sup> As a spokesman for covenant amillennialism, the author anticipates Christ’s second advent to be “the next important messianic event on the horizon.”<sup>59</sup> It is this event, also called the Day of the Lord, which signals the final judgment, the separation of the wheat from the tares. Are all evangelicals agreed on the import of these two eschatological events, the return of Christ and the last judgment? Sadly, the answer is no. But as Reymond accurately states, “the doctrines of the final judgment and of hell for the impenitent and the unbeliever are among the *cardinal* doctrines of the Christian faith.”<sup>60</sup> The controversial views of Pinnock are again featured in Reymond’s critique of (radical) evangelical theology and defense of historic Christian teaching on the end times.

Prior to that great and awesome Day, there is the present, interadvental conflict between Israel of the flesh and the true Israel of God. This conflict is but one aspect of the spiritual battle fought in the earthly and the heavenly realms, a warfare involving the entire cosmos. While the hardening of the Jews at the outset of the Christian era means blessing for the Gentiles, the apostle Paul anticipates the complete accomplishment of God’s redemptive purpose. Through the preaching of the gospel to both Jew and Gentile, God is calling the full number of the elect to faith and repentance. Together, believing Jews and Gentiles comprise the Israel of God.

“The instrumentality of the church’s proclamation of the gospel,” explains Reymond (in opposition to the teachings of premillennialism), “meets all the details of [Rom] 11:26 as well as or better than the instrumentality of Christ’s second coming.”<sup>61</sup> To offer any other word of hope to unbelieving Jews would amount to the preaching of another gospel. Israel’s former, ethnic identity as the chosen people of God has no significance with respect to the heavenly reward to be enjoyed by all those who are elect in Christ. The earthly land of Canaan is no longer the site of God’s (theocratic) dwelling; the temple of Jerusalem has been destroyed, never again to serve as the sacred place of worship; the altar of sacrifice has been replaced by the heavenly throne upon which the victorious Lamb of God is seated in power and glory. “It is indeed a strange twist of thinking, if not outright disloyalty to the gospel,” observes Reymond, “for the Christian to aid or abet the Jew in the retention of these Jewish distinctives which provide him the ground for his hope of salvation, the holding on to which only solidifies him in his unbelief.”<sup>62</sup> Failure to recognize these teachings of biblical eschatology

betrays a fundamental misreading of the Old Covenant. Indeed, “[realized] eschatology is the capstone of systematic theology.” It is that which draws together all the strands of redemptive revelation. Hopefully, renewed appreciation of amillennial covenant theology will be one of the many rewards of reading and digesting *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*.

## References

- \* Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998).
- <sup>1</sup> Two recent works in Reformed systematics which incorporate the distinctive contributions of biblical theology (with different degrees of success) are Gordon J. Spykman, *Reformational Theology: A New Paradigm for Doing Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), and Richard Lints, *The Fabric of Theology: A Prolegomenon to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids, 1993). For a broad perspective on developments in contemporary evangelicalism, see Gary Dorrien, *The Remaking of Evangelical Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998). Dorrien favors the revisionist school represented by such writers as Stanley Grenz and Clark Pinnock.
- <sup>2</sup> Compare Mark W. Karlberg, “Doctrinal Development in Scripture and Tradition: A Reformed Assessment of the Church’s Theological Task,” *CTJ* 30 (1995), pp. 401-418. On problems relating to creedal subscription, see *The Practice of Confessional Subscription*, ed. David W. Hall (New York: University Press of America, 1995).
- <sup>3</sup> Consult especially, Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1991).
- <sup>4</sup> For a succinct overview of various contemporary theologies see the study by Donald K. McKim, *The Bible in Theology and Preaching: How Preachers Use Scripture* (Nashville, Abingdon, 1985).
- <sup>5</sup> *A New Systematic Theology*, p. xxi.
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xxxiv.
- <sup>7</sup> See the provocative work of John H. Leith, *The Reformed Imperative: What the Church Has to Say That No One Else Can Say* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1988).
- <sup>8</sup> David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth: Or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1993); *God in the Wasteland: The Reality of Truth in a World of Fading Dreams* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994); *Losing Our Virtue: Why the Church Must Recover Its Moral Vision* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998). John H. Leith in *From Generation to Generation: The Renewal of the Church According to the Church According to Its Own Theology and Practice* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox 1990) offers an analysis of the contemporary church that differs from, yet compliments, Wells’.
- <sup>9</sup> *A New Systematic Theology*, p. 17.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52, original italicized.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 102.
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 102, n.19.
- <sup>13</sup> For my critique of Frame’s (multi-)perspectivalism, see “On the Theological Correlation of Divine and Human Language: A Review Article,” *JETS* 32 (1989), pp. 99-105; and for my critique of Frame on Van Til, see “John Frame and the Recasting of Van Tilian Apologetics: A Review Article,” *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 9 (1993), pp. 279-296. Regarding the discipline of systematics, Van Til maintains that Reformed theology “is not a system of theology in accordance with a logical methodology borrowed from Aristotle or from Kant. On the other hand, it is not chaos. Biblical truth is systematic; that is, it is orderly. Its various doctrines are not deductions from a common central theological principle, but they stand in orderly relation to one another. The one is meaningless without the other. They supplement

one another. Together, they form what may properly be called a system of truth; that is, the content of Scripture is an analogical system of truth" (*The Theology of James Daane* [Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1959], p. 123).

- <sup>14</sup> Reymond writes: "Certainly there are biblical concepts that we cannot fully understand. ... Such concepts are *mysteries* to us, but they are not contradictions in terms." In a footnote he adds: "If someday [God] tells us how he did these things, then of course we will be able to understand them" (*A New Systematic Theology*, p. 107, n.31).

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1112.

<sup>17</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960) 1.1.

<sup>18</sup> *A New Systematic Theology*, p. 152.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* p. 162; cf. pp. 166-67. Reymond perpetuates an ancient tradition of exegesis. Dissenting from this interpretation, I contend that the Johannine text speaks contrastingly of two ways of worship observed by the people of God: under the Mosaic economy worship focused upon the holy, theocratic site in Jerusalem, whereas under the New Covenant worship is unrestricted. The contrast is redemptive-historical and eschatological. "Spirit" has reference to the (Spiritual) presence of God in the midst of his people (there is some overlap here with the letter/Spirit contrast as that pertains to the two covenants, the Mosaic and the New; see especially the argument set forth in the Letter to the Hebrews). In his Gospel, John is particularly fond of comparing OT shadows with NT realities. Jn 4:24 is one instance of it.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 173, 174.

<sup>21</sup> See the illuminating work of Meredith G. Kline, *Images of the Spirit* (Baker Biblical Monograph; Grand Rapids, Baker, 1980). Elsewhere Kline writes: "In pre-Consummation earth history the heavenly Glory-Presence has appeared occasionally in localized symbolic fashion in the form of the theophanic Glory-cloud. This earthly projection is identified in the Bible as the Spirit, and accordingly the heavenly reality, while a trinitarian manifestation, is more particularly identified with the Spirit." He continues: "There is then an eternally continuing Glory-embodiment of God's Spirit-Presence in creation, shaping creation and constituting it a temple. The primal creation event that brought this Glory-Spirit epiphany into existence (Gen 1:1) may be called the endoxation of the Spirit. It is comparable to the incarnation of the Son. Incarnate Son and endoxate Spirit are both living embodiments of the God of Glory" ("The Exaltation of Christ," *Kerux* 12/3 [December 1997], p. 12).

<sup>22</sup> Geerharus Vos, the pioneer of twentieth-century Reformed biblical theology, was also a notable dogmatician. Standing in that same tradition today is Meredith G. Kline, whose literary output has been significant. See the forthcoming *festschrift* written in his honor. My article is entitled "Reformed Theology as the Theology of the Covenants: The Contributions of Meredith G. Kline to Reformed Systematics" (in *Creator, Redeemer, and Consummator: Essays in Biblical Theology Presented to Meredith G. Kline*, eds. H. Griffith and J. R. Muether (Greenville: Reformed Academic Press, forthcoming). This writing, as well as others cited in the present article, can also be found in my *Covenant Theology in Reformed Perspective: Collected essays and book reviews in historical, biblical, and systematic theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2000).

<sup>23</sup> *A New Systematic Theology*, p. 325.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 336.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 355. Compare Paul K. Jewett, *Election and Predestination* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), and my review of this book in *WTJ* 48 (1986), p. 388-91. See also the "Declaration of Faith Regarding Predestination," written on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Reformed Church in Japan, published in *Theological Forum* 26 (1998), pp.

- 27-42; the same issue carries Richard A. Muller's positive evaluation, "Declaring the Faith Today: The Reformed Church in Japan on Predestination" (, pp. 3-46).
- 26 *A New Systematic Theology* 377; cf. p. 414.
- 27 *Ibid.*, p. 392.
- 28 *Ibid.*, p. 396. Compare the discussion in *Three Views on Creation and Evolution*, eds. J. P. Moreland and J. M. Reymonds (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, forthcoming).
- 29 *Ibid.*, pp. 397-403.
- 30 See especially Van Til's *The Theology of James Daane*. Concerning true knowledge of God after the Fall, both Murray and Reymond oppose a natural theology standing independently of God's supernatural revelation. Reymond's appeal, however, to the christomonistic formulation of T. H. L. Parker in this discussion is unfortunate. Surely Reymond does not advocate neoorthodoxy, but his extreme supralapsarianism does blur the biblical distinction between creation and redemption, and between common grace and special grace. Kim Riddlebarger in "The Lion of Princeton: Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield on Apologetics, Theological Method and Polemics" (Ph.D. dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1997) argues unpersuasively that Warfield's natural theology is biblical and presuppositionalist; his case rests on Warfield's belief in the absolute necessity of the regenerative work of the Spirit for understanding God's revelation in nature and in Scripture. "Despite the unfortunate and ill-deserved confusion that surrounds his methodology," writes Riddlebarger, "B. B. Warfield must be placed among the most significant American apologetists of the period" (p. 132). Lacking in this work is substantive interaction with the theological argument and apologetic of Van Til, as well as other exponents of this school of thought.
- 31 Better is Reymond's statement that "The covenant of works reflects the fact that the most fundamental obligation of man the creature to God his Creator always has been, is now, and always will be obedience to the will of the Creator. As *covenant* creature (and therefore always as either covenant *keeper* or covenant *breaker*), man is always ultimately related to God on a *legal* (covenantal) basis" (*A New Systematic Theology*, p. 439). Consult further Mark W. Karlberg, "The Original State of Adam: Tensions in Reformed Theology," *EvQ* 59 (1987), pp. 291-309.
- 32 The angels, like our first parents, were initially placed on probation; those who with Satan rebelled against God were cast out from the Presence of God. There is an ethical dimension to creaturely knowledge of God. Failure to guard the holy temple of God in the garden of Eden culminated in Adam's expulsion from the earthly sanctuary, just as the evil angels were previously cast out from the heavenly sanctuary. Compare my "Israel Under Probation: An Evaluation of Frank Thielman's *Paul and the Law*," paper read at the regional meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society in Valley Forge, PA (April 4, 1995), and "The Significance of Israel in Biblical Typology," *JETS* 31 (1988), p. 257-69.
- 33 *A New Systematic Theology*, p. 492.
- 34 *Ibid.*, p. 509.
- 35 *Ibid.*, p. 544. Compare the helpful collection of essays in *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments*, ed. J. S. Feinberg (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1988), and in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: The Search for Definition*, eds. C. A. Blaising and D. L. Bock (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1992). I have reviewed the former volume in my "Israel and the Eschaton: A Review Article," *WTJ* 54 (1992), pp. 135-152.
- 36 See Mark W. Karlberg, "The Search for an Evangelical Consensus on Paul and the Law," *JETS* 40 (1997), pp. 563-79; and my "Paul's Letter to the Romans in the *New International Commentary on the New Testament* and in Contemporary Reformed Thought," *EvQ* 71 (1999), pp. 3-24. Consult also P. T. O'Brien, "Justification in Paul and Some Crucial Issues of the Last Two Decades," *Right with God: Justification in the Bible and the World*, ed. D.

- A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), pp. 69-95. Edmund P. Clowney in "The Biblical Doctrine of Justification by Faith," *Right with God* (pp. 17-50) cites the study paper "Westminster Statement on Justification" (May, 1980) drawn up by the faculty of Westminster Seminary addressing issues in the seminary's doctrinal controversy on justification, a controversy that has divided both faculty and constituency since the mid-1970s. On the broader context of these debates, see the collection of essays in *Presbyterion* 8/1 (1982) and Reymond's summary analysis in *A New Systematic Theology*, pp. 431-22.
- 37 Compare B. B. Warfield's superb treatment in *The Plan of Salvation: A Study of the Basic and Essential Differences Between Various Interpretations of the Christian Religion* (Revised edition; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970). See also my review of G. Michael Thomas' recent study, *The Extent of the Atonement: A Dilemma for Reformed Theology from Calvin to the Consensus in TrinJ* 20 NS (1999), pp. 116-119.
- 38 *A New Systematic Theology*, p. 704. Compare Anthony A. Hoekema's treatment in *Saved by Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989).
- 39 Reymond questions Murray's analysis of the *ordo*, specifically, his contention that union with Christ is foundational to the entire process, wherein regeneration is seen as the result of God's initial act in effectually calling sinners to Christ (*A New Systematic Theology*, p. 716).
- 40 Reymond adds the clarifying comment: "the Scriptures will not permit us to believe that, because God elected certain people in Christ from all eternity, they have therefore always enjoyed the fullness of his favor in history and that for them there is no transition from wrath to grace in history. ... It is only when they are brought to faith in Christ by their effectual calling that the elect *actually* become partakers of Christ and of the salvific blessings of his cross work" (*ibid.*, p. 737).
- 41 Reymond espouses the common, but problematic, view that rewards in heaven result in gradation among believers: *A New Systematic Theology*, pp. 750-52, 1020-22.
- 42 I would add that the sequel, "The Gift of Salvation," does not fare any better. See the remarks by W. Robert Godfrey in "A Discussion on Justification," *The Outlook* 49/2 (February 1999), pp. 5-7.
- 43 *A New Systematic Theology*, p. 746, n.54.
- 44 Consult Philip Eveson, *The Great Exchange: Justification by Faith Alone in the Light of Recent Thought* (Bromley: Day One, 1996), and the "Interview with Peter Jensen" in *Modern Reformation* 8/2 (March/April 1999), pp. 19-23.
- 45 See the useful collection of essays in *From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Investigation*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982).
- 46 *A New Systematic Theology*, pp. 765, 766.
- 47 *Ibid.*, p. 761.
- 48 *Ibid.*, p. 806.
- 49 See further, J. A. Heyns, *The Church*, trans. D. R. Briggs (Pretoria: N. G. Kerkboekhandel Transvaal, 1980), and Edmund P. Clowney, *The Church* (Contours of Christian Theology; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1995).
- 50 *A New Systematic Theology*, p. 870.
- 51 *Ibid.*, p. 872. Consult *Leading in Worship: A Sourcebook for Presbyterian Students and Ministers Drawing Upon the Biblical and Historic Forms of the Reformed Tradition*, ed. T. L. Johnson (Oak Ridge, TN: The Covenant Foundation, 1996), and Hughes Oliphant Old, *Worship That is Reformed According to Scripture* (Guides to the Reformed Tradition; Atlanta: John Knox, 1984). See also my "Music in Worship: An Historical Sketch and Theological Appraisal," *The Outlook* 49/9 (October 1999), pp. 3-6.
- 52 *A New Systematic Theology*, p. 878.
- 53 See note 2 above.

- <sup>54</sup> Reymond places special weight on seminary training; see my discussion in “Current Theological Trends in Reformed Seminaries: The Dilemma in Ministerial Education,” paper read the Eastern regional meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society in Lancaster, Pennsylvania (April 3, 1998).
- <sup>55</sup> *A New Systematic Theology*, p. 882.
- <sup>56</sup> Concerning the minister of the gospel, Reymond writes: “He is ever to bear in mind that his authority as a minister is subordinate to the authority of Scripture. ... he must not take offense when his auditors examine the Scriptures, as did the Bereans (Acts 17:11), to see if what he is preaching is true” (p. 917).
- <sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 892.
- <sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 980. Consult further the amillennial studies by Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), and G.K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (The New International Greek Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).
- <sup>59</sup> *A New Systematic Theology*, p. 1023.
- <sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1084.
- <sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1029.
- <sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1031.

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The Lord poured out his Spirit with sovereign freedom. This is encouraging. We cannot trigger the Spirit’s downpour but we should always abound in hope, for we live in the age of the Spirit.

The Lord Jesus may at any time and under any circumstances grant us a fresh bestowment of his Spirit. And we can be certain that nothing will defeat God’s purpose whenever he chooses to renew a season of unusual spiritual richness. How can any opposition down here on earth restrain the outpouring of the Spirit from on high? It is God’s free decision, effortless accomplishment, and sovereign purpose. ‘I will no longer hide my face from them, for I will pour out my Spirit on the house of Israel, declares the Sovereign Lord’ (Ezek. 39:29). At any time, in any measure, upon any church, the Sovereign Lord is able to send the showers of his Spirit, for his greater glory, our richer joy, and the salvation of the nations.

God has promised us this blessing. ‘I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh’ (Joel 2:28). ‘The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call’ (Acts 2:39). Now let us seek his promise. Let us seek it earnestly, laying hold of him in prayer and not letting go. Let us seek it wisely, not sitting around waiting for ‘a special motion of the Spirit before we act, but confidently obeying our Lord’s commands to go and speak at any price and against all opposition and ridicule, even as we continue to pray. He will empower us, according to his will, as we are moving forward in faithful obedience.

Raymond Ortlund in *Revival Sent From God*, commenting on Joel 2:28-29 in reference to the ministry of Jonathan Edwards

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# Old Testament Literature Survey (1999–2001)

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*Philip H Eveson*

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The purpose of this survey is to draw people's attention to recent books which might be otherwise missed or where some guidance is needed. It makes no claim to be exhaustive. The previous OT survey in Spring 1999 should be consulted for a brief description of some of the evangelical commentary series.

## **Biblical Theology**

We begin with the latest addition to the IVP's series of 'New Dictionaries', the *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* edited by **T.D. ALEXANDER** and **Brian S. ROSNER**, (IVP, 2000). It witnesses to the renewed interest in this branch of theology which has suffered considerably from the destructive criticism that dominated biblical scholarship during the 19th and 20th centuries. This substantial volume is divided into three sections. Part One provides an introduction to the whole subject of biblical theology. Among the items covered, is an article on the importance of biblical theology to preaching. The remainder of the work assumes the conservative evangelical position taken in this first section.

In Part Two the major sections of the biblical material are considered such as the Wisdom literature and the Prophetic Books. Instead of separate essays on the Pentateuch and the Former Prophets, there is one article dealing with Genesis to Kings. These introductory items are followed by a discussion of the theology of each book of the Bible. Over half the dictionary is contained in Part Three. It focuses on topics that 'are of central importance for an understanding of the unity of the biblical corpus'. The articles take us alphabetically from 'Abraham' to 'Worship'. There are cross-references to other topics of interest. For some subjects not individually covered, the reader is referred to articles in which the topic is discussed. Certainly this will remain an extremely useful tool for many years to come.

The most recent addition to the series, 'New Studies in Biblical Theology' is **Barry WEBB's** *Five Festal Garments* (Apollos, 2000). Its subtitle reads, *Christian Reflections on the Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes and Esther*. All preachers and students of God's word should possess a copy of this book. In the series preface, the editor, D.A. Carson writes, 'This volume will not only help thinking Christians understand their Bibles better, and therefore the God of the Bible, but (I cheerfully predict) it will form the substance of not a few sermons delivered by preachers who for the first time dare expound the Five Scrolls.'

## **Preaching**

There are two books on preaching to be commended. They are included in this survey because they deal in some detail with a subject that is of considerable interest and concern to every evangelical preacher and teacher who wishes to be faithful to the word of God. **Graeme GOLDSWORTHY**, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian*

*Scripture* (IVP, 2000), seeks to apply biblical theology to expository preaching. While there are many books on preaching there are few which see the significance and role of biblical theology in the task of moving from the exegesis of Scripture to the preached message. In chapter one the author reminds us that evangelical preachers have an agenda. 'We want to see people converted and established in the Christian life on the surest foundation. – the word of God.' He is concerned to rectify a situation where people are encouraged to read and apply the Old Testament without any explicit Christian content. Old Testament characters are used by the preacher and teacher primarily, and sometimes exclusively, as examples of faith and behaviour for us to follow or, conversely, to avoid, and the gospel content is missing. Having moved away from the old methods of finding Christ in all the Scriptures which owed more to an over-productive imagination than to sound biblical principles, many no longer preach 'Jesus Christ and him crucified' from the whole Bible. This book presents a more satisfying approach to finding Christ in all the Scriptures. In the first part, Dr Goldworthy answers some basic questions about the Bible, biblical theology and preaching with a view to proclaiming Christ-centred sermons. The second part tackles in a practical way the application of biblical theology to preaching, by examining the various types of literature that make up the Bible. For instance, in dealing with the wisdom literature such as Proverbs, he warns against taking up an ethical or behavioural issue and divorcing it from the wider redemptive-historical context. We must 'not use the opportunity to put our hearers under the law with no gospel. Proverbs is as much about how one goes about gaining wisdom as it is about particular topics of wisdom.'

**Sidney GREIDANUS**, *Preaching Christ From the Old Testament* (Eerdmans, 1999), is an informative and practical textbook on this subject. He takes nothing for granted. Before considering the various methods, he emphasises the importance of preaching Christ and the necessity of preaching Christ from the OT. In doing so he covers the whole issue of what it means to preach Christ, the reasons for the lack of preaching from the OT as well as presenting the reasons for and the benefits of preaching Christ from the first part of the biblical canon. After surveying the history of the subject, he identifies seven acceptable ways of preaching Christ from the OT. He takes the reader step by step from the text to the 'Christocentric sermon'.

Although not a book about preaching, *The Ancient Love Song, Finding Christ in the Old Testament* by **Charles D. DREW** (Presbyterian & Reformed, 2000) is an example of how to preach Christ from the Old Testament using the benefits of the biblical theology approach. There are questions for discussion and reflection at the end of each chapter.

## OT Introductions

**David W. BAKER** and **Bill T. ARNOLD** have assembled a collection of essays by leading conservative evangelical authors which should prove very useful for those wishing to keep abreast of current thinking. *The Face of Old Testament Studies, A Survey of Contemporary Approaches*, (Apollos/Baker, 1999) examines the state of OT scholarship over the last twenty years with judicious and fair comment. The essays cover all the main areas of OT study and the footnotes and author index will reveal the thorough nature of this survey. Professor VanGemenen of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School considers the work to be 'A magnificent contribution to the state of Old Testament scholarship'.

In *Re-thinking Genesis, the sources and authorship of the first book of the Pentateuch* by **Duane GARRETT** (Mentor, 2000), the author makes a fresh and interesting contribution to an old question, arguing that Moses made use of different source materials. Of this book Motyer writes, 'no reader will put it down unrewarded'. For an up-to date, clear and informative introduction to the making, transmission, and significance of the first translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into any language, *Invitation To The Septuagint* by **Karen H. JOBES** and **Moises SILVA** (Paternoster, 2000) should prove helpful for beginners.

## OT Commentaries

Commentaries on Genesis continue unabated. The latest include **John E. HARTLEY**, *Genesis* in the **New International Biblical Commentary** series (Hendrickson/Paternoster, 2000). The series editor in his forward devalues commentaries which do not engage with recent scholarly works, applying the word *precritical* to them, a term demeaning to the scholarship of Calvin and those who followed him. It is a pity that Professor Hartley has not taken note of his editor and engaged with recent scholarship concerning the 'seed' theology in Genesis (see, for instance, *From Paradise to the Promised Land* by T.D. Alexander, Paternoster, 1995). According to Hartley neither the author nor readers of the OT period would have seen anything more in Genesis 3:15 than God giving 'humans the hope of mastering frightful serpents'. **Bill T. ARNOLD**, *Encountering the Book of Genesis* (Baker, 1998) is not a detailed commentary, but an introduction that interprets Genesis against the background of the Ancient Near Eastern world. It is full of diagrams and illustrations and is user-friendly.

After a period which has seen little in the way of books on Exodus, it is good to introduce four commentaries from evangelical authors. **John D. CURRID**'s *Exodus, Vol.1 Chapters 1-18* (Evangelical Press, 2000) is the first OT volume in the **EP Study Commentary** series. Currid's research in Egyptology is reflected in his comments and notes. Both this and the **Mentor Commentary** on *Exodus* by **John L. MACKAY**, (Christian Focus, 2001) explain and apply the text in a careful and God-honouring way. There is very little to choose between them, except that the second part of Currid's work is not yet available. Both are well-researched and readable productions that open up this second book of Moses. While Mackay adopts 'on balance' a 15th century date for the exodus, Currid considers it 'an open question', although his sympathies seem to lie with a 13th century date. **Peter ENNS** has produced a fine piece of work in the **NIV Application Commentary** series, (Zondervan, 2000). It follows the format of the series by dividing each section of material into three parts: the Original Meaning, Bridging Contexts, and Contemporary Significance. There are excellent comments on the text, the biblical theological significance of each section is brought out and the application is generally of a high standard. An annotated bibliography adds to the usefulness of this commentary. In the **Welwyn Commentary Series**, **Michael BENTLEY**'s *Travelling Homeward, Exodus simply explained* (Evangelical Press, 1999) expounds the text with plenty of illustrations and down-to-earth application, particularly of a moral nature. It is not so clear in coming to terms with the theological significance and purpose of the book.

New in the **Focus on the Bible** series is **Dale Ralph DAVIS**' *1 Samuel, Looking on the Heart*, (Christian Focus, 2000), which brings together two books previously

published by Baker in 1988 and 1996. Alec Motyer describes it as 'A great feast of biblical truth made so digestible, garnished with so many apt illustrations.' *2 Samuel, Out of every adversity*, was published in 1999. **Roger ELLSWORTH** has made a further contribution to the **Welwyn** series with his *From Glory to Ruin, 1 Kings simply explained* (Evangelical Press, 2000). The **Crossway Classic Commentaries** series has recently added two works by **John CALVIN**, *Isaiah* and *Jeremiah and Lamentations* (Crossways, 2000). They are condensed and modernised to introduce more readers to this prince of commentators.

The wisdom literature of the OT is receiving more attention these days. It is good to see in print again **William Henry GREEN**, *Conflict and Triumph, The Argument of the Book of Job Unfolded* (Banner of Truth, 1999). It is not a word by word commentary on the text but an extremely valuable summary of the whole book by one of old Princeton's great biblical scholars.

Good commentaries on Proverbs are thin on the ground. All who are looking for a trusty guide in their study of this wisdom book will be much encouraged by **Eric LANE**'s book, *Proverbs, Everyday Wisdom for Everyone*, in the **Focus on the Bible** series (Christian Focus, 2000). Each verse is considered in a clear and user-friendly way and at the end of the commentary there is a comprehensive thematic index of the topics covered. There is application at the end of each chapter, often in the form of questions with biblical references. The author takes account of the personification of wisdom and folly in terms of the good and bad (or 'strange') woman respectively, but could have developed the theme in a more thorough-going way. Of the two more technical commentaries recently published, **Roland E. MURPHY**'s work on *Proverbs* in the **Word Biblical Commentary** series, No. 22 (Nelson, 1998) is much to be preferred to **Richard J. CLIFFORD**'s *Proverbs*, in the **Old Testament Library** series (Westminster/John Knox, 1999). There are detailed comments on each section of the text with an explanation which seeks to capture its theological import. **Roland MURPHY** is also responsible for the briefer comments on Proverbs in the **New International Biblical Commentary** series, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs* (Hendrickson/Paternoster, 1999). **Elizabeth HUWILER** deals with the other two biblical books. In *Ecclesiastes* there is not enough comment on key texts, such as 12:9-14. *Song of Songs* is seen as a unified work about young lovers and their dreams. The reader will be left wondering whether the book encourages sex before marriage. Furthermore, at no time are we led to consider the love between the Lord and his people. Doubt is placed on Solomonic authorship while too much is made of what is described as the 'likely hypothesis' of female authorship.

**Michael V. FOX**, in *A Time to Tear Down & A Time to Build Up, A Rereading of Ecclesiastes*, (Eerdmans, 1999), is a work of great erudition and insight. It is a revision of his 1987 study *Qohelet and His Contradictions*. He gives more attention than he did previously to the Preacher's constructive thought and takes the opportunity to respond to recent scholarly literature. Unlike Longman in his commentary on *Ecclesiastes* in the **NICOT** series (see review in Spring 1999), Fox sees less of a contrast between the message of the Preacher and the message of the author of *Ecclesiastes*. He dismisses too readily *Fredericks*' understanding of 'vanity' as 'ephemerality' and in its place argues for the meaning 'absurd' or 'senseless'.

**Tremper LONGMAN III's** contribution to **The NIV Application Commentary** series, (1999, Zondervan) on *Daniel*, brings out the meaning and contemporary significance of the book but one will need to go to Young and Baldwin for a more detailed treatment of the text. As he considers wisdom in Daniel he does not hesitate to present his own interpretation of Ecclesiastes.

## **OT sermons**

*Just Grace* is a series of sermons on the Ten Commandments by **R.T. KENDALL** (SPCK, 2000), with a helpful forward by Terry Virgo. Kendall introduces the sermons by telling us of his experience at Oxford as he began studying the Puritans. One gets the feeling that the author is embarrassed to mention the Commandments in Christian circles, whereas the New Testament is not diffident in referring to them. We close this survey by referring to two books published by Bryntirion Press in 1999. The first brings together sermons preached by **D. Martyn LLOYD-JONES** which have been given the title, *Let everybody praise the Lord, An exposition of Psalm 107*. These evangelistic sermons show the profound difference between false and true religion and how true Christianity inevitably leads to praising God from a sincere and grateful heart. Another gripping and challenging series of evangelistic sermons this time by **Graham HARRISON**, entitled *Beginning at the Beginning, Sermons from the Book of Genesis*, is also warmly recommended.

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To his eternal glory, God does not deal with his covenant people strictly on the basis of what they deserve. He figures into his moral equation the merit of his crucified Son and he gives us good things we do not deserve. And that means one thing for us who bear his name. Discipline may be necessary but it is never final. We may ruin our lives; we may bungle the stewardship of God's cause in our generation. But God is the greatest junk dealer in the universe. He deals in secondhand merchandise. In his wisdom and mercy, he takes the damaged goods of our lives and he restores us. No one else can do this. No one else cares enough to try. All our hope lies in God. And this vision of God our Restorer fills the people of God with hope, even as they remain for new under discipline. God will restore our fortunes. But there is still more.

Raymond Ortlund in *Revival Sent From God*, commenting on Psalm 126

So what is the proof that the Spirit is being poured out on us? The voice of the church rings with prophetic clarity. The people of God are no longer passive, intimidated, unresponsive, uncertain. They are no longer preoccupied with self-convenience, comfort. They are no longer complaining, whining, griping. Instead, they become outspoken in God's praises and gospel truth, 'declaring the wonders of God' (Acts 2:11). The Spirit-drenched people of God 'speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. [They] sing and make music in [their] heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ' (Eph. 5:19-20). And the unbeliever, observing a church eloquent with prophetic power, 'Will be convinced by all that he is a sinner and will be judged by all, and the secrets of his heart will be laid bare, So he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, "God is ready among you"' (1 Cor. 14:24-25).

Raymond Ortlund in *Revival Sent From God*, commenting on Joel 2:28-29

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## Book Reviews

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### John Stott – The Making of a Leader

*Timothy Dudley Smith, IVP, £14.99*

Some people will never forgive John Stott for four things: being an Anglican; supporting Billy Graham in 1966 (we must wait until Volume 2 for that story which probably will not be fully told or understood this side of eternity); his position on conditional immortality and most seriously that he has been a success while still being alive!

This volume is part one of a projected two-volume biography of Stott. It covers the first 40 years of his life. As the title suggests, this is an account of the background and influences that shaped this man who has made such an impact on global evangelicalism since the Second World War. Timothy Dudley Smith is a close friend of Stott and overall this is a friendly treatment.

There are six things which stand out in this biography.

**The shaping of a careful man.** It is clear that the home where Stott was nurtured had very high standards. Even the lifelong hobby of birdwatching has early beginnings in the young John Stott making meticulous drawing of birds that he had observed.

**The strength of principles.** A very moving section records the tension between Stott and his father over whether John should serve in the forces during the Second World War. Stott senior had a distinguished career in the army during both World Wars and obvious did not begin to understand how John could fail to serve his King and country. Maybe it is this principled tenacity that allows him to take unpopular stand on issues like nuclear pacifism and more recently on Conditional

Immortality. I think we would understand Stott better if we saw that his position on the later point is not the result of the disintegration or denial of his evangelicalism but a principled expression of an evangelical mind wrestling with profound questions.

**The power of mentoring.** The defining influence in Stott's early life was the rather eccentric bachelor EJH Nash (Bash) who is a legend among a certain generation of former Public School boys who went through his camps as boys and then later as officers. It is clear that many of the practical lessons of godliness, bible study, evangelism and leadership were learnt from Bash. Later at All Souls, Stott's Rectory was a veritable leader factory as curate after curate did their apprenticeship under his careful eye. He also developed a method of training church members to understand and pass on their faith.

**The importance of the local church.** Stott could have gone a long way in the Anglican Church, but he saw the strategic importance of building the church. All Souls has quite literally been his church all his life, it was the place he attended as a boy and in retirement he remains Rector Emeritus. Recently I heard Rico Tice who is now on the staff at All Souls speak warmly about the advice and support he as a young man received from Stott. There have been two Rectors since Stott moved into a wider ministry; the church that Stott built has stood the test of time and change.

**The necessity of strategic evangelism.** This is a thrilling story of a man who did not merely pay lip service to meeting the challenge of engaging contemporary society with the unchanging gospel. This is found in his support of Billy Graham, his writing of life changing books like Basic Christianity, his University missions and the week by week work of mobilising the

congregation at All Souls to reach their friends and neighbours for Christ.

**The impact of a biblical ministry globally.** This will clearly be worked out more fully in the much awaited second volume. However the seeds of his future influence are noted here. The basis for so much of John Stott's considerable influence is in his careful reflection on biblical principles and his careful application of them to life.

Anyone interested in the development of evangelicalism in the latter part of the 20th Century will benefit from this book. So too will all who like Stott seek to serve Christ in a changing world.

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## **Losing our Virtue**

*David Wells, IVP, 228 pp, £9.99*

This is the author's third book about the effect of modern culture on evangelical churches. The introductory *No Place for Truth* maintained that evangelicalism today is governed not by theology, but by management methods and psychological therapy. *God in the Wasteland* says that pushed by a culture where God is unimportant, the church has lost its sense of God's sovereignty and holiness and has taken the worldly mind-set of modernity. This third volume turns to our view of man, with telling analyses of modern secularism and evangelicalism.

Wells compares classic evangelical spirituality with that of post-modern evangelicalism. The first issues from an understanding of God's holiness, which puts morality centre stage. It highlights sin, salvation, and obedience. The other focuses on God's love in a way that sees sin less in a moral relationship with God, and more in a therapeutic relationship including inner anxiety and pain. This leads to a greater

emphasis on techniques than on proclaiming the need of salvation from sin.

Wells says that while today's evangelicals assume the central evangelical doctrines, in fact marketing and psychology control their thinking. He points out that as westerners today see morality as private opinion and personal choice, we talk about values, rather than virtues, and seek to deal with inwardly felt shame rather than objective guilt. Self-restraint has disappeared. Today's evangelicals utilise these aspects of modernity rather than challenge them.

Wells correctly insists that Christianity should speak to the culture of the day, rather than be formed by it. By returning to a strong moral vision, evangelicalism would find an effective apologetic to challenge modern people who cannot live consistently with their denial of objective morality. However, while Wells' main thesis is correct, the link between culture and theology may be more complicated than seems apparent from these books. It is arguable, for example, that the Reformation and the Evangelical Revival both owe something to the cultural trends of their times, and that similarly, modern views have helped to challenge an over-cerebral evangelicalism.

The main weakness of the whole series for British readers is that they analyse the American scene. Wells' understanding of Europe is rudimentary, and he makes at least one simple mistake. The British editions even retain American spelling, enhancing the impression we are reading about other people, not ourselves. This is a pity, because although there are important differences between America and Britain, there remains much in their secularism and their evangelicalism that is similar. What Wells is saying remains of paramount importance to both countries.

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*Ivan Stringer*

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## **EDITORIAL POLICY**

1. To articulate that theology characteristic of evangelical churches which are outside pluralist ecumenical bodies.
  2. To discuss any theological issues which reflect the diverse views on matters not essential to salvation held within the BEC constituency.
  3. To appraise and report on contemporary trends in theology, particularly those which represent departure from consistent evangelicalism.
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