



Foundations

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Contents

Editorial	1
Ralph Cunnington	
Evangelical Spirituality in Eighteenth-Century Dissent: Philip Doddridge and John Gill	4
Robert Strivens Principal, London Theological Seminary	
Gathered Worship: Personal Preference or Sacrificial Service?	21
Andrew Towner Associate Vicar, Christ Church Beckenham	
The Changing Architecture of Global Mission	40
Mark Pickett Lecturer in Missiology, Wales Evangelical School of Theology	
Augustine on Revelation 20: A Root of Amillennialism	53
David McKay Professor of Systematic Theology, Ethics and Apologetics, Reformed Theological College, Belfast	
Review Article: Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works (James K. A. Smith)	72
Ted Turnau Lecturer in Cultural and Religious Studies, Anglo-American University and Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic	
Review Article: Romans: The Divine Marriage (Tom Holland)	81
Robert Strivens Principal, London Theological Seminary	
Book Reviews	91

Foundations

Foundations is an international journal of evangelical theology published in the United Kingdom. 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 particular focus is the theology of evangelical churches which are committed to biblical truth and evangelical

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EDITORIAL

"These three words will stand you in good stead as you continue theological study and enter into pastoral ministry. They will guard you against theological heterodoxy." The entire class (myself included) were sat on the edge of our seats waiting for our lecturer, Dr Letham, to give us this great key to theological orthodoxy. He looked at us purposefully and slowly spoke the three words: "Distinct but inseparable."

It's fair to say we were distinctly underwhelmed. We had expected something more profound, more radical; but as the years have passed I have become convinced that he was absolutely right. The three words were not original to him of course; they were first formulated in the heat of the fourth century debates about Trinitarian relations, but they have application far beyond that context. They provide the crucial framework for understanding how the distinct yet inseparable Godhead interacts with his diverse yet unified creation. Indeed, they provide illumination for such difficult doctrines as the nature of the incarnation, the relationship between divine sovereignty and human responsibility, the *ordo salutis*, Word and Spirit, and the doctrine of the sacraments. Over the next few issues, I want to explore some of these doctrines and examine how these three simple words can help us to maintain theological orthodoxy while unpacking some wonderful gospel truths that are often perceived to be impenetrable or unimportant.

It is sensible to begin at the historical theological starting point which is, of course, the Doctrine of God and, in particular, his Trinitarian relations. Against the challenge of Arius and his followers the Early Church Fathers re-asserted the deity of Christ. This meant, however, that they needed to explain how God has eternally existed as one being in three persons. There were two opposite errors that the Fathers needed to avoid.

On the one hand was the error of subordinationism: the view that the Son and the Spirit were somehow derivative and separate from the Father. In time this error tended towards a loose tri-theism making it necessary, even as early as the fourth century, for Gregory of Nyssa to write a treatise titled "On not three gods". Against such error, the Fathers re-affirmed that the God of the Bible is not three Gods. The Trinity is not like a divine club or association where Father, Son and Holy Spirit get together for a common purpose. No, such a view has more in common with the shenanigans on Mount Olympus in Greek mythology than with the God of the Bible. Rather, Father, Son and Holy Spirit have eternally existed in inseparable union. A failure to articulate this clearly among merchants on the Arabian trade routes probably explains why the Qur'an equates Trinitarianism with tri-theism. That, of course, is a gross error which has no Scriptural warrant and

must be avoided at all costs. The persons of the Trinity are inseparable – they are one – eternally so.

But the Fathers also had to avoid slipping into opposite error. In their determination not to separate the Trinity they had to be alert to the danger of confusing or mixing the persons. This was the error of modalism: the belief that God is one person who has appeared in three different modes at three different times: Father (in the Old Testament), Son (in the New Testament) and Spirit (post-Pentecost). Modalism is appealing because it appears to simplify the Trinity but in fact it horribly disfigures God, reducing him to an impersonal, confused and changeable being who cannot be trusted or related to in a personal way. Sadly, one of the most popular Trinitarian illustrations, that of H₂O, where the Father is like ice, the Son like water and the Spirit like steam, falls foul of modalism. Indeed, all human analogies inevitably tend towards either modalism or tri-theism and should therefore be avoided (see the helpful warning of Gregory of Nazianzus, *On God and Christ*, Oration 31.31).

It is here that the formula of “distinct but inseparable” really helps us. The emphasis upon distinction guards against modalism and the emphasis upon inseparability guards against tri-theism. Today, it is popular to speak about balancing different emphases. We hear calls for balance in the “worship wars” where we’re told to balance Word and Spirit. But that, of course, is nonsense. It is an illegitimate importation of a Hegelian dialectic which proposes a synthesis between a thesis and antithesis. While that might work in the context of the philosophy of history (as Hegel proposed), it certainly does not work in theology where two absolute truths must be held together. We worship God in Spirit and truth, not in something in between the two. God is one and three, not a *via media*, which would presumably make him two! The formula of “distinct but inseparable” enables us to hold these truths together. It calls us to recognise that, in all God’s works, the three persons of the Trinity act distinctly yet inseparably. As Augustine put it in his commentary on the works of creation and grace from Matt 3:13, there is “a distinction of persons, and an inseparableness of operation” (*NPNF1*, 6:262). Such inseparable operation spills over into our worship of God which must itself be Trinitarian in character. No one has described this better than Gregory of Nazianzus who wrote: “No sooner do I conceive of the one than I am illumined by the splendour of the three; no sooner do I distinguish them than I am carried back to the one” (*On God and Christ*, Oration 40.41).

Affirming that the persons of the Trinity are distinct but inseparable is important, not only for the sake of theological orthodoxy (which itself would be sufficient reason), but for our understanding of who God is, how we relate to him, and how we understand the world he has created. Without Tri-unity, we could not speak of God as being loving in his very being. Rather we would have to say that a monadic God only had the potential for love, a potential which he realised when he created a world to love – which of course would

make God dependent upon his creation. In a similar vein, the distinct yet inseparable nature of God helps us to understand, appreciate and preserve the diversity in unity that we observe in the world around us. Indeed, as Colin Gunton and Robert Letham have persuasively argued, this will become an increasingly important apologetic against the homogenising trend of Islam and the fragmenting tendency of postmodernism. Furthermore, as we shall see in future editorials, the distinct yet inseparable nature of the Godhead flows out into other important doctrines, beginning with the incarnation.

Turning to the current issue of the journal, I am delighted to be able to present four articles: Robert Strivens, Principal at London Theological Seminary, examines the attitudes to spirituality evidenced in the writings of Philip Doddridge and John Gill. Drawing on his doctoral research, Strivens demonstrates that both men shared a common desire to emphasise the link between doctrine and spirituality. While they differed on the specificity of the guidance they offered for Christian spirituality they both insisted upon the importance of heart religion which engaged the affections as well as the mind. They also shared a common concern to stress the importance of public worship as a means by which spirituality may be strengthened. Andrew Towner, an Anglican Minister who serves on the leadership team of Music Ministry, considers how Jesus' call to footwashing and the two great commandments apply to the sphere of gathered worship. He suggests that Jesus's teaching provides a much-needed corrective in church situations where members allow matters of personal preference to divide the church.

Mark Pickett, Lecturer in Missiology at the Wales Evangelical School of Theology, provides a thought-provoking analysis of how the changing face of the world has impacted traditional mission structures. He argues that, despite recent attempts to challenge the biblical basis for mission agencies, they remain an important component in a multi-faceted approach to global mission. David McKay (one of the Associate Editors of *Foundations*) contributes the final article, analysing Augustine's treatment of Revelation 20. He contends that it provides a strong argument for an amillennial reading of the text and suggests that it should be carefully considered by twenty-first century readers. Also included in the issue are a number of book reviews, including review articles of James Smith's second instalment in his Cultural Liturgies project and Tom Holland's commentary on Romans.

I very much hope you enjoy reading the journal and, as always, welcome correspondence on any of the topics addressed. The next issue promises to be particularly thought-provoking as we publish articles examining the growth and development of gospel partnerships within Anglo-American evangelicalism.

Ralph Cunnington
November 2013

EVANGELICAL SPIRITUALITY IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY DISSENT: PHILIP DODDRIDGE AND JOHN GILL

*Robert Strivens**

Spirituality is very much on the agenda of evangelical Christians today. Yet there is great confusion about what true spirituality is or should be. The means by which true spirituality may be achieved is controversial. Is it primarily a mystical experience, impossible to define, hard to obtain, difficult to lay down rules by which to attain it? Or is it a matter of pursuing certain clear, albeit challenging, disciplines of prayer, Bible reading and other daily habits of life? Is true spirituality something that comes upon an individual, beyond his control and outside his expectations, or is it something that may be actively sought, step by step? And where do we find authoritative answers to questions such as these? The issues are vital for anyone who believes, as any biblically-minded Christian surely does, that life in Christ involves regular communion with, and experience of, the triune God. This article examines the thought and practice of two Englishmen from the eighteenth century, Philip Doddridge and John Gill, in order to help identify more clearly the nature of biblical spirituality and the means of achieving it.

Introduction

In early October, 1751, Philip Doddridge was travelling by ship to Lisbon in Portugal. He was a dying man. The previous December, he had travelled from his hometown of Northampton to St Albans, a journey of about 45 miles. He had gone there to preach the funeral sermon of his lifelong friend and mentor, Samuel Clark, who had pastored an Independent congregation in St Albans for many years. On his journey, Doddridge caught a chill, which he proved unable to shake off through the rest of that winter. Despite the efforts and suggestions of medical advisers and friends, the illness clung to him and, as a last resort, he was persuaded to leave England and sail south, to Portugal, in the hope that the warmer climate there would help him to recover. It was not to be. Lisbon in October can be as wet as Britain is at any time of year and so it proved. The linen on the bed he slept in was damp and,

* Robert Strivens is the Principal of London Theological Seminary. This article is based on a paper delivered at the Andrew Fuller Conference, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville KY, 24-25 August 2009. The papers from that conference are due to be published next year.

despite his wife's best efforts, Doddridge could not get warm. Philip Doddridge died there on 26 October 1751, aged 49.

Just after landing in Lisbon, Doddridge had written to his assistant at the church that he pastored in Northampton: "I chearfully submit myself to GOD. If I desire Life may be restored, it is chiefly, that it may be employed in serving *Christ*... I hope I have done my Duty, and *the Lord do, as seemeth good in his Sight*."¹ In that short extract, we see some of the principal elements of the spirituality of this man, who was for twenty years the pastor of a large, Independent congregation in the market town of Northampton and the principal tutor of a flourishing Dissenting academy there, an institution which, over that period, prepared around 120 men for pastoral ministry in Dissenting congregations in England and elsewhere. As I hope to show, Doddridge's spirituality consisted in a very strong sense of duty to Christ, to serve Christ in whatever way he commanded, coupled with an equally strong sense of the privilege and joy which such service involved. These elements can be summarised in the phrase that appears in the letter which I have just quoted: "I chearfully submit myself to GOD".

Twenty years later, John Gill was dying, not on a ship but, appropriately, in his study. His first biographer, John Rippon, states in his memoir of the great man, that it was in his study that he was "seized for death", though it is not clear whether he meant by this that Gill died actually in that room or elsewhere in the house. Like Doddridge, Gill had written a letter to a fellow-minister shortly before his demise, which again expresses the essence of Gill's spirituality:

*I depend wholly and alone upon the free, sovereign, eternal, unchangeable, love of God, the firm and everlasting covenant of grace, and my interest in the Persons of the Trinity, for my whole salvation; and not upon any righteousness of my own; nor on any thing in me, or done by me under the influences of the Holy Spirit... but upon... the free grace of God, and the blessings of grace streaming to me through the blood and righteousness of Christ, as the ground of my hope. These are... what I can live and die by.*²

And die by them he did, at the age of 73, with the words of Isaac Watts on his lips:

He rais'd me from the deeps of sin, –
The gates of gaping hell;
And fix'd my standing more secure
Than 'twas before I fell.

¹ Job Orton, *Memoirs of the Life, Character and Writings of the Late Reverend Philip Doddridge, D. D. of Northampton* (Salop: Printed by J. Cotton and J. Eddowes, 1766), 346.

² John Rippon, "A Brief Memoir of the Life and Writings of the Reverend and Learned John Gill, D. D.", in John Gill, *An Exposition of the Old Testament in Six Volumes* (London: Printed for Mathews & Leigh, 1810; repr. Paris, Arkansas: The Baptist Standard Bearer, 1989), lxxx.

A very strong doctrinal emphasis, coupled with a strong sense of his interest in the finished work of Christ on his behalf, evident both in the letter just quoted and in the verse of that hymn, characterise the spirituality of John Gill. Again, the words just quoted, “These [that is, these great truths] are... what *I can live and die by*”, sum up in a phrase Gill’s piety.

Doddridge and Gill

Who were these two men? Philip Doddridge began his ministry in Northampton in 1730. He was a convinced Dissenter, congregationalist and paedo-baptist. He described himself as a “moderate” Calvinist. Though sure in his own convictions, he was broad in his sympathies, ready to form friendships with Christians who did not see eye-to-eye with him on every point. While he held the great reformed confessions of the previous century in high regard, he opposed the imposition of creeds and confessions on a man as a test of his faith. The greatest threat to evangelical Christianity he saw as coming from Roman Catholicism and from the Deists. Doddridge did not have a great deal of time for high Calvinists, who held strongly to distinctively Calvinist doctrines such as election, the irresistible nature of grace and the effects of sin upon the human mind and will. Some high Calvinists also felt a reluctance to a free and universal offer of the gospel to unbelievers. Doddridge’s suspicion of such men tended to be reciprocated – he was accused of Arminianism by some who disliked the free and open way in which he urged sinners to repent and believe in Christ.

John Gill was born a few years earlier than Doddridge, in 1697, and lived quite a few years longer, dying (as stated above) in 1771, at the age of 73. Gill ministered for over 50 years to a Baptist congregation meeting in Horselydown in Southwark. He was an adherent of a strong Calvinistic theology which tended on some points to high Calvinism: he taught eternal justification and was opposed to the idea of gospel “offers”, though he did believe that the gospel should be preached to all and that all who truly repented of their sin and trusted in Christ would be saved. Like Doddridge, he had contacts outside his immediate circle, counting the Anglicans Augustus Toplady and James Hervey amongst his friends. Unlike Doddridge, though, Gill would not have dreamt of extending his friendship to men whom he considered to be moving in an Arminian or Arian direction in their theology. It is perhaps not so surprising that the two men do not appear to have had dealings with one another.

Despite that, their views on the nature of true spirituality have a number of important common features, of which the following are significant.

Points of agreement

(i) the importance of the heart

Firstly, true spirituality begins in the heart. Both Doddridge and Gill, as evangelicals, held that true spirituality was a matter, first and foremost, of the heart. This, of course, was the Puritan view; the foundation of true piety did not lie in outward activities of any kind. The fundamental matter, in the Puritan view, concerned the heart. John Downname (1571-1652) put it in this way: "The Lord, above all other parts, requireth the heart, as being the first mover and chiefe agent in this little world of man, which ordreth and disposeth of all the rest."³ The heart was the central matter and concern. Philip Doddridge agreed: "Religion, in its most general View, is such a Sense of God on the Soul, and such a Conviction of our Obligations to him, and of our Dependance upon him, as shall engage us to make it our great Care, to conduct ourselves in a Manner which we have reason to believe will be pleasing to Him."⁴ Hypocrites may exhibit an outward piety but, like the Pharisees who devour widows' houses, it is for them no more than what Doddridge calls a "grave Mask".⁵ The Pharisees are the paradigmatic exemplars of the folly of a mere outward form in religion: "How little do the most specious *Pretences of Piety* signify, if they are not animated by the Heart, and confirmed by the Life!"⁶

John Gill's treatise, *Practical Divinity*, which follows his two volumes of *Doctrinal Divinity*, takes for its subject the worship of God, which for Gill is the essence of true godliness and spirituality. True worship, he held, is, first of all, inward: "Internal worship requires our first attention," he says, "it being of the greatest moment and importance; external worship profits little in comparison of that;... yea vain is such worship where the heart is far removed from God."⁷ So, perhaps unsurprisingly, we find that both men agreed that true spirituality begins in the heart and that without the heart, all that is left of religion is hypocrisy.

(ii) the need to be born again

The second point of commonality between the two men is that true spirituality is possible only for the regenerate. Doddridge was very strong on

³ John Douname, *A Guide to Godlynesse. Or a Treatise of the Christian Life...* (Printed at London by Felix Kingstone for Ed. Weuer & W. Bladen, 1622), Epistle Dedicatory, second page.

⁴ Philip Doddridge, *The Rise & Progress of Religion in the Soul...* (London: Printed and Sold by J. Waugh, 1745), 2-3.

⁵ Philip Doddridge, *The Family Expositor: Or, a Paraphrase and Version of the New Testament... Vol. 1* (London: Printed by John Wilson, 1739), 308.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 327.

⁷ John Gill, *A Body of Practical Divinity; Or, a System of Practical Truths, Deduced from the Sacred Scriptures...* (London: Printed by George Keith, 1770), 6.

this point, with good reason. The early eighteenth century in England was the age of the moralists – preachers who believed that men could be persuaded, merely by the reasonableness of the Christian religion, to act in accordance with its moral precepts. One of the most popular sermons of the day was that of John Tillotson, Archbishop of Canterbury under William III. His text was 1 John 5:3, “And his commandments are not grievous”. The sermon has three points: “1. That the Laws of God are reasonable... 2. That we are not destitute of sufficient power and ability for the performance of them. And 3. That we have the greatest encouragements to this purpose.”⁸ There is no hint here that man is incapable of obeying God without a prior supernatural work of God in his life.

Doddridge’s approach, as well as Gill’s, was quite different. Doddridge’s view of human nature in its natural condition was bleak: “All our Soul is infeebled, and all our Nature corrupted”, so that we find it is impossible “to attempt a Reformation of our corrupt Habits and exorbitant Passions”.⁹ In 1742, Doddridge published a series of ten sermons which he had recently preached at his church in Northampton, on the subject of regeneration. He sought in these sermons to show “how *absolutely impossible* it is, that *any Unregenerate Man* should... *see the Kingdom of GOD*”.¹⁰ Regeneration, then, for Doddridge, was essential for true spirituality. Gill was of the same view: true worship of God is possible only for those who have a right knowledge of God, who have a living faith in God, who are themselves spiritual and godly.¹¹ For those who have not experienced this change, brought about through regeneration, true worship, and so true spirituality, is impossible.

(iii) mind and heart

Thirdly, both men held that true spirituality involved intellectual and emotional elements, that mind and heart were together engaged in true piety. In his classic work, *The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul*, Doddridge brings out each of these elements in turn: true religion, he says, involves a renewed mind, with “*new Apprehensions of Things*” and “*a practical Judgment* different from what you formerly” had; it also involves new affections, “*a Principle in your Heart, which tends to*” God, leading to “*a*

⁸ John Tillotson, *The Works of the Most Reverend Dr. John Tillotson, Late Archbishop of Canterbury...* (London: Printed for B. Aylmer and W. Rogers, 1696), 71.

⁹ Philip Doddridge, *Ten Sermons on the Power and Grace of Christ...* (London: Printed for R. Hett, 1736), 13, 15.

¹⁰ Philip Doddridge, *Practical Discourses on Regeneration, in Ten Sermons...* (London: Printed and sold by M. Fenner and J. Hodges, 1742), 119.

¹¹ Gill, *Practical Divinity*, 9-10.

reverential Fear, and a supream Love... for His incomparable Excellencies, an Affection to Him as the Highest Good".¹²

According to Gill, true godliness may be called a "gracious disposition of the mind God-ward"; it is "the inward devotion of the mind".¹³ But, again, the affections must also be deeply involved:

[believers'] affections are set upon [Christ], and they love him cordially and sincerely; their desires are after him, and to the remembrance of his name; they pant after more communion with him, and the manifestations of his love unto them;... they taste that the Lord is gracious; his word and the doctrines of it; his fruit and the blessings of his grace are sweet to their taste, these are savoury things which their souls love.¹⁴

Spirituality, then, involved both mind and heart.

(iv) grace in living

Fourthly, each man held that true godliness was evidenced by a gracious life. In his *Rise and Progress*, Doddridge devotes a chapter to expounding the temper of the true Christian, who is one who gives evidence of Spirit-influenced graces in his life: humility, a dependence upon God, repentance and a sense of sin, a purity of soul, generosity to the poor, one who guards against indulgence in the things of this world, contentment, patience, and so on.¹⁵ Similarly, Gill held that "Godliness... is an assemblage of graces of the Spirit of God in the hearts of his people, in the exercise of which experimental religion, or internal worship lies".¹⁶ It involves the knowledge of God, repentance towards God, fear of God, faith and trust in him, "the hope of good things from him", love to him, joy in him, humility, self-denial, patience, submission and resignation to his will, thankfulness, "with every other grace necessary to the worship of God, and which belongs to experimental religion and godliness".¹⁷

(v) personal devotion

Fifthly, both men believed that true godliness expressed itself in acts of devotion to God: private prayer and Bible reading and also family worship. In his *Discourse on Prayer*, preached in 1732 to a young men's prayer meeting in his church, Gill gives a detailed exposition of the various elements of

¹² Doddridge, *Rise and Progress*, 127-29.

¹³ Gill, *Practical Divinity*, 10, 7.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁵ Doddridge, *Rise and Progress*, 132-34.

¹⁶ Gill, *Practical Divinity*, 13.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 12-13.

which prayer should consist.¹⁸ He recommends that prayer should begin with the praise of God, move on to an acknowledgement of our unworthiness and confession of sin, be followed by prayer for pardon and a fresh view of God's grace, continue with petition and thanksgiving, as well as prayer to be kept from evil, and end with doxology and a hearty "Amen".¹⁹ Elsewhere, Gill warns that believers can become sluggish in prayer and then they need to stir themselves up to it: "It becomes christians to bestir, awake, and *arouse* themselves... from their spiritual stupor and lethargy, at least, to implore the spirit and grace of God to enable them so to do."²⁰

In a similar way, Doddridge, in the *Rise and Progress*, reproduces a letter which he had written several years previously to a young man who had died shortly after receiving the letter. It was designed to encourage him in a life of true Christian devotion. In the letter, Doddridge urges prayer as the first activity of the day: "It should certainly be our Care, to *lift up our Hearts to GOD*, as soon as we *wake*, and while we are *rising*." Like Gill, he then gives detailed directions as to the subject matter of the "*secret Devotions of the Morning*" – for those who have sufficient time in the morning, Doddridge recommends praise, prayerful consideration of the day ahead and meditation on a few verses of Scripture, closing with a psalm or hymn.²¹

Private devotions, then, form an important part of these men's view of true spirituality.

(vi) the Lord's Supper

There is a sixth and final element which, in the minds of both men, is vital for true godliness. This centres on the Lord's Supper. Both Gill and Doddridge held this ordinance in the highest esteem. Both of course held that, in the bread and wine, there is no actual transformation of substance into the body and blood of Christ, but that the elements are there to remind the believer of Christ's death on his behalf. However, neither man was purely memorialist in his view of the Lord's Supper. Commenting on the apostle Paul's account in 1 Corinthians of the institution of the Lord's Supper, Doddridge urged his readers to "attend this blessed Institution; endeavouring by the lively Exercise of Faith and Love, to *discern*, and in a spiritual Sense, to feed upon,

¹⁸ John Gill, *A Discourse on Prayer, from 1 Corinthians xiv. 15. Preached December 25, 1732...* (London: Printed and Sold by Aaron Ward and H. Whitridge, 1733).

¹⁹ Gill, *Discourse on Prayer*, 23-33.

²⁰ John Gill, "Neglect of Fervent Prayer Complained of", in *A Collection of Sermons & Tracts* (London: George Keith, 1773), Vol. 1, 228.

²¹ Doddridge, *Rise and Progress*, 176-87.

the Lord's Body."²² The Lord's Supper was, in Doddridge's view, "*a Seal of that Covenant which was ratified by his [sc. Christ's] Blood*",²³ and as such to be very highly valued by the Christian as an aid to piety. It was, moreover, at the Lord's Table that "*we have Communion in the Body, and the Blood of Christ, and partaking of his Table and of his Cup, we converse with Christ, and join ourselves to Him as his People*".²⁴

The Puritans had been of the same opinion. John Preston (1587–1628), Master of Emmanuel College, Cambridge, opened his three sermons on the Lord's Supper with a statement of the immense significance of this ordinance:

Of all the actions wherein wee are conversant throughout the whole Tract of life, none are of so great consequence as those wherein we have to doe with the Mightie God of Heaven and Earth: And among all those, none so weightie, as that wherein we draw nearest to him, as we doe in this holy Sacrament of the Lords Supper.²⁵

Again, Preston affirms,

This Sacrament is nothing else, but the Seale of the Gospell of the New Covenant; and it is indeed nothing else, but a visible Gospell;... the same thing which the Gospell preacheth to the eare, that same the Sacrament preacheth to the eye... the Gospell presents it to us under audible words, and the Sacrament presents it to us under visible signes: this is all the difference.²⁶

Gill considered that at the Lord's Supper it is the body and blood of Christ, "on which believers being encouraged by Christ's presence, and assisted by his spirit, feed plentifully, and he sits there and delights himself in viewing the graces of his own spirit in exercise; thus at this table they are both mutually feasted and delighted".²⁷ The bread is to be eaten, discerning the Lord's body – by faith, the believing communicant partakes of the body of Christ:

to eat of this bread spiritually, is no other than *the communion of the body of Christ*, or an having fellowship with him, while feeding on it, and an appropriation and enjoyment of spiritual blessings in him: as bread taken into the mouth and chewed, is received into the stomach, and digested there, and becomes incorporated into the very substance of a man, and by which he is

²² Doddridge, *Family Expositor*, Vol. 4, (London: Printed for the Benefit of the Family, 1753), 340.

²³ Doddridge *Rise and Progress*, 168.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ John Preston, "The Cuppe of Blessing: Delivered in Three Sermons upon 1 Cor. 10. 16", in John Preston, *The Saints Qualification...* (3rd edn., corrected; London: Printed by R. B., 1634), 533-34.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 547.

²⁷ John Gill, *An Exposition of the Book of Solomon's Song...* (London: Printed for Aaron Ward, 1728), 62.

nourished and refreshed; so Christ being received and fed upon by faith, believers are one body and spirit with him, have union to him and communion with him; there is a mutual indwelling of Christ and them, they are one bread. And having spiritual appetites, hungering and thirsting after Christ, they feed upon him, and grow up in him.²⁸

So much, then, for the areas of agreement. These six fundamental elements of true spirituality were professed and taught by both Philip Doddridge and John Gill: true spirituality begins in the heart, requires regeneration, involves both mind and heart, expresses itself in spiritual graces in the life, as well as in practical acts of devotion, and leads to a high view of the Lord's Supper. We will turn now to consider areas of difference and contrast between the two men.

Points of difference

(i) detailed guidance

Firstly, Doddridge was far readier than Gill to give detailed advice on the content and pattern of private devotions and on the practical working out of a life of piety. The description of the content of private prayer, referred to earlier, is somewhat unusual for Gill and it is noticeable that he deliberately stops short of prescribing the times or frequency of private acts of devotion: he warns that "no stress is [to be] laid on the punctual performance of [devotional] duty at... precise times, and [it] is not made the term and condition of our acceptance with God, and of our standing in his favour, which would be to reduce us to the covenant of works, ensnare our souls, and bring us into a state of bondage".²⁹

Philip Doddridge, by contrast, was far more ready to provide detailed prescriptions in matters of devotion and spirituality. Where Gill was anxious to avoid a false spirituality which consisted only of outward duties, Doddridge was concerned that a lack of outward activity would result in a quenching of true piety. In the letter to his young friend, already referred to, Doddridge follows his advice about early morning devotions with comments on the different kinds of pious activity which may make up the believer's day: further times of devotion at various points in the day, the maintenance of appropriate godly attitudes in "*worldly Business*" or in "*Seasons of Diversion*", the careful observation "*of Providences*", watchfulness against temptation, a constant dependence on divine grace, a guarding of one's behaviour both in solitude and in company and finally prescriptions for evening devotions at

²⁸ Gill, *Practical Divinity*, 349.

²⁹ Gill, *Discourse on Prayer*, 36.

the close of the day and the “*Sentiments*, with which we should *lie down*, and compose ourselves *to Sleep*”.³⁰

In these pieces of advice, Doddridge’s idea of everyday piety differs little from that of the Puritans of the previous century. They too had been keen on detailed descriptions of helpful devotional practices. One of the most often reprinted works of Puritan piety in the seventeenth century was *The Practise of Pietie* by Lewis Bayly (c. 1575–1631), Bishop of Bangor from 1615.³¹ Bayly’s work gives detailed instruction for private morning devotions (prayer and Bible reading), the conduct of daily life (including thoughts, words and actions), evening devotions; family prayers (morning and evening), the right use of the Sabbath (morning and evening), fasting, feasting, the Lord’s Supper, conduct during sickness and dying. Similar advice can be found in the *Seven Treatises* of Richard Rogers (1551–1618), a work which went through several editions in the first half of the seventeenth century as well as appearing in an abridged version, *The Practice of Christianitie*, in 1618, itself republished a number of times.³² These works, and others like them, set down in detail how the godly Christian man or woman was to conduct himself or herself throughout the course of a normal day. For the seventeenth-century Puritan, as for Doddridge, spirituality was intensely practical and Christians benefited, in their view, from detailed advice as to exactly when and how to perform their duties of devotion. It was an approach which Gill evidently viewed with some suspicion, for fear that it would lead to legalism or hypocrisy.

(ii) public worship

A second area of difference concerns the emphasis which Gill gave to the church of Jesus Christ as the place particularly appointed by God for the blessing of his people. Gill placed high value upon private and family devotions, but he considered the public worship of the church to be the highest expression of true spirituality. “The Lord loves the private worship of his saints”, he told his hearers in a sermon on Psalm 87:3, “their closet and family devotion; yet he prefers public worship and ordinances to them, where he is more openly worshipped, and by more; and which makes more

³⁰ Doddridge, *Rise and Progress*, 176–87.

³¹ Lewes Bayly, *The Practise of Pietie: Directing a Christian how to walke, that hee may please GOD* (London: Printed for John Hodgets, 1613).

³² Richard Rogers, *Seven Treatises, Containing Such Direction as is Gathered out of the Holie Scriptures, Leading and Guiding to True Happiness, Both in This Life, and in the Life to Come...* (London: Imprinted by Felix Kyngston, for Thomas Man, and Robert Dexter, 1603); *The Practice of Christianitie. Or, An Epitome of Seven Treatises, Penned and Published in the Yeare 1603 by That Reverend and Faithfull Pastor, Mr. R. R. ...* (London: Imprinted by F. K. for Thomas Man, 1618).

for his manifestative glory".³³ It is noteworthy that his volume entitled *Practical Divinity* is in effect a treatise on the church, covering its constitution, government and discipline, as well as the duties of the members and church officers, the ordinances, the preaching and the hearing of the Word, prayer and singing.

Christ's love for his church and, by way of reaction and response, the church's love to Christ, lay at the centre of Gill's view of true spirituality. This, naturally, is the theme of his well-known *Exposition of the Book of Solomon's Song*, first published in 1728. He writes: "Though Christ gives the first discoveries of love on his part; yet when the church is espoused unto him, it highly becomes her to shew an affectionate regard unto him, and strong desire after his company."³⁴ He continues, a little later, "his love [that is, Christ's love for the church] must be preferable to all others... Nothing is so valuable as the love of Christ".³⁵ This theme runs through the entire exposition and one could quote many excerpts to similar effect.

Doddridge, of course, also believed in the importance of the church and her public worship. However, he was a strong advocate of the value of daily household, or family, worship, and this, comparatively speaking, is where he placed his emphasis. Towards the end of his life, Doddridge published a pamphlet on the subject, *A Plain and Serious Address to the Master of a Family on the Important Subject of Family Religion*, in which he addressed his desire to his readers that they "would honour and acknowledge GOD in your Families, by calling them together every Day, to hear some part of his Word read to them, and to offer, for a few Minutes at least, your united Confessions, Prayers, and Praises to him".³⁶ He devoted a considerable portion of his writing life to the production of a mammoth, six-volume commentary and paraphrase, with technical notes, on the entire New Testament. While this does not quite rival Gill's achievement of a verse-by-verse commentary on the entire Bible, it is significant that Doddridge's stated aim in publishing his *Family Expositor* was to help heads of household lead family devotions.

In this, Doddridge differed little from his Puritan forebears, who were equally keen to encourage Christians to engage regularly in family worship, which they saw as foundational to true spirituality, both in individuals and also in society at large. William Gouge (1575–1653), minister at St Ann Blackfriars, London, wrote at length on the subject of family duties: "The spirituall good of children, and that in their childhood, is to be procured by

³³ John Gill, "The Glory of the Church in the Latter Day", in *Sermons and Tracts*, Vol. 1, 53.

³⁴ Gill, *Song*, 12.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 16.

³⁶ Philip Doddridge, *A Plain and Serious Address to the Master of a Family on the Important Subject of Family Religion* (4th edn., London: Printed by Assignment from the Author's Widow, 1761), 7.

parents as well as their temporall. Wherefore *Parents must traine up their children in true piety.*" The parent is the family minister: "That which a Minister is to doe for matter of instruction in the Church, a parent must do at home."³⁷ This he is to do by regular teaching, catechising and correction. The family is the basic unit of society, a microcosm of the community which is the nation. So, argued the minister at Dry Drayton, Richard Greenham (c. 1540–1594), "if there be no practise at home, if fathers of families use not doctrine and discipline in their houses... they may, but most unjustly... complaine that their children are corrupted abroad, whereas indeede they were before, and still are corrupted at home".³⁸

For Doddridge, as with the Puritans, the family was the basic, foundational unit of society and so it was vital that the worship of God in the family be constantly encouraged and assisted. For Gill, by contrast, although family worship was important, the focal point where the Lord's people were to experience his blessing was primarily in the gathered congregation of the Lord's chosen people.

(iii) doctrine

The third point of difference between the two men concerns the link between spirituality and doctrine. In order to learn how to walk in Christ's ways, Gill believed that Christians need to seek out faithful gospel ministry. Those who desire to be fed by Christ should, he said, "seek after a gospel ministry, and sit under it; for a church in gospel order, and give up themselves unto it, to walk with the saints in all the ordinances, and commands of Christ".³⁹ For Gill, there is no tension or disjunction between love for Christ and love for his truth. The one flows from the other. They "*hold fast the faithful word, as they have been taught, whose souls having been nourished up in the words of faith, and of good doctrine, and established therein, cannot be moved from thence, but will earnestly contend, and strive together for the faith once delivered to the saints*". This applies to their worship as well – it is regulated exclusively by God's word: they follow God's word as their rule in worship, "and not the authorities, customs, and inventions of men;... [T]hey desire that whatsoever they do, more especially in divine worship, might be done in faith, from a principle of love to God, and according to his word and will".⁴⁰

³⁷ William Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties Eight Treatises* (London: Printed by John Haviland, 1622), 537.

³⁸ H[enry] H[olland], ed., *The Workes of the Reverend and Faithfull Servant of Jesus Christ M. Richard Greenham, Minister and Preacher of the Word of God...* (5th edn., London: Printed for William Welby, 1612), 279.

³⁹ Gill, *Song*, 43–44.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 23–24.

In his exposition of the Song of Songs, perhaps the highest point of Gill's published works on the subject of spirituality, Gill often emphasises points of doctrine, particularly the central doctrines of justification by faith, penal substitutionary atonement, predestination, election and the perseverance of the saints. Commenting on Songs 2:3 – the bride sitting in the shadow of her beloved – Gill speaks of Christ and his righteousness as the believer's shadow

which protect souls from the heat of his father's wrath; he, by making atonement for sin and satisfaction to divine justice, hath *delivered* his own people *from the wrath to come*, and will eternally skreen [*sic*] them from it; for though showers of divine wrath will fall on Christless sinners, yet those that are under this shadow of Christ's righteousness, shall not have one drop of it fall on them, for *being justified by his blood, they shall be saved from wrath through him*.⁴¹

Gill thus effortlessly ties together the doctrines of the atonement and of the imputation of Christ's righteousness to the believer, on the one hand, and the believer's felt experience of the blessings of salvation in Christ.

True spirituality in Gill's view, then, is marked by a love for God's word and it is founded in a firm grasp of true Christian doctrine:

The soul is in good health and in a prosperous condition, when there is an appetite for the word; when it hungers and thirsts after righteousness; when it desires the sincere milk of the word; when it finds it, and eats it by faith; when the word is mixed with faith upon hearing, and it is taken in and digested by it; as also when a soul has a comfortable view by faith of the forgiveness of its sins through the blood of Christ.⁴²

Doddridge also appreciated the vital importance of doctrine. Much of the course which he taught to ministers in training at his academy in Northampton consisted of theology and doctrine. He held to the great evangelical doctrines of the gospel and he preached them. Yet it is noticeable that there is not generally in Doddridge the strong link which we find in Gill, between doctrine and spirituality. Moreover, the truths which Doddridge preached most often were the more general gospel truths: the need for conversion and regeneration, the reality and danger of sin, the need for a man to consider his eternal destiny and his need to repent and put his faith in Christ. By contrast, the more particular truths in which Gill took so much delight, and which so often formed the bedrock of his spirituality – justification by faith alone, election, Christ's special love for his church – played relatively little part in Doddridge's ministry. This difference of approach is, I believe, symptomatic of a deep-seated division in their respective understandings of the nature of spirituality. The very truths which, in Gill's thinking, buttress and undergird true spirituality tend to be,

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 92.

⁴² John Gill, "Faith in God and His Word", in *Sermons and Tracts*, Vol. 1, 85.

in Doddridge's mind, an occasion for division between Christians. They should therefore, in Doddridge's view, be downplayed in preaching.

This tendency can be seen most clearly in the attitude of the two men to the doctrine of the Trinity. John Gill saw clearly the absolute importance of upholding the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity, in all its aspects, at a time when it was under sustained attack from a variety of directions – the doctrine was being denied by some while others, who claimed to be gospel men, were nibbling away at the edges of this fundamental Christian doctrine. Gill, seeing the need, wrote robustly in defence of the traditional, orthodox doctrine of the Trinity. Doddridge, by contrast, did not appear to see the danger. Though himself orthodox in his writings for a general readership, he failed in his lectures to his students to distinguish clearly between views which are orthodox and those which fall short of that standard. He ends his lectures on the subject with these words: "Considering the excellent character of many of the persons above-mentioned, whose opinions were most widely different, we may assure ourselves, that many things asserted on the one side and on the other relating to the trinity, are not fundamental in religion."⁴³ Doddridge, sadly, here demonstrates that he had not grasped, as Gill clearly did, the dangers inherent in the various less-than-orthodox trinitarian views which were in circulation at that time. As the eighteenth century progressed, these dangers became all the more apparent, as congregation after congregation slid into Arianism, Socinianism or outright Unitarianism. As has been often remarked, this is not a phenomenon that affected the Particular Baptists, no doubt in no small part due to the work of John Gill in his robust defence of orthodoxy.

Doddridge, then, played down doctrinal differences in order to avoid what he believed to be unnecessary division between Christians, which he saw as harmful to true spirituality. For Gill, by contrast, the defence of biblical doctrine was an essential prerequisite to the safeguarding of biblical godliness, even if it led to contention and division between believers. Moreover, for Gill, doctrine was no arid, intellectualist affair, but something which was to affect the heart deeply and form the foundation of true, affectionate, warm spirituality.

(iv) the affections

The fourth and final point of difference between the spiritualities of Doddridge and Gill concerns the place of the affections in religion. As has been shown, religion was, for both men, a matter of the heart just as much as the head. The published works of Doddridge are replete with expressions of

⁴³ Philip Doddridge, *A Course of Lectures on the Principal Subjects in Pneumatology, Ethics, and Divinity...* (London: Printed by Assignment from the Author's Widow, 1763), 403-404.

love and warmth to Jesus Christ and of joy in knowing and serving him, as well as of the affection which is to exist between fellow-believers. Yet it is here that Gill excels. This, of course, is the great theme of his *Exposition* of the Song of Solomon. The church's great desire for communion with Christ, he writes, commenting on the words "draw me" in chapter 1 verse 4,

shews that high value and esteem she had for communion with Christ, which makes her so earnestly importune that blessing, and use such pressing and repeated instances for the enjoyment of it; this was the *one thing* she earnestly desired, and sought for, yea, preferred to all other enjoyments.⁴⁴

Gill wrote of

those chambers of intimate communion and fellowship, which Christ sometimes brings his people into, and of which they are exceeding desirous: This inestimable blessing Christ frequently grants to his people in his ordinances; for he don't always suffer them to stand without, in the outer courts, but sometimes takes them into his inner chambers, where he discloses the secrets of his heart unto them, gives evident intimations of his love, and fills their souls with divine consolation.

The results of communion like this, he says, are: "Gladness and rejoycing in Christ... a remembrance of his love". Again speaking of the shade of the beloved, he writes: "She sat here *with delight*, and indeed it could not be otherways, when its shade was so agreeable, and the fruit so sweet; this pleasure and delight of her's arose from the enjoyment of Christ's presence... from the discoveries of his love to her soul, which is *better than life*, and all the comforts of it, and in the exercise of faith upon him; in the actings of which grace, the soul is filled with *joy unspeakable and full of glory*."⁴⁵

The intimacy of communion which the believer may enjoy with Christ is a constant theme with Gill, belying the image of dreary theological drudgery with which he is sometimes associated. He uses the highest language to attempt to communicate to his hearers and readers the delights of the believer's intimate fellowship with Christ and experience of his love. There is nothing really like this in Doddridge. Doddridge is very warm, affectionate and moving, but he does not rise to the heights which we find in John Gill.

Assessment

Drawing together these threads, therefore, it has been shown how these two men, so different in many aspects of their theology and churchmanship, nevertheless shared many common ideas about true spirituality. There were also important differences between them: in the degree to which they were

⁴⁴ Gill, *Song*, 29.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 30-32, 93.

prepared to prescribe the believer's daily expressions of spirituality, in their respective emphases upon family worship and the public worship of the church, in the view they held of the place of doctrine in relation to spirituality and in the kind of language which they used to speak of the believer's communion with Christ. Many of the chief aspects of the spiritualities of both men can be traced back to Puritan thinking and practice, as has been demonstrated. Puritan theology and practice was undoubtedly the major heritage of both men and the fount from which, subject to the Bible, they drew their main ideas about spirituality. However, it does seem that both men departed somewhat from that heritage, though in different directions.

Doddridge, it is suggested, failed to hold sufficiently tightly to the prime importance which the Puritans placed upon doctrine and theology. He loosened the close link which they maintained between a person's doctrinal beliefs and his experience of God. He failed to see the need to defend foundational doctrines, such as the Trinity, and in that area and others sought to give Christian love and fellowship a higher place in his thinking, teaching and practice than biblical doctrine. As a result, Doddridge, no doubt unwittingly, played some part in the doctrinal downgrade which so sadly mars the experience of much of eighteenth-century English Dissent.

Gill, by contrast, fortified the link between doctrine and piety, defending orthodoxy in key areas such as the Trinity and basing his understanding of true spirituality firmly in a clear grasp of biblical doctrine. In this, he followed clearly in Puritan footsteps. Yet it would seem that his high Calvinism may have made him overly-suspicious of the Puritan practice, exemplified by Doddridge, of being specific and detailed about the duties and devotional practices which they advised believers to adopt. More significantly, perhaps, it would seem that Gill's focus on ecclesiology and his tendency to a more enclosed spirituality – emphasising the preciousness of communion between Christ and his church, but perhaps becoming overly inward-looking as a result – together with his reluctance to press faith upon sinners as their immediate duty, combined to blunt the influence of his ministry on the outside world. Doddridge was always outward-looking – that was his temperament, apart from anything else. If one had the choice of an evening's company with either man, there is little question as to who would give the better entertainment!

More seriously, Doddridge's writings are full of appeals to his readers to consider their state before God and to think most seriously about their eternal destiny. He constantly appeals to men, women and children to turn from their sin and put their faith in Jesus Christ. Though Gill is clearly zealous for the preaching of the gospel to all, as well as for conversions, one misses the sharp evangelistic thrust which is so present in Doddridge's work. The Puritans had brought and held together these various elements – a

strong doctrinal emphasis to underpin their spirituality, together with a strong outward-looking evangelistic thrust. Whilst both Gill and Doddridge maintained many of the foundational elements of Puritan spirituality, in these particular areas – the place of doctrine, on the one hand, and an outward-looking evangelistic emphasis, on the other – English Dissent in the early and mid-eighteenth century saw significant downgrade, with serious consequences for spiritual health and well-being.

Conclusion

In our own day, we see, even within Christian and evangelical circles, a strong tide of anti-doctrinalism, which wants to be spiritual without being theological. We also face the constant battle against ghettoism – the temptation, in the face of all the antagonism and apathy of an unbelieving world, to turn inwards and simply delight ourselves in the love of Christ for his people, losing the evangelistic thrust that should accompany all true godliness. In my view, we would benefit vastly from a return, in our own day, to a biblical spirituality, as taught and practised by the Puritans, combining the common elements which we have seen in these two great men, Doddridge and Gill, but with the corrective which I believe each brings to the other's view of true godliness. A spirituality which is grounded firmly in biblical doctrine, which delights from the heart in intimate communion with Christ – both in private and in congregational worship, including and perhaps especially at the Lord's Supper – and which is outward-looking and evangelistic in its attitude to the world of unbelief is surely the heritage of our seventeenth-century forefathers. May we, by the grace of God, see a resurgence of this true spirituality in our day.

GATHERED WORSHIP: PERSONAL PREFERENCE OR SACRIFICIAL SERVICE?

*Andrew Towner**

Disagreement continues to surround the issue of style in gathered worship, and yet Christians are called to love and serve one another sacrificially. This essay examines Jesus' call to footwashing and statement of the two great commandments, applying them to gathered worship. Such language is not heard strongly within current disagreements, and provides a much-needed corrective. Many areas of church practice are not issues over which Christians should divide, yet they remain divisive. Into this context, all Christians need to hear Jesus' call to wash each other's feet, and to be reminded that worshipping God is worked out in love of others.

Those saved by Christ are called to love and serve others for his sake. That is the substance of Jesus' command that his disciples wash one another's feet and has always been the shape of worshipping God; loving him is to be worked out in loving others. This article asks whether we have lost this focus in our thinking and speaking about gathered worship. On his way to crucifixion Jesus gives a picture of the cross in washing his disciples' feet, and hence calls them to do likewise for each other (John 13:12-17). How sad if those meeting to focus on and sing about the cross were not interested in the needs of other disciples around them. How tragic if people called to love God with their whole heart, soul, mind and strength, and their neighbours as themselves (Mark 12:29-31) were to come to a meeting focussing on their personal preferred way to do the former without thinking of the latter.

This essay therefore explores one aspect of the Bible's teaching on worship: that worshipping God is always worked out in serving others, applying it to our gathered worship. The truth of this logic can be summarised simply: if any of us have made gathered worship into anything approaching "getting our fix" or "having our needs met" then what we are doing in those gatherings may well not be true worship at all. True worshippers, precisely because they worship God wholeheartedly, will care so deeply for the needs of fellow worshippers that others' needs trump their own. If we are there primarily for ourselves, then we are worshipping ourselves and not God.

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The logic of this thesis means that current discussions (and disagreements) as to whether the Christian Sunday gathering can rightly be called worship are immaterial. The Puritans were happy to publish a paper on the Christian gathering called *The Directory for the Publick Worship of God*¹ and Acts 13:2 seems to apply the term “worship” (*leitourgein*) to a Christian gathering. That said, the Bible’s uses of the worship words hardly focus on the gathering, and generally have a whole-life orientation. Trivially, if worship has our whole lives as its primary referent, then church must be worship, since it is a part of our lives. Hence one’s opinion on the issue has no bearing on this article’s thrust. We all agree that what we do when we gather as Christians for church must be worship. The question this article examines is whether or not we are succeeding in worshipping God sacrificially during our gatherings, or whether a craving for personal preference has crept in.

One possible criticism of this approach is to ask why one would focus in on the Christian gathering. Don Carson notes that in *Engaging with God* David Peterson, while writing a book to argue that the words translated “worship” in our Bibles are primarily focussed on our whole lives, ends up applying this truth to gathered worship.² Carson’s point is not without merit, and there appears to be a hint of irony in his making such an observation. Yet surely gathered worship must be worship, and therefore the logic of worship may be applied to it – just as it may to behaviour in the office, on the sports pitch, at home or on holiday. Applying broad principles to the gathering does not imply that they have no further application. I cannot discover who originally said that “praise is re-calibration” – that the act of praising God recalls the wandering compass-needle of our idolatrous minds and hearts to the true north of God in all his splendour.³ Given that we gather in our services to focus on God, they should be the time of all times when, focussing on God, we are called to and encouraged in that true worship which is to characterise our whole lives, and in which we are to put him first, others next and ourselves last.

Peterson argues convincingly that the Bible’s use of words translated as “worship” do primarily focus on whole-life discipleship and do not speak chiefly about gathered worship, so that “worship in the New Testament is a comprehensive category describing the Christian’s total existence”.⁴ It is sad, however, that some have ended up minimising the worship aspect of the

¹ See e.g. *The Westminster Directory of Public Worship* (Christian Focus: Fearn, 2008).

² D. A. Carson (ed.) *Worship by the Book* (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 2002), 25.

³ I first remember hearing this from Gavin McGrath during a houseparty (weekend away) in 2008. In Walter Brueggemann’s *Spirituality of the Psalms* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002) he sees the book of Psalms as moving from orientation through disorientation to reorientation, so it may be that this quote was inspired by his work.

⁴ David Peterson, *Engaging with God* (Apollos: Leicester, 1992), 18.

gathering. In Vaughan Roberts' excellent *True Worship* he pens a memorable phrase: "A friend of mine has put it like this: 'To say, 'I'm going to church to worship' is about as silly as saying 'I'm off to bed to breathe for a while'.' Worship should define the whole of my life."⁵ Roberts' main point is that worship is a whole-life activity, as he emphasises at the start of his next chapter, and that is right. Yet since the Christian gathering is a meeting the Bible prioritises, he could be re-phrased slightly. Better, perhaps, to say that "going to church to worship is like going to the gym to exercise" since one can and should exercise elsewhere, and our whole lives will display (or not) our commitment (or not) to exercise, but we gather at the gym to focus on our exercise and to be encouraged in that by others. In other words, the Bible locates the Christian gathering right at the heart of the life of worship, and the language we use for church must reflect that. Arguably, it is one of the key times of worship in our lives of worship.

This article proceeds in four sections. The first examines Jesus' setting us an example to follow, as the footwisher of John 13 calls us to footwashing; the second takes a wider view of the whole Bible, seeing that God sets us a pattern to model, that loving God is to be expressed in love for others. The third section asks whether there any limits on our loving others; the fourth raises a number of practical issues within our gatherings to which the call of footwashing applies, exploring some attitudes we are to prayerfully develop.

I. An example to follow: Jesus the footwisher calls us to footwashing

In the history of famous last words, Jesus' Upper Room Discourse in John chapters 13 to 17 must feature highly. Here is Christ in his final hours with the disciples, just before the crucifixion, and what he does is astonishing: he washes their feet. Having done that, he calls his disciples to wash each other's feet. This offers a paradigm for discipleship: we need to be served by Jesus, and he calls us then to respond by serving others. Hence Carson: "the episode of the footwashing is turned in two directions. On the one hand it is symbolic of spiritual cleansing (cf. especially vv. 8-10); on the other, it serves as a standard of humble service."⁶

1. Context

John emphasises that Jesus knew "the time had come" (John 13:1).⁷ The first half of John's Gospel has been building to this point, ever since Jesus had

⁵ Vaughan Roberts, *True Worship* (Authentic: Bletchley, 2002), 26.

⁶ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 458.

⁷ Scripture quotations are taken from the ESV Anglicised edition (Collins, 2001).

explained to Mary at Cana that “my time has not yet come” (John 2:4). Chapter 12 has been clear what this time means: “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly truly I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies it remains alone; but if it dies it bears much fruit” (12:23-24). So the “hour” or “time” in John’s Gospel is Jesus’ death, and this is the hour in Jesus’ mind at the start of our chapter. In this context, Jesus’ footwashing of the disciples is to be seen as a picture of his sin-washing all of his followers at the cross.

2. Jesus’ footwashing

The twin issues of familiarity and lack of historical contextual awareness dull our twenty-first century minds to the shocking nature of Jesus washing feet. Perhaps a moment’s consideration of the likely state of those feet may help. Can we imagine cleaning those toenails? As one excellent Bible-study guide to John makes clear “the initial reaction to the footwashing – that Jesus should take on the task of a slave – is one of horror”⁸ and many of us fail to experience that horror.

A few years ago Channel 4 ran a programme called “The Worst Jobs in History” in which Tony Robinson tried out the worst jobs associated with various periods of history.⁹ He invites us to consider the horror of serving as Groom of the Stool to King Henry VIII, the perils of a junior sailor in Nelson’s navy, and the reality of life as a chimney sweep. It is hard for most of us to imagine doing those jobs ourselves – why not pause and try to imagine one of those roles as a way of life? It is harder still to conceive of the God of the universe humbling himself to do them.

Understanding that Jesus washing his disciples’ feet points to the cross must serve to deepen our revulsion. The passage makes clear our need to be washed (John 13:8) and we must not lose sight of that – especially since the time had come for Jesus to show the full extent of his love at the cross. That is the price paid to wash us from our sins. Jesus washing his disciples’ feet would have shocked and revolted them. Jesus going to the cross for us must likewise shock and revolt us – that the Son of God would do such a thing!

3. Disciples’ footwashing

Our focus must not be centred on the shock of Jesus doing such a menial task, just as our focus at the cross should not be on Jesus’ physical sufferings. However, the fact that Jesus carries out such a task gives weight to the command that follows: “If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your

⁸ Read Mark Learn: *John’s Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 125.

⁹ Now written up as Tony Robinson, *The Worst Jobs in History* (Oxford: Pan, 2005).

feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you" (John 13:14-15). Jesus is clear that being served by him will lead to a life serving others. His sacrificial actions are models for his disciples, examples for us to follow.

Jesus' explanation is simple: "a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him" (John 13:16). If, during a work trip to a hotel, your boss were to stay in a corner suite, you would not expect to be given the penthouse. If your boss is provided with a BMW or Audi for his company car, you may expect a VW but not a Jaguar or Ferrari. But if your boss were to ride a broken skateboard, what would you expect? Jesus, who is our Lord and Teacher, washed feet and went to the cross. I sometimes wonder what I expect in following such a Lord.

One of the beauties of this passage is that the command to follow Jesus' example comes with a promise of blessing: "If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them" (John 13:17). To know these things and not do them is, whilst perfectly comprehensible on a human level, to doubt God's word of promise. To hear this command and obey it is to trust God's word of promise. When we struggle to obey, we do well to remember that the one who promises is faithful.

4. A common objection

Teaching this truth in a number of contexts has thrown up a repeated issue: are we not called to be ourselves, and hasn't God made us the way we are for a reason? The answer is a qualified yes – and the qualifications really matter. Are we not called to be ourselves? The yes is qualified in two ways: First, we are called to be our re-created selves and not our dead-in-Adam selves. Second, we are called to be ourselves as servants for Jesus' sake (2 Cor 4:5). Did not God make us the way we are for a reason? The qualification is simple yet profound: yes – to serve.

A few years ago now I invited a church youth worker to run a section of the monthly prayer meeting. He included great content, but presented in a style suited to 11-18 year-olds. Given that the majority of prayers at that church are aged 50 or 60 or 70, my question for him (when we met to review a few days later) was why he had chosen that style and language. His answer was, basically, it is right to be myself, and God made me how I am. We spent some time reflecting together, and I encouraged him to think that God had made him how he was so that he could serve others. That is one of the inescapable messages of John 13:1-17.

Tease out the logic that says: "I am called to be myself because that is how God made me" and consider placing it in Jesus' mind. God the Father eternally generates the Son so that he might be ruler over the kingdom his Father has chosen to give him. Knowing this, Jesus washed feet. Knowing

this, Jesus went to the cross. Jesus truly knew who he was – the Father’s chosen King. Knowing this, he chose to serve. In Philippians language, having humbled himself to become human, he humbled himself to death on a cross (Phil 2:7-8). Hence Bruce Milne’s summary of Jesus’ call in John 13:17: “Humility is a universal Christian virtue to be expressed through sincere and costly service of others in Christ’s name. Christian churches and fellowships are possible only where this attitude is expressed.”¹⁰

5. Summary

Jesus’ paradigm for discipleship in John 13:1-17 reminds us all that we need to be washed by him, and the cost of that washing should shock – not just because footwashing was menial, but because it was a picture of the cross. Having been washed, we are called to serve each other after the pattern Jesus modelled. This principle has broad application across the whole of our Christian walk, and therefore must have application to our Christian meetings.¹¹ Hence Calvin: “We may infer from this [v 17] that, until a man has learned to yield to his brethren, he does not *know* if Christ be *the Master*. Since there is no man who performs his duty to his brethren in all respects, and since there are many who are careless and sluggish in brotherly offices, this shows us that we are still at a great distance from the full light of faith.”¹²

The question this passage must leave us with is whether any action is too menial, too embarrassing, too un-enjoyable for a Christian to perform in the service of a fellow Christian. We will return to this.

II. A pattern to model: loving God expressed in love for others

There is a huge and tragic irony in our (natural) human ability to be selfish about gathered worship. Perhaps the best way to see this irony is in the two greatest commandments: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbour as yourself.”¹³ In other words, true worship of the Lord (which is a vertically-focussed activity) has always been and must always be integrally linked to a deep concern for the needs of other human beings, all of whom are our neighbours (which is a horizontal activity). This section demonstrates that love for God shown in love for others is patterned across the whole Bible.

¹⁰ Bruce Milne, *The Message of John* (Leicester: IVP, 1993), 199.

¹¹ Two excellent resources which tease this out across both whole-life and church-life in different ways are Timothy Keller, *The Secret of Self-Forgetfulness* (Chorley: 10Publishing, 2012) and Nate Palmer, *Servanthood as Worship* (Adelphi: Cruciform, 2010).

¹² John Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 62-63.

¹³ Luke 10:27 c.f. Mark 12:28-34.

1. *The greatest commandments*

Mark and Luke both record versions of Jesus' engagement with an expert in the law in which the greatest commandments are stated. In Mark's version, Jesus himself is asked which commandments are the greatest and states the famous summary; in Luke's account Jesus' interlocutor states the summary (and reverses the ordering of "mind" and "strength") before Jesus endorses it. Thus the fact that these are the two greatest commandments cannot be in doubt. There is not just one greatest command that we love God; there are two, that we love God and neighbour. If ever a clear statement of the fact that love for God is rightly expressed in love for others was needed, here it is. As Bob Kauflin puts it helpfully, "you can't claim to fulfil the greatest commandment in song while neglecting the second greatest commandment in life."¹⁴

2. *The Ten Commandments*

It is well known that the Ten Commandments (Exod 20:2-17 and Deut 5:6-21) fall into two tables: 1-4 focus on God and 5-10 on other people. Hence commands to worship God alone, make no idols or images of him, honour his name and respect his day are followed by commands to honour parents, others' lives (by not murdering them), others' marriages and spouses (by not committing adultery), others' possessions (by not stealing them), and others' justice (by not giving false testimony against them).¹⁵ Hence the Ten Commandments model the fact that love for God is expressed not just in honouring God but also in loving, serving and honouring others.

John Frame's lengthy and outstanding exposition of the Ten Commandments strengthens this argument further, since he demonstrates that each Commandment contains within it commands not only to love God but also to love each other. Here is one of his summaries: "The fourth commandment covers everything. Like the others, it is equivalent to the command to love God and one another. Although it focuses on our attitude towards God, it also governs our attitudes and actions towards one another."¹⁶

3. *Other biblical evidence*

The pattern of love for God worked out in love for others is across the whole Bible. It is there in Gen 1-2, where the three interwoven human relationships are upwards towards God, horizontal towards each other, and downwards

¹⁴ Bob Kauflin, *Worship Matters* (Crossway: Wheaton, 2008), 46.

¹⁵ Arguably, the 10th commandment guards the hearer's heart in their pursuit of the other horizontally focussed commands.

¹⁶ John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2008), 547. Frame's exposition of the Ten Commandments runs from pp. 385-850.

towards creation. Thus the prelapsarian world models relationship with God affecting relationship with others. Genesis 3-4 makes that explicit, as a broken relationship with God radically disrupts the mutuality of human relationships (leaves are found and then skins given to hide nakedness, and then murder is committed). God's curses on humanity and the serpent express the effect of failure to love God, and those effects are horizontal.

Ephesians 2:1-10 focusses on the vertical or God-ward aspects of salvation: objects of wrath (1-3) made alive in and raised up with Christ (4-7), saved by grace through faith (8-9). To what does Paul immediately turn? Ephesians 2:11-22 focusses on the horizontal effects of that salvation. In Christ there is no separation between Jews and Gentiles, and all sociological barriers are broken down. There is one new humanity in Christ, since "through him we both [all] have access to the Father by one Spirit" (2:18). And this new humanity have (individually) been saved to do good works (2:10) so that we are (corporately) a dwelling place for God by his Spirit (2:22). As Paul turns from a focus on the church's calling (chapters 1-3) to examine the church's conduct (chapters 4-6) his first exhortation is that we "walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love" (4:1-2).

Examples have been shown from the prelapsarian world order, the Ten Commandments, Jesus' own teaching and that of the New Testament which all demonstrate that love for God is to be shown in love for others. This is the pattern of any true worshipper, and will be pursued and developed in any true worship. This article is not the first writing to make this point. Such a pattern is explored by Vaughan Roberts in his chapter on "The Purpose of Christian Meetings" in *True Worship* and by John Frame in his discussion of participation and love during the gathering.¹⁷ Mike Cosper's 1-2-3 of worship also locates much of this very helpfully: one object of worship, the Triune God; two contexts, scattered and gathered; three audiences, God, the church and the world.¹⁸

4. Potential issues

The first issue might run as follows: there is a call to love others, so we should do whatever it takes to love those who are not yet in our gathering. Whether or not that statement is helpfully biblical depends on what one understands by "whatever it takes" and what limits one intends to place on it. Many of us will have heard versions which continue, "let's make it more like a disco, and cut down the length of the sermon – that'll bring them in." At

¹⁷ John M. Frame, *Worship in Spirit and Truth* (Presbyterian and Reformed: Phillipsburg, 1996), 80-81.

¹⁸ Mike Cosper, *Rhythms of Grace* (Crossway: Wheaton, 2013), 73-90.

its worst, this line of thought could ignore the Word of the very Lord for whom we are to love the lost. It is God who calls us to love the lost, and we are not free to throw away his other commands in seeking to obey that one. We are to love the lost his way. So the Bible will stay a key part of any gathering, and the music (and any other contents) will be defined by and designed to serve the Word of God.

This issue is easier to answer logically than it is to detect honestly in ourselves. Proponents of “your service should be no longer than an hour” and “we won’t use any words which wouldn’t make sense to a poorly-educated non-Christian” are not hard to find. Of course those two statements are not theologically wrong, but neither are they theologically necessary, being stated explicitly in Scripture or forming logically imperative correlates of the Bible’s teaching on the Christian gathering. In other words, the command to love can become an excuse for pragmatism – and that is always dangerous for anyone aspiring to think as an Evangelical. If we are people of the Book, then every single thing that it says will be more important than any pragmatic “wisdom” found outside of it.

The second issue is more contentious, as it relates to the homogenous unit debate. If you think that the best way to reach 45-year-old mums is through other 45-year-old mums, there are certain things you will never do at your gathering because you are trying to reach a specific group of people (although you will affirm that all Christians are joined in glorious unity-in-diversity forming one new humanity). It bears noting that Paul regularly writes to congregations from mixed backgrounds; this seems to be (at least part of) the occasion of Romans, can be seen in Colossians and is clear in Ephesians. What Paul does in each context is explain the gospel to show how united the diverse sociological groups are. What Paul never does is say “well, why not have two congregations, a Jewish and a Gentile one – that way you can each enjoy a gathering which suits your personal sociological backgrounds and inherited tastes”.

Colossians shows that the very fact of sociological diversity leads Paul to teach all the Christians to love each other: “Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all. Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience” (Col 3:11-12). One of the reasons such attitudes were necessary is that it was a hugely diverse church. Imagine picking the songs one night. The Jews grew up knowing the Psalms, and probably learnt to speak from the Old Testament. Many of the Gentiles would not have even heard of the Old Testament, the Psalms, or maybe even of Yahweh himself. So the Jews would presumably love to sing some of their favourite Psalms, and the Gentiles wouldn’t even know one of them. How would you pick the music? Would you split the congregations? Or would you teach everyone to grow in “compassion, kindness, humility,

meekness and patience... and above all these put on love" (Col 3:12-14)? It seem that we can be clear what Paul would have done.¹⁹

5. Summary

Worship of the one true God has always been a vertically-focussed activity, and has always been expressed horizontally in love for others. Hence Bock, commenting on Luke 10:25-28 says that "at the heart of believing in God is loving him and one's neighbour. In fact, life is found in loving God and one's neighbour."²⁰ Thus worship, which is vertical, is always to be shown horizontally.

III. Some limits to avoid: when should we say no to footwashing?

Imagine that your local church is one where few, if any, members tend to raise their hands during the singing. Then, on Sunday, a new family walk in, sit at the front and raise their hands during most of the songs. How could you serve them? I take it some answers are obvious: don't stare, don't mention the hand-raising, and so on. But wouldn't one of the best ways to serve them be to join in raising your hands? Most of us feel pretty self-conscious when we stick out like sore thumbs. Of course you shouldn't raise your hands if you think it is sinful, but otherwise, what would stop you? Or imagine the opposite, that most people in your local church generally raise their hands, dance and clap during much of the singing. On Sunday a new person walks in and remains seated for all the singing. On the same basis, should someone should go and sit with them? As Bob Kauflin has it: "our highest priority when we gather with the church is not our own personal expressiveness but the privilege of serving others".²¹

Before we tease out the logic of acting to wash others' feet, we need to be clear whether there are any limits on such activity. Presumably there are things that, as Christians, we would be unwilling to do. So what are those limits? The three main ones are compliance, conscience and context.

1. Compliance

There are numerous commands that Christians obey the laws of the land (Rom 13: 1-7, 1 Pet 2:13-17, Titus 3:1) and their employers (Eph 6:5-8, 1 Pet 2:18-21, 1 Tim 6:1-2, Titus 2:9-10). Likewise, footwashing does not trump

¹⁹ From this it could be argued that those reached through homogenous churches end up having fewer opportunities to be discipled, since cultural diversity provides many opportunities to wash feet.

²⁰ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 1021.

²¹ Bob Kauflin, *Worship Matters* (Crossway: Wheaton, 2008), 172.

commands that children obey parents (Eph 6:1-3), church members submit to their leaders (Heb 13:17, Titus 1:9) and wives submit to their husbands in the Lord (Col 3:18, Eph 5:22-24, 1 Pet 3:1-6). The temptation for many of us with such passages is to start exploring the exceptions – which tells us something fairly sobering about ourselves. The Bible’s focus is on a general habit of obedience and submission to appropriate authorities, since we know that “there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God” (Rom 13:1). Since God is sovereign over all the authorities that exist “whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed” (Rom 13:2).

Are there contexts in which disobedience to authorities may be acceptable for a Christian? Of course! And if (when?) a government forbids preaching the gospel, we must prayerfully and gently refuse to submit in that (whilst still obeying their speed limits, and being willing to accept whatever punishment that government metes out for our preaching).²² At first glance this truth may seem to have little effect on the logic of this article. In the above example of raising hands or remaining sitting during singing, are many of us likely to be in contexts where fathers, husbands, employers, pastors or governments forbid either of them? So compliance will not have a large impact on this thesis.

Yet the rubber hits the road when pastors (or parents) teach against certain ways some Christians behave during the gathering. Spurgeon is said to have condemned the organ as “Satan’s wind-pipe” and there are church leaders today who will warn against or even condemn the guitar, the drum kit, or the singing of anything other than Psalms. Care will need to be taken in encouraging other Christians to continue to submit to those the Lord has placed over them. In fact, we must pray for strength to serve those God has put over us, being willing to wash their feet. If your pastor or parent has forbidden something, you must take that seriously. The command to footwashing does not trump those other commands. Yet the next section will help too.

2. Conscience

As Christians we must both obey and educate our consciences. For any of us to disobey our conscience is a sin, so that “whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is a sin” (Jas 4:17). Thus none of us should go against our consciences in washing others’ feet. However, the fact that we are to obey our consciences does not mean we are right! This explains the Bible’s double requirement that we both obey and educate our consciences.²³

²² Samuel Rutherford’s *Lex Rex* is one of the classic treatments of this issue.

²³ For an extremely helpful recent treatment of the conscience, see Christopher Ash, *Pure Joy* (Leicester: IVP, 2012).

To be willing to educate your conscience is to be willing to learn that you were wrong. To educate your conscience is to bring it back to the perfect Word of God to be taught, rebuked, corrected or trained. It is precisely the belief that the Bible is God's perfect Word that both calls us to educate our consciences, and enables us to do so.

There is a subtle distinction here. No one should encourage a brother or sister in Christ to disobey their conscience, since all of us must care for other's consciences. At the same time, each of us must not only educate our own, but encourage each other to educate theirs. I take it this must impact the tone and focus of any debates and discussions between brothers and sisters on debatable matters. The tone will be warm and gentle because we are recognising a fellow believer and would not be trying to persuade them to go against their own conscience. The focus will be Scripture, as that will be our final authority in all matters of faith and conduct, and the only reason for any of us to change our consciences.

I know of an evangelical church in England where the senior minister was opening up the pulpit for women to preach. Leaving aside whatever one's view on that issue may be, his request to the congregation was that they all tried it out for a bit, they "taste and see" if it was OK. Now that might be a good approach for those who were opposed because they were culturally conservative and change-averse. But there were a good number in the church who had serious questions about the Bible's commands in this area, and such a request does not take those consciences seriously. Hence, the way change is discussed or introduced will be affected by a high view of the importance of others' consciences.

Applying this to gathered worship probably means that many of us need to educate our consciences to be a little more relaxed about issues such as style. There is little in the Bible to command or commend certain musical or sociological styles. We have the words of the Psalms but not their tunes – implying that the tunes are less important than the words.²⁴ Wisdom will have its place, but those of us who claim conscience issues over every little thing are really making sure that we get what we want. The Lord's desire is a people who, loving him, serve each other. Church leaders will want to develop a congregation who are sacrificially serving each other, and will seek to be careful not to force people against their consciences.

3. Context

Paul is very clear that context may define whether an action is right or not: "I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. Nevertheless, in

²⁴ I think Chris Green was the first person to point this out to me, during my time at Oak Hill Theological College.

church I would rather speak five words with my mind in order to instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue" (1 Cor 14:18-19). Hence something can be a blessing in one context and wrong in another. In this specific instance, Paul describes something that is a blessing in his personal relationship with and worship of God that he deems inappropriate in gathered worship at church.

Clearly there will be a number of footwashing activities that would be appropriate in private but not public (as well as some appropriate in public but not private). Paul says praying in tongues is one such, but many deeds of mercy fall into this category: financial generosity, praying, fasting and so on. We must do our own Bible study and prayer at a time and in a way that works for each of us, getting into the Word, clear on the gospel and joyful in Christ, ready to bring all our praise, lament, confession, thanksgiving and requests to the throne of grace. Following our own preferences in that context is absolutely right. But we must never bring that mindset into the gathering – we come there as part of a new humanity called to love Jesus and serve others for his sake.

So there will be footwashing opportunities that we notice and think "that would be a good thing to do, but not here, or not now" – that is right. The call to footwashing does not trump the need to be appropriate to context. To give a hard example, I have heard the story of Western missionaries arriving at an African tribe where all the women went topless, except for the prostitutes who wore blouses. If you were that husband and wife missionary team, what would you do? And would you recognise that doing something in one context for the sake of serving a given tribe does not mean that it would always be appropriate? So it will always be for those committed to wash feet – context will sometimes say "no" and sometimes "yes" – so context can be a reason not to perform a certain footwashing activity.

4. Summary

The purpose of this section is to be clear that, other things being equal, we are called to be footwashers. There may be rare occasions and specific reasons that make certain acts inappropriate, but the general call to sacrificial service for others is clear. The three major limits to whether and when we could or should perform certain footwashing activities are compliance – that we obey those Christ has put over us; conscience – that we neither offend our own conscience nor encourage others to go against theirs; and context – that some activities are entirely appropriate in private but not public, and vice versa. We now turn to examine some of the many practical ways this impacts our Christian gatherings.

IV. Some attitudes to develop: what issues must we relax about?

We are considering gathered worship in the context of Jesus' command to wash each other's feet, and the fact that those truly worshipping God always show that in love for others. We now turn to consider the issues within gathered worship at this moment in the twenty-first century that cause the most discussion or distress amongst UK evangelicals. Let us first recall where we arrived at the end of our consideration of John 13:1-17. Our summary included the following: "The question this passage must leave us with is whether any action is too menial, too embarrassing, too un-enjoyable for a Christian to perform in the service of a fellow Christian."

Here is a list of some current issues, to which we may each wish to add:

- service style – extended times of singing or music spaced out?
- musical style – led by organ or piano or guitar or band (or even CD)?
- song style – hymns or Townend or Redman or any of the other stables?
- congregational expression – hands raised or not, dancing or not, weeping or not?
- set liturgy – Lord's Prayer and creeds, some pre-written confessions, or not?
- children – welcomed for the first bit, or whole service, or straight to their groups?
- sermon length – 10 minutes, 25 minutes, 45 minutes, longer?
- music played under the reading of God's Word or not?

All of these are theological issues – matters that require us to think theologically and apply the whole Bible to them – but they are hardly up there with God as Trinity, the doctrine of the cross and Christ as the only way to be saved. Yet it often seems that the majority of people either choose or leave churches over the above list. It is a sad truth for many churches that, as ministers know, changing the time or style of your meeting is more likely to see people leave than changing one of your core doctrinal beliefs.

Have a look at the above list, with Jesus' footwashing in your mind's eye, and the call to serve others ringing in your ear. Which of the above items are too much to ask of yourself as a footwasher? We will all have opinions – that is fine – but this issue is deeper. Which parts of the list would you say "I could not do that to serve someone else because ____"? Let's examine a few of the issues in turn.

One of the biggest superficial distinctions between evangelical churches in the UK today is musical style: whether our service includes extended times of singing or not, what instruments we use or don't use, the type of songs we sing, and who they are written by. I cannot personally see many of those things mandated or condemned in Scripture. There are good and wise and appropriate ways of deciding many of them – so that the words we sing need to be true and comprehensible, for example. So if your church changes to do a little more of this and a little less of that, it would certainly be hard to claim compliance or conscience issues as a reason to disagree. Hence Frame: “The younger generation should learn to sympathise with... the spiritual needs of their fathers and mothers in Christ. But the opposite is also true: if the older do not bend somewhat, the younger will be deprived of their own language of worship.”²⁵ In fact, if you personally prefer guitar music but a hymn is struck up on the organ, that's an opportunity to serve those you are worshipping amongst, and sing up as best you can for their encouragement. To do otherwise is to place your personal preference over Jesus' call to wash feet. The same argument applies if you prefer organ music and the next song is guitar-led. Our cultural preferences are opportunities to wash others' feet.

It could be noted that Jesus only commands the disciples to wash the other disciples' feet, and thus this command should not apply to the serving of non-Christians. There are diverse views within the evangelical constituency as to the intended audience for gathered worship, but the Bible gives sufficient calls that we love and seek to win the lost that a degree of giving up our own preferences on their behalf does not seem to extreme a logical jump – even though it does not flow directly from John 13.

The issue of context is likely to affect some of the options on our list. Where I currently serve, some of our older members struggle to remain standing for too long, and even a pair of songs can be too much if they are lengthy. So those of us who enjoy longer times of praise are serving them by remaining in this fellowship despite missing such times, and when we do occasionally have such times of extended singing, the older members are serving us. Of course, it was very sad when a local family visited us for a couple of weeks, enjoying the preaching and fellowship, but did not stay because we did not have such extended times of singing. Perhaps we need to equip people better to look for churches where they can serve and not just churches where they are served?

I take it context is both personal (should I do that here and now) and geographical/sociological (we are here to reach them and them), and is thus driven both by who is in our gathering and who we pray will join our gathering. This brings added complexity, but the thought process is the

²⁵ John M. Frame, *Worship in Spirit and Truth* (Presbyterian and Reformed: Phillipsburg, 1996), 117.

same: I am here to serve; we are here to serve. So context may determine sermon length (those in old-people's homes cannot generally last through 45 minutes) and musical style (many of those older people would know the great hymns by heart, so you would want to use them). Geographical or sociological context will certainly play into how we plan services (if you are trying to reach people who generally smoke a lot, you will want to think about building in a cigarette break, probably disguised as a coffee break) and how we run them. There are many gospel essentials we must never give up, and there are many stylistic preferences that we must always be ready to give up.

Take liturgy as another example. Is saying the Lord's Prayer together each week really that bad? After all, Jesus does say that when we pray we should pray like that! Is repeating a summary of what we believe every week, or every now and then such an awful thing to do? We should recite the creeds with joy and resolution, remembering those who have died for the truths in them. Is it such a bad idea to have some prayers written in advance, so that they are well phrased, clearly focussed and memorable? I know that many of my Free Church brothers and sisters can struggle with these things. Tim Keller has written of the great benefit that the Anglican collects (weekly set prayers) have been to him, both in private devotions and in public prayer.²⁶ For me to use one of Cranmer's prayers of confession is for me to admit that God gifted that man in theology and poetry, and that not all of us have such gifts. Is that so hard to admit? And it is certainly hard to make the case that the Bible commands all prayer to be extemporary. So maybe we Anglicans need to include and enjoy extemporary prayers (as many of us do), and maybe some Free Church members need to relax about liturgy!

I used to preach regularly in a Free Church before I went to Theological College. It was close to my sending church, and they were without a full-time minister for about 18 months, so I would fill in fairly regularly. They were all strongly opposed to any liturgy, and insisted on things being spontaneous and extemporary. What I noticed after a few months was that certain elders would always pray in certain ways for certain things, and that each elder had their preferred Bible passage for the Lord's Supper. They had a liturgy through such habits – it was just an unexamined liturgy. For myself, I know that the less I plan, the more I tend to do the same thing each week. This is why I tend to plan services in groups of at least a month – and preferably even longer – so I can plan diversity. That is one of the benefits of set prayers and pre-written confessions; they ensure that things don't get into a rut.

In the last 20 years or so there has been a growing habit in some circles to play music under the reading of God's word. Often this is simply extended

²⁶ Redeemer Report, October 2010, http://www.redeemer.com/news_and_events/newsletter/?aid=134.

chords from a keyboard, and generally sounds extempore and un-prepared. Theologically there is little if any difference between this practice and that of singing a Bible passage (such as Psalm 23, versions of which many of us will sing regularly). Each is accompanying the Bible with music, and the fact that one is read by one person while we all sing the other only draws a parallel with solo as opposed to congregational singing. So what issue might there be with the practice of accompanying words with music? If done poorly it could be distracting, but so can singing. Another would be that older or weaker ears may not pick up the words of Scripture so well, which is, of course, a much stronger argument. I have heard this done very well and very poorly, have experienced it mixed well so that the words were clear and mixed badly so that the reading was inaudible. Graham Kendrick's *Crown Him* Tour included a spoken creed for which music had been specially written, which was brilliant – probably the most up-lifting recital of a creed I have ever heard, giving a much greater sense of the words' meaning and importance than the average congregation manages.

Take the issue of learning new songs. Each of us will have our own appetite for new songs; some would like to learn a new song practically every week, and some would rather we almost never did. New songs can keep our gatherings fresh, help us see different aspects of the old truths, express truth in diverse musical styles, and have all sorts of benefits. Likewise, since worship is an attitude of heart, to the extent that learning new words and trying to follow an unfamiliar tune is distracting, new songs can actually impede the worship of those to whom they are unfamiliar. Hence the learning (or not) of new songs is an opportunity for footwashing, a chance to learn to prioritise others' needs over my personal preferences.

This article is not seeking to argue or imply that such volumes as *Worship by the Book*²⁷ and *Perspectives on Christian Worship*²⁸ are useless, or in error by their very existence.²⁹ There is an important place for historical and theological reflection as to what structures and styles of gathered worship are the most faithful to the Bible's sufficient witness. This article has demonstrated, however, that those volumes' failure to exalt the serving of others above any personal stylistic preferences we worshippers might have is a significant weakness, and would have made an outstanding introduction or conclusion to their otherwise helpful endeavours.

²⁷ D. A. Carson (ed.), *Worship by the Book* (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 2002).

²⁸ Matthew Pinson (ed.), *Perspectives on Christian Worship* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2009).

²⁹ It should be noted that Carson does address some of the issues highlighted in this essay in D. A. Carson, *Love in Hard Places* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2002), not least the link between the two greatest commandments and the biblical requirement that Christians serve each other sacrificially.

Presumably not all of the issues on the list fall into categories of personal preference for all of us. There will be issues on which we all need to take prayerful and lovingly gracious stances in our desire to follow the Bible's teaching, and some of yours may be on that list. But I am concerned that the question of how we best serve others is rarely heard. Ministers may speak of a desire (which may well be pragmatically-driven) to be accessible to the congregation. Congregation members may voice concerns that we remain faithful to our traditions or relevant to our friends. Each of these issues has its place – and its place is defined by the Bible's call that loving God always be worked out in living to love and serve others.

V. Conclusions

Who will look after my preferences? Everyone will be worrying about you, just as you'll be worrying about them. Imagine a business with 300 employees. In that context each of you would generally have to fight your own corner – that is 1 versus 299, and how often do we win with those odds? In a church of 300 there will be 299 people fighting your corner for you, so that you won't have to – and will be freed to fight all of their corners for them. That is the joy of being at a church where we all gather to serve. I don't have to worry about my preferences – you are already prioritising me!

I worry that too many of our conversations about gathered worship can come down to "I like to ____" as opposed to "I can love God by serving these people and doing ____" as it were. I am sure this is not true of all of us at all times, but the extent to which it is ever true is the extent to which we are idolaters (worshipping ourselves and prioritising our own preferences) as opposed to true worshippers of the living God. You see, there is no opposite to "worship" in the Bible. All of us are always worshipping. The question is this: who or what are we worshipping?

This truth that we are all worshipping all of the time is both sobering and encouraging. In Greg Beale's stimulating *We Become what we Worship* he has a summary sentence that "what people revere, they resemble, either for ruin or restoration".³⁰ So those of us truly worshipping the Lord will (by the power of the Spirit) become more like him, and will become more and more wholehearted footwashers. Those of us worshipping self or worshipping the buzz of experience, or whatever, will also change and develop – but not into Christlikeness. Here is Beale:

People will always reflect something, whether it be God's character or some feature of the world. If people are committed to God, they will become like him; if they are committed to

³⁰ Greg Beale, *We Become What we Worship* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2008), 16, 311.

something other than God, they will become like that thing, always spiritually inanimate and empty like the lifeless and vain aspect of creation to which they have committed themselves.³¹

This is easy to see. Those who worship money become hard and impersonal, since people matter less. Those who worship others' approval become plastic and changeable, since truth and honesty will be of reduced importance. Such examples can be multiplied. Here then is both warning and encouragement: warning that we must take wholehearted worship of the living God seriously by pursuing our own idolatries and running them to earth in the power of the Spirit; encouragement that as the Holy Spirit equips and strengthens us to do that for Christ's sake, we will be being transformed into the likeness of the one we worship, even Jesus Christ our Lord.

We have seen that Jesus calls his disciples to follow him in washing feet, and that biblical worship is always worked out in loving others. Although there are a few specific situations in which certain acts of footwashing may be inappropriate, due to compliance, conscience or context, the general call remains clear throughout Scripture. Whether or not our gatherings are "worship" in a narrow sense, or key parts of our lives of worship, they must be worship. Therefore our own preferences will not matter to us, since as worshippers we will be putting God first and serving others, knowing we are called to wash feet. Can singing to an instrument one doesn't like really be compared with footwashing? Does our putting hands in the air (or not) really bear comparison with Christ's great act of washing at the cross? Jesus has set us an example to follow, an example of living for others. Many of us will find some of the conclusions here hard, often for sociological reasons such as habit and background. John 13:17 is a great promise from our Lord who calls us to wash others' feet: "If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them."

³¹ Ibid., 284.

THE CHANGING ARCHITECTURE OF GLOBAL MISSION

Mark Pickett^{*}

The changing face of the world has led to heart searching on the part of churches and missions based in the West over their calling and the proper relationship between the two institutions. Theological rethinking leads to a rejection of the mission agency as a biblical form. Pragmatic considerations, however, lead to the acceptance of a plurality of structures for properly fulfilling the mission of the church.

Since New Testament times followers of Christ have sought to obey the Great Commission by making disciples and gathering them into local churches (Matt 28:16-20; Mark 13:10; 14:9; Luke 24:44-49; John 20:21; Acts 1:8). They have carried out that mission not as independent disciples but as *groups*. The shapes of these associations and the principles by which they operate have been hot topics among Protestants for over 200 years. In this paper I will explore this issue by examining biblical data on mission structures, historical examples of such structures, the current global situation and responses to that situation by churches and organisations in the UK.

The Growing Global Church

It has become commonplace today to talk about the phenomenal growth of the worldwide church. From being the religion of a minority of people living mostly in Europe and its colonies 200 years ago, the church has grown exponentially in many places so that today fully 63.2% of those who identify themselves as Christians are situated in the non-Western world.¹ Philip Jenkins asserts that, “We are currently living through one of the transforming moments in the history of religion worldwide”.² Over the past century, observes Jenkins, the centre of gravity in the Christian world has shifted inexorably southward, to Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Today the largest communities on the planet that identify themselves as Christian are to be found in Africa and Latin America, with huge minority communities in

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¹ Jason Mandryk, *Operation World* (7th ed.; Carlisle: Biblica, 2010), 5.

² Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 1.

places like China, South Korea and India. This tremendous expansion has been accomplished in great measure through the missionary movement of the last couple of centuries.³

Furthermore, non-Western churches themselves are surging ahead in missions so that it is now estimated that there are more non-Western missionaries than Western ones.⁴ David Cho, the International Director of the Global Network of Mission Structures, tells us that “the national goal of the Korean church is to send out 100,000 missionaries in the next 20 years. The Chinese church and Filipino church have similar goals. We are witnessing an enormous shift in the center of gravity of foreign mission sending.”⁵ It is with such phenomena emerging that the Global Network of Mission Structures was set up. Addressing the ongoing task of world evangelisation, Cho adds, “The issue is not a lack of resources to reach the remaining unreached peoples. It is simply a matter of better coordination.”⁶ At face value, that seems extraordinarily reductionistic but taking it in the best possible light Cho is highlighting that coordination is needed to ensure the wisest allocation of resources in world mission.

Such global church growth gives us a lot to be thankful for. We live in a day in which we can see tremendous advances of the gospel in the world. But the statistics obscure three tragic realities. Firstly, large numbers of people who identify themselves as Christian have very little understanding of the gospel. In India, for instance, to be identified as Christian one has merely to belong to a community (caste or tribe) that has been so identified by society at large and enshrined in law.

Secondly, as Andrew Walls writes, this global church growth has been accompanied by a massive recession in the former heartland of the church, Europe and the countries that grew out of its colonial expansion, such as Canada, Australia and New Zealand, and even, as is increasingly evident, in the United States.⁷

³ See Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions* (Pelican History of the Church: 6, rev. ed.; New York: Penguin, 1986) and Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity, Volume IV - The Great Century in Europe and the United States of America, AD1800-AD1914* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970).

⁴ Bruce A. Koch, “The Surging Non-Western Mission Force” in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement, a Reader* (eds. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne, 4th ed.; Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2009), 370.

⁵ Yong Cho, “Challenge and Opportunity for the Global Network of Mission Structures” *Mission Frontiers* July/August 2010, 16 [cited 27.9.13.] Online: <http://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/challenge-and-opportunity-for-the-global-network-of-mission-structures>.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Andrew F. Walls, “Culture and Coherence in Christian History” in *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1996), 21.

Thirdly, vast numbers of people, even in countries where the church has grown have as yet very little meaningful contact with the gospel, as Ralph Winter and Bruce Koch point out:

The fact is that the gospel often expands within a community but does not normally “jump” across boundaries between people, especially those that are created by hate or prejudice. Believers can readily influence their “near neighbours” whose language and culture they understand, but religion is often bound up with cultural identity. Therefore religious beliefs do not easily transfer from one group to another.⁸

Winter and Koch demonstrate that if all disciples of Jesus Christ were to witness to their friends, relatives and neighbours there would still be billions of people cut off from the gospel. They break down this scenario so that we can see how many people, and how many communities (“people groups”) need to be approached in “frontier mission”.⁹

Clearly these realities indicate that the age of mission is not over. The Lord Jesus told his disciples that “this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come” (Matt 24:14). But how are we to go about that? One of the big missiological discussions has been over the legitimacy and effectiveness of what we might call the architecture of missions. In recent decades, with the massive global changes we are witnessing, that discussion is once again calling for our attention.

Structures of Redemptive Mission

In a seminal 1973 article, Ralph Winter, the late founder of the US Center for World Mission in Pasadena, California, asserted that God has used two distinct structures in his mission of redemption in the world.¹⁰ In the first case, local churches were started in NT times based on the model of the synagogue which had existed for over a hundred years throughout the Roman Empire. In the second, Paul’s apostolic band was formed to take the message of the Lord Jesus to places where such local churches did not yet exist. The apostolic band was not dependent on the local church of its origin

⁸ Ralph D. Winter and Bruce A. Koch, “Finishing the Task: The Unreached Peoples Challenge”, in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement, a Reader* (eds. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne, 4th ed.; Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2009), 532.

⁹ It is important here to understand that when missiologists like Winter talk about a group being “reached” they are usually referring to the *opportunity* that group has to hear an appropriate communication of the gospel from a local church movement that is evangelistically minded.

¹⁰ Ralph D. Winter, “The Two Structures of God’s Redemptive Mission,” in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement, a Reader* (eds. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne, 4th ed.; Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2009), 244.

(Antioch) either for authority or funds. Rather, the team moved about with freedom and independence.

These two structures, Winter says, continue to turn up through Christian history. In medieval times diocesan local church structures were supplemented by the monastic movement, which was used to plant other churches based on the diocesan model in such places as Britain after the Angles and Saxons had invaded and wounded Celtic Christianity. Winter calls these structures *modalities* and *sodalities*. In the one, baptism was the initial route to membership and there was no barrier of age or sex. To join the other, however, a second decisive act was needed that would only be taken by the few who could accept that.¹¹

Winter asserts that the Protestant Reformers did not appreciate the medieval monastic orders as they should have done. The reformers (Luther was a monk himself, of course) highlighted the corruption that was endemic in the system. They denied any place for such orders. But to Winter they missed out on the very positive role the orders played throughout the medieval period in preserving and extending the mission of the church. It was this denial of the sodality that to Winter was “the greatest error of the Reformation and the greatest weakness of the Protestant tradition”.¹² Later, the Pietist movement was itself a sodality, Winter asserts. But even this movement, along with Anabaptist communities, “dropped back to the level of biological growth” and so ceased to function as a sodality.

It was William Carey’s promotion of the use of “means” that brought the sodality back onto the Protestant stage.¹³ And within a few short decades the Protestant movement, using the opportunities made available to it by the colonial expansion of northern European powers, had been carried all over the world. But church-based mission societies like the Church Mission Society and the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions were taken under the control of denominational powers, and other sodalities, the “Faith Missions” like Hudson Taylor’s China Inland Mission took up the baton.

Winter goes on to warn that today’s missionary societies are in danger of denying the efficacy of the very structure that has got them out to the frontiers. Many societies, he argues, plant churches and leave it at that. Winter asks, “Why don’t they also plant mission agencies?” Is it because of a mindset of Western agencies that finds it difficult to entrust the work of mission to those of the traditional receiving nations? The church, in countries where it has grown significantly, is in danger of not being able to continue the work of mission.

¹¹ Ibid., 246.

¹² Ibid., 250.

¹³ William Carey, *An Enquiry into the Obligation of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens* (new facsimile ed.; London: Carey Kingsgate, 1961).

Although I think Winter's article is stimulating and helpful in tracing these two structures through Christian history, the NT evidence, it seems to me, does not bear the weight that he loads on it. Eckhard Schnabel agrees. While there is plenty of evidence for the normative character of the local church (*ekklēsia*) there is very little NT data about the evangelistic band to go on. "This is another area", he writes, "where Paul's missionary work provides neither a paradigm nor principle or rules".¹⁴

Furthermore, Winter does not seem to take enough account of the cultural and ecclesiastical context of the eras through which the church and mission has passed. He rightly points out the diocesan pattern of the local church as being modelled after the Roman civic administrative pattern.¹⁵ But then the emergence of Christendom with the adoption of Christianity as the official religion of the Empire by Constantine in 313AD surely changed the shape of the church and its relationship to the world dramatically. It was the nexus of the church with political power and the corresponding corruption of the church that led to the emergence of the monastic orders.

Missionary Societies as a Phenomenon of Modernity

Mission historian Andrew Walls locates the phenomenon of the missionary as we have come to understand it, firmly in the church's response to the culture of globalisation and modernity:

We can thus see that, while the element of cross-cultural diffusion runs throughout Christian history, it has never been dependent on any one instrument. The 'missionary' in the technical sense is one present, and historically important, example of a recurrent Christian phenomenon.¹⁶

Cross-cultural diffusion (mission) is a constant in the history of the church but the "missionary" is just one particular expression of that.¹⁷ Walls traces the history of modern missionary societies to their roots in the idea of the "voluntary society" which itself was a product of a particular combination of

¹⁴ Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Paul the Missionary: Realities, Strategies and Methods* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2008), 393. See also Bruce K. Camp, "A Theological Examination of the Two-Structure Theory" *Missiology* 23 (1995):197-209 and George W. Peters, *A Biblical Theology of Missions* (Chicago, Ill.: Moody, 1972), 244. Roland Allen, likewise makes no comment on the structure of Paul's missionary band though he places great emphasis on the ongoing relevance of his principles of mission: Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1922. Repr., 1962).

¹⁵ Winter, "The Two Structures of God's Redemptive Mission", 246.

¹⁶ Andrew F. Walls, "The Old Age of the Missionary Movement" in *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1996), 258; repr. from *International Review of Mission* 77 (1987).

¹⁷ Even if we accept the gift of evangelist as continuing along with that of the pastor/teacher (Eph 4:11) the label "missionary" is commonly applied a lot wider than simply to those who are doing full-time evangelistic ministry.

political, economic, and religious conditions that arose at the end of the seventeenth century in Western Europe. In political terms, says Walls, "it required regimes permitting free association, a climate in which such association was not perceived by the state as a threat, a type of society in which individual consciousness was highly developed, in which it was not necessary or appropriate that all should look like their neighbours".¹⁸ In economic terms there had to be a surplus of resources which were enjoyed by a broad spread of the population and a system in which this surplus could be moved around. In religious terms there had to exist church structures that allowed for such societies to form without them being perceived as a serious threat to religious life. Furthermore, for the agencies to operate there had to be a relationship between the West and the rest of the world which allowed for relative freedom and security in travel and settlement.

In a voluntary society churches and individuals and other wider groupings can act freely together towards a common purpose. There was some resistance to the idea – why were they necessary when the church was already providing ministry? There was also some theological resistance to the extension of the church among far-flung nations. But William Carey's arguments were not only theological. Having established the biblical basis for missions his arguments are also *pragmatic* – in Carey's words, Christians were under obligation "to use *means* for the conversion of the heathens".¹⁹ As Walls puts it, "There never was a *theology* of the voluntary society. The voluntary society is one of God's theological jokes, whereby he makes tender mockery of his people when they take themselves too seriously."²⁰ The society arose because the churches of the time had no structure to advance the gospel in previously untouched areas.²¹

Globalisation

Walls asserts, rightly I think, that the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries "saw a high degree of convergence of these conditions", allowing missionary societies to flourish relatively unhindered.²² But, says Walls, those conditions have not continued into the present. The colonial system has passed. Even more markedly the economic system has led missionaries

¹⁸ Ibid., 259.

¹⁹ Carey, *An Enquiry*, from the title to this ground-breaking manifesto (my emphasis).

²⁰ Andrew Walls, "Missionary Societies and the Fortunate Subversion of the Church" in *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of the Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996), 246; repr. from *The Evangelical Quarterly* 88 (1988).

²¹ See also Dwight P. Baker, "William Carey and the Business Model for Mission" in *Between the Past and Future: Evangelical Mission Entering the Twenty-first Century* (ed. Jonathan J. Bonk, Evangelical Missiological Society Series Number 10; Pasadena, Calif.: William Carey, 2003), 167-202.

²² Walls, "The Old Age of the Missionary Movement", 259.

to be expensive commodities especially in comparison with the cost of living in the countries they have traditionally been sent to serve.

There have, furthermore, been huge religious changes as we have already seen. One result of the recession of the church in the West is that mission organisations based in these old missionary-sending countries are facing a serious shortfall in income to meet their ever-growing budget.²³ This has led to some deep heart-searching on the part of those mission boards and leaders.

The vastly increased interconnectedness of the world has had a massive impact on both the way we view the needs of the world and the way we respond to them. Instant newsfeeds, the ease with which we can communicate with a church leader on the other side of the world, the convenience of international travel, and the ability to be understood through the widespread use of English as an additional language all mean that the need for the skilled culture-broker, of which the traditional missionary is the classic example (and by extension the mission society), is deemed by many to be redundant.

Opportunities for churches and individuals to give to missions (also a product of globalisation) have mushroomed resulting in many long-established mission agencies often struggling to pay their bills as erstwhile donors send their gifts elsewhere. Gordon Stewart, of AsiaLink, believes that the recent financial crisis has had an effect on the way British church members view mission agencies:

The present financial crisis and the uncertainty which that places on jobs, wages, pensions and student debt are squeezing church members. Christians are less willing to “give to mission” and those that do are much more discerning today than 20 years ago. They want to know who it is going to, how much is being kept for admin, how much is actually going to the “field”. They want good value for their hard-earned money.²⁴

The apparent high cost of sending a church member into missions via a mission agency has led some churches, especially bigger churches and newer churches, to cut out the “middleman” and organise things themselves.²⁵

²³ As dramatically presented in the form of the fictitious Global Harvest Mission in James F. Engel and William A. Dyrness, *Changing the Mind of Missions: Where Have We Gone Wrong?* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000).

²⁴ Gordon Stewart, personal communication.

²⁵ A phenomenon even more common in the USA. Stan Guthrie, “New Paradigms for Churches and Mission Agencies” *Mission Frontiers* 24 (1, Jan-Feb 2002): n.p. [cited 23.9.13.] Online: <http://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/new-paradigms-for-churches-and-mission-agencies>. Against this trend, Guthrie reports that Bethlehem Baptist Church, Minneapolis (where John Piper was until recently the senior pastor) is one that has chosen not to “re-invent the wheel”, though for its size, it could easily have done so. Missions pastor Tom Steller told Guthrie, “I don’t feel we have the time or expertise to do what a well-run agency can do.” (Ibid.) I think Winter’s influence on Piper is undoubtedly a factor in this decision. Other large American churches to buck this trend are Elmbrook Church, Brookfield, Wisconsin and Grace Church, Lexington, Massachusetts where Paul Borthwick was Missions Pastor.

Some organisations and mission leaders have built their profile on the apparently high discrepancy between the cost of supporting a missionary from home and that of supporting “native missionaries”.²⁶

So the globalisation of mission has resulted in the formation of new structures, new patterns of funding, new channels of recruitment, and new ways of involvement for a new generation in the emerging global economic, political, and religious environment.

Theological Rethinking

The discussion over mission structures is one thread, and an important one, of larger discussions over the nature of mission. Those wider discussions coalesce around two questions: firstly, what exactly is it that the Lord has commissioned the church to do (or the role of the church in engaging the world materially, politically, environmentally, and socially as well as spiritually); and, secondly, how wide should mission be in terms of the work of perfecting the saints as opposed to the narrower task of reaching “unreached people groups”?²⁷ The way you answer those questions has serious consequences for the kinds of structures you will advocate.

But no matter how these questions are answered the question remains, pragmatic considerations aside, is there any biblical basis for mission agencies at all? In the early 1970s the Strict Baptist Mission (as Grace Baptist Mission was then called) ceased to be run as a traditional missionary society to be replaced by a charitable trust with a council elected by the mission’s supporting churches. Chris Richards writes, “On the face of it there was not much difference but a profound change had taken place. The Mission now belonged to, and served, the churches.”²⁸ One area that this impacted was on mission finances. “At a Council meeting sometime in the mid-seventies” writes Richards, “the Treasurer reported that there was a financial crisis....

²⁶ E.g. K. P. Yohannan, *Revolution in World Missions* (Carrollton, Tex.: Gospel for Asia, 1986). See also my critique of Yohannan’s book: Mark Pickett, “Revolution in World Missions Part 1” [cited 25.9.13]. Online: <http://markpickett.blogspot.co.uk/2013/06/revolution-in-world-missions.html> and “Revolution in World Missions Part 2” [cited 25.9.13]. Online: <http://markpickett.blogspot.co.uk/2013/06/revolution-in-world-missions-part-ii.html>.

²⁷ For representative arguments see on the former, Engel and Dyrness, *Changing the Mind of Missions: Where Have We Gone Wrong?* and Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert, *What is the Mission of the Church: Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom, and the Great Commission* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011), and on the latter, Ralph D. Winter and Bruce A. Koch, “Finishing the Task: The Unreached Peoples Challenge” in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement, a Reader* (eds. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne, 4th ed.; Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2009) and James E. Plueddemann, “Measurable Objectives, No! Vision, Yes!”, *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 31 (2) (1995): 184-187.

²⁸ Chris Richards, “Introduction: Becoming a Church-Based Mission,” in *Tell All the World: Church-Based Mission for the Twenty-First Century* (ed. Don Crisp and Jim Sayers; London: Grace, 2011), 13.

Should this be shared with the churches? ‘No’, he said, ‘I think it should be kept within the family’. Yes, thought some – but who exactly *is* ‘the family’?”²⁹ Ongoing discussions within the Council and the churches led to further clarification of their new paradigm. The 1977 Annual Report declared that “the Mission would no longer undertake work on behalf of the churches. In future the Mission would help the churches to do their work”.³⁰

World Consultancies

More widely, how have mission organisations adapted to the changing environment? Ten years ago, Brian Knell of Global Connections wrote a paper in which he traced the recent history of UK-based missions and noted a subtle shift that took place sometime during the 1980s when mission societies, as they invariable were called, began to call themselves mission *agencies*.³¹ The life-long service expected of mission societies in which missionaries felt like family, had been replaced by a more pragmatic orientation around task and project. Missionaries in agencies were no longer expected to forge family-like relationships with others in the agency. Their call was not for life but for however long it seemed expedient. This change was gradual and may not have completely overtaken all the member groups of Global Connections (which was formerly known as the Evangelical Missionary Alliance). But it was quite apparent that such a change had taken place. This shift was in response, Knell argues, to changing attitudes towards missionaries in the churches (in which we might hear such comments as “Don’t they spoil cultures, and aren’t we all missionaries anyway?”) and the changing global situation in which such factors as difficulties with securing long-term visas, the education of children, and the shifting needs of host churches make life-long membership of a mission organisation more and more untenable.

Knell goes on to suggest that as churches demand more personal involvement in global missions further changes need to take place, and are indeed taking place already, such that mission agencies need to morph into “world consultancies”. This change, he argues, must come as a response to the demand for more choice and the distrust of organisations that is

²⁹ Ibid., 14.

³⁰ Ibid., 15.

³¹ Brian Knell, “From Societies through Agencies to Consultancies – a Trend in Mission Organisations”, prepared for the conference *Survive or Thrive? Is There a Future for the Mission Agency?* September 2003. Originally published online but no longer available. Global Connections is a network of UK churches and mission agencies that aims “to serve, resource and encourage churches as they explore their role in God’s plan for the world”. “Working Together for the Gospel” [cited 5.7.13]. Online: <http://www.passionformission.org.uk/>.

characteristic of Generation X, and must be focussed on the provision of services. This is all a far cry from the sodality-model of Ralph Winter.

So how are UK-based missions continuing to adapt to the present situation? In response to a blog post, Eddie Arthur, CEO of Wycliffe, UK agrees that churches must do the sending and mission agencies are there to support and help them in doing so.³² He also admits that mission agencies, including his own, have tended to have a low view of the church but thinks that this is changing rapidly.³³

OMF likewise, believes that the local church should be the sending body. The document "OMF and the Local Church: An Initial Overview" seeks to lay down the principle of local church involvement in the sending and supporting of missionaries with the mission agency while also recognising that the practicalities of pastoral care and ministry involvement far from the church may not be straightforward.³⁴ One implication of this is where there is shared responsibility:

In deciding the balance of responsibility between OMF and the local church a rule of thumb would be that areas where a church would normally expect to pastor its own members and ministers remain their responsibility. Matters that are related to ministry within OMF will be primarily OMF's responsibility.

ReachAcross, also, has been through a major restructuring process over the last ten years explicitly to transform it from being a more traditional missionary society to being a mission agency.³⁵

Another organisation that has been through a similar change is Serving in Mission (SIM). Keith Walker, the outgoing UK Director, explained the change as moving from being a traditional mission society to a community whose members' ministry is defined by a Partnership Agreement between the home church, the SIM home office, the field leadership, and the missionary.³⁶ This change started off in the 1990s but only last year was introduced globally across the mission. In the deployment of a new missionary his or her home church gets to have a significant input in defining their ministry and is responsible for their pastoral care and financial support. Walker believes that the changes make the mission's view of the local church much stronger. We are committed, he says, to "enabling churches to fulfil their mission globally".

³² Eddie Arthur, comment on 20 Schemes blog post. Cited 5.7.13. Online: <http://20schemes.com/are-mission-agencies-killing-missions/>

³³ Eddie Arthur, "Churches and Mission Agencies", Kouya blog, 13.2.13. Online: <http://www.kouya.net/?p=5132>. Accessed 20.9.13.

³⁴ "OMF and the Local Church: An Initial Overview". Unpublished paper kindly provided by Ray Porter.

³⁵ Personal communication from Glenn Tainio, UK National Director of ReachAcross.

³⁶ Personal communication.

Members of Albania Evangelical Mission usually have a single sending church plus two or three others who take an interest and support with prayer and finance. Each is considered to be independent of mission control. Rather, the mission sees its role as supporting both expatriate and local workers. Workers from overseas try to fit into a local Albanian church and exercise their ministry in that setting. Director Paul Davies admits that there is sometimes a tension for missionaries between the concerns of their sending church and those of the local church with whom they are working. This is especially so in situations where a missionary becomes a pastor of an Albanian church.³⁷

In 2009 Crosslinks underwent a major review of their purpose and ethos which resulted in the restructuring of the mission. The creation of a Church and Member Team is the result of a desire to esteem the role of the local church in the sending of missionaries. Nevertheless, the governance of the mission is as a society independent of local church control (though governed by a General Council which includes a member of the Church of England's General Synod):

At its most fundamental level Crosslinks exists as a voluntary society. Membership is open to any individual who signs the Basis of the Society and the Statement of Faith... and give a written undertaking... that they have been a supporter of the Society by prayer and gifts for at least a year, and that they continue to support the Society in the same manner.³⁸

There has clearly been a widespread review of attitudes towards the place of the local church in mission among UK-based mission organisations. In some cases there have been changes in governance but the architecture of mission organisations continues to be diverse.

Problems with Church Control

Turning over power and influence to sending churches is a risky venture. Writing out of the American experience, Paul Borthwick cautions churches from becoming quasi-mission agencies: "Churches operating autonomously as mission agencies tread on very dangerous ground. They may repeat the same errors or become the very bureaucracies they're rebelling against."³⁹ In the same vein, Stan Guthrie points out that the increasing control of mission by local churches can sometimes come with a high price. When a church takes on full responsibility for its missionary personnel those missionaries become vulnerable to changes in that church. A church split, for instance, can result in the abandonment of a mission project by personnel who no longer

³⁷ Personal communication.

³⁸ "Crosslinks Governance review – April 2013", supplied to me by Andy Lines, Mission Director.

³⁹ Paul Borthwick, "When Churches Act Like Agencies", *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 35 (1999): 324-33.

have the support of their fractured fellowship. (The question of which part of the split church the returning missionaries are to side with is a vexing pastoral issue at a time of great stress and at the moment when pastoral care may not be available.) Or the church may shake up their whole approach to global mission resulting in their missionaries no longer fitting their new paradigm. Guthrie tells the story of one Bible translator who was recalled because his home church was only going to support church planting!⁴⁰

Is this a good enough argument, though, for maintaining a traditional approach? It is true that mission agencies have built up a huge amount of expertise in ministry in the diverse contexts of the globe. Churches that decide to go it alone without consulting with such expertise are surely naive and irresponsible. But this is not a killer argument against a greater share of responsibility and control resting in the lap of the local church. After all, mission agencies, like churches, can split or go through a paradigm shift in ministry approach, and often do. Borthwick voices the concerns of local churches in demanding more involvement.⁴¹

Jim Sayers, Deputy Mission Coordinator of GBM, reports that another result of the structural changes in a mission can be the pluralisation of philosophies of ministry.⁴² After all, if a number of local churches send their personnel into ministry, those missionaries may have a range of approaches to that ministry. If individuals from different churches with different emphases are to work on the same field it will take clear understanding to ensure that they can work together effectively. Again, this is surely also the case in more traditional missionary societies but perhaps in times gone by a drastic mismatch between a mission agency and a new recruit was often prevented by careful vetting of the candidates during the selection process. The necessity for carefully worked out arrangements for cooperation in ministry is, nevertheless, clear no matter what the structure.

Creative Solutions to Twenty-first Century Opportunities

The globalisation of missions also throws up another new challenge which local churches and denominations in places like the United Kingdom have only recently begun to think through – the arrival of gospel workers on our shores from countries that were until recently thought of as the “mission field”. They may or may not arrive with any structure behind them. Do we have the structures to ensure that they are welcomed, guided, and even held to account (2 John 10)? What if they are under the leadership of strongly hierarchical mission directors who dictate their methods from afar without

⁴⁰ Guthrie, “New Paradigms for Churches and Mission Agencies”.

⁴¹ Borthwick, “When Churches Act Like Agencies”.

⁴² Personal communication.

any reference to their hosts? Do we allow them to make the same mistakes that we made a century ago in their homelands or do we seek to open up channels of fellowship in the gospel to seek for something better?

The Valley Commandos project in South Wales is one recently formed creative structure. Evangelical churches in the cities of Newport, Cardiff and Swansea have long been burdened to help the small gospel fellowships in the valleys that have been struggling to maintain their witness in a context of great spiritual and social deprivation. So some of these churches have joined together to promote church planting and strengthening in each of the 23 valleys in this densely populated area and are partnering with Wales Evangelical School of Theology, SaRang Church in Seoul and Acts29 Europe to resource this vision. The paradigm shift that is going on in mission in our day must surely call for such creative thinking.

Mission structures emerge as people respond in concert to the commission of the Lord Jesus to continue his work on earth in the power of the Spirit. Those structures must be rooted in a right biblical theology and a realistic practical perspective of the global and local situation. The biblical basis for the local church is indisputable. (And though we may struggle to agree on the precise arrangements we must all at least be working to express the unity of the church by seeking fellowship with others in bodies like Affinity.) Arguments for a particular organisational structure as the biblical vehicle for global mission are not convincing. Rather, the application of biblically-informed wisdom to the task of mission and the needs of mission personnel may result in a plurality of structures in different times and in different places. Schnabel agrees. It may be that a mission agency is just what is needed: "...it stands to reason to pool knowledge, expertise and resources in sending missionaries".⁴³ Even some of those who have previously seen no place for agencies that are not under church control recognise this – GBM in recent years has begun to partner with a number of mission agencies that have field-led teams. While the worker is on the field they are accountable to the field leader. But mutual reporting between agencies and an annual review of the situation by mission leaders and home-church elders ensures proper accountability. "It's a bit of a trade-off" admits Jim Sayers.⁴⁴ Such a trade-off may be just what is needed to glorify God in the ongoing mission of the church in the twenty-first century.

⁴³ Schnabel, *Paul the Missionary: Realities, Strategies and Methods*, 394.

⁴⁴ Personal communication.

AUGUSTINE ON REVELATION 20: A ROOT OF AMILLENNIALISM

David McKay^{*}

Revelation 20 is one of the key passages in debates about differing views of the millennium. It is often thought that the amillennial view is of relatively recent origin, but in fact it is rooted in the early Christian centuries, especially in the interpretation of the chapter offered by Augustine. His study of Revelation 20, set out in Book 20 of his great work *The City of God*, offers useful resources for an amillennial approach to the passage.

Are you Premill, Postmill or Amill? Few subjects have a greater capacity to generate controversy among Christians than eschatology, especially when the subject of the millennium is involved. Indeed, for many evangelicals it is one's view of the millennium that is the litmus test for "soundness" regarding an understanding of large tracts of Scripture, in particular the prophetic books. Most Fundamentalists are committed to a premillennial position, according to which Christ returns to earth and reigns over an earthly kingdom before the end comes. A large number hold to the Dispensational version of this view. Many of the Reformed have held to a postmillennial position which places the return of Christ after a period of a thousand years, during which the gospel is the overwhelmingly dominant force on earth. Although this view still has significant support, a growing number of Reformed believers are committed to an amillennial position, which views the millennium as something other than an earthly kingdom to be expected at the end of time. Many Christians are simply confused.

It may be tempting to conclude that there is no hope of developing greater agreement on eschatology among those equally committed to the supreme authority of the Bible. If that commitment is sincere, however, profound differences of biblical interpretation should stimulate more careful and more thorough exegesis of the relevant biblical texts, always with the prayerful hope that greater unanimity may be attained. In this enterprise the insights of the great theologians and biblical scholars of the past must not be neglected. This is especially necessary in a day when the new is automatically assumed to be superior to the old. Whilst we must never be captive to the past, we must profit from the wisdom of earlier generations of God's servants.

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With regard to eschatology, one of the most significant early contributions to the subject was made by Augustine, Bishop of Hippo in North Africa. In this, as in so many theological matters, Augustine (354-430) was a towering figure. Amid the diversity of views in the Patristic period, Augustine developed an understanding of the biblical material which proved to be a root of what has come to be termed Amillennialism. Key elements of this view were formulated in Augustine's greatest work, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans*, written between 413 and 427, in response to the sack of Rome by Alaric and the Goths in August 410.

Rather than try to summarise Augustine's full contribution to eschatology in the *City of God*, embracing as it does a philosophy of history and an examination of relations between Church and State, as well as his famous and controversial understanding of the "two cities", we will focus on Augustine's exegesis of a crucial New Testament passage, Rev 20, which he considers in *City of God* Book 20, chapters 7 to 17. This will highlight such central eschatological themes as the nature of the resurrection, the millennium, final judgment and the new creation.

Eschatology in the Early Church

To provide context for Augustine's views, we must (briefly) note the main lines of thinking about eschatology among his predecessors in the Early Church. In doing so we should bear in mind the warnings of J N D Kelly against views which minimise the conviction of the first generations of Christians that they were *already* living in the age of the Messiah and which argue that they quickly turned attention to an entirely *future* coming of the Kingdom. He argues that "the primitive conviction of enjoying already the benefits of the age to come was kept vividly before the believer's consciousness".¹

Nevertheless, as Kelly recognises, the element of hope was crucial to Christian faith in the New Testament and, as Gregg Allison notes, "This hope continued to characterize the church during its first few centuries of growth".² We could not imagine the early Church without its longing for the return of Christ and the glorious new creation which he would usher in. Thus Irenaeus includes among the fundamentals of the faith, the *regula fidei*, the Lord's "[future] manifestation from heaven in the glory of the Father", when he will "execute just judgment towards all" and may "in the exercise of His grace, confer immortality on the righteous, and holy, and those who have kept His commandments, and have persevered in His love, some from the

¹ J N D Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 5th edition (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1977), 461.

² Gregg R Allison, *Historical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 684.

beginning [of their Christian course], and others from [the date of] their repentance, and may surround them with everlasting glory".³

Given the possibility, and at times the fact, of violent persecution faced by Christians in the early centuries, much attention was given to the dramatic visions of books like Ezekiel and Daniel in the Old Testament and Revelation in the New Testament which depict both the sufferings and deliverance of the people of God. Persecution is summed up in the figure of Antichrist, the "Deceiver of the World" as the *Didache* describes him, one who "will work such wickedness as there has never been since the beginning".⁴ Hence the exhortation to Christians, "Be watchful over your life; never let your lamps go out or your loins be ungirt, but keep yourselves always in readiness".⁵

The Christian's hope of a resurrection in glory is of course central to eschatology, based as it is on the resurrection of Christ. In his *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, written around 96, Clement of Rome writes,

Think, my dear friends, how the Lord offers us proof after proof that there is going to be a resurrection, of which he has made Jesus Christ the first-fruits by raising Him from the dead.⁶

The role of Christ as forerunner and pattern of Christians' resurrection is a common theme in the early centuries. To take but one example, Ignatius writes to the Trallians,

[Christ] was also verily raised up again from the dead, for His Father raised Him; and in Jesus Christ will His Father similarly raise us who believe in Him, since apart from Him there is no true life for us.⁷

It is no surprise that such a crucial doctrine should soon come under sustained attack. Thus, as Ronald Heine notes, "The subject of the resurrection became a storm center in the second century in the debate between orthodox Christians and gnostics".⁸ On the orthodox side the key defenders of the doctrine of bodily resurrection were Irenaeus and Tertullian. Their gnostic opponents denigrated the material in comparison to the spiritual, recasting core Christian doctrines in the light of this fundamental commitment. In their view the material creation was the work

³ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 1.10.1 (ANF, 1.330). Unless otherwise indicated, patristic quotations are taken from: *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, edited by Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, 10 volumes, reprint of 1885 edition (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1994). Cited as ANF.

⁴ *Didache*, 16, in *Early Christian Writings: The Apostolic Fathers*, translated by Maxwell Staniforth (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1968), 235.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁶ *The First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians*, 24, in *Early Christian Writings*, 36.

⁷ Ignatius, *Epistle to the Trallians*, 9, in *Early Christian Writings*, 97.

⁸ Ignatius, *Epistle to the Trallians*, 9, in *Early Christian Writings*, 97.

of an inferior deity, the idea of God taking human flesh was unthinkable and bodily resurrection highly undesirable. As Heine describes their outlook,

The goal of gnosticism was to free the spiritual element in human beings from its imprisonment in the fleshly body. People who were aware of the essentially useless and corrupt nature of flesh and lived only for the spiritual were said to be experiencing resurrection already.⁹

In response, orthodox theologians insisted on God's having created the material realm, and originally "very good", and on the bodily nature of resurrection. Thus they argued that salvation involves the whole person, body as well as soul, and that the God who created man's body at the beginning is able to bring about a bodily resurrection. Irenaeus argues, for example, that if God was able out of nothing to create man's material body and constitute him a rational creature, God is likewise able to raise the body to life at the general resurrection:

For He who in the beginning caused him to have being who as yet was not, just when He pleased, shall much more reinstate again those who had a former existence, when it is His will [that they should inherit] the life granted by Him.¹⁰

In the view of Irenaeus the most convincing proof of bodily resurrection is the incarnation in which the Word assumed flesh in order to save it.¹¹

In similar fashion Tertullian defends the doctrine of bodily resurrection. He argues, for example, that body and soul are both involved in human actions, the soul motivating action and the body carrying it out, and so both must be raised in order to receive appropriate reward or punishment. Whilst the soul is first to suffer in Hades, "still it is waiting for the flesh in order that it may through the flesh also compensate for its deeds, inasmuch as it laid upon the flesh the execution of its own thoughts".¹² In his exposition of 1 Cor 15:21 in the fifth book of *The Five Books Against Marcion* Tertullian draws on the profound comparisons and contrasts between Adam and Christ; commenting on Paul's words, "Since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection", he writes,

But if we are all so made alive in Christ, as we die in Adam, it follows of necessity that we are made alive in Christ as a bodily substance. The similarity, indeed, is not complete, unless our revival in Christ concurs in identity of substance with our mortality in Adam.¹³

We might note at this point the dissenting voice of Origen who held to the resurrection of the "body" but was reluctant to speak of the "flesh" being

⁹ Ronald E Heine, *Classical Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 159.

¹⁰ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 5.3.2 (ANF 1.529).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 5.14 (ANF, 1.541ff).

¹² Tertullian, *On the Resurrection of the Flesh*, 17 (ANF, 3.557).

¹³ Tertullian, *The Five Books Against Marcion*, 5.9 (ANF, 3.448).

resurrected. Origen wished to defend Christian truth against pagan detractors such as Celsus and eschewed what he perceived as the crude literalism of a resurrection of the flesh. For Origen, pre-existing souls put on a fleshly body suitable for the life in this world which they enter, and at the resurrection they will put on a different kind of body suited to heavenly life, a body that in some sense is put on over the present body: "it assumes another [body] in addition to the former, which is needed as a better covering, suited to the purer ethereal regions of heaven".¹⁴ The resurrection body is of a different kind from the physical body suited for the present life.

Another important aspect of the eschatology of the early Church is a fairly widespread belief that after the resurrection of believers at the return of Christ, he will reign for a thousand years over an earthly kingdom centred on Jerusalem. This was thought to be the "millennium" mentioned in Rev 20, a key text for all millennial views, including that of Augustine. Thus Justin Martyr in his *Dialogue with Trypho* writes of "a certain man with us, whose name was John, one of the apostles of Christ" who prophesied

that those who believed in our Christ would dwell a thousand years in Jerusalem and that thereafter the general and, in short, the eternal resurrection and judgment of all people would likewise take place.¹⁵

In the same vein Tertullian writes,

But we do confess that a kingdom is promised to us on the earth, although before heaven, only in another state of existence; inasmuch as it will be after the resurrection for a thousand years in the divinely built city of Jerusalem "let down from heaven" ...¹⁶

This "premillennial" view places the return of Christ before the millennium and argues for an earthly reign by Christ centred on Jerusalem. It proved to be very influential in the early centuries and some of the Fathers could wax very eloquent regarding conditions on earth during the millennium. Thus Irenaeus, for example, writes of the creation, "renovated and set free", becoming abundantly fertile and fruitful almost beyond imagination. He quotes the Lord as teaching:

The days will come, in which vines will grow, each having ten thousand branches, and in each branch ten thousand twigs, and in each true twig ten thousand shoots, and in each one of the shoots ten thousand clusters, and on every one of the clusters ten thousand grapes, and every grape when pressed will give five and twenty metretres of wine.¹⁷

¹⁴ Origen, *Against Celsus*, 7.32 (ANF, 4.624).

¹⁵ Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*, 81 (ANF, 1.240).

¹⁶ Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, 3.25 (ANF, 3.342).

¹⁷ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 5.33.3 (ANF, 1.562).

All other crops would be similarly abundant and all the animals would live in harmony with each other.

By no means everyone was convinced about this premillennial reading of eschatology. Theologians from the Alexandrian tradition, especially Origen, rejected such a literalistic understanding of Rev 20 and associated texts. In view of Origen's understanding of the resurrection body noted above this is not surprising. In *De Principiis* he attacks those who avoid hard thinking and are "disciples of the letter alone" who, in indulging their bodily desires,

are of the opinion that the fulfilment of the promises of the future are to be looked for in bodily pleasure and luxury; and therefore they especially desire to have again, after the resurrection, such bodily structures as may never be without the power of eating, and drinking, and performing all the functions of flesh and blood.¹⁸

Christians may certainly hope for the fulfilment of God's promises, not in eating physical bread but rather in eating "the bread of life, which may nourish the soul with the food of truth and wisdom".¹⁹

Although it has often been suggested that the premillennial approach to eschatology was the predominant view in the early centuries of the Christian Church, this has been vigorously challenged by Charles Hill in his book *Regnum Caelorum: Patterns of Millennial Thought in Early Christianity*.²⁰ His search in this study, he indicates, is for an early, orthodox (non-Gnostic) "non-chiliasm".²¹ He recognises that there are difficulties in assessing the influence of chiliasm since many early Christian authors are silent on the subject and, he claims, some usually cited as chiliastic are in fact ambiguous in their position. Although we do not have scope in this article to examine Hill's study in detail, we might note that for him the crucial test to apply to determine an author's chiliastic outlook is what view of the intermediate state is held. Non-chiliasts in general held that at death the soul passed immediately into the presence of God, whilst chiliasts usually envisaged an intermediate period of unconsciousness. As Hill expresses it,

[We] may in one sense resolve the matter into the question whether the *regnum caelorum*, the kingdom of heaven, (understood as the interim reign of Christ), would have as its capital the terrestrial or the celestial Jerusalem.²²

After careful study of a wide range of evidence, Hill concludes that in fact, contrary to much received wisdom, non-chiliast views in the early Christian

¹⁸ Origen, *De Principiis*, 2.11.2 (ANF, 4.297).

¹⁹ Ibid., 2.11.3 (ANF, 4.297).

²⁰ Charles E Hill, *Regnum Caelorum: Patterns of Millennial Thought in Early Christianity*, 2nd edition (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001).

²¹ Ibid., 2.

²² Ibid., 7.

centuries were “quickly and widely diffused”.²³ This was the case even in Syria-Palestine with its strong undercurrent of nationalist-political Jewish chiliasm. Hill sees the first traces of chiliasm in Asia Minor among writers such as Papias, Justin Martyr and, especially, Irenaeus, yet even in Asia Minor chiliasm was not the dominant view. There were competing patterns of eschatological teaching in the early centuries, but there was, for example, an early non-chilastic interpretation of Rev 20, and, Hill concludes, “A solidly entrenched and conservative, non-chilastic eschatology was present in the Church to rival chiliasm from beginning to end.”²⁴

Augustine on Revelation 20

Augustine’s amillennial eschatology, which shapes his exegesis of Rev 20, is not entirely his own creation. It is evident from Augustine’s writings that he drew significantly on the work of a theologian named Tyconius, whose writings are lost apart from the use made of them by Augustine. Tyconius, a fourth-century African Donatist theologian, wrote a work on biblical interpretation entitled *The Book of Rules*, which set out seven rules that exerted a powerful influence on subsequent biblical interpretation. Indeed, Gregg Allison points out that Augustine’s *On Christian Doctrine* presents “a modified summary of *The Book of Rules*”.²⁵ It was Tyconius’ contention that biblical prophecies will be fulfilled spiritually, not physically and materially as the premillennialists held. In relation to Rev 20 “Tyconius focused on a spiritual millennium corresponding to the current church period”.²⁶

Initially Augustine was attracted to the premillennial position: “I also entertained this notion at one time”.²⁷ He came to feel repulsed, however, by the crass materialism of “the most unrestrained material feasts” said to be enjoyed by the saints, together with quantities of drink “that will also exceed the limits even of incredibility”.²⁸ Augustine became convinced that the spiritual interpretation of prophecy was the correct approach and, rather than refute the premillennial view of those he termed “Chiliasts” and “Millennarians” in detail, he chose to set out the positive position which he believed to be sound. In *City of God* 20.7-17 he expounds Rev 20:

²³ Ibid., 252.

²⁴ Ibid., 253.

²⁵ Gregg R Allison, *Historical Theology*, 166.

²⁶ Ibid., 688.

²⁷ Augustine, *City of God*, 20.7 (CG, 907). Quotations from Augustine’s *City of God* are taken from: *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans*, translated by Henry Bettenson, with an introduction by David Knowles (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972).

²⁸ Ibid., 20.7 (CG, 907).

Chapter 7: The two resurrections and the millennium. The descriptions of John in the Apocalypse, and their interpretation.

The background to Augustine's understanding of the two resurrections mentioned in Rev 20 is his consideration of Jesus' words in John 5:25-29, set out in chapter 6. As Augustine notes, Jesus speaks of a present resurrection: "...I am telling you that a time is coming, in fact has already come, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear shall live..." (v. 25). Clearly, Augustine argues, this is not the resurrection of the body but of the soul, and the dead who are delivered are dead in soul. It is only in v. 28 that Jesus comes to refer to the resurrection of the body. Those who have shared in the first (spiritual) resurrection will be spared condemnation and the "second death".

In chapter 7 Augustine uses John 5 to exegete Rev 20:1-6. He notes how some Christians have misunderstood John and have concluded that the "first resurrection" of v. 5 is a bodily resurrection. He links this to their excitement over the mention of a period of a thousand years in v. 2. Drawing on Peter's reference to one day being to God as a thousand years (2 Peter 3:8), they believed that the six days of creation provided the pattern for the 6000 years of human history and that the subsequent millennium would be "a kind of seventh day of Sabbath rest for the final thousand years, with the saints rising again, obviously to celebrate this Sabbath".²⁹

Indeed, in the final chapter of the book Augustine states that "We ourselves shall become that seventh day"³⁰ and, as Michael J Scanlon comments in this connection, "the future is the Christian's favourite tense".³¹ Nevertheless, Augustine vigorously rejects the view of the "Chiliasts" because of its crassly materialistic understanding of the blessings of the millennium. As noted previously, Augustine admits that he was once attracted to such views, but now rejects them.

The thousand years relate, according to Rev 20:1-3, to the imprisonment of Satan in "the bottomless pit" (or the Abyss). Augustine offers two possible interpretations of this period. One possibility is that the thousand years indicate the sixth millennium, "the sixth day", which, according to the scheme discussed above, precedes the eternal Sabbath, "the seventh day", and of which, says Augustine, "the latter stretches are now passing".³² The second possibility is that the thousand years are intended

²⁹ Ibid., 20.7 (CG, 907). Such an approach to understanding human history is to be found as far back as *The Epistle of Barnabas*, 15, in *Early Christian Writings*, 214-5.

³⁰ Ibid., 22.30 (CG, 1090).

³¹ Michael J Scanlon, art. "Eschatology" in *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Allan D Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 316.

³² Ibid., 20.7 (CG, 908).

to stand for the whole period of this world's history, signifying the entirety of time by a perfect number.³³

The perfect number is, of course, 1000, the cube of 10. In chapter 5 of Book 20 Augustine considered some significant numbers in Scripture and notes here how 100 is sometimes used to signify totality, as in Christ's statement that those who have left all to follow him will "receive a hundredfold in this world" (Matt 19:29, Augustine's quotation). He goes on, "If this is so, how much more does 1000 represent totality, being the square of 10 converted into a solid figure".³⁴ Augustine does not draw a specific conclusion from this discussion of the thousand years assigned to the devil's confinement.

As far as the confinement is concerned, the "abyss" in Augustine's view "symbolises the innumerable multitude of the impious, in whose hearts there is a great depth of malignity against the Church of God". A barrier is set by the angel which the devil is unable to pass, whilst the "sealing" to which John refers suggests to Augustine "that God wished it to be kept secret who belongs to the Devil's party, and who does not".³⁵ This, he believes, is why in this world it is uncertain who of those standing firm will later fall and who among the fallen will rise again.

This binding of the devil means that he is no longer able to lead astray "the nations of which the Church is made up, nations whom he led astray and held in his grip before they were a Church".³⁶ Augustine recognises that the devil does lead nations astray, though God ensures that individuals within them are not led astray into final condemnation. He does insist, however, that God has chosen certain nations to make up his Church. Quoting Eph 1:4, which in context does not appear to refer to nations, Augustine asserts that "God chose those nations before the foundation of the world"³⁷ and though they once were led astray by the devil, his binding now means that he cannot lead them astray.

Chapter 8: The binding and unloosing of the devil.

In chapter 8 Augustine turns to consider the release of the devil described in Rev 20:3. He asserts that this does not indicate that the devil, having been prevented by his binding from leading the Church astray, will subsequently be able to lead it astray: "he will never seduce that Church which was

³³ Ibid., 20.7 (CG, 908).

³⁴ Ibid., 20.7 (CG, 908).

³⁵ Ibid., 20.7 (CG, 908-9).

³⁶ Ibid., 20.7 (CG, 909).

³⁷ Ibid., 20.7 (CG, 909).

predestined and chosen before the foundation of the world”.³⁸ He believes in this regard it is important to note that there will still be a Church on earth when the time for the devil’s loosing comes. He finds support for this assertion in Rev 20:9-10, where reference is made to the Church’s enemies surrounding “the camp of the saints and the beloved city” just before the final judgment. The Church will not be absent when the devil is released nor will he succeed in annihilating it.

Augustine therefore argues,

the Devil is bound throughout the whole period embraced by the Apocalypse, that is, from the first coming of Christ to the end of the world, which will be Christ’s second coming...³⁹

During that time the devil is allowed to attack the Church but “he is not permitted to exert his whole power of temptation either by force or by guile to seduce men to his side by violent compulsion or fraudulent delusion”.⁴⁰ He will be unloosed against those who cannot be conquered, namely the Church, in order that his full malignity and “the endurance of the Holy City”⁴¹ will be clearly seen. Though he has been cast out of the hearts of the saints, he is allowed for three and a half years to assault outwardly “so that the City of God may behold how powerful a foe it has overcome to the immense glory of its Redeemer, its Helper, its Deliverer”.⁴²

In Augustine’s view the binding of the devil began as the Church was spreading beyond Judaea, continues now and will last until the end of the age. This is evidenced by the conversion of sinners, the property of the “strong man” of Matt 12 being carried off. What may then be said of the unloosing of the strong man who has been bound? Augustine first suggests that this will mean that during the three and a half years “no one will join the people of Christ”,⁴³ although some will fall away from the Church. The latter, Augustine is sure, “will not be people belonging to the predestined number of the sons of God”.⁴⁴ The elect remain secure.

Augustine then wonders about “the little ones”. Surely during the time of the devil’s final onslaught children will be born to believers? If they are, how could it be thought that none of them will be brought to the “washing of rebirth” (quoting Titus 3:5), for Augustine the sacrament of baptism by which they will be saved? This leads him to a different view from that which he expressed previously: he accepts that even during the time the devil is unloosed new members will be added to the Church. There will be those who

³⁸ Ibid., 20.8 (CG, 910).

³⁹ Ibid., 20.8 (CG, 911).

⁴⁰ Ibid., 20.8 (CG, 911).

⁴¹ Ibid., 20.8 (CG, 911).

⁴² Ibid., 20.8 (CG, 911).

⁴³ Ibid., 20.8 (CG, 912).

⁴⁴ Ibid., 20.8 (CG, 912).

receive baptism and there will be those who come to believe for the first time who will have victory over “the strong man” even though he is no longer bound. God’s grace will still be at work: there will be those

who will then, with the help of God’s grace, and by the study of the Scriptures... become more resolute to believe what they did not believe before, and strong enough to overcome the devil, even when unloosed.⁴⁵

Chapter 9: The nature of the kingdom of the saints, lasting a thousand years; and its difference from the eternal kingdom.

The saints, says Augustine, reign with Christ during the whole of the thousand-year binding of the devil, the period beginning with the first coming of Christ. It is not possible that this is the kingdom mentioned in Matt 25:34 (“inherit the kingdom prepared...”), which depicts Christ speaking at the end of the world. So, argues Augustine,

even now, although in some other and far inferior way, his saints must be reigning with him, the saints to whom he says, “See, I am always with you, right up to the end of the world”.⁴⁶

It is the Church, according to Augustine, that is in this sense called Christ’s kingdom. It is from this imperfect kingdom, the Church, that the reaping angels will gather the tares at the end of the world (Matt 13:39ff). The tares are collected “from this kingdom, which is the Church in this world”.⁴⁷

Developing this thought, Augustine refers to Matt 5:19 where both the man who does not keep Christ’s commandments and the man who does keep them are said to be in the kingdom of heaven. Alongside this statement must be placed Jesus’ teaching in verse 20 to the effect that only those whose righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, something that is possible only for those who obey the commandments, will enter the kingdom. Augustine holds both of these texts together by understanding the kingdom in two senses, one which includes both the keeper and the breaker of the commandments, and another which required obedience for entry. His conclusion is,

Thus where both are to be found we have the Church as it now is; but where only one kind will be found, there is the Church where it will be, when no evil person will be included.⁴⁸

Even now the saints reign with Christ, but the tares in the Church do not.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 20.8 (CG, 913).

⁴⁶ Ibid., 20.9 (CG, 914).

⁴⁷ Ibid., 20.9 (CG, 914).

⁴⁸ Ibid., 20.9 (CG, 915).

Augustine goes on to link these truths with the “first resurrection” referred to in Rev 20. John tells his readers, “I saw thrones, and those who sat on them, and judgment was given” (v. 4, Augustine’s translation). These thrones he interprets as “the seats of the authorities by whom the Church is now governed, and those sitting on them as the authorities themselves”.⁴⁹ Their reign, Augustine believes, consists in the binding and loosing described in Matt 18:18. It is not only the living who reign with Christ however. The souls of the martyrs, according to Rev 20:4, also share in this reign.

As Augustine puts it, “the souls of the pious dead are not separated from the Church, which is even now the kingdom of Christ”.⁵⁰ Augustine sees this belief reflected in such ecclesiastical practices as commemorating the pious dead at the altar when the Lord’s Supper is observed or when in time of danger baptism is sought for fear of dying unbaptised (and so separated from the dead in Christ). Thus the pious dead share in the reign of Christ during the thousand years. Augustine does note that “this reign after death belongs especially to those who struggled on truth’s behalf even to death”,⁵¹ but is unwilling to exclude any of the dead in Christ and argues that John is using the part (martyrs) to refer to the whole (all dead saints).

The “rest” who do not come to life until the thousand years are ended (Rev 20:5) are those who do not believe in Christ and so do not share in the first (spiritual) resurrection. At the last day they will be raised to face judgment, not to enter into life. At this “second” resurrection the unsaved will pass body and soul into the “second death”. Had they participated in the first resurrection they would have escaped the second death.

Chapter 10: The notion that resurrection has reference only to the body, not to the soul.

In defending his view of the “first resurrection” Augustine must address opponents who argue that the concept of “resurrection” refers only to the bodily aspect of human nature. Their logic (insofar as it may be termed “logic”) is that only what can fall can rise again and since bodies fall when they die there can be a resurrection only of bodies. Leaving aside the manifest weaknesses of this type of argument, although he was no doubt aware of them, Augustine makes his appeal to the clear teaching of Scripture, where the language of “resurrection” is used frequently of what is clearly a spiritual, not a bodily, experience.

Augustine quotes, for example, Col 3:1-2, which in his rendering says, “If you have risen with Christ, show a taste for the higher wisdom”.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 20.9 (CG, 916).

⁵⁰ Ibid., 20.9 (CG, 916).

⁵¹ Ibid., 20.9 (CG, 916).

Undoubtedly, Augustine argues, the Apostle “was surely addressing those who had risen again in the ‘inner man’, not the outer”.⁵² He reinforces his case by appeal to Paul’s exhortation to Christians to “walk in a new way of life” just as Christ rose again from the dead (Rom 6:4) and to the summons, “Awake, you sleeper, and rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you” (Eph 5:14). In all of these examples the resurrection in view is spiritual.

Even the argument that only what falls can rise may be answered from Scripture. Along with a quotation from Ecclesiasticus Augustine offers Rom 14:4, “in relation to his own Master he stands or falls” and 1 Cor 10:12, “Anyone who thinks he is standing firm should beware in case he may fall”. He concludes, “For the fall that we should beware of is, I imagine, the fall of the soul, not that of the body”.⁵³ There is no biblical obstacle, in Augustine’s view, that the “first resurrection” is spiritual.

Chapter 11: Gog and Magog, the agents of the devil’s persecution towards the end of the world.

The figures of Gog and Magog mentioned in Rev 20:8, and in Ezek 38-39, have exercised the ingenuity of exegetes and stirred the imaginations of Bible readers for the entire history of the Church. It is noteworthy that suggested interpretations have often focused on identification in terms of geography and have reflected the interpreter’s circumstances to a remarkable degree. Thus the view of such a widely influential twentieth-century Dispensational writer as Hal Lindsey that Gog refers to the USSR, and that Israel’s next war would be with Russia, clearly reflects the Cold War situation of the 1960s and 1970s.⁵⁴ As with all such theories, geopolitical changes soon leave them looking foolish.

Augustine will have no truck with such approaches which seem to have reared their heads even in his day. When Satan is released at the end of the thousand years, John says that he “will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle” (Rev 20:8). According to Augustine, this event is not to be thought of in terms of some circumscribed geographical area:

This, in fact, will be the last persecution, when the last judgment is imminent, and this persecution will be suffered throughout the whole world by the holy Church, the universal City of Christ being persecuted by the universal city of the Devil, each at the height of its power on earth.⁵⁵

⁵² Ibid., 20.10 (CG, 918).

⁵³ Ibid., 20.10 (CG, 919).

⁵⁴ Hal Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, (London: Lakeland, 1971), chapter 5. Lindsey performs some amazing linguistic acrobatics to make the names found in Ezekiel’s prophecies fit the history and geography of the USSR.

⁵⁵ Augustine, *City of God*, 20.11 (CG, 919-20).

Thus Gog and Magog are not to be understood as designations for barbarian tribes “outside Roman sway” but rather they exist all over the world, “at the four corners of the earth” as John says. Despite some wildly inaccurate etymologising of his own (not unusual in Augustine), he concludes that the names designate all the nations deceived by the devil.

We should also note that “the camp of the saints and the beloved city” of Rev 20:9 is not, in Augustine’s opinion, one specific location, certainly not Jerusalem as many Dispensationalists believe. Rather, says Augustine, “these are simply the Church of Christ spread all over the world”.⁵⁶ He continues,

It follows that wherever the Church is at that time, and it will be among all the nations... there the camp of the saints will be and there God’s beloved City.⁵⁷

At the end of history, this City will face the full fury of the devil and the nations under his sway.

Chapter 12: The fire that consumed Gog and Magog: and the fire of the last punishment.

The outcome of this cataclysmic confrontation between the two cities is not in doubt. Fire comes down from heaven and consumes the enemies of “the beloved city” according to Rev 20:9. Augustine stresses that this is not the fire of final, eternal punishment. John will speak of this in later verses. This fire from heaven is, rather, “the firmness of the saints which will keep them from giving way to those who rage against them and from carrying out the wishes of these opponents”.⁵⁸ The enemies will be tormented by the blazing zeal of the saints whose “firmness” originates in the “firmament” of heaven. The zeal of the saints will be the fire that consumes their enemies.

Almost as an afterthought Augustine suggests an alternative explanation of the fire: it may refer to the destruction of the persecutors of the Church when Christ returns, the killing of the Antichrist by the breath of his mouth, spoken of in 2 Thess 2:8. Either way, this fiery destruction is not the final punishment of evildoers, of that Augustine is sure.

Chapter 13: The relation of the persecution of Antichrist to the thousand years.

Is Satan’s brief, intensive attack on the Church to be viewed as taking place during or after the “thousand years”? That is the question to which Augustine now turns. On the one hand, he argues, if the release of the devil described in Rev 20:7 falls within the thousand year reign of the saints with

⁵⁶ Ibid., 20.11 (CG, 920).

⁵⁷ Ibid., 20.11 (CG, 920).

⁵⁸ Ibid., 20.12 (CG, 921).

Christ, then their reign lasts longer than the devil's binding. Yet the saints must surely reign with Christ even in the final persecution, "in fact, especially at that time, when they will overcome all its great evils, at a time when the Devil is no longer bound, and so can persecute them with all his might".⁵⁹ How could the reign of the saints and the binding of the devil last for a thousand years if he is released three and a half years before the end of the saints' reign?

On the other hand, if the devil is released after the thousand years, the conclusion would have to be drawn that the saints do not reign with Christ during the final, terrible persecution. Such a conclusion is unacceptable to Augustine. Indeed, by the same token those who perished during the times of persecution in the course of the thousand years could not, in Augustine's view, be considered to reign with Christ. He concludes, "Now this, to be sure, is utterly absurd, a conclusion to be repudiated at all costs".⁶⁰ If any Christian may be thought to reign with Christ it is surely the martyr who gave his life for the cause of Christ.

Augustine offers two possible solutions to the problem, both preserving the reality of the reign of the saints with Christ. It may be that in each case the thousand years is not so much a precise number of years as it is a designation for the "particular totality" of years allotted to each, though the exact figure differs for the saints and for the Devil. The other possibility is that the Devil's three and a half years of freedom is so short that it need not be taken into account when speaking of the thousand years. In either case the saints reign with Christ even in the darkest hours of suffering and persecution.

Chapter 14: The condemnation of the devil and his followers; and a summary account of the resurrection of the body and the final judgment.

The persecution of the holy City is for a strictly limited time. God's judgment will be executed on all his enemies. The One sitting on the great white throne will be the Judge, according to Rev 20:11. Augustine interprets John's statement that heaven and earth fell from the One on the throne as indicating the end of the present universe, after the last judgment, and the ushering in of the new. He is careful to stress the nature of this change: "For it is by a transformation of the physical universe, not by its annihilation, that this world will pass away".⁶¹

As the judgment unfolds, books are opened (Rev 20:12). These Augustine takes to be the Scriptures, setting out the divine law given to men for his

⁵⁹ Ibid., 20.13 (CG, 921).

⁶⁰ Ibid., 20.13 (CG, 922).

⁶¹ Ibid., 20.14 (CG, 924).

obedience. Reference is then made to “another book” that is opened to enable judgment to be passed on all men. This, according to Augustine, is “the book of every man’s life, [which] was to show which of these commandments each man had fulfilled or failed to fulfil”.⁶²

Augustine muses about the nature of this book of each man’s life. If it were a material volume, what size would it have to be to contain accounts of the lives of all men? How long would it take to read all its contents? Perhaps we should suppose that there is an angel assigned to each period who will read the account of that individual’s life: one book for each person. Augustine’s favoured explanation recognises that John refers to a single book:

Consequently, we must understand this to mean a kind of divine power which will ensure that all the actions, good or bad, of ever individual will be recalled to mind and presented to the mind’s view with miraculous speed, so that each man’s knowledge will accuse or excuse his conscience.⁶³

All the dead will give account, as John indicates by his references to the sea, Death and Hades giving up their dead (Rev 20:13).

Chapter 15: The meaning of the dead given up by the sea, and by Death and Hades.

Expounding John’s words regarding those who are judged in some more detail, Augustine first suggests that the dead given up by the sea are those, both good and evil, who belong to the present age (“the sea”) and who will be alive and in the body when the Lord returns. Thus John’s reference “means that this age gave up all who belonged to it, because they had not yet died”.⁶⁴

Those who have died before the Lord’s return are embraced by the terms Death and Hades, which also give up their dead. Although the distinction is not made in the Greek text of Rev 20, Augustine speaks of Death and Hades “giving back” their dead whilst the sea “gives up” its dead.

How are Death and Hades to be distinguished? Augustine suggests that “Death” embraces the good, and “Hades” the wicked. The saved experience death but are spared the punishment of hell, whilst the wicked must endure both. At this point Augustine refers to the position of those holy people who lived before the coming of Christ: Old Testament saints. They, he says,

dwelt in regions far removed from the torments of the ungodly, but still in the nether world, until Christ’s blood and his descent into those regions should rescue them from that place.⁶⁵

⁶² Ibid., 20.14 (CG, 924).

⁶³ Ibid., 20.14 (CG, 924-25).

⁶⁴ Ibid., 20.15 (CG, 926).

⁶⁵ Ibid., 20.15 (CG, 926).

All the redeemed now await the full enjoyment of the blessings purchased by the sacrifice of Christ.

The lake of fire awaits “those whose names were not found in the book of life”. As Augustine notes, this “book” is not an aid to the divine memory, to ensure that no mistakes are made. Rather the book is a symbolic reference to predestination, the decree of God which determines those to whom eternal life will be given. “The fact is that his foreknowledge of them, which is infallible, is itself the book of life in which they are written, that is, they are known beforehand”.⁶⁶ The sovereign action of God is thus the crucial factor determining the eternal destiny of all human beings. Augustine maintains the emphasis on God’s sovereign election and grace that is such a central theme especially in his anti-Pelagian writings. As Matthew Levering notes, for Augustine “the key issue at stake in predestination arguments is the radical gift-character of salvation as an intimate participation in God”.⁶⁷ At the consummation of human history, God’s electing grace is triumphant.

Chapter 16: The new heaven and the new earth.

Whilst at first sight Rev 20 does not deal directly with the new creation, Augustine, as noted earlier, sees a reference to this transformation in John’s statement in verse 11 that from the presence of One seated on the great white throne “earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them”. After the devil and all who are absent from the book of life have been flung into the lake of fire,

then the form of this world will pass away in a blazing up of the fires of the world, just as the Deluge was caused by the overflowing of the waters of the world.⁶⁸

The world will be transformed by this conflagration, not annihilated, and the result will be a home fitted for resurrected saints. Augustine’s description is worth quoting:

Thus in that blazing up, as I call it, of the fires of the world, the qualities of the corruptible elements which are appropriate for our corruptible bodies will utterly perish in the burning, and our substance itself will acquire the qualities which will be suited, by a miraculous transformation, to our immortal bodies, with the obvious purpose of furnishing the world, now renewed for the better, with a fitting population of human beings, renewed for the better even in their flesh.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Ibid., 20.15 (CG, 927).

⁶⁷ Matthew Levering, *The Theology of Augustine* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 79. Note also the comment of Mathijs Lamberigts that Augustine’s goal in opposing Pelagianism “was to establish in the preaching of predestination an impenetrable bulwark for the defense of God’s grace against the teaching on meritorious deeds proposed by Pelagius’ followers” in “Predestination” in *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, 678.

⁶⁸ Augustine, *City of God*, 20.16 (CG, 927).

⁶⁹ Ibid., 20.16 (CG, 927).

Augustine wonders whether the fact that “there is no longer any sea” indicates that the heat of the burning will dry up the sea or perhaps it too will be changed for the better. It may, he concludes, be the sea in a metaphorical sense, “For from that time the rough weather and the storms of this age will cease to exist, and ‘the sea’ is used as an allegory of this stormy age”.⁷⁰

Thus the scene is set for the vision of the New Jerusalem of Rev 21 which Augustine examines in chapter 17. He has, nevertheless, reached the consummation of the divine work of grace and the beloved City is triumphant. As Henry Chadwick notes,

Augustine offers much more hope to the individual than to the institutions of human society, peculiarly liable to be vehicles of group egotism.⁷¹

There will, nevertheless, be a pure and blessed society filling the new creation to the glory of God throughout eternity.

Conclusion

It is perhaps surprising that the standard expositions of Augustine’s theology give scant attention to his exposition of Rev 20. Often the writer’s interest is more taken by Augustine’s views of history and politics than by his eschatology.⁷² Even a study devoted specifically to *The City of God*, such as the commentary on Augustine’s work by J H S Burleigh⁷³ devotes only a couple of pages to the section on Rev 20. Interests generally lie elsewhere.

There has, in contrast, been some acknowledgement of Augustine’s role in the development of amillennial eschatology, and in particular an amillennial understanding of Rev 20. The acknowledgement is, however, limited. In his classic work *The Bible and the Future* A A Hoekema mentions Augustine’s views several times, although at one point he does not seem to reflect Augustine’s understanding of the present reign of the saints as embracing *all* the saints living and dead, and later dissents from Augustine’s inclusion of the living in the thousand-year reign.⁷⁴ Cornelis Venema notes Augustine’s contribution to the decline of premillennialism in the early Church and also comments that “Augustine gave impetus to the amillennialist

⁷⁰ Ibid., 20.16 (CG, 928).

⁷¹ Henry Chadwick, *Augustine*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 106.

⁷² See for example Eugene TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian*, (London: Burns and Oates, 1970), 268ff.

⁷³ John H S Burleigh, *The City of God*, (London: Nisbit and Co., 1949).

⁷⁴ A A Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, (Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1978). On p183, n32, Hoekema’s three categories for understanding Augustine’s view of the thousand-year reign are unduly narrow. He disagrees with Augustine on p233, n8.

contention that the millennium does not follow chronologically the early history of the New Testament church".⁷⁵ Most disappointing is the very recent volume by Sam Storms in which Augustine is mentioned twice, once to mention that he is claimed by some postmillennialists and again at the very end of chapter 17 where he quotes Augustine's confession with regard to the Antichrist, that he does not know what Paul means.⁷⁶

Augustine's careful exegesis of Rev 20, whether we agree or disagree with it in detail, deserves much better treatment. He is certainly one of the roots of an amillennial eschatology and he still offers valuable exegetical and theological resources for the twenty-first century Church.

⁷⁵ Cornelis P Venema, *The Promise of the Future*, (Edinburgh and Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2000), 196, 237.

⁷⁶ Sam Storms, *Kingdom Come: The Amillennial Alternative*, (Fearn: Mentor, 2013), 376, 547.

REVIEW ARTICLE

IMAGINING THE KINGDOM: HOW WORSHIP WORKS

IMAGINING THE KINGDOM: HOW WORSHIP WORKS

(CULTURAL LITURGIES, VOLUME 2)

James K. A. Smith, Baker Academic, 2013, 224 pp, £14.99

In 2009, James K. A. Smith embarked on a three-volume project called the Cultural Liturgies trilogy. The first volume, *Desiring the Kingdom*,¹ sought to highlight the role of desire as the leading aspect of human personhood, and how desire is formed through worship. Ultimately, it's not about what we think, or what we believe. It's about how and what we love. That's what truly shapes our human existence. And what we love is formed through repeated practices ("rituals") that inevitably project an imaginative horizon – ritual shapes our outlook on what the world is, and what the world should be. These repeated practices, these "liturgies", shape us far more profoundly than what we think or consciously believe. On balance, worldview doesn't matter – at least, not as much as we think it does. Desire formed by ritual worship (secular or Christian) weighs far more heavily.

Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works (2013) is the second instalment of the trilogy. *ITK* is designed to fill in the gaps and refine the argument of *Desiring the Kingdom*. Drawing on French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty, French Marxist anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu, as well as various thinkers in social psychology and cognitive linguistics, Smith attempts to give a theoretical basis for his redefinition of human being. He sees Christian scholarship as having a skewed, overly-intellectual vision of human existence, and he seeks to redress the balance by relativising the role of the intellect. He wants to put the mind in its place, so to speak. And the mind's "place" seems to be something akin to a janitor or office organiser: it comes along and arranges things once the real work has been done. So who or what is doing the real work? The body, which turns out to be the proper seat of the imagination. The body, through repeated practices, inhabits various narrative spaces (the liturgy of the mall, or of the church). And that narrative habitation moulds the imagination, which in turn forms our desire and character. Formation, not intellection, is the name of the game. This formation

¹ James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Culture Formation*, Cultural Liturgies vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009).

happens not only privately, but in shared social spaces within which we are habituated to certain ways of life. This is the process that anthropologist Bourdieu calls *habitus*.²

Smith offers an illustration of this bodily social space trumping intellectual orientation. One day, he finds himself inspired by the words of Wendell Berry (poet and Christian agrarian activist). There is just one problem: he is reading these words from the book table at Costco, an American wholesale megastore, and symbol of all that is evil about American consumerism for Smith.³ One almost feels the desperation of Rom 7:15-20 in the scene: What I read I want to do, but what I want to do I cannot do because my desires and imagination have been co-opted by Costco! Our Christian lives and imaginations (that is, images of the world informed by Christian compassion) are undermined or established by the kinds of practices and social spaces that we allow our bodies to inhabit.

Worship (or “liturgy”), both secular and Christian, is the key player in this drama. Therefore, Christian worship must pay attention to the rituals and forms employed, for ritual praxis and aesthetic form project a shared narrative space that shapes our imaginations – out of which we live and breathe and have our being. Smith comments:

an adequate liturgics must assume a kinaesthetics and a poetics, precisely because liturgies are compressed, performed narratives that recruit the imagination through the body.⁴

Smith defines worship as any repeated, social, ritual action that projects an imaginative, narrative horizon that becomes the assumed context for our living and action. Christian worship, then, is a type of shared habitation that captures and trains our imaginations and orients our desires, presenting our bodies with an alternative *habitus* where we can unlearn worldly imaginative praxis and relearn/recapture a sound Christian imagination. Imagination is not, then, primarily a thing of the mind; it’s a thing of the body, a “bodily intelligence” (or *praktognosia*) that escapes conscious reflection.⁵

Part I of the book seeks to establish this philosophical anthropology through a careful reading of various theorists like Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu. Part II of the book deals with the practical implications of this theory. Part I is for philosophers. Part II is more for practitioners (worship leaders, etc.). In Part II, Smith applies his theory by warning his readers of the imagination-warping dangers of “secular liturgies” such as consumerism. Such practices shape character through the back door of imagination and

² Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works*, Cultural Liturgies vol. 2, Kindle edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 79-98, loc. 1796-2020.

³ Smith, *Imagining*, loc. 428-439.

⁴ Smith, *Imagining*, loc. 636-637.

⁵ Smith, *Imagining*, 56-61, loc. 1267, 1341-1375.

desire. Worship, Christian or secular, is not just (or even primarily) a feeding of the mind. Rather, worship is a narrative space that we inhabit through repeated ritual action together. Therefore, in thinking through Christian worship, we should focus primarily on form, texture, and movement more than on theological (that is, intellectual) content. Preaching counts for less than we think it does, precisely because what shapes us isn't thinking. In the last few pages of the book, he tries to reserve a space for engaged thought and conscious reflection so that we can avoid superstition and hypocrisy.⁶ But such a trifle, almost a postscript, does little to alter the impression that he has little use for conscious reflection or biblically-informed theology... except at those crucial interstices where one must choose which liturgical regime to expose one's imagination to, such as sudden awakenings while reading Berry in Costco.

All in all, *Imagining the Kingdom* is a book to be reckoned with. Smith writes with imagination and scholarly precision, and shows a remarkable ability to turn scholarship to practical use (though those untrained and unused to philosophical discourse may find it heavy going). But to the real question: is Smith correct in redefining human being away from mind and more towards body? He certainly has a point (that he pushes repeatedly). Much of the evangelical church (particularly Reformed circles) over-emphasises theology, as if the mind were the only thing that matters. There has been a healthy reaction away from disembodied, attenuated Christianity towards a more robust, incarnational understanding of the faith. Good theology has always understood the importance of orthopraxis alongside of orthodoxy. This reaction movement is why we have lately seen an intense interest in sacramental theology and practice and liturgy, whether in the form of a renewed interest in the Mercersburg theology, the "ancient-future" emphasis in some emergent churches, mining ancient resources on spiritual formation, or simply experimentation with "high church" forms of worship among Presbyterians (a.k.a. "Prescopalians"). However, in trying to swing the pendulum away from intellect back towards body and social praxis, Smith may have pressed his case too far, leading to several problems. Here are a few (painted with an admittedly broad brush):

First, in trying to emphasise practice and ritual, he leaves the question of the authority of Scripture ambiguous. He addresses it nowhere in *DTK* or *ITK*, perhaps because he wants to steer clear of the theological and conceptual. It is a most troubling ambiguity, a silence that might speak volumes, or might not. The closest he comes to even broaching authority in faith and practice is when he talks about acknowledging our debt to Augustine.⁷ If not the Bible, what then is the source of authority for

⁶ Smith, *Imagining*, loc. 4002 ff.

⁷ Smith, *Imagining*, loc. 411.

Christians? His locus of authority seems to be “historic Christian worship practices”.⁸ This seems to be a particularly dubious move, as tradition and practice are anything but united in church history, and they are constantly on the move and fallible. Our readings of Scripture are fallible as well, but at least we have a text to struggle and argue over. And there are normative readings of that text: there are right and wrong ways of reading the Bible. In other words, just because hermeneutics exists does not make Scripture into a wax nose. If God wanted to communicate inscripturated truth to his people (and that seems to be the consistent presupposition of the Bible), our own interpretive limitations do not pose a barrier to him. It would have been most welcome for Smith to present a clear position one way or the other.

Related to this first point (ambiguity regarding Scriptural authority), Smith seems to uncritically embrace the secular writers he employs. Without a clear set of biblical presuppositions, he seems happy to let Merleau-Ponty, Bourdieu and company set the agenda, as if they were simply giving us neutral, unbiased, unmotivated data. This is clearly not the case. A careful reading of Bourdieu’s theory and biography shows otherwise. Bourdieu, for all his brilliance, was/is a scholar with a mighty big axe to grind. He came up the ranks of the French academy as a marginalised, provincial outsider, and he sorely resented the treatment he received from those at the centres of academic power. One can read much of his work as an outworking of a mission: to dethrone the intellectuals and socially powerful in France, and to empower the culturally disadvantaged, the proletariat through a quasi-Marxist theory of everything (especially social and cultural power).⁹ One way to achieve this goal was to dethrone the regal position of the mind and emphasise bodily disposition such that everything is relative to praxis. There is no truth, only social spaces that have certain rules that make this or that opinion function *as* truth. There is no truth; only *habitus*. Bourdieu presents us with very helpful tools for understanding social action and mindset, to be sure, but he is anything but a neutral scientist calmly interpreting data. His is a thoroughly engaged and biased perspective. And there are similar arguments to be made about other figures that Smith draws from. Overall, I would have liked to see a more Christian-critical engagement with these thinkers, rather than simply taking their findings at face value (or “as gospel”, so to speak).

Third, I found Smith’s focus on praxis and *habitus* to be insular, bordering on sacerdotalism. Let me unpack that a bit. What is it that generates our sense of truth, our internal compass, our desires, etc.? For Smith, the answer seems to be straightforward: repeated social ritual action generates certain forms of desire and imagination, and these give us certain states of

⁸ Smith, *Imagining*, loc. 650.

⁹ For a concise biography of Bourdieu, see David Swartz, *Culture and Power: The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), ch. 2.

consciousness. The real dynamo of our faith and life seems ultimately to be our own praxis. In this, Smith comes very close to the Catholic doctrine of sacraments that proclaim that the sacraments are efficacious *ex opere operato* (that is, they benefit the believer quite apart from the faith of either the priest administering the sacrament, or of the parishioner who receives it). Ritual praxis generates grace through the movements of its own operation, like a self-winding watch. This is problematic on a number of levels, not least of which is that it runs counter to the insistence of the Reformers on the close intertwining of the operation of Word and sacrament. The sacraments (and all other ritual elements of worship) become efficacious as incarnational embodiments of the Word (incarnate and inscripturated) that God has given to us. Without the biblical Word, sacrament becomes superstition, a type of magical salvation. It is no coincidence that the origin of “hocus pocus” was a parody of words instituting the Catholic mass. It is the biblical truths as grasped in faith that keeps the sacraments and ritual elements of worship from becoming magical or superstitious.

On a more general level, there seems to be no reflection on the category of revelation as such, special or general. This is less a question of sacramental theology than of the ultimate context that surrounds us, that notifies us, that shapes us. Smith shows no (apparent) awareness of the revelational matrix within which our bodily action takes place (à la Ps 19:1-4 or Rom 1:18-25). He does acknowledge that we are transformed by a power outside of ourselves, but it always only seems to come through worship rituals. He writes rather vaguely about worship as a “habitation of the Spirit”, and the “Spirit’s transformative power”.¹⁰ But I would have liked some reflection on the revelational context that surrounds our practice and ritual, *especially* given that our imaginations are so closely woven into our bodily activity. If Smith is right about our imaginations being so closely tied to the body, then it raises some fascinating theological questions regarding the nature of revelation. Given that it is divine revelation that renews our minds and transforms us from inside out (e.g. Rom 12:2, 2 Cor 3:18), how does it do that? What is it that impacts our embodied imaginations? Just to answer “our liturgy and ritual praxis” seems to foreclose the question before it is properly investigated. Surely more can be said in terms of rethinking or refining our notions of revelation and how it is received in our imaginations.¹¹

¹⁰ E.g. Smith, *Imagining*, loc. 2267 and 4073.

¹¹ One possible consequence of the embodied imagination for revelation (with special relevance for apologetics) is to understand general revelation more in terms of affect and poetics rather than distinct concepts. Unbelievers resonate to and feel the presence of God through creation more affectively than intellectually, in a manner that eludes purely rational analysis. This is why mythopoetic and imaginatively suggestive language, especially narrative and metaphor, captures the imaginations of non-Christians better than traditional apologetics.

Fourth, Smith's emphasis on practice and worship produces a strangely Manichean universe; there are only white hats and black hats. On the one hand, there is Christian worship which forms us into people who desire the right things. On the other, there are secular liturgies that deform us and our imaginations counter to Kingdom purposes. There is no room for the grey, no room for common grace, for the ways that God's revelation resonates *in and through* secular *liturgies and artifacts*. If there is no area of overlap, if it is simply black versus white, then the only logical option is withdrawal, though Smith repeatedly denies that he advocates such a course. He wants instead a worldly monasticism. That is, instead of withdrawing into a monastery, Smith wants those spiritually forming practices to be brought out into worldly vocations, to make the whole world a monastery (at least for the Christian).¹² This is obviously true to the intentions of Calvin and Luther, and good spiritual advice. And yet, there is still an element of withdrawal here. We don't truly connect with the ways of the world, for our alternative set of rituals buffer us against the rituals that might contaminate our imaginations and desires. The stance is still stolidly self-protective. Whatever happens, don't get your hands dirty with the cultural currents of the world (whether that is nationalism or consumerism, or entertainments, or what have you). But self-protection is not our calling. If we want to truly understand the lost in the world around them, if we want to speak into their world with wisdom and compassion, then we need precisely to get our hands dirty. We need to participate with them in some of the ways of the world, not just create spiritually safe versions that further our own spiritual formation.¹³ While I appreciate his emphasis on the spiritual antithesis between church and

This explains the unlikely fact that a Christian writer like C. S. Lewis is a best-seller even in places like atheist Czech Republic. According to Czech Christian scholar Pavel Hisek, Lewis understood the mutually reinforcing dynamic between the imagination and the aesthetic texture of nature itself as a means for communicating the glory of God (that is, general revelation). There is such a deep affinity between the natural and spiritual that nature itself becomes a rich storehouse of metaphors that generate "mythopoetic testimony" of the existence and nature of God. It is worth noting, too, the central role of desire in this revelational interplay, as a calling of God through nature to the soul (cf. Smith's emphasis on desire in *DTK* and *ITK*). See Pavel Hisek, "C. S. Lewis and the Language of Apologetics", available online at <http://www.bethinking.org/what-is-apologetics/intermediate/c-s-lewis-and-the-language-of-apologetics.htm> (accessed 22 October, 2013).

¹² Smith, *Imagining*, loc. 3309-3344.

¹³ Obviously, there are some "ways of the world" that are beyond the pale for some Christians, cultural currents and liturgies that really would contaminate them. "Going to a prostitute" would be one clear example. But there are many other examples that are less clear: going to Costco? Watching a football match? Going to a dance club (and even enjoying it)? These examples are ones about which each Christian must search his or her own conscience, in full knowledge of the idols of the heart that are so easily fed. But just labelling each "deforming liturgies" reactively puts distance between us and the people we seek to reach.

world, the fact remains that if you do away with common grace, you do away with our point of contact for apologetics and evangelism. Perhaps it is not a coincidence that apologetics gets no mention in *ITK*, and evangelism is mentioned only twice in a single footnote.

Fifth, there is what I call the Serbian Orthodoxy objection: heavily liturgical traditions often do not produce the kinds of imagination or desires that Smith thinks they will. An example: years ago, I taught a university class called *Letters of Paul*. In this class there was a student who just could not get his head around the idea of the gospel, especially substitutionary atonement. I did everything to communicate to him, even taking the concepts down to a children's Sunday School level for this young man. Nothing worked. I scheduled a meeting with him to try to figure out what the mental block was. I said, "You're wearing a cross, so I'm guessing you're Christian?"

"Yeah, I'm Christian."

"So you must have talked about the gospel at home?"

"No, we never talk about religion at home."

"Okay, well what about when you go to church?"

"We only go at Christmas and Easter."

"Okay, well, at least at Easter, the priest must have talked about Jesus dying on the cross and stuff like that?"

"We never listen to what the priest is saying. We just sit and talk among ourselves. He does his thing and we do ours."

This young Serb man spent a lifetime going through motions of ritual observance, and it made no impact. I'm not convinced that even if he had gone to church every Sunday it would have made any difference. That is not to say there are not devout Orthodox believers in Serbia; there are. But simply repeating rituals without conscious theological reflection on those rituals does not produce the kinds of imaginations and desires that please God. After all, ritual-heavy Serbia was the land where priests (those most steeped in an ancient Christian liturgy) came out to bless the boys' Kalashnikovs as they went out to massacre Albanians. The fact is, the whole European continent (and the UK) is filled with ritual observance... and it has produced a largely dead church. Smith's theory gives no reason why that should be (save the couple of pages at the end of the book where he allows that reflection may have a role after all).

The real question for Smith is: Do ideas have consequences? Or are they merely consequent on our bodily praxis? I am willing to concede an important role for the body, but I believe that Smith needs to concede a much more important role for the mind (despite his attempts to serve as counter-balance). It seems probable to me that the imagination is an arena of dialogue between the precognitive and the cognitive, between the body and the mind, of passive disposition and actively chosen direction. That seems to be the case in, say, the imaginative activity of day-dreaming. It is part

unconscious wandering and part directed tour. Sometimes our mind wanders into places that surprise (or dismay) us, and sometimes we want it that way (or more properly, both). Imaginations are both precognitively caught and consciously driven. I would have liked more recognition of that delicate interweaving of active and passive, of mind and body, rather than so strenuously asserting the primacy of body over mind.

Finally, I have a soteriological concern. By placing so much emphasis on our ritual action, Smith runs the risk of shifting the focus from the gospel of grace, that is, a dynamic centred squarely on God's unmerited action. That is not to say that Smith ignores grace altogether – it figures prominently, for instance, in his discussion of the liturgical elements of confession and assurance.¹⁴ I am also not arguing for “cheap grace” that suppresses the need for a response of faith and repentance. But when one focusses on one's own action because, after all, *that's* what counts in spiritual formation, there is a danger of confused motivations. *Why* do we worship and obey? Isn't it out of a sense of gratitude for our salvation and adoption, freely given through no action of ours? The worship itself may form us, but that is almost secondary. We worship because we rejoice in the God who has captured us, who has drawn near to us at great cost to himself, who abides with us, and who will teach us obedience, and lead us through whatever crisis comes, who will complete what he began in us, who will bring us at last to glory. Without that conscious, theological reflection on the manifold grace of God, worship is stillborn. Yes, there are times when we're not feeling grateful, when we must “go through the motions”. But if worship never engages the mind, then it is no better than dead formalism, and we're back at the Serbian Orthodoxy objection. A better formulation of this relationship inherent in worship, then, might be that worship is a place of dialogue between body and mind, embodied imagination shaped by ritual, and conscious reflection, shaped by theology.

For all of my reservations about Smith's perspective, we ought not to miss the fact that *ITK* is delivering a message that we would do well to heed. There is no doubt that the world is full of worship, as full as the church ever is. There are myriad liturgies projecting myriad narrative spaces which beckon us to enter in and participate. And these spaces do form our desires and imaginations. I believe that it is crucial that we reflect apologetically on these systems of worship, not just for the sake of our own spirituality, but to understand the world in which our friends and neighbours live.¹⁵ But it is also true that apologetical reflection alone will not “defuse” all of the formative influence of these liturgies upon our imaginations and desires. A

¹⁴ Smith, *Imagining*, loc. 3222.

¹⁵ This is the burden of my book *Popologetics: Popular Culture in Christian Perspective* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2012).

childhood filled with Godzilla and Gamera will shape one into a certain kind of adult. Believe me, I know. A lifetime of consumer practice will leave its mark on desire and imagination. And there are numerous other influences, traces upon the shape of my imagination. Such things will always leave a remainder, a residue of formative influence that bends our desires away from God and his Kingdom. That is why worship is so important as a counter-formative influence so that we may desire and imagine and live the way God desires. *That* is what we must hear from *ITK*. It may be that the problems and imbalances I perceive are addressed elsewhere in Smith's corpus. If so, my apologies; I have read only these two works of his. But I think many evangelicals would appreciate clarification on those points in the text of *Embodying the Kingdom*, the forthcoming final installment of the Cultural Liturgies project. It would make the whole project not just provocative, but more theologically sound as well.

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REVIEW ARTICLE

ROMANS: THE DIVINE MARRIAGE

ROMANS: THE DIVINE MARRIAGE. A BIBLICAL THEOLOGICAL COMMENTARY

Tom Holland, Pickwick Publications, 2011, 558 pp, £35.95

Tom Holland's commentary on Paul's letter to the Romans is not just another commentary. He has a thesis to establish and he goes about his task with powerful argument, incisive exegesis and clear theology. I do not agree with all he says, as this review will make clear, but I am thankful for his contribution to the discussion of some vital themes in Romans. I will not attempt in this article to summarise, still less to review, all aspects of Holland's book, but will select a small number of topics which are prominent in the commentary and which have significant implications for understanding and applying Paul's letter.

Background and Context for Understanding Paul

Holland is concerned that New Testament scholarship still takes too little account of the Old Testament background to Paul's thinking. Though he acknowledges that attitudes are beginning to change for the better in this area, he believes that too much credence is still given on exegetical questions to classical Greek sources. Moreover, although recent scholarship has seen some shift away from reliance upon Greek sources, that shift has tended to be in favour of a more detailed exploration of extra-biblical Jewish literature roughly contemporary with the New Testament. Too often, complains Holland, scholars now use such extra-canonical Jewish documents to interpret Paul, in the same way as Greek classical literature used to be employed, without giving proper consideration to, firstly, the different viewpoints represented amongst such literature and, secondly, the questions as to how far such literature was, in fact, known amongst the early Christian community and how influential it was.

These are excellent points. Exegetical commentaries on books of the New Testament are increasingly weighed down by detailed references to and discussion of extra-canonical documents from the intertestamental and New Testament periods, without sufficient consideration of the pertinent questions that Holland raises about the relevance of such literature to an understanding of the New Testament. Holland is surely right to argue that the far more obvious source of influence on the inspired writers were the

writings of those previously inspired by the same Spirit of God, the books of the Old Testament.

As with his previous volume, *Contours of Christian Theology*,¹ therefore, Holland argues strongly for a clear Old Testament background to Paul and, in this commentary, seeks to uncover that background in the letter to the Romans. Holland sees that background emerging throughout the themes that Paul explores in his letter, with particular emphasis upon the idea of the new exodus, prominent in Holland's earlier book and also in the writings of N. T. Wright and others.

The Passover Context in Romans

Somewhat more unusual is Holland's sustained argument that the Passover should be understood to play an important background role in Romans. He expands his views on this topic in two excursions, "The Influence of the Prophet Ezekiel on Paul's Theology" (84-96) and "Passover Themes in Paul's Theology" (91-96). In Ezekiel's vision, the sin offerings made by the Davidic prince who is to come and rule a redeemed Israel were made at the Passover, not on the Day of Atonement (Ezek 45:21-25). Holland argues that John the Baptist's reference to the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29) and the fact that Jesus died at Passover time reinforces the connection, evident in Ezekiel, between the redemptive Passover and the atoning sacrifice of the Day of Atonement, a connection which some scholars, says Holland, have been reluctant to make (though he cites James Dunn and J. K. Howard as exceptions, 90).

Holland argues that the Passover theme is particularly clear in Rom 3:21ff. In verse 25, Paul speaks of God's "passing over" (*pareisis*) previous sins. Additionally, the themes of justification (a term used of Israel returning from exile in Babylon, in Isa 50:8; 53:11) and the display of the righteousness of God (see Gen 15:13-14; Isa 55:1-13), as well as the language of redemption, evident in this passage point, argues Holland, to a clear exodus context and therefore to a Passover connection. The theme in Romans of salvation as the reversal of what Adam brought upon humanity points to the eschatological Passover in which all who have faith in Jesus share. Holland goes to other Pauline epistles also to demonstrate that connections between atonement, exodus and Passover themes are not uncommon in Paul – he refers to 1 Cor 5:7; 2 Cor 5:21; Gal 1:3; Col 1:12-14; Eph 5:25.

The connection in Paul's thinking between Passover and the sacrifice which Christ offered in his own body on behalf of his people is difficult to negate in the light of passages such as 1 Cor 5:7 and 2 Cor 5:21. It is,

¹ Tom Holland, *Contours of Pauline Theology: A radical new survey of the influences on Paul's biblical writings* (Fearn: Christian Focus, 2004).

moreover, attractive to see the sacrificial elements in salvation in Christ as Paul expounds it in Romans in terms of the Passover. This is particularly the case in 3:25, where, as Holland states, a public display of the sacrificial victim is in view, something which is difficult to reconcile with the view of some scholars that *hilasterion* there refers simply to the mercy seat, which, as Holland points out, was located in anything but a public space. Some of Holland's Passover connections, however, seem a little tenuous – that concerning the reversal of the Adamic fall, for example – or a little too remote or general – why connect justification particularly to Passover, for example, given the occurrence of the term at least equally prominently in other contexts in the Old Testament? Nevertheless, a Passover background to 3:25, in particular, does seem to help make sense of the language that Paul uses there, especially in the light of similar connections, referred to above, in his Corinthian correspondence.

Justification and the Righteousness of God

Romans 3:21 contains the much-discussed phrase, "righteousness of God". No commentator on Romans can avoid significant discussion of this phrase in Romans and its connection with the cognate word in Greek, "justification". As is conventional now, Holland understands God's righteousness in Paul in terms of God's saving activity in redemption and not only in terms of his moral perfection (though not less than that either). While he agrees with New Perspective arguments that situate the New Testament debate about justification within the context of Jew-Gentile relationships in the church, he rightly does not believe that that is all that there is to say about justification. The debate originated in the New Testament in that context but has far broader consequences for our understanding of salvation. Thus Holland affirms the Reformation position that justification involves acquittal from sin and the imputation of Christ's righteousness to the believer. However, he argues that, although the Reformers took massive steps in the understanding of justification, they failed to see the entire picture.

Holland thus embarks on a significant re-examination and re-casting of the Reformed and the New Perspective understandings of justification, particularly in his excursus, "Justification in the Theology of Paul" (107-30). He concludes that the term has three areas of meaning: firstly, that equivalent to the Reformers' understanding of "acquittal and imputation" (129); secondly, the theme of bringing salvation to his people corporately, not simply declaring them to be in covenant with him but "bringing his collective, corporate community into a new relationship with him" (129); thirdly, justification can be understood as "God making covenant" (129), particularly in passages which have Gen 15 and Ps 106 as background.

It seems that, on Holland's exegesis, Rom 3:21-25 can be seen as an example of the first understanding of justification, above, where Christ's sacrifice obtains for all who have faith in him a once-for-all acquittal from guilt for their sin and redemption from the bondage in which they had previously lived. That meaning can, argues Holland, also be seen in Rom 4:6-8, where Paul cites the example of David's justification and quotes from Ps 32. However, Holland argues that Paul's use of Abraham in the same chapter, a few verses earlier, must be understood differently. Resting strongly on the Old Testament contexts cited by Paul in the two cases, Holland says that in the earlier part of Rom 4, Paul is using justification in the third way described above, to speak of the making of a covenant, as that is the context of Gen 15 which Paul quotes in those verses. Paul is not, in these particular verses, dealing with acquittal from sin at all. This latter argument has some attraction and Holland presents his case forcefully with effective use of the Old Testament background. However, I believe his argument founders on the immediate argument and context in which Paul makes use of these Old Testament examples. Paul is still, at this point in his letter, addressing the fundamental question of sin and how someone may be right before God. The examples of Abraham and of David at the start of chapter four are very closely linked and there would seem to be little, if any, indication in those verses that Paul believes himself to be tackling two separable issues – covenant-making and the forgiveness of sin. Without denying that covenantal issues lie behind Paul's discussion and that the salvation issues which he is discussing need to be understood in the context of covenant, the repetition of words and phrases and the linking words in those verses seem to indicate that the central issue in Paul's mind at that point is sin and how it is to be dealt with, not the initial making of covenant.

Baptism into Christ

Holland's emphasis upon the corporate nature of salvation in Paul's understanding (without in any way wanting to downplay the necessity of individual appropriation of that salvation) leads him to understand Rom 6, in particular, in terms of a corporate "baptism" of the whole people of God into Christ, the "major, redemptive event which happened long before the work of regeneration in the individual took place" (170). Holland argues that, there being no mention of water in the letter, it is unlikely that Paul has water baptism in mind here. Moreover, the opening verses of Rom 6 follow the corporate discussion of the second half of Rom 5 and, on Holland's view, are followed by the corporate terminology of the phrase "the body of sin" in 6:6 (discussed below). Hence a corporate understanding of the baptism is required. It is not individual water baptism, nor is it individual conversion or any kind of individual Spirit baptism. By analogy with the "baptism into

Moses" which the people of Israel experienced corporately at their redemption from Egypt, the baptism of Rom 6 is to be identified with the death of Jesus, when he experienced his "exodus" (Luke 9:31) on behalf of, and in union with, his people. This, in Holland's view, explains the corporate nature of the language of these verses and their exposition of, it seems, something which happened to all God's people at the same time, in Christ.

Again, this major theme in Holland's exposition is attractively presented and strongly argued from Old and New Testaments. My difficulty with it is simply whether the verses in question are most naturally read in that way. There would seem to be little need for the express mention of water for readers to associate baptism with the initiatory act by which they professed faith in Christ publicly and were joined to the visible church. Although a corporate understanding of the start of Rom 6 is possible in the light of the second half of chapter 5, Holland's argument in that regard rests on an unusual understanding of the phrase "body of sin" in 6:6. Moreover, Paul's concern by the start of chapter 6 has undergone a clear development, with the pointed rhetorical questions which now focus on the living of the Christian life rather than the issue of dealing with sin which occupied the previous chapters. Without, I hope, giving way to the overly-individualistic viewpoint which continues to dominate western thinking, it does seem natural to understand a discussion about how we live in more individual than purely corporate terms. Nevertheless, although I am not persuaded by it, Holland's argument is stimulating, has some considerable attractions from a theological viewpoint and deserves careful thought.

"Body of Sin" and Corporate Understandings

Readers of Holland's work would expect to find in his commentary considerable emphasis upon the corporate nature of salvation. As already seen, Holland rightly reacts against the overly-individualistic understanding of salvation which developed in twentieth-century western evangelicalism and continues to be strong today. Although there are welcome signs that the significance of the church in the Christian's experience is being increasingly recognised and a more healthy, biblical, corporate Christianity is being rediscovered in some parts, significant numbers within evangelicalism continue to appear to regard their faith as almost entirely individualistic in its nature. This should be of very serious concern.

Thus, as we have seen with respect to baptism and chapter 6, Holland seeks to reassert a more biblical, corporate emphasis. However, I believe that he takes this idea too far and is in danger of over-compensating for past mistakes of western evangelicalism on this issue. A suggestion in this direction has been made already, above, in relation to the concept of baptism into Christ in chapter 6. I believe that the same phenomenon can be seen in

Holland's understanding of the terms "old man" and "body of sin" in 6:6, both of which, Holland argues, need to be taken in a corporate sense. On the former term, he argues from its use in Col 3:9-12 and the term "new man" in Eph 2:15. The last-mentioned reference is clearly, as Holland says, to the church corporately considered, as the context, "making the two one", makes clear. The same cannot, in my view, be said of the Colossians passage, where Paul is (as in Rom 6) turning his attention to the behaviour of Christians. An individual understanding of the phrase seems to be a far more natural reading here. The parallel passage in Eph 5:20-24 likewise seems to emphasise the necessity of an individual response to being in Christ, in terms of individual behaviour. Thus the understanding of the term "old man" in Rom 6:6 would seem to rest on our understanding of the context – individual or corporate – and cannot be used to determine whether that context is itself corporate or not.

Taking the term "body of sin" in the same verse as corporate, argues Holland, suits the corporate nature of the opening of the chapter. However, as one of the reasons which Holland gave, above, for considering that opening in a corporate manner was that "body of sin" in 6:6 is corporate, this mode of reasoning seems circular. He then argues that the term mirrors the phrase "body of Christ", used of the church. Could the phrase "body of sin" then refer to those not in covenant with Christ but who are in covenant with sin? Holland develops an argument which seeks to relate the phrase to the Old Testament characterisation of idolatry as a covenantal relationship with foreign gods. Thus the "body of sin" indicates all those who are in Adam and not in Christ, who serve idols and are thus in covenant with sin.

This argument seems to require a great deal of a short phrase which occurs only once in Paul. Whereas the term "body of Christ" is a familiar one to readers of Paul and clearly indicates the church, the term "body of sin" is not familiar, neither is it immediately comparable to the better-known phrase. As Holland himself points out, if Paul wanted to coin a parallel but opposite term to "body of Christ", one might have expected something like "body of Adam". Holland argues that that would not have been an appropriate term, on the grounds that Adam's mediatorial work on behalf of humanity had ended and "the community he has represented is no longer his body but Sin's. Satan has control, and the significance of Adam as representative head has ended" (187). I confess to finding this limb of the argument difficult to follow, particularly in the light of Adam's evidently continuing corporate significance for humanity demonstrated in chapter 5, and am not persuaded of Holland's understanding of Paul's phrase "body of sin".

Divine Marriage and Marriage to Sin

Holland's idea that the world of unbelief is in covenant relationship to sin forms the basis for one of the central themes of his commentary: humanity after the Fall was effectively in a marriage covenant with Satan and it was to destroy that covenant and bring his people into a new marriage covenant with himself – the “divine marriage” of the commentary's subtitle – that Jesus Christ came into the world, died and rose again. From the way in which the New Testament treats the unbelieving world in parallel with that of believers – Christians are children of God and citizens of the kingdom of light, unbelievers are children of the devil and belong to the kingdom of darkness (John 8:44; Col 1:14; Eph 2:1-3) – Holland argues for a more general parallel between the two groups of people, such that the covenant that believers enjoy with God should be paralleled by a covenant between fallen humanity and Satan. Holland asserts, “when Paul speaks of Sin (sing.) in Rom 5-8, he is speaking of Satan” (179) and maintains this understanding throughout the relevant exposition, though, so far as I could ascertain, without arguing for that identification in any more detail.

From this, Holland argues (180) that fallen humanity is the “bride of Satan”, just as the church is the bride of Christ. The state of affairs for the fallen community seems hopeless – whereas death would normally release a marriage partner from the marriage bond, death for the unbeliever brings only judgment and, in any case, Satan cannot die. It is through this lens that Holland understands the marriage analogy in Rom 7:2-4. It is only through the death of our representative, Christ, that we can be freed from the marriage covenant with Satan and brought into the new life-giving marriage covenant with the Saviour. It is only thus that the covenant with Satan can legally be annulled, argues Holland, because “[f]or God to accept them without the covenant-annulling death of Christ would implicate God in adultery!” (181). Thus, argues Holland, the death of Christ achieves more than atonement and propitiation – it also ends the relationship with sin and breaks the power of the covenantal relationship that previously existed.

As with his exegesis of “body of sin”, discussed above, Holland here seems to attempt far too much on far too little data. Fallen humanity is certainly corporately represented in Adam; it is also true that the Old Testament sometimes represents idolatry in covenantal terms and unfaithfulness to the Lord as adultery. It seems a long way from this, however, to argue that Paul is working with an understanding, presumably shared with his readers, that mankind is not only lost in the guilt of sin and in bondage to its power, but also in a marriage covenant with sin, and therefore with Satan himself, a covenant which can only legally be broken by the death of Christ. None of these ideas is necessary, on my understanding, for a satisfactory reading of Paul's argument. Paul is clearly addressing the

issue of the power of sin in chapters 6 and 7 and clearly wants his readers to understand the enormous transformation in their status due to Christ's work – not simply that their sins have been forgiven but that the power of sin in their lives has been broken. However, I cannot see that the concept of a marriage covenant is needed in order to understand the power that sin holds over the unbelievers, nor can I see that some concept from the law of marriage or adultery needs to be introduced in order to explain the need for Christ's death to destroy the putative marriage with Satan, an idea which appears to have echoes of a "ransom" theory of salvation. These ideas are neither on the surface of Paul's exposition in Romans nor are they required to understand his argument and would in my view have been best left out of this commentary.

Corporate Privilege or Individual Salvation?

Linked to Holland's corporate understanding of much of Paul's letter is his view of Rom 9. He argues that the divine election of which Paul speaks in that chapter is corporate, not individual, and that it concerns an election to privilege and service, not election to salvation. (Holland also makes clear in his commentary that he does believe that the Bible teaches individual election to salvation; the point here is that he does not believe that that is what is at issue in Rom 9.) He sets Romans in the context of potential divisiveness in the Roman church between Jewish and Gentile believers. He sees chapters 9-11 as a major effort on Paul's part to address this danger, by showing Gentile believers the privileges which Israel enjoyed under the Old Covenant, but also by showing Israel that they cannot simply rest on their privileges under that covenant, as it is for God in his sovereign mercy to decide whom he raises to the privilege of service.

The question whether Rom 9 deals with individuals or peoples has been often discussed. In his excursus, "Election to Privilege and Service" (310-20), Holland gives eleven reasons for his view. There is not space to deal with them all fully here. I want to focus on what appears to be one of Holland's main exegetical arguments for directing the thrust of chapter 9 away from issues of salvation and damnation to those of status and privilege. He notes, by the way, that in chapter 10 Paul does indeed address issues of salvation.

This argument concerns God's use of Cyrus and focusses on the potter illustration that Paul uses in verses 20 to 23 of chapter 9. Holland examines the Isaianic source of the quotation that Paul appears to use in verse 20 and the appearance in that quotation of the word, "why?". The source is normally identified, says Holland, as Isa 29:16, but that verse does not contain the interrogative. Thus, argues Holland, it is necessary to bring in the other "potter" reference in Isaiah, in 45:9, where the Greek word for "why?" is present, although in the context the word seems to mean "what?" rather than

“why?” (the relevant Greek word being able to be used in either sense). On this basis, Holland argues that the import of the later passage must be taken into account, where, he says, God is making plain to Israel that he is perfectly entitled, should he so wish, to use the pagan king Cyrus in his plans to bless Israel. Thus, argues Holland, Paul in chapter 9 must be understood to be using the potter illustration to speak of God’s raising peoples to the honour of serving him, not of salvation.

As with some of the arguments examined earlier in this article, this line of argument appears to ask too much of its supporting verses. To expect a reader to understand Paul as bringing in a reference to a whole new passage simply on the basis of a single, two-letter (in Greek) word which happens to be missing from the more obvious source of the quotation, and thereby to bring in the whole issue of God’s use of Cyrus, absent from the other passage in question, seems to ask a great deal. Moreover, the word, though the same word, does not seem to bear the same meaning as that for which Paul uses it in Rom 9. The Cyrus argument is thus not convincing.

I have not dealt with other arguments that Holland brings in his excursus to attempt to demonstrate his understanding of Paul’s purpose in chapter 9 of Romans, which need to be considered on their own merits. However, it should be noted that a few of those arguments appear to be driven by a desire to demonstrate that verse 22 cannot be understood as teaching election to eternal damnation. Holland asserts that such an election is not taught anywhere else in Scripture. In his comment on that verse, Holland, surely rightly, understands it as speaking of God’s wrath and judgment on sin. Yet he says that such judgment is the consequence of, and on the basis of, disobedience. God is willing to the last to be merciful and to see them come to repentance, but if they will not then the only consequence can be judgment. Leaving aside the questions whether such an exegesis does full justice to the phrase “prepared for destruction” and to its parallel phrase “prepared for glory” in the next verse, it is clear that, at least in these verses, Paul has in mind something more than simply status, honour and privilege – he is discussing eternal salvation. Moreover, all that Holland says about verse 22, as just summarised, would be echoed by many Reformed commentators who also assert that Paul is here dealing with questions of election. If God elects to damnation, the Reformed have generally been eager to assert that such damnation is also on the basis of sin and of just judgment. Paul’s language here is appropriately restrained as he approaches such awful mysteries.

Conclusion

Tom Holland’s commentary is to be welcomed especially, I suggest, for its detailed exploration of the Old Testament background to Paul’s letter to the

Romans, for its efforts to combat an overly individualistic understanding of the salvation that Paul expounds in that letter and for the attempt to take that which is worthwhile in the New Perspectives and marry it with the great truths restored at the Reformation to expand our understanding of justification in Paul's thought. I have taken issue in this article with some other key points of Holland's commentary on Romans, particularly on the significance of the example of Abraham in chapter 4, the understanding of baptism into Christ in chapter 6, the phrase "body of sin" in verse 6 of that chapter and the thrust of chapter 9. Nevertheless, this should not obscure the value of Holland's work to anyone wanting to grapple with Paul's great letter. Holland writes fluently and expresses his arguments clearly and winsomely (though occasionally he has been let down on typographical points by his editor). His exposition of Paul's arguments will repay careful consideration and will lead to a deepened and enlarged understanding of the immense, eternal issues which Paul addresses in his letter to the Romans.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Paul and the Law: Keeping the Commandments of God
(*New Studies in Biblical Theology*)

Brian S. Rosner, Apollos, 2013, 256pp, £14.99

In this excellent study, Brian Rosner wades into a discussion which he likens to trench warfare: “no clear winners, hardly any progress, many casualties, no sign of an armistice or even a *détente*” (23), and to carving a chicken: “fairly easy to start well, but you quickly have to make some tricky decisions (about which everyone has an opinion), and it’s very easy to end up with a sticky mess with lots of bits left over that no one knows what to do with” (25). To extend the latter metaphor, Rosner’s book is a work of resourceful cooking, using up all the left-overs, and presents us with a solution to the much discussed problem of Paul’s understanding of the Christian’s relationship to the law, which resembles some neat hermeneutical carvery, even if we may spit out a few bones along the way.

Rosner opens his first chapter with quotes from five New Testament scholars, all of whom have described Paul’s relationship to the law as “complex”. More specifically, this complexity surrounds the “apparent inconsistency” in which Paul’s letters present “both negative critiques and positive approval of the law” (24). The solution, according to Rosner, is a hermeneutical one in which Paul makes three moves: firstly he repudiates the law as law-covenant, secondly he replaces the law and thirdly he re-appropriates the law as prophecy and wisdom. The remainder of the book is given to demonstrating and explaining these three moves.

The first move, in which Paul is understood to repudiate the law as law-covenant, is dealt with in the second and third chapters in which Rosner deals with Paul’s “explicit” and “implicit” repudiation of the law, respectively. In dealing with the “explicit” evidence, which looks at what Paul says in regard to his negative stance towards the law, he limits the material to what he considers to be “two of the most critical pieces of evidence” (47) – Paul’s assertion that believers are not under the law and his use of Lev 18:5. He argues that Paul’s phrase “under the law” refers to the natural status of any Jew, under the jurisdiction of the law of Moses, and that Paul’s exegesis of Lev 18:5 in Gal 3 and Rom 10 shows that he understood the essence of this law-covenant to be “its call for something to be done in order to find life” (72). This call has failed as a result of human sin, and as Paul writes in Eph 2:15, Christ has abolished the law with its commands and ordinances, meaning that the law-covenant which promises life for obedience has been done away with. Chapter 3 continues to examine Paul’s repudiation of the law-covenant by taking note of the “implicit” evidence. Here he demonstrates

that Paul does not say, as he does of the Jews, that Christians do, keep, observe, transgress, walk according to or learn the law.

The second move is that in which Paul replaces the law. Here Rosner accumulates a range of strong evidence from Paul's letters to argue that for believers, the law has been replaced by the law of Christ, faith and the Spirit. The evidence presented includes the "Christ-Torah antithesis" in Gal 2:19-20 and Phil 3:7-8, the substitution of the law of Moses for the law of Christ /faith/the Spirit in Gal 6:2, 1 Cor 9:21, Rom 3:27 and 8:2, passages which describe believers fulfilling the law through love such as Rom 8:3-4 and Gal 5:13-14 and the language of new life in Rom 6:4, 2 Cor 5:17 and Gal 6:15. Further, Rosner presents the "circumcision is nothing" sayings, 1 Cor 7:19 (a passage which is dealt with more thoroughly in the first chapter), Gal 5:6 and 6:15, to show that circumcision is replaced "not by some other part of the law of Moses but by something else" (128). The "something else" includes apostolic instruction (1 Cor 7:19), love produced by faith in Christ (Gal 5:6) and new creation (Gal 6:15). In summary, "We do not seek to walk according to the law, but according to the truth of the gospel, in Christ, in newness of resurrection life, by faith, in light and in step with the Spirit" (134).

Paul's re-appropriation of the law, the third move according to Rosner's proposal, is explored in chapters 5 and 6 according to its two-fold form of prophecy and wisdom. As Rosner demonstrates the prophetic re-appropriation of the law in chapter 5, he explains this not as a change in genre, but as a new prophetic significance in light of the death and resurrection of Christ (143). Here he argues that Paul's use of Deut 9:4 and 30:11-14 in Rom 10:6-9 is a re-appropriation of the law as prophecy, raising the question as to whether the whole law should be read in such a way, before citing five Old Testament scholars who have understood the Pentateuch as in some way prophetic. This is followed by a closer look at the way Paul re-appropriates the law as prophecy in the whole of Romans. When he turns to the re-appropriation of the law as wisdom in chapter 6, Rosner demonstrates his strong grasp of contemporary Pauline scholarship by surveying the current debates surrounding Paul's use of the law in his moral teaching. He then outlines the use of the law as wisdom in the Psalter and in wider literature, arguing Paul's use of the law as wisdom is analogous to the examples given from the Psalms in that he "internalizes the law, undertaking reflective and expansive applications, based in part on the moral order of creation and the character of God that stand behind the law" (188).

The final chapter helpfully summarises Rosner's thesis, that Paul repudiates, replaces and re-appropriates the law, which he compares to a restaurant manager who fires a waitress, replaces her and then hires her again as the *maitre d'* and the *sommelier*. He also offers some very helpful tables which outline how Paul makes these moves in several of his letters.

Throughout the book, Rosner proves himself to have an excellent grasp on contemporary Pauline scholarship as well as the biblical and relevant extra-biblical material. His unflinching use of the Pastoral epistles and other “disputed letters” which are all too often left out is commendable and even provides a useful contribution towards their defence as Pauline, demonstrating aspects of their consistency with the rest of the Pauline canon. Much of this book should be uncontroversial for evangelicals, as Rosner admits (218-19). For example, we recognise the re-appropriation of the law as prophecy whenever we understand a passage to be “pointing to Christ”. His strategy of finding a hermeneutical solution helpfully moves beyond exegesis of particulars into a search for a wider framework for understanding Paul’s thought. The book is also structured very well, with very useful chapter summaries which are compiled at the end of the book in order to present the whole argument in summarised form.

Rosner’s thesis is, however, not without its problems. One of these is the extent to which he relies upon what is essentially an argument from silence when developing Paul’s “implicit” repudiation of the law-covenant. Whilst it is true that Paul never explicitly says “Christians should obey the law”, his use of the commandments in Rom 13:8-10 and Eph 6:2 suggest that he was comfortable applying them to Christians rather directly. Another problem is the vagueness surrounding Paul’s re-appropriation of the law as wisdom; despite the contrast with the use of the law in the Psalms, it is hard to see a consistent and repeatable pattern within this paradigm. This partly, I believe, rests on Rosner’s insistence of maintaining the law’s unity, which leads him to a rejection of the traditional threefold distinction of the law into moral, civil and ceremonial categories. He is right to say that these distinctions are never explicit in Paul (or the rest of Scripture for that matter) and he does recognise them as useful implications of a redemptive-historical reading of the law, even if in a limited sense (35-36). However, Paul is clearly very aware of the New Covenant realities which stand behind the three-fold distinction, even if the categories themselves are not present in his thought, and such a redemptive-historical filter is necessary in part for understanding his selective “re-appropriation” of the law, even if we maintain the “wisdom” paradigm.

This book is a very strong contribution towards the debates surrounding Paul and the law and will be useful for anyone already interested in the discussions or even as a good introduction to them. Whilst not everyone will be convinced by aspects of his methodology and exegesis, this hermeneutical approach to Paul and the law is a fresh step forwards and will hopefully stimulate further debate on the wider structure of Paul’s thought in this area.

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*What Is the Mission of the Church?**Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom, and the Great Commission*

Kevin DeYoung & Greg Gilbert, Crossway, 2011, 288pp, £10.99

There is much confusion in the modern church about its role in the world. Anxious that the love of God is displayed to the nations, it has heavily promoted social justice. This emphasis is clearly a response to the Lausanne Commission on Evangelism, held in 1996, when the assembled delegation recognised the church's recent failings to engage with issues of social justice. The Commission urged that the church should recognise the gospel was for the whole man and not just for his soul.

In response to this challenge, there has been a plethora of books and articles using language that contains the word "mission". So, as DeYoung and Gilbert observe:

the language now relates to almost anything. There is the mission to engage with ecological issues, the mission to eradicate poverty, to regenerate urban areas and many others. We now have the situation where churches have missions in which the emphasis is to clean up a local community of its litter and graffiti or to care for the elderly. All these are of course worthwhile activities, but to describe it as Christian mission is going beyond a legitimate use of the term mission. The mission of a company, or a crack unit in the army for example, focuses on the one task that they are responsible for, and cleaning the streets is not the one task the church is called to do!

Thus, the burden of the authors is to sort out how this language of mission has come to be applied to almost everything the church does, resulting in the loss of true mission, i.e., the evangelism of individuals, communities and nations through the preaching of the good news of the Saviour's death and resurrection.

The book is well structured. The opening chapter reflects on recent trends in order to demonstrate the confusion concerning mission. The authors see that one of the aims of their book is "to guard the church from these errors". They acknowledge their own failure to respond adequately to social need and emphasise that they do not wish to be divisive; however, they are convinced that a voice has to be raised to alert the church to its drift away from gospel proclamation. They are sensitive, but do not shrink from shining the light on those who have contributed, in their judgment, to the confusion, including some of the most respected evangelical writers and preachers.

Chapter two is an overview of the NT's teaching on mission. They examine this material against the OT teaching which the apostolic church inherited and was guided by. They note that there is no suggestion that the call of Israel to be the servant of the Lord had anything to do with the social improvement of the surrounding nations. They acknowledge, of course, that

the NT's teaching about mission must override the OT's if there is any conflict between the two, and they note that the distinctive feature of NT mission is that the "church is sent into the world to witness to Jesus by proclaiming the gospel and making disciples of all nations. This is our task. This is our unique and central calling" (26).

In this second chapter, the authors examine the way Jesus used OT servant passages to describe and validate his own ministry. Clearly, he saw that the focus of his ministry was to be spiritual emancipation rather than social. They observe how these same OT texts were eventually applied to the church and her mission – evidence that her focus was to be the same as that of Jesus. They give special attention to the Great Commission, and explore the meaning of "the poor" who are the recipients of the good news. Again, it is by reference to Isaiah's servant imagery that the identity of "the poor" is settled: they are not the materially poor but the poor in heart. They scrutinise the various accounts of the Commission and how the apostles interpreted it, noting what they gave their energies to as shown in the book of Acts. They conclude that Luke shows that the mission of Jesus was "being fulfilled as the Word of God increases and multiplies" (51). The authors also look at John's Gospel and the Pauline letters, and show that there was a common understanding that the mission of the church was the proclamation of Jesus' Lordship and his call, delivered by the apostles, to repentance and faith.

The third chapter is an overview of the biblical narratives of creation, the fall, and the new creation, showing how David (Christ) emerges as the centre of the NT's story of redemption. It is a basic study, but helpful for those not familiar with biblical theology.

In the fourth chapter, entitled "Understanding the Good News", the authors discuss the danger of adding to the essentials of the gospel. They acknowledge that good works are a valid test of authentic mission but insist that they are not at its heart. Noting how some understand ecological concerns and actions to be part of the church's mission, the authors ask:

Are there two gospels? Are they two different things, but connected like two wings of a bird? Is the gospel of the cross part of the gospel of the kingdom? If so, is it central to it, or peripheral to it, or just one part among many, or something else entirely? For that matter, why are the New Testament writers content to call the one blessing of forgiveness of sin through the death of Christ "the gospel", but no other single blessing by itself ever warrants that dignity/ why do we never see Paul saying, "And that's the gospel: that the earth will be renewed"? Or why does he never preach, "The gospel is the good news that Jews and Gentiles can be reconciled to one another through Jesus"? Why is the forgiveness of sins so readily called "the gospel" while no other particular blessing is? (107)

In this fourth chapter, the relationship between biblical statements, called wide-angle and zoom texts, is examined. The former give a broad-stroke picture of the blessings that the "gospel of the kingdom" bring, while the

latter focus on the gospel's heart. This is a very helpful chapter, teaching the reader the crux of the NT message.

Chapter five, entitled "Kings and Kingdoms", is an excellent introduction to the biblical theology of the "kingdom of God", helping the reader to appreciate the term's different nuances. A concluding statement is worthy of quotation: "Jesus is not just King; he is the suffering King. Not just King Jesus the Great, but King Jesus the Crucified and Resurrected!" The authors point out that this confession defines membership of the kingdom: it is made up of those who have submitted to this king and have responded to his command to follow him.

Chapter six is another excellent guide, exploring social justice from a biblical perspective. The authors do not deny the importance of seeking this for all people, but they rightly show that many of the biblical passages used to support the social gospel were written so that specific redemptive points could be made. By removing these, the passages lose their redemptive clarity and become mere slogans for supporting particular political actions. They work through the twelve key passages that speak of social justice and show how they relate primarily to the freeing of spiritual prisoners, which is the mission of the church. They are clear that failure to engage in this task can never be compensated for by programmes of social justice alone, however many or sincerely pursued. This chapter alone is worth the price of the book!

In the seventh chapter, the authors give a brief history of the ideas of political social justice. They work through texts which show that care of the underprivileged is not a responsibility that the church can hand over to government or agencies. The authenticity of the gospel is demonstrated in the behaviour of the church, and its care of the underprivileged has been a crucial element in the triumph of the good news. However, they are aware that caring for the poor raises numerous questions: Who are the poor? Since we cannot be responsible for the poor of the whole world, who should we be responsible for? Is it right that some people have more wealth than others? It is in this chapter that there is the likelihood of division amongst reviewers and readers as the authors clearly favour a capitalist model. As a Brit born into a working-class family, I have a different take on this side of their presentation! However, I would not want this difference of opinion to undermine my recommendation of their theological presentation, which is excellent; nor would I want to deny the incredible generosity of many wealthy Christians.

Chapter eight, entitled "Understanding the New Heavens and the New Earth", is an introduction to the topic of the New Creation in biblical theology. As the Christian community is still part of human society, questions are raised as to whether it is responsible for this fallen, rebellious world. Basing their argument on Jeremiah's call to those exiled in Babylon to seek

the welfare of the city, the authors urge that Christians should not withdraw from the world as many have done throughout church history.

Chapter nine explores the responsibility of churches and individual Christians to do good works as part of their Christian testimonies. Again, there is the reminder that feeding a person and not sharing the good news with him can be dangerous for both, for we can delude ourselves into thinking that we have fulfilled our Christian obligation. Demonstrating the good news is not the same as declaring the good news; both should go hand in hand.

In chapter ten, entitled “What it Means and Why it Matters”, the authors make a final appeal for the priority of the evangelical message, i.e., the need for repentance and faith in Jesus Christ.

The final chapter is a fictitious encounter between an older “mainstream” pastor and a young church-planter, who has sought the older man’s advice. It seeks to be positive to those involved in movements such as the emerging church, which challenges the practices and, possibly, priorities of other congregations. It is a useful chapter, but for this reviewer it does not sit comfortably in the book as it is so different in style and substance to the earlier ones. Perhaps there is room for a separate book, written in this narrative style, which seeks to bring the minds and hearts of these two sections of the church together. It would be challenging to write, but a very helpful contribution to today’s church.

In conclusion, it is my opinion that every pastor/theological student should read this book. Indeed, because of the importance of the issues with which it deals, I would recommend it to be required reading for all seminary student before they graduate.

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