



Foundations

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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

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EDITORIAL

In the previous editorial we considered sacramentology and the way in which the Christological maxim “distinct but inseparable” can help us navigate the relationship between sign and reality in the sacraments. We saw that, while Martin Luther fell into error by conflating the sign and the thing signified, Huldrych Zwingli fell into the opposite error of separating the sign from its corresponding reality. John Calvin sought to steer a middle course, teaching that, while the sign and reality must be distinguished, they must never be separated: “If God cannot deceive or lie, it follows that he performs all that it signifies.”

Each of the Reformers acknowledged the close connection between the Word and the Sacraments. Luther spoke of the preached Word as being the “means of God’s sacramental message to man”. Likewise, Calvin described the preached Word as fulfilling the same office as the sacraments: they both “offer and set forth Christ to us, and in him the treasure of heavenly grace”. It is therefore unsurprising to find that the same distinct yet inseparable relationship operates in the realm of Word and Spirit in preaching.

Scripture undoubtedly has a high view of what God’s Word will achieve. It accomplishes the purpose for which it was given: “For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out of my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it” (Isa 55:10-11). The Word of God is effective, the writer of the letter to the Hebrews tell us: it “is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword” (Heb 4:12). God’s Word works; it is powerful and always achieves its purpose.

Nevertheless, some Christians are nervous about the exalted language that is sometimes used by conservative evangelicals to describe the Bible and the effect of preaching. They flinch at the title of the recent collection of essays in honour of Phillip Jensen: “Let the Word do the Work”. God’s power resides in the Holy Spirit, they insist, not directly in the Word. In Acts 16:14, Lydia only received the Word preached by Paul because the Lord first opened her heart. In 2 Cor 4:6, we are told that we are helpless and spiritually blind until God shines his light into our hearts. According to Jesus it is the Holy Spirit who brings spiritual regeneration and new birth (John 3), not the Word. But at the same time James can write that God “brought us forth [gave us birth] by the word of truth” (Jam 1:18), and Peter insisted that we are “born again... through the living and abiding word of God” (1 Pet 1:23).

How do we hold together these seemingly conflicting texts? Does God work by his preached Word or by the Holy Spirit? Which is the agent of regeneration and sanctification? The answer must of course be both, operating distinctly but inseparably. Listen to John Calvin again: “[W]e maintain that when God speaks, the efficacy of his Spirit is added at the same time, for otherwise the Word would be fruitless. Nevertheless, the Word does not lack effectiveness, because the instrument must be joined with the author of the action”, (John Calvin, *Commentary on Ezekiel 1 (Chapters 1-12)* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1994), 59). Word and Spirit are not in conflict; they work together. The Spirit is the efficacious means of regeneration and Christian growth while the Word is the instrumental means that the Spirit uses. No one has put it better than Sinclair Ferguson: “For the New Testament writers... there is no hint of a threat to divine sovereignty in the fact that the word is the instrumental cause of regeneration, while the Spirit is the efficient cause. This is signalled in the New Testament by the use of the preposition *ek* to indicate the divine originating cause (e.g. Jn 3:5; 1 Jn 3:9; 5:1) and *dia* to express the instrumental cause (e.g. Jn 15:3; 1 Cor 4:15; 1 Pet 1:23)” (Sinclair B Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit* (Leicester: IVP, 1996), 125).

The distinct yet inseparable relationship between Word and Spirit in preaching has important implications. It means that, just as we approach the administration of the sacraments with eager expectation knowing that the reality is always present to be received with the sign, so we approach the preaching of the Word with expectation knowing that it is God’s means of sustaining and growing his church. It is a “perennial fountain that will never fail us” (John Calvin, *The Gospel According to John: Volume 1* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1959), 93). This, however, should not lead to complacency in listeners since the Word is a double-edged sword. It is “the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing” (2 Cor 2:15-16). The preaching of God’s Word is always effective but it has a twofold effect: it blesses those who come with faith but judges those who come with unbelief.

This understanding of the distinct yet inseparable relationship between Word and Spirit in preaching will mean that we are committed to expository preaching – letting the main message of the text be the main message of our sermon – because we know that the Bible (not our own flair or eloquence) is God’s chosen means of blessing his people. But it will also drive us to our knees in prayer because we know that we are dependent upon God the Holy Spirit to soften hearts and illumine minds so that we can drink from God’s “perennial fountain” by faith. There is no dichotomy between prayer and rigorous exegetical preparation. It is “both... and...” because the Holy Spirit works through the means of the faithful teaching of his Word.

All of this also has important implications for the Word / Spirit debate in the sphere of sung worship too. Recently I was speaking at a conference for

Music Ministry (www.music-ministry.org), where we were looking at the relationship between Word and Spirit in sung corporate worship. In more charismatic circles, sung worship is often viewed as being either a means of preparing to encounter God or a way of ushering in God's presence. The spiritual experience is judged to be proportionate to the emotional experience of the music. However, Col 3:16 teaches us that sung worship is, in fact, Word ministry. By singing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs to each other, we "let the word of Christ dwell in us richly". In this respect, sung corporate worship is a lot like the sacraments. As Augustine showed us, the sacraments are "visible words"; good Christian hymns and songs are "memorable words". They impart vividness and memorability to God's words which, in turn, "drive the word into our hearts, so that it becomes precious to us and motivates us to praise and obedience". (John Frame, *Worship in Spirit and Truth* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1996), 112-113).

This means that, far from believing that the Spirit only occasionally accompanies our sung worship, we should recognise that he always accompanies it, either in blessing or judgment, whenever his Word is sung. This of course elevates the importance of singing in our corporate worship services (a song should never be used as a filler or for the children to leave for their groups!) and it also underlines the importance of ensuring that our hymns and songs are Word saturated. It is never simply a question of what people like or what "works musically" (although both those questions are important). Word and Spirit are distinct yet inseparable in the preaching of the Word and the singing of the Word. Therefore we must approach both of these ministries with faith and expectation.

Turning to the current issue, we have three articles and two reviews for you. Nathan Weston has written an excellent piece providing an evangelical response to postmodern scepticism of textual interpretation. After a brief historical introduction, Weston works through the various objections to the stable meaning of languages. He persuasively argues that, since God is the origin of language, he is the only stable guarantor of its meaning. Thus, the only secure criterion for religious knowledge is an objective, revealed word from the Father applied by his Spirit to the hearts of sinners redeemed by God the Son.

In the second article, I examine the significance of the Lord's Supper in the life and ministry of Adolphe Monod, a nineteenth-century French Reformed minister. The Supper held a high place in Monod's theological and pastoral thinking and played a crucial role in ecclesiastical disputes in both Lyons and Paris. Unlike his North American contemporaries, Monod remained committed to Calvin's doctrine of the real spiritual presence of Christ in the Supper. He cherished the spiritual nourishment that the Supper provides and spent his final months of life expounding and celebrating it with his family and co-workers in Christ.

In the third article, Robert Strivens provides a response to John Stevens' contribution to Issue 68 in which he argued that the New Testament views the Lord's Supper as a new covenant community celebration meal. Strivens argues that the Lord's Supper does not require a full meal and suggests that Stevens over-emphasises the horizontal aspects of the Supper at the expense of the vertical element of the believers' communion with Christ himself. Also included are book reviews of *Preaching with Spiritual Power* and *The Plausibility Problem*.

I hope you enjoy reading Issue 69 of Foundations and, as always, welcome correspondence and the submission of articles.

Ralph Cunnington
December 2015

“BUT THAT’S JUST *YOUR* INTERPRETATION!”: FOUNDATIONS FOR AN EVANGELICAL RESPONSE

*Nathan Weston**

Postmodern scholarship has radically challenged the notion that texts have clear and accessible meaning which corresponds to the author’s intent. This has led to particular scepticism towards any claim of certainty within biblical interpretation. At best, such certainty is largely considered to be inappropriate and potentially divisive; at worst it is thought to represent a manipulative power play. Christians are often confronted with such scepticism when they seek to propound Scriptural truth to outsiders (or even to those in their churches), often expressed in the objection: “that’s just *your* interpretation”. This article aims to provide the foundations for an evangelical response to this scepticism, arguing that the only secure criterion for religious (or indeed any) knowledge is a revealed word from the truthful Father applied by his Spirit to the heart of a sinner redeemed by his Son.

Introduction

“You do realise that not everyone reads it the way you do, don’t you?”

My non-Christian friend and I had enjoyed a long conversation about the nature of the OT, during which I had spent some time outlining my understanding of the fulfilment of the OT in the gospel of Jesus Christ. My friend’s comment, quoted above, effectively ended the discussion. He did not dispute my exegesis of New or Old Testament texts; the mere fact that other serious readers of the OT (he was thinking particularly of Jewish scholars) had come to different conclusions was enough to close down for him the possibility that the Christian understanding was to be embraced. My friend is no radical pluralist; he did not wish to persuade me that *both* the Christian and the Jewish readings were true – in fact, he believed neither. He was simply sceptical that I could be so *sure* that the Christian reading of the OT was correct and the Jewish reading false.

My friend’s scepticism is by no means unusual. Postmodern philosophy has been highly successful in casting doubt on claims of any kind of certainty in interpretation, especially Scriptural interpretation, and the results of postmodern thought have filtered down to popular thinking. Indeed, to claim to know some transcultural and universally-applicable truth in an

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intellectual environment saturated by postmodern thought "smacks of imperialism and bigotry".¹ Moreover, it is not a recent objection. As far back as Pyrrhonian scepticism in Ancient Greece, philosophers have struggled with "the problem of the criterion"²: if a dispute is to be decided, an unarguable standard for what constitutes truth, a criterion, must be agreed. But if the criterion itself must be chosen, then it too must be measured against a criterion – resulting in an undecidable circular argument. Far better, argued the Pyrrhonians, to live in *ataraxia*, "quietude" – a deliberate non-committal on divisive or controversial matters.³

Tracing the development of this theme through the debates of the European Reformation, the Enlightenment and the rise of postmodernism is a fruitful exercise, but one outside of the scope of this article. Suffice it to say that the fundamental problem – that of determining a criterion for religious knowledge (or indeed any knowledge) only deepened in complexity with each philosophical development. Spinoza rejected the role of faith and made certainty a function of human reason;⁴ Kant argued that human reason only goes as far as apprehending the phenomenal (experienced) world and could not attain the noumenal ("real") world;⁵ Nietzsche rejected *every* suggested criterion as a fabrication: "there are no facts, only interpretations", interpretations which ought to be deconstructed;⁶ and Derrida argued that language itself was unable to bear meaning, such that "neither language nor human self-awareness conceals any thread of reference to things as they are".⁷ In light of this, my friend's show-stopping comment seems completely cogent and natural. I had confidently appealed to the obvious meaning of the words of a centuries-old text, written in a culture completely alien to me, to demonstrate that its long-dead author shared my convictions about a universal truth to which my friend ought to subscribe, in direct opposition to the conclusions of other readers, even those with whom I share basic presuppositions. If even a fraction of the academic philosophy surveyed above had made an impact on him – either directly or through its popular-level percolation to the general public – my attempt to convince him of the

¹ Mark D Thompson, *A Clear and Present Word: The Clarity of Scripture* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2006), 33; it is to open oneself up to "the same pity (or scorn) usually reserved for fundamentalists... in postmodern literary criticism, scepticism is next to godliness" (Kevin J Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in this Text?* (Leicester: Apollos, 1998), 282).

² Richard H Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza* (Berkeley: University of California, 1979), 3.

³ Popkin, *History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza*, xv.

⁴ D A Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 66.

⁵ Carson, *Gagging of God*, 67.

⁶ Luc Ferry, *A Brief History of Thought* (New York: HarperCollins, 2011), 153.

⁷ Carl Raschke, "The Deconstruction of God", in *Deconstruction and Theology* (ed. T J J Altizer; New York: Crossroad, 1982), 1-33, 4; cited in Thompson, *Clear and Present Word*, 41.

centrality of Jesus Christ was not only nonsensical but morally offensive. Can there be any challenge to radical postmodern scepticism which could recover a criterion for knowledge to which I could appeal to better convince my friend? Or is the only option to present my opinion as one among many, such that he and I can live in blissful *ataraxia*?

Given this introduction, the approach of this article might seem strange. In the following sections we attempt to present a foundation for an evangelical response to postmodern scepticism, built on Scripture itself. Throughout the article we will quote Scripture and simply assume its clarity and truth. The legitimacy of this approach will be explored as the article develops, as we argue that the *only secure criterion for religious knowledge is a revealed word from the truthful Father applied by his Spirit to the heart of a sinner redeemed by his Son*. If this is true, there is no other starting place than Scripture for proving that we can have confidence to interpret it correctly.

Scepticism in Scripture

Although we have suggested that the beginnings of postmodern scepticism were in Ancient Greece, Scripture invites us to delve further back to see its real origins. The very first words which are spoken against God in Scripture are sceptical ones – the serpent’s malicious “did God really say...?”⁸ The point is, of course, that God *had* spoken clearly and unambiguously, and the serpent’s plan is to “lead the woman to a contempt of the divine precept”.⁹ Adam and Eve’s sin was culpable precisely because they refused to believe the divine communication – they “engendered a false faith from [Satan’s] lies”¹⁰ – not because they couldn’t have expected to understand it. Immediately, then, we see that against the assertion that scepticism is a state of humble *ataraxia* – a neutral stance which will not state more than is unambiguous and uncontroversial – scepticism is presented in Genesis 3 as a means to sinfully undermine trust in God’s word and oppose his purposes.

Moreover, this is not an isolated incident in Scripture – examples abound where an epistemology centred around acceptance of God’s word is contrasted not with a neutral *ataraxia* but with a sinful opposition to God’s clearly revealed purposes. Pharaoh, initially sceptical about Moses’ claim to divine revelation,¹¹ is presented with overwhelming evidence of God’s power in the form of the plagues, acknowledged as divine by court magicians, empirically verified by clear evidence and interpreted correctly by his

⁸ Genesis 3:1.

⁹ John Calvin, *Commentary on Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 147.

¹⁰ Turretin, *Institutes of the Elenctic Theology*, 1:605.

¹¹ Exodus 5:2.

servants.¹² Pharaoh's unwillingness to obey is not a function of lack or ambiguity of evidence, but of his hard-heartedness.¹³ When the Preacher of Ecclesiastes embarks on his quest to explore the meaning of life "under the sun",¹⁴ his response is a world-weary scepticism even towards words, which only increase the "vanity" or "meaninglessness" of existence.¹⁵ But contrary to other Ancient Near Eastern pessimism literature, Ecclesiastes "holds forth the possibility of joy, faith and assurance of God's goodness"¹⁶ in the "words of delight... [and] truth" which have stable meaning "like nails firmly fixed" because "they are given by one Shepherd".¹⁷ The alternative to scepticism is thus humble trust in the source and reliability of divine revelation.

The contrast continues into the NT. Romans 1:19-20 goes further than stating the essential clarity of Scripture by claiming that the universe itself is "an intelligible disclosure of the otherwise unknown God".¹⁸ Again, there is no problem with the source material – rather, it is the proud epistemological self-sufficiency of those who "claim to be wise" which leads them to "suppress the truth" and therefore incur God's wrath.¹⁹ There is a "fundamentally moral"²⁰ underpinning for rejecting God's word – that "everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed."²¹ The postmodern sceptical project resembles this dynamic: if belief involves humiliating repentance, it behoves sinners to develop strategies for unbelief, such as functionally silencing God by claiming no-one can really understand what he is saying. Even Thomas, a disciple of Jesus, is rebuked for his scepticism towards Jesus' resurrection – his principled refusal to commit until he has sufficient empirical evidence to satisfy his own criteria is described as unbelief by Jesus, whose blessing rests on those who believe *without* such evidence.²² Indeed, as John explains, the testimonial evidence of the inscripturated apostolic witness is precisely the divine revelation which ought to engender belief.²³ But of course, this revelation comes in linguistic form – can these Scriptural assertions stand up to postmodern attacks on the ambiguity of language itself?

¹² Exodus 9:16, 9:7, 8:18-19, 19:7.

¹³ Exodus 4:21; 7:3, 13, 14, 22, 23 etc.

¹⁴ Ecclesiastes 1:14.

¹⁵ Ecclesiastes 5:3, 7; 6:11; 10:13-14; 12:12.

¹⁶ Michael A Eaton, "Ecclesiastes", in *New Bible Commentary* (ed. D A Carson et al.; Leicester: IVP, 2002), 609-618, 609.

¹⁷ Ecclesiastes 12:10-12.

¹⁸ John R W Stott, *The Message of Romans* (Leicester: IVP, 1994), 73.

¹⁹ Romans 1:18, 22.

²⁰ D A Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Leicester: Apollos, 1991), 207.

²¹ John 3:19-20.

²² John 20:25-29.

²³ John 20:30-31.

Language and meaning

Language and God's nature

From the beginning of Scripture, God is revealed to be a speaking God; one whose words carry not only stable meaning but creative power. The initial explosion of God's powerful word in Genesis 1 sets the scene for one of the Bible's "most basic and influential assumptions"²⁴ – that God speaks, and what he says is trustworthy, powerful, true and good. Indeed, insofar as Scripture gives glimpses of the intra-Trinitarian life, it is clear that the stages of redemptive history are set in motion via inter-personal speech – including the creation of mankind to begin with,²⁵ the decision to judge sinful mankind,²⁶ the anointing of the Son as the Messiah,²⁷ the divine approval of Jesus' work,²⁸ the source of Jesus' words themselves,²⁹ Jesus' prayer for the ongoing protection of his disciples,³⁰ and his confession of their name in the final act of salvation.³¹ The Son himself is characterised as the "Word"³² through whom the message of salvation has come in its fulness;³³ and the Spirit as the "breath" through whom the word comes with power.³⁴

For those made in the image of God, therefore, human language has a stable referent in the eternal character of God himself. Although the precise nature of what in mankind constitutes the image of God is disputed, it is notable that Adam's first act of God-given dominion is to emulate God's definitional speech – essentially, to be an *interpreter of facts* just like God by naming the animals.³⁵ This leads to two conclusions about the nature of language. First, in contrast to Foucault,³⁶ language cannot be *inherently* manipulative: "The language of suspicion, of the covert exercise of power, or manipulation or tyranny is entirely out of place when speaking about God's

²⁴ Thompson, *Clear and Present Word*, 60.

²⁵ Genesis 1:26.

²⁶ Genesis 11:7.

²⁷ Psalm 2:7, 110:1.

²⁸ Matthew 3:17, 17:5; Mark 1:11, 9:7; Luke 3:22, 9:35; John 12:49.

²⁹ John 14:24.

³⁰ John 17:9-11.

³¹ Revelation 3:5. "Words are not something alien to God... They are ingredients of the mutual self-giving of the divine persons to us" (Thompson, *Clear and Present Word*, 64).

³² John 1:1.

³³ Hebrews 1:1-2.

³⁴ Ephesians 6:17, 1 Thessalonians 1:5.

³⁵ Genesis 1:5,8; 2:20. C.f. Moises Silva, *God, Language and Scripture* (Leicester: Apollos, 1990), 21.

³⁶ See, e.g. Michel Foucault, "What Is Critique?" in *What Is Enlightenment? Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth-Century Questions* (ed. James Schmidt; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 385-386.

dealings with his people."³⁷ Second, humans bear a responsibility to ensure they use language in a manner coherent with God's intention in giving it as a gift to them;³⁸ the possibility of abusing God's gift for selfish and manipulative ends is entirely real, but the fact of such abuse ought to inspire our reformation, not our rejection of the stability of language *per se*.

The correlation between human language and God's prototypical divine speech provides the first plank in our argument – that the quest for a criterion for religious knowledge *must* start from the revelation of the eternally reliable Triune God. Indeed, without the changeless God guaranteeing that language can have a meaning, language and meaning are essentially unmoored from one another, and the attribution of meaning to language essentially arbitrary, as postmodern thinkers such as Derrida allege.³⁹ Similarly, if our conception of language has no stable *telos* – no good, God-honouring design for its usage – then the use of language as a means to power and manipulation cannot be questioned or legitimately resisted, and we have no recourse other than to submit to – or join in with – Nietzsche's programme for the utter deconstruction of ideals.

Language after the fall

But does this conception of language hold after mankind's fall into sin and the subsequent corruption of our nature? If the concept enshrined in the Canons of Dordt as "Total Inability" is true,⁴⁰ and the "blindness of mind [and] vanity and perverseness of judgment" is passed on to all the offspring of Adam "by the propagation of a vicious nature" such that people even render the light of natural revelation "wholly polluted",⁴¹ why should we suppose that human language – even that enshrined in Scripture – would remain unpolluted? Indeed, the immediate aftermath of the Fall shows people following in the serpent's footsteps, lying, boasting, swearing murderous oaths, and concocting idolatrous plans which God frustrates by confusing language yet further.⁴² However, after the first sin and the subsequent linguistic scattering at Babel, God does not abandon language as a means to communicate or fulfil his purposes. He is able to have a conversation with his newly-corrupted creatures which all protagonists

³⁷ Thompson, *Clear and Present Word*, 59.

³⁸ Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in this Text?* 205.

³⁹ "The break with the postulate of the sacred is the break with any stable, potentially ascertainable meaning of meaning." (George Steiner, *Real Presences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 132); cited in Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in this Text?* 198.

⁴⁰ The present author gladly affirms this doctrine on the basis of passages such as Romans 1:18-32, 3:10-18 and 5:14-19.

⁴¹ Canons of Dordt, Third and Fourth Heads of Doctrine, Articles III-V.

⁴² Genesis 4:9, 23-24; 11:1-4,7.

understand, and the (spoken) curse of judgment is entirely effective.⁴³ God's purpose of salvation is promised in speech and put into effect by a promise to Abram which is understood, believed and acted upon without apparent difficulty.⁴⁴ Moreover, the character of God as an inherently reliable speaker who always acts according to his word⁴⁵ and able to order all things according to his will⁴⁶ puts paid to any suggestion that "God was somehow constrained, hampered and indeed frustrated in His revelatory purpose"⁴⁷ by having to use language.

The possibility and necessity of stable inscripturated meaning

These considerations lead us to consider not only the possibility of stable meaning in God's *spoken* word, but also in his *written* word. The move from spoken to written word forms a crucial plank in the sceptical project, summarised by Derrida's maxim: "iterability alters".⁴⁸ That is, inscripturation means that the same words will be said at different times as the written word is read; and in Derrida's thought, that rehearsal could only change their (inherently unstable) meaning.

An immediate Scriptural counter-argument to this objection is that God does not seem to share Derrida's concerns. Indeed, examples of inscripturation – many at God's explicit command, some even by his own finger – are found throughout the Bible,⁴⁹ and in every case inscripturation is assumed to *preserve* the meaning such that later generations can have access to the same revelation as their forebears, and to aid in "remembering and internalising" God's revelation – a form of writing on the heart.⁵⁰ Jeremiah 36 provides an important example of inscripturation which demonstrates that the written word is no less God's voice than the spoken; when Baruch reads "the words of Jeremiah in the scroll" (*bassēper*, 36:10), Micaiah hears "the words of the LORD [coming] from the scroll" (*mē'al hassēper*, 36:11).⁵¹ In fact, one can go further than stressing the *possibility* of stable inscripturated meaning and insist on its *necessity*. Several times in Scripture the *acts* of God

⁴³ Genesis 3:9-19.

⁴⁴ Genesis 3:15, 12:1-3. C.f. Thompson, *Clear and Present Word*, 69.

⁴⁵ Numbers 23:19, 1 Samuel 15:29, Isaiah 55:11, Titus 1:2, James 1:17, Hebrews 6:18.

⁴⁶ Most notably, Acts 4:28.

⁴⁷ J I Packer, "Fundamentalism" and the Word of God (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), 79-80.

⁴⁸ Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in this Text?* 386; citing Jacques Derrida, "Limited Inc abc", *Glyph* 2 (1977): 162-254, 200.

⁴⁹ E.g. Exodus 17:14, 24:12; Deuteronomy 28:58; Joshua 1:8; Isaiah 30:8; Jeremiah 30:2-3; Habakkuk 2:2; 2 Corinthians 13:10; 2 Peter 1:12-15, 3:1-2; Revelation 1:11 (Silva, *God, Language and Scripture*, 35-37).

⁵⁰ Andrew G Shead, *A Mouth Full of Fire: The Word of God in the Words of Jeremiah* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2012), 234.

⁵¹ Shead, *Mouth Full of Fire*, 239.

– even his spoken words – are misinterpreted or misunderstood without corresponding explanation,⁵² unsurprising given the Bible's insistence that our faculty for interpreting natural revelation is culpably flawed.⁵³ The supreme example is the death of Christ, which as an *unexplained* event, appears offensive and foolish to the whole world (1 Cor 1:18-27). What makes the difference to a person's perception of the cross is "what was preached"⁵⁴: "the biblical position is that the mighty acts of God are not revelation to man at all, except in so far as they are accompanied by words of God to explain them".⁵⁵

Our earlier conclusions about the nature of language can now be supplemented with two reflections on the nature of Scripture. First, not only is it *possible* for Scripture to be a revelation of God, it is the *only* reliable revelation of God due to its divine origin and purpose. Even though our linguistic faculties are fallen along with the rest of our beings, God is able to use human agents to faithfully record his divine words such that they can be heard afresh in new contexts. For this reason, rejecting Scripture as the locus of divine revelation is recklessly destabilising; for where else can one find reliable truth about God? Any speculation on God's nature that has its origin *outside* the eternally truthful and infinite God whose thoughts are higher than ours⁵⁶ is rightly open to suspicion and scepticism as an attempt to "measure the Divine nature by the limitations of [man's] own".⁵⁷ Second, this goes some way to explaining the method taken in this article (of defending Scripture by means of Scripture). If God really is the source and origin of the entire universe such that the universe is designed to bear witness to him⁵⁸ then our true knowledge of the universe is predicated on knowing God.⁵⁹ Even before the Fall, Adam as a finite being required the divine words of God to rightly interpret God's world (Gen 2:16-17), to deal with creation "in the light of the destiny of the whole of created realm of being".⁶⁰ How much more then, do those who are like "old and bleary-eyed men" through sin need the

⁵² E.g., Exodus 16:15; Isa 42:25; Daniel 12:8; Mark 6:52; 9:32; John 12:29; Acts 2:12-15, 22-23; 22:9.

⁵³ Romans 1:18-32.

⁵⁴ 1 Corinthians 1:21, c.f. Romans 10:14-17.

⁵⁵ Packer, "Fundamentalism" and the Word of God, 92.

⁵⁶ Isaiah 55:9.

⁵⁷ Hilary, *On The Trinity*, I:18, cited in Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds., *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church: Second Series* (New York: The Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1890-1900), 45.

⁵⁸ Psalm 19:1; Romans 1:19-20.

⁵⁹ In particular, our knowledge of self is predicated on knowledge of God (Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1.1.2, Battles 1:37).

⁶⁰ Cornelius Van Til, "Introduction to B B Warfield's 'The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible'", in *Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Philadelphia: P&R, 1970), 3-70, 31; c.f. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:359, #99.

“spectacles” of God’s own self-revelation to understand him and thus his world?⁶¹

God, man and culture

But a further objection will be raised from the postmodern sceptic – namely, how can words given to people in a specific culture – using that culture’s language and norms – transcend that culture to speak meaningfully to those embedded in another culture?⁶² Moreover, how can the hearers avoid reading into the text the norms of their *own* culture and interpretive community?⁶³

The embedded human and the enculturated word

There is no embarrassment in Scripture about the enculturation of God’s words – indeed, as passages such as Deut 30:11-14 show, such enculturation is both *necessary* and a *cause for celebration*. For the people of God about to enter the Promised Land, acutely aware that their ongoing possession of the land was contingent on their obedience, a *comprehensible* law was crucial.⁶⁴ Deuteronomy 30 is therefore an exposition of God’s condescending kindness – he has not given them a *heavenly* law which would require the people to transcend their human existence in order to obey; nor is it a *foreign* law which would require cross-cultural translation. For a Hebrew-speaking people in a specific time and place, God gives a law in Hebrew which is able to regulate life in those conditions in a form and manner readily comprehensible to those who first heard it.⁶⁵ The fact that God was able to reveal timeless truths about his character, nature and purposes for creation in a specific time to a specific people in a specific language ought to give

⁶¹ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1.6.1, Battles 1:70.

⁶² As Lessing put it at its most incisive: “accidental truths of history can never become the proof of necessary truths of reason” (G E Lessing, *Lessing’s Theological Writings*, edited by Henry Chadwick (London: A & C Black, 1956): 53; cited in Timothy Ward, *Words of Life* (Leicester: IVP, 2009), 40).

⁶³ If Ricoeur is right to say that “readers can never escape the influence of the world-in-front-of-the-text” such that “‘meaning’ likewise differs and cannot be regarded as an absolute property of the text” (Benjamin Sargent, *As It Is Written: Interpreting the Bible with Boldness* (London: Latimer, 2011), 13), Fish’s “pragmatic hermeneutics” seems the only option: “readers need to actively seek particular readings of texts, readings which benefit the community in which reading takes place... one might regard meaning as utterly independent of the text.” (Sargent, *As It Is Written*, 13).

⁶⁴ Deuteronomy 6:6-7.

⁶⁵ “God has deliberately decided to accommodate mankind by disclosing himself in our language and according to the mode to which we are accustomed” (Walter C Kaiser, Jr., “Legitimate Hermeneutics”, in *Guide to Contemporary Hermeneutics* (ed. Donald K. McKim; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 111–141, 114).

readers confidence that, in God's sovereignty, transcendent truth *can* be accommodated and enculturated.

Perhaps the supreme example of this is the words of Jesus Christ – a man, born and raised in 1st century Palestine, speaking Aramaic to particular people in particular situations, who can yet claim: "whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say".⁶⁶ But the incarnate Christ is more than just paradigmatic for how time-bound human words can yet be transcendent divine words; the embeddedness of Jesus was not a mere "accident of history". Rather, just as mankind's plight is the result of rebellion committed *within human history*, so it is necessary that the solution is also historical.⁶⁷ If we desire a transcendent, ahistorical revelation of God that is free from the "scandal of particularity", we therefore abandon ourselves to the historical plight of mankind's rebellion and destiny of wrath: "There can be no salvation by the discovery of eternal truth, for eternal truth brings naught but despair, because of sin."⁶⁸

However, this still leaves the issue of whether such an enculturated word can survive the process of translation unscathed. The very composition of Scripture – 66 books written across centuries in many different cultures and in three different languages – suggest this is entirely possible. One of the major flaws in the sceptics' approach is that they reject *a priori* a God who can transcend time such that he can superintend his words across diverse languages and cultures; "for modern thought time is ultimate"⁶⁹ and thus meaning is time-bound and language becomes a prison. But if a personal God is admitted into the picture, then revelation can not only be *unified* across multiple times, languages and voices, but can also *progress* over that time.⁷⁰

The necessity of interpretive communities

Part of the seedbed of postmodern scepticism is the despair at the modernist quest to find "objective" knowledge, accessible from a truly neutral standpoint. But Scripture takes the opposite attitude by evincing a humble joy in mankind's creatureliness and limit compared to the Creator's infinite knowledge.⁷¹ Because God is the sovereign author of the whole universe and has ordained every event in it – and thus "understands us better than we

⁶⁶ John 12:49-50.

⁶⁷ Romans 5:12-19, 1 Corinthians 15:42-57, Hebrews 2:5-10.

⁶⁸ J Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 60.

⁶⁹ Van Til, "Introduction to B B Warfield's 'The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible'", 41.

⁷⁰ Indeed, because of the progressive nature of revelation, "the 'fuller meaning' of [OT] Scripture – the meaning associated with divine authorship – emerges only at the level of the whole canon". (Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in this Text?* 264; c.f. Vern S Poythress, *Inerrancy and Worldview* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 83-84).

⁷¹ E.g. Psalm 131; 139:1-14; Isaiah 44:6-8; 55:9.

understand ourselves”⁷² – he can be “the causal source of contingent truth”,⁷³ revealing precisely the words his people need in their specific situation without error or oversight.⁷⁴ This does not mean that humans can possess the *archetypal* knowledge that only God has; but that we can truly possess *ectypal* theology, a true but non-exhaustive knowledge derived from God’s revelation.⁷⁵ Indeed, both the modernist desire for objectivity, and the postmodernist despair at never finding it, represent an attempt to have the kind of immediate knowledge only God can have – to be “like God, knowing good and evil”⁷⁶ – and “resembles an epistemological tantrum that refuses to accept the human condition.”⁷⁷

This becomes even more acute when it is considered that the *goal* of revelation is not merely to enlighten certain individuals, but to gather a people to form a new humanity in Christ.⁷⁸ This new humanity does not immediately understand all that Scripture teaches, but joins in the task, “together with all the saints”, of *apprehending* the gospel of the boundless love of Christ, joyfully committed to the fact that they will never fully *comprehend* the “love that surpasses knowledge”.⁷⁹ To advance this cause, God provides teachers who, by “rightly handling the word of truth”⁸⁰ using the ordinary means of careful study and prayerful reading⁸¹ are able to “equip the saints for the work of ministry”.⁸² This does not mean that churches will always get it right; rather, division and dissension is to be expected as false teachers and false professors are uprooted from within the midst of the church.⁸³ But Christians realise they are limited beings and thus need the insights of others to help grasp the boundless truth of God’s word; individual Christians who sever themselves from the life of the church are effectively guilty of the same arrogance as the postmodern sceptic who

⁷² Katherin A Rogers, *Perfect Being Theology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 90.

⁷³ Paul Helm, *Eternal God: A Study of God Without Time* (2d ed.; Oxford: OUP, 2010), 67.

⁷⁴ “If God is really self-contained and if he has really causally created the world and if he really controls it by his providence then the revelation of himself and about this world must be that of fully *interpreted fact*” (Van Til, “Introduction to B B Warfield’s ‘The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible’”, 29-30, emphasis original).

⁷⁵ C.f. Carson, *Gagging of God*, 130-131.

⁷⁶ Genesis 3:5.

⁷⁷ Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in this Text?* 300.

⁷⁸ Romans 8:29; Ephesians 2:15; 1 Corinthians 15:23; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Revelation 5:9.

⁷⁹ Ephesians 3:17-19.

⁸⁰ 2 Timothy 2:15.

⁸¹ Turretin lists the means needed to understand Scripture as “the internal light of the Spirit, attention of mind, the voice and ministry of the church, sermons and commentaries, prayer and watchfulness” (Turretin, *Institutes of the Elenctic Theology*, 1:444, 2.17.6).

⁸² Ephesians 4:11-12.

⁸³ E.g. Acts 20:29-30; 2 Timothy 4:3.

craves objective, independent knowledge;⁸⁴ as is the church that cuts itself off from the rich blessings of church history and the diverse readings of the worldwide church and tries to "start from scratch".⁸⁵

A personal word in a personal universe

Underpinning the argument so far has been an assumed *personalist* worldview, such that linguistic laws are not just "out there", operating by "a kind of mechanical control", but rather "God personally rules over all the particulars of all languages and gives these languages as gifts to humanity".⁸⁶ But this presupposition is by no means shared by the postmodern sceptic; indeed, the explicit rejection of all metanarratives and the anti-authoritarian streak (which caused Nietzsche to proclaim the death of God) is a common "God-defying" feature of postmodernity.⁸⁷ The postmodern "suspicion of transcendence... of our ability as reader to be addressed by what is beyond us"⁸⁸ is predicated on modernism's suspicion of testimony, disparaging as gullible all "propositions made not on the basis of sufficient reason or evidence but only upon the credit of the proposer".⁸⁹ Can there be an evangelical response to this suspicion of testimony?

The present author

Scripture repeatedly affirms that God is personally active in both the speaking and reception of his words. His word goes out from him and somehow "returns" to him after achieving its purpose, he is "watching over his word to perform it" and those who hear the reiteration of God's word in a new context nevertheless "hear his voice".⁹⁰ Moreover, God's word is presented in Scripture as the means by which he communicates his presence⁹¹ via the close association between word and Spirit,⁹² and thus

⁸⁴ "To try to start totally afresh ('just me and my Bible'), as many cultists have tried to do, is an act of disobedience and pride" (John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg N.J.: P&R, 1987), 304).

⁸⁵ "Creeds do not simply offer new doctrinal models and establish new vocabulary with which to solve particular issues; they also generate new problems and questions and set the terms for future debates... This is one of the reasons why theology cannot simply be done by reading the Bible; the fine-tuning of concepts and vocabulary is a cumulative and traditionary exercise" (Carl R Trueman, *The Creedal Imperative* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2012), 97).

⁸⁶ Poythress, *Inerrancy and Worldview*, 67-68.

⁸⁷ Carson, *Gagging of God*, 133.

⁸⁸ Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in this Text?*, 383.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 290.

⁹⁰ Isaiah 55:11; Jeremiah 1:12; Hebrews 3:7.

⁹¹ E.g. Deuteronomy 4:7-8, 30:11-14; Romans 10:6-8.

⁹² E.g. Psalm 33:6, John 16:13; 1 Thessalonians 1:5; 2 Peter 1:21; c.f. Frame, *Doctrine of the Word of God*, 64-65.

establishes his covenant between himself and his people.⁹³ Over against the impersonalist worldview that says that the universe operates in a mechanical fashion such that, if God exists, he “could only be present to human beings in some special, extraordinary intervention”,⁹⁴ God is constantly present by his Spirit in the “normal” operation of speaking, hearing and reading his word.⁹⁵

This clearly constitutes a challenge to the postmodern view of the text as static; an object to be discussed and dissected removed from the presence of its author.⁹⁶ The concern that there is no “quality that the text itself is able to employ to govern interpretation... that may protect the text from anarchic reading”,⁹⁷ even if it does apply to texts in general, cannot apply to Scripture.⁹⁸ This does not imply immediate understanding or a removal of the need of ordinary means, nor does it guarantee freedom from error; but it does imply the possibility of *corrigibility* – reformation and correction not from a Magisterium of experts who have unusual insight into Scripture but from the Lord himself through his Spirit.⁹⁹

Without an encounter with a personal transcendent being, the only hope of apprehending transcendent truth would be to become transcendent ourselves, to “break out” of the language system; but “inhabiting the system is part of what it means to be human... The only way to break out would be to have a nonhuman language, and then we could not understand it.”¹⁰⁰ If, however, our presuppositions allow for a personal God to break *in* to the system which he himself has designed to be the “means [he] has chosen for his presence”,¹⁰¹ and if we have the epistemological humility to be content with non-exhaustive, ectypal theology, then believing Scripture to be true is

⁹³ “When we encounter certain *human words* (e.g. the words of an Old Testament prophet), we are in direct contact with *God’s words*. This is itself a direct encounter with *God’s activity* (since God’s speech is one form in which he regularly acts), especially with his *covenant-making activity*. And an encounter with God’s covenant-making communicative activity is *itself an encounter with God*” (Ward, *Words of Life*, 36, emphasis original).

⁹⁴ Poythress, *Inerrancy and Worldview*, 95.

⁹⁵ “Unlike any other text we might name, the biblical text never leaves the presence of its ultimate author.” (Thompson, *Clear and Present Word*, 77).

⁹⁶ To use Buber’s definition, to treat theology as a matter of “I-it” rather than “I-Thou”.

⁹⁷ Sargent, *As It Is Written*, 14; Sargent is summarising the thought of A K M Adam.

⁹⁸ Indeed, the language of “quality” clearly shows the assumption of impersonalism – Scripture’s governance is not a property of a static text, but of the personal Lord who watches over it.

⁹⁹ Anthony C Thiselton, “Authority and Hermeneutics: Some Proposals for a More Creative Agenda”, in *Pathway into the Holy Scripture* (ed. Philip E. Satterthwaite and David F. Wright; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 107–142, 137.

¹⁰⁰ Poythress, *Inerrancy and Worldview*, 99.

¹⁰¹ Trueman, *Credal Imperative*, 57.

"not to enter into an agreement with an absentee God; it is to trust the God who has come to you".¹⁰²

The virtuous reader

In the impersonalist worldview in which Scripture is static and dormant, a proper examination of it would be improved with the reader's *distance* – the more disinterested and objective the reader, the less the reading is likely to be distorted by outside influence. But if Scripture is a personal word spoken to persons, then distance is equivalent not to objectivity but to *indifference*; an indifference which cannot help but have an impact on the quality of the relationship and thus the effectiveness of communication. With this in mind it is no surprise that Scripture links the accurate hearing of God's word with the faithfulness and humility of the hearer, as our survey of scepticism within Scripture noted.¹⁰³ This gives the postmodern critique a profoundly moral (indeed immoral) slant: the "tendency to privilege perception over testimony" constitutes "a hankering after a primacy for *my* perception"¹⁰⁴ over that of the revelation of our Creator. It is possible to employ the hermeneutics of suspicion against postmodern authors themselves – as sinners under the judgment of their Creator, it is in their "power interests" to silence God.¹⁰⁵

This is not to suggest that every passage of Scripture is plain and easy to understand, but that the chief cause of lack of understanding "is not so much the intrinsic incomprehensibility of Scripture as the refusal to abide by it".¹⁰⁶ It is for this reason that Reformed theologians have pointed to the internal testimony of the Spirit as crucial for sure religious knowledge; not because without it Scripture is somehow impenetrable, but because the interaction between Scripture and reader is a *personal* interaction between God and a sinner whose shares in the "cognitive malfunction"¹⁰⁷ of the fall. It is precisely because of the "problem" the postmodernist has identified – that one cannot have an "objective" read on the text – that understanding for

¹⁰² Ward, *Words of Life*, 31.

¹⁰³ For example, in 2 Peter 3:16 the fact that some of the content of Paul's letters is "hard to understand" is only a problem for those who are "ignorant and unstable" and "twist [the teaching] to their own destruction"; by contrast, even the simplest reader who approaches the word with reverence and trust is made wise by reading (Psalm 19:7).

¹⁰⁴ C A J Coady, *Testimony: A Philosophical Study* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), 148, cited in Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in this Text?*, 291, emphasis added.

¹⁰⁵ Steiner was surely correct to discern "the covert thrill of violence in current interpretive methods" (George Steiner, *Tolstoy or Dostoevsky* (London: Faber and Faber, 2010), iii).

¹⁰⁶ D A Carson, *Collected Writings on Scripture* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2010), 180. C.f. William Whitaker, *A Disputation on Holy Scripture Against the Papists, Especially Bellarmine and Stapleton* (Translated and Edited by Rev. William Fitzgerald, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1849), 365-366.

¹⁰⁷ Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in this Text?*, 299.

sinful rebels hearing the proclamation of their king is a “matter of having the right prejudices, or... interpretive virtues”; to be properly “attuned” to the Spirit’s voice.¹⁰⁸

Conclusion

The argument for the approach taken in this article – to use Scripture to build the foundations for a criterion for religious knowledge – is now built. The origin of language is God and he is the only stable guarantor of meaning in general, especially in a post-Fall world. The only way as an embedded human being to hear the transcendent word of God is to rely on an objective revelation which continues to be superintended and shepherded by God’s Spirit. The only position to take which allows the personal God freedom to correct wrong understanding is humble trust in his Son and prayerful attentiveness to his word. The only stable criterion for religious knowledge is a revealed word from the truthful Father applied by his Spirit to the heart of a sinner redeemed by his Son. Any other epistemological stance logically leads to scepticism and despair.

How should I have responded to my friend’s comment? Given the argument above, a fruitful approach might be one which helps my friend consider his own epistemological presuppositions and examine the heart attitudes which underlie them. In Isaiah’s devastating critique of idolatry, his sad conclusion is that “no-one stops to think” (Isa 44:19) that their idols are blocks of wood – creaturely, unreliable, powerless and unsatisfactory. In helping my friend “stop to think”, I also hope to “give the reason for the hope that [I] have” (1 Pet 3:15), reasoning that a Biblical epistemology is more satisfying precisely because it finds its ultimate grounds in the gospel of Jesus that I want my friend to believe.

Perhaps the beginnings of my response would be something like this:

“No, you’re quite right, not everyone reads it the same way as me. But let me ask you a question – why do you think that is? It could be that the text is simply so unclear and ambiguous that no-one could possibly understand what it means. Do you think that’s the case here? I guess the very fact that we’re able to talk about it and discuss our interpretations without just giving up the exercise as hopeless shows that, deep down, we really *do* think that these texts mean something, something discoverable, and that when people speak or write they genuinely expect to be heard and understood. But my interpretation is different to others’. And I’m perfectly happy to admit that the main reason is that I’m self-consciously invested in Jesus Christ – because of who he is, and what he says, and what he has done for me in living, dying, and rising to forgive me and restore me to fellowship with his Father, my

¹⁰⁸ Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in this Text?*, 316.

creator. I am, frankly, biased to believe what he says and to accept his interpretation of the Old Testament more than that of my Jewish friends. I'm committed – because I'm committed to Jesus – to the truth that God, the author of Scripture, rules the universe at all moments and in all places by his active control.

So reading Scripture isn't actually like reading any other book – God continues to speak, personally, through what he has written, so that false teachings are side-lined and the truth continues to be available to the world. Not that that happens in a mystical or magical way; if God's the inventor of language, he's also the inventor of all the normal human ways of interpreting language and we expect to be able to use those means to interpret his word. I also trust him to continually equip the church – as he promised – with teachers and scholars and so on who can help me understand it better. Again, that doesn't mean I agree with every teacher who's ever called himself a Christian. I'm actually called by Scripture itself to test what people say by Scripture, to expect false teaching and that I'm to be bound by my conscience as I understand Scripture rather than my church.

But what about you? How do you read it? Have you actually read it? And why might you read it differently? I hope you wouldn't want to claim that you'd be able to read it completely without bias – I've already said I wouldn't claim that for myself. But perhaps it's worth you considering – what are *your* biases? Why do you believe what you believe about the Bible? Why do you believe what you believe about God? Could it be that at least part of the reason you don't believe that the Bible is true is that you don't *want* to believe it? Here's my fear for you – that you hope so much that the Bible isn't true that you're no longer prepared to hear what it's clearly saying. In fact – and I say this fearfully – there are statements in the Bible which suggest that God, in judgment, will stop speaking to those who won't listen. I'm desperate this doesn't happen to you. We've been talking for a long time about the Ancient Near East, and about matters of philosophy and science and archaeology and so on. That's all important, and I'm glad we can talk about it. But I hope you agree that what we're really disagreeing on – the big difference between us – is what we make of the Lord Jesus. No matter how you interpret the New Testament, it's clear that it presents Jesus as someone at the very least worthy of our focused attention – indeed, our devotion and our allegiance. I'd be so glad to read the Bible with you and talk through what it's saying about Jesus; I'd be thrilled if you'd come to church with me and see what difference he makes in the lives of those who trust him. What do you think?"

THE DOCTRINE OF THE LORD'S SUPPER IN ADOLPHE MONOD'S PREACHING

*Ralph Cunningham**

This article traces out the significance of the Lord's Supper in the life and ministry of Adolphe Monod, a minister in the French Reformed Church during the nineteenth century. The Supper held a high place in his theological and pastoral thinking and played a crucial role in disputes in both Lyons and Paris. While Monod's Reformed contemporaries in North America were jettisoning Calvin's doctrine in favour of a modified Zwinglian view, Monod remained committed to it. For Monod, communion was "the Lord's love feast" and it was a feast he could not bear to see profaned.

At the time of the Reformation, more was written on the Lord's Supper than on any other doctrine. It divided the Reformers not only from the Church of Rome, but also among themselves as disagreements arose as to the nature of the sacrament and the presence of Christ in its celebration.¹ The relative neglect of the Supper in contemporary church life is a recent phenomenon, probably having its roots in a shift towards a memorialist position in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.² The focus of this article is on the understanding of the Lord's Supper in the preaching of Adolphe Monod, a minister in the French Reformed church during the early nineteenth century. It will be shown that communion occupied a high position in his theological and pastoral thinking and that his insistence upon its faithful observance marked key events at both the inception and close of his public ministry.

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¹ Luther and his followers insisted upon the physical presence of Christ's body in the Supper. They claimed that his body and blood were present "in, with and under" the elements by virtue of Christ's human nature having become ubiquitous (Article VII: 35 of the Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration). Zwingli rejected this view, insisting that the Supper was merely symbolic and that Christ was remembered in his absence in the sacrament ("On the Lord's Supper", in *Zwingli and Bullinger* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Westminster Press, 1963), 188-189). Calvin offered a third view, insisting that Christ's body was spiritually present in the sacrament (*Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, The Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia, Pa.: The Westminster Press, 1960), 4.17.1-4.17.12; "Short Treatise on the Holy Supper of our Lord and only Saviour Jesus Christ", in *Calvin: Theological Treatises*, Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia, Pa.: Westminster Press, 1954), 144-149).

² While the memorialist position is attributed to Zwingli, there is evidence that he departed from it later in his life ("An Exposition of the Faith," in *Zwingli and Bullinger*, (Philadelphia, Pa.: Westminster Press, 1963), 257-258).

The article is divided into three parts. The first sketches a brief overview of Monod's life and ministry, marking key events that shaped his thinking. The second examines a sermon delivered on 20 March 1831 at the Reformed Church of Lyons, in which Monod controversially challenged the church on the issue of who should partake of the Lord's Supper. In the final part, Monod's teaching on the sacrament in *Les Adieux* is examined. The key aspects of his understanding are identified and Monod's interaction (often indirect) with others is critically examined.

I. The Life and Ministry of Adolphe Monod

Adolphe Monod is considered by many to have been one of the most gifted preachers in nineteenth-century France. Robert Baird wrote:

I have no hesitation in saying that Adolphe Monod is the most finished orator I have heard on the Continent. Modest, humble, simple in his appearance and dress, possessing a voice which is music itself, his powerful mind, and vivid but chaste imagination, made their influence felt on the soul of every hearer in a way that is indescribable.³

Richard Cecil described Monod's scholarship as "accurate and extensive", and his style as "singularly beautiful and perspicuous".⁴ Edmond de Pressensé agreed, noting his "happy blending of holy austerity and brilliant natural endowments" and describing him as "one of the noblest names on the role of French Protestantism".⁵ What appeared to impress people the most was Monod's sustained humility even as his fame and success grew. Monod always had time for people; whether they were young or old, rich or poor;⁶ and his gifting was matched by his hard work.⁷ Monod's character was undoubtedly forged in the trials and tribulations that he faced early on in his life and ministry.

³ Cited in: Henry Clay Fish and Daniel Warren Poor, eds., *Select Discourses by Adolphe Monod, Krummacher, Tholuck, and Julius Müller* (New York: Sheldon & Company, 1860), 15.

⁴ Richard Cecil, *Favourite Passages in Modern Christian Biography* (London: James Hogg & Sons, 1859), 43-44.

⁵ Edmond de Pressensé, *Contemporary portraits: Thiers, Strauss compared with Voltaire, Arnaud de l'Ariège, Dupanloup, Adolphe Monod, Vinet, Vernet, Robertson* (New York: A D F Randolph, 1880), 152, 155. See also Ralph E Turnbull, *A History of Preaching: Vol 3: From the Close of the 19th Century to the Middle of the 20th Century* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1974), 361; Richard Travers Smith, *The Church in France* (London: Wells Gardner, Darton & Co, 1894), 478.

⁶ Edwin Charles Dargan, *A History of Preaching Vol 2: from the Close of the Reformation period to the end of the nineteenth century 1572-1900* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1968), 460.

⁷ *Ibid.*

Monod's early years

On 21 January 1802, Adolphe Monod was born in Copenhagen. He was from solid Protestant stock; his father was a pastor as was his grandfather before him. At the age of six, Adolphe and his family moved to Paris where his father became a minister in the Reformed Church of France. Although Adolphe was still unconverted, he was called to the ministry at the age of fourteen and in 1820 headed off to the University of Geneva to commence his theological studies. Monod was chilled by the religious atmosphere that he found at the University but was struck by the teaching of the Awakening which was beginning to have an influence among the students.⁸ In 1823, Monod had the opportunity to meet Thomas Erskine during one of the Scotsman's visits to the city. Monod wrote: "There is in him a zeal and devotion that interests me. The result of this conversation will be to make me think; that is all I can say; for, on the other hand, it leaves me, or plunges me deeper than before in the doubt and uncertainty which belong to my religious opinions."⁹

Monod left Geneva in 1824 still unsure of his conversion and pursued further studies in Paris. In 1826, he took his first pastoral charge at the French-speaking church in Naples. It was here that he experienced a great spiritual crisis as he realised that he did not have the spiritual resources to equip him for the task he had been called to.¹⁰ He was plunged into still deeper depression until he was visited by Erskine in 1827.¹¹ Following this meeting, Monod committed himself to seeking the truth "in the Bible, and in those who have faithfully explained the Bible."¹² Several weeks later he was converted, and gave the following account of his experience:

Renouncing all merit, all strength, all resources of my own, and confessing that I had no claim to his mercy but that of my own misery, I asked of Him His Spirit, to change my spirit... I was before without God and depended for happiness on myself, now I have a God who undertakes to make me happy.¹³

Monod's Stand in Lyon

Three months later Monod preached a trial sermon at Lyons and was called to serve the Reformed Church as its second pastor. A few months later he

⁸ *Ibid.*, 457.

⁹ Adolphe Monod, *Life and Letters of Adolphe Monod, Pastor of the Reformed Church of France*, ed. Sarah Monod (London: James Nisbet & Co, 1885), 13.

¹⁰ Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church*, vol. 6 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 2007), 20.

¹¹ Monod, *Life and Letters*, 40-41.

¹² *Ibid.*, 42. By this time, he had also committed himself to regular disciplines of prayer and to the reading of the works of the Protestant Reformers. Apparently he had found these works in a library in the still largely Catholic city of Naples. See: Old, *Reading and Preaching*, 6:21.

¹³ Monod, *Life and Letters*, 54.

was appointed President of the Consistory following the retirement of M. Pasche. As Constance Walker has observed, the Consistory in Lyons was renowned for its worldliness,¹⁴ and it is highly unlikely that he would have been appointed had his theology been more developed at the time.¹⁵ Conflict was inevitable as Monod's understanding grew and as he began to emphasise the doctrines of sin and grace.¹⁶ This came to a head on 20 March 1831, when Monod preached a sermon on who should partake of the Lord's Supper. We will return to this in the second part of the article. It is sufficient to note here that the fall-out from that sermon and from Monod's subsequent decision not to preside over Whit-Sunday communion led to his eventual dismissal.¹⁷

Monod remained in good standing amongst evangelicals and received invitations to a pastoral role in Lausanne and to a Chair at the New School of Theology in Geneva. He declined both of these because he felt that "pastoral fidelity" required him to remain in Lyons where he agreed to become the minister for a small group of evangelical believers who had already left the Reformed Church.¹⁸ Over the next four years he saw numerous conversions, particularly among Catholics, and he also met his wife, Hannah.¹⁹

The Montauban Years

In August 1836, Monod was unexpectedly offered the Chair of Morals at the Reformed Church's Faculty of Theology in Montauban. His time in Montauban was a very happy one; his family grew and he was extremely busy with teaching and preaching. After initially teaching Ethics, he went on

¹⁴ A contemporary publication gives the following description of the Consistories at the time: "How are these Consistories elected? It could scarcely be believed that this is done in the following manner: - The twenty-four richest members of the congregation meet together in the presence, and under the presiding authority of the Prefect of the Department... and choose twelve, whom the law then invests with the government of the church. Thus the commanding authority over the churches is reduced to a question of money... Very small is the number of Consistories in which the majority of members are evangelical; by far the greater number care nothing for religion." (*The Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle, Volume 11* (London: Frederick Westley and A H Davis, 1833), 494). See also: Pressensé, *Contemporary Portraits*, 166.

¹⁵ Constance K Walker, "Adolphe Monod: The Voice of the Awakening" (Duke University, Durham, NC, 2011), 5. Monod himself wrote: "It was not until February 1828 that I clearly expounded the way of salvation for the first time... Since then, my preaching, following the development of my personal convictions has become ever clearer and more characterized by the meaning of Scripture and of the Confession of Faith. I have noticed that from that time it began to displease and worry the Consistory." (*Adolphe Monod: Souvenirs de sa Vie, Extraits de sa Correspondence avec un Portrait* (Paris: Librairie Fischbacher, 1885), 145). Cited in Walker, "The Voice of the Awakening".

¹⁶ Dargan, *History of Preaching*, 458.

¹⁷ Walker, "The Voice of the Awakening", 6.

¹⁸ *The Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle, Volume 11*, 494.

¹⁹ Pressensé, *Contemporary Portraits*, 179.

to teach Hebrew and later New Testament Exegesis. Monod was well-known for his pastoral care and discipleship of the students. Pressensé remarks: "He was a true master, in the noblest sense of the word, kindling in young and eager souls the spark of a higher life, so that they looked up to him reverently as their spiritual father."²⁰ Monod's pastoral concern was evident in the sermons that he delivered during this period. When preaching on *The Conflict of Christ with Satan* (Luke 4:1-13) he turned to his young listeners and said:

Do not think that anything extraordinary has happened to you, if the time you spend in this holy preparation should be for your soul a time of uncommon trial... this is the common history of all those who have trodden the path before you... [I]t is your future ministry he hopes to frustrate; it is a whole people he hopes to deprive of the Word of life, if he succeeds in robbing you of "your most holy faith".²¹

Monod's preaching was not limited to the Seminary or to the churches in Montauban. He regularly undertook preaching tours and used his vacations to preach at Reformed churches throughout France.²² He also engaged in writing, publishing his notes on public and private worship and his popular work on Scripture, *Lucille, ou la Lecture de la Bible*.²³

Monod's reputation grew internationally and in August 1846 he was invited to attend the first meeting of the Evangelical Alliance in London. He accepted, noting that "the principle of the Alliance is no other than that of brotherly love... I could not bear to think of such a work being pursued in our days, and myself remaining aloof from it".²⁴ He did, however, express concern about the confession of faith that the Alliance was seeking to adopt: "The unity which [the Alliance] is intended to bring to light is essentially spiritual, and therefore seems hard to be kept within visible limits such as those which a church or association require."²⁵ This was perhaps an early evidence of the spirit of moderation and compromise that would characterise his later actions during the crisis in the Reformed Church of France.

Monod's Final Years in Paris

Monod accepted a call to the Reformed Church in Paris in 1847 joining a large staff including his elder brother Frédéric. In 1849, a general assembly of the Reformed Church of France convened and proposed an ecclesiastical

²⁰ Ibid., 180.

²¹ Fish and Poor, *Select Discourses by Adolphe Monod, Krummacher, Tholuck, and Julius Müller*, 127-128.

²² Dargan, *History of Preaching*, 458.

²³ Walker, "The Voice of the Awakening", 9.

²⁴ Monod, *Life and Letters*, 155.

²⁵ Ibid., 154.

reorganisation and doctrinal downgrade.²⁶ A small group, led by Frédéric, left the Reformed Church and founded the Union of Evangelical Churches. Adolphe declined to follow his brother expressing a desire to work for unity and change in the Reformed Church while it retained the French Confession of 1559. While Frédéric's departure caused deep grief to both brothers they remained united in their gospel purpose. Adolphe wrote, "Let our rivalry be only in love and in holiness."²⁷

In 1854, Adolphe became seriously ill and was later diagnosed with liver cancer. For the last six months of his life he held communion services in his bedroom each Sunday. He invited pastors from the Lutheran, Independent and Wesleyan churches to preside over these and each Sunday he prepared a meditation, his now famous *Les Adieux*. Monod died on 16 April 1856. A week before his death he was heard to say: "My ministerial labours, my works, my preaching I reckon all as filthy rags: a drop of my Saviour's blood is infinitely more precious."²⁸

II. *Qui Doit Communier?*

As early as December 1827, we read of Monod having preached a sermon on preparation for the Lord's Supper. His mother wrote a letter to him soon afterwards saying: "You were happily inspired in writing that sermon on preparation which gave us so much pleasure. I would gladly hear it from your mouth today as I am preparing for a communion, with a soul, alas!"²⁹ It is clear that Monod had spent considerable time meditating and thinking upon the Lord's Supper prior to preaching "*Qui Doit Communier?*" at Lyons on 20 March 1831.

The sermon was precipitated by gross immorality and a failure to exercise discipline within the church at Lyons. Monod appealed to the confessional standards of the church (the French Confession of 1559)³⁰ but in so doing was accused by his opponents of "exhuming old doctrines, which the good sense and sound reason of man (more advanced now than in the age of the Reformation) had wisely buried in oblivion".³¹ Monod persevered,

²⁶ This was probably sparked by the political uncertainty and instability arising from the revolution of 1848. See: Walker, "The Voice of the Awakening", 10.

²⁷ Monod, *Life and Letters*, 172.

²⁸ Fish and Poor, *Select Discourses by Adolphe Monod, Krummacher, Tholuck, and Julius Müller*, 15.

²⁹ Monod, *Life and Letters*, 59.

³⁰ The French Confession is referred to as the Confession of La Rochelle in the writings of Monod since it was confirmed by all the Churches of France at the Seventh National Synod at La Rochelle in 1571. The Confession was recently reaffirmed by the Reformed Church of France in 1936. See: Arthur C Cochrane, *Reformed Confessions of the 16th Century* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 139.

³¹ Pressensé, *Contemporary Portraits*, 171.

arguing, perhaps mistakenly, that the State was bound to support him as he sought to enforce the Confession.³² Nothing changed at Consistory level and his conscience continued to be troubled.³³

Tensions escalated until, on 20 March, Monod preached his sermon on the topic of who should take communion.³⁴ It is clear from the preface to the first edition of the sermon that Monod felt compelled to preach as he did by both Scripture and the Confession.³⁵ He began by addressing his listeners and noting that many came to communion “without knowing what they are doing”, thinking that they might “eat and drink the Lord’s blessing” when in fact they were “drinking a new measure of his anger”.³⁶

After noting the need for clarity in matters of religion,³⁷ Monod turned to the words of institution in 1 Corinthians 11 and said that it was a mistake to think that everyone was invited to the Lord’s table. The Supper is for believers alone; “[it] is not a means of salvation, but it is for those who have been saved a commemoration of the salvation already obtained.”³⁸ Monod illustrated the point by reference to the twelve stones that the Israelites set up in Joshua 4:8-9, and continued “[h]e... who receives communion does by this act, before God and before men, make the following statement: ‘I am one of those whom Jesus Christ has reconciled with God his Father.’”³⁹ Monod asked: “Who should receive communion?... He who can truly keep to the language of communion.”⁴⁰

Monod next acknowledged an acute difficulty that confronted the church in his own day. In earlier times, it had been easy to discern who was a true believer and who was not because of the cost of following Jesus. This was no longer the case since, in the nineteenth century, the name “Christian” had become a badge of honor. As a result the church had become thoroughly mixed; barriers which had previously “surrounded and protected” the church had been “overturned and trampled upon”.⁴¹ And now it was necessary to declare explicitly that only those whose hearts (rather than

³² See the discussion of polity issues in: *Ibid.*, 173-174.

³³ On 22 January 1831 he wrote to Gaussen: “Judging by the letter of Scripture and the example of the primitive Church, I should be disposed to separate (from the church at Lyons). Certainly neither the church of Jerusalem nor that of Corinth was organized like the church of Lyons. Nor do I feel any longer an entire liberty in administering the communion to the first comer.” (Monod, *Life and Letters*, 88).

³⁴ Monod preached the sermon two weeks prior to the Easter communion in order to give his congregants time to think carefully about whether they should participate (*Sermons Première Série*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Librairie De Ch Meyrueis et Comp, 1855), 268, fn1).

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 266.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 268 (my translation).

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 269-270.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 272.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 274.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 275.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 276.

mere names) belonged to Christ should come.⁴² Monod urged once again that he was not speaking on his own authority but on “the authority of the eternal Word”. He recalled the practice of the early Church: “[I]n all times, except in the time of disorder in which we live, the principles I have just established have been recognized... and enforced with extreme severity.”⁴³ And he maintained that his teaching was consistent with the practice of his own denomination, up until now. Then, in memorable words, Monod exclaimed:

Where am I? Is this truly the Church of Christ here? Is this truly the Reformed Church of France here?... Will days of communion always be days of mourning, anguish and scandal for a faithful minister?... For myself, I would rather put the body of Christ on a stone and cast the blood of Christ into the wind, than present them to an unbelieving and profane mouth!... Take away, take away the scandal of your church!... This is pure unbelief – unbelief clothed in the name of Christ, so that in the Church of Christ, under the name of Jesus Christ, perhaps even in the pulpit of Jesus Christ, in those who have been prepared to look after the sheep of Jesus Christ, there, even there, the Devil has placed his unbelief. It is no longer the Church of Christ... it is “the assembly of Satan”.⁴⁴

As Monod drew to a close, he confessed that he had exhausted both strength and words. It was his earnest desire that the coming communion might be one presided over by a “loyal minister” and observed by “faithful disciples”.⁴⁵ Despite the terrible mess of the church, he dearly hoped that the table of Christ might be preserved.⁴⁶

Monod was censured by the Consistory for the sermon and on 14 April he replied with a formal proposal that the church should re-establish discipline.⁴⁷ The following day, the Consistory instituted proceedings for his dismissal and this was rendered inevitable when, on Whit-Sunday, Monod refused to preside over communion. Commenting on the decision, he wrote, “O my God! I cannot, Thou knowest, give the Lord's Supper this Sunday in the midst of this confusion. I thank Thee that Thou hast enlightened me on this point. Thou wilt enlighten me also on the rest.”⁴⁸

Writing about the sermon, Pressensé opined: “Never had [Monod's] eloquence risen to such a height of power and holy passion.”⁴⁹ While some have suggested that the rhetoric was due to excessive youthful zeal, Monod's comments in the preface to the sermon reveal that his zeal was due to the “exceptional circumstances” pertaining in the church. Monod's concern was

⁴² Ibid., 278.

⁴³ Ibid., 279.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 281-282; see also: Walker, “The Voice of the Awakening”, 6; Pressensé, *Contemporary Portraits*, 176.

⁴⁵ Monod, *Sermons Première Série*, 283.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 284.

⁴⁷ Monod, *Life and Letters*, 89.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 90.

⁴⁹ Pressensé, *Contemporary Portraits*, 175.

to see biblical and confessional standards applied. In the sermon itself, he referred to 1 Corinthians 5:9-11 and alluded to the French Confession, article 33 of which requires the church to “follow that which the Lord Jesus Christ declared as to excommunication”.⁵⁰ One of the original drafters of the Confession, John Calvin,⁵¹ insisted that discipline should include deprivation of communion until such time as the offender gives assurance of repentance.⁵² In preaching “*Qui Doit Communier?*”, Monod was simply seeking to be consistent with what he considered to be the teaching of Scripture and of his own Reformed tradition.

Monod was later accused of inconsistency for regularly celebrating communion at the church in Paris where discipline was not practised. Monod replied to this charge in the preface to the second edition of his sermon (May 1855). He said that lack of discipline had “not stopped hurting [his] eyes” but that now he was more concerned for the general discipline of the church than for the special discipline of the Lord’s Supper. He accepted that his view had changed but insisted that the position was consistent with “nearly all evangelical pastors in our language”.⁵³

Whether this new position was consistent with Calvin and the French Confession is perhaps less clear. On the one hand, the Confession is unambiguous on the need for discipline; but on the other, it makes no explicit provision concerning whether a minister should refuse to celebrate the Supper in a church that does not practice discipline. In a similar vein, Calvin was very clear that the Supper was for believers alone: “Christ is too unworthily torn apart if his body, lifeless and powerless, is prostituted to unbelievers”;⁵⁴ but he also stressed that the participation of unbelievers did not nullify the “truth and effectiveness” of the sacrament for those who came with faith.⁵⁵

Accordingly, there is no reason to doubt that the content of “*Qui Doit Communier?*” was entirely consistent with the French Confession, Calvin and Monod’s later beliefs.⁵⁶ It was his decision to refuse to preside over Whitsunday communion that is more difficult to reconcile with his later conduct. We must remember, however, that Monod felt himself to have been peculiarly “enlightened” by God in making this decision and that it related to the “exceptional circumstances” that pertained in Lyons.⁵⁷ It is therefore

⁵⁰ Cochrane, *Reformed Confessions*, 156.

⁵¹ It is commonly assumed that the first draft was prepared by Calvin, Beza and Viret (Ibid., 138).

⁵² Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.7.6.

⁵³ Monod, *Sermons Première Série*, 266.

⁵⁴ Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.17.33.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Even though he perhaps regretted the style; Pressensé comments: “Adophe Monod... afterwards admitted that he had gone too far in this sermon” (*Contemporary Portraits*, 176).

⁵⁷ Monod, *Life and Letters*, 90.

unfair to compare it with his later conduct in Paris and to accuse him of inconsistency and departing from the confessional standards. As we shall see, Monod held very closely to the Confession right up until his death.

III. Reflections in Les Adieux on the Nature of the Lord's Supper

In the final part of this article we will examine Monod's teaching on the Supper in his final sermons, *Les Adieux*. In twelve out of the twenty-five sermons Monod either alluded to or taught on the sacrament. Its prominence was undoubtedly due to the Supper being celebrated immediately prior to each of the sermons. Since Monod's teaching was largely devotional and scattered over a large number of sermons, we will examine the material thematically. We will also look at a small number of Monod's earlier sermons and writings in order to see the continuity of his views.

1. Frequency of Observation

Monod began his sermon on "Communion with Christ" by observing how much "sweetness" and "fruit" he had found through taking communion frequently during his illness.⁵⁸ He lamented the infrequency with which it was celebrated in the Reformed Church of France and suggested that it may have been this infrequency that had given rise to the strange ideas about the sacrament that had proliferated in his day.

Monod considered his desire for frequent observation to be entirely in keeping with Calvin. He said:

Calvin said somewhere that communion should be celebrated at least every Sunday. Note that "at least". If every Sunday is *at least*, what then is *at most*? According to Calvin (and this refers rather clearly to the Book of Acts) at most is to take it as the first Christians took it: to take it every day, from house to house following the family meal.⁵⁹

It is doubtful that this is a fair representation of Calvin. While it is true that Calvin urged more frequent observation of the Lord's Supper, describing the view that it should only be observed once a year as "a veritable invention of the devil",⁶⁰ he maintained that Scripture did not set down any express requirement as to its frequency. Calvin would have liked the Supper to have been observed weekly in Geneva,⁶¹ but this was overruled by the Council in

⁵⁸ Adolphe Monod, *Living in the Hope of Glory*, ed. Constance K. Walker, trans. C. Walker (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2003), 63.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁶⁰ Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.17.46.

⁶¹ Calvin's view that the Supper should be celebrated "at least once a week" is found in *Ibid.*, 4.17.43; "Articles Concerning the Organization of the Church and Worship at Geneva Proposed

favour of monthly observance.⁶² Monod's claim that Calvin would have favoured daily communion in the family home is highly doubtful for two reasons. Firstly, Calvin was clear that the daily breaking of bread referred to in Acts 2:46 did not describe the Lord's Supper but was rather a reference to the thrifty sharing of food among the disciples.⁶³ Secondly, Calvin insisted that the right administration of the sacraments cannot stand apart from the Word,⁶⁴ and thus, as chapter 27:4 of the WCF makes explicit, the sacraments are only to be dispensed by a Minister of the Word, lawfully ordained.

Although Monod may have overstepped in claiming that Calvin favoured daily communion from house to house, both Calvin and Monod sought more frequent communion for the same reason – so that the sacrament might be better understood.⁶⁵ And it seems that they were in agreement as to what that understanding was.

2. The French Confession

As we noted in our discussion of “*Qui Doit Communier?*”, Monod sought to expound the doctrine of the Lord's Supper in a manner consistent with the French Confession. This approach continued throughout his ministry. In his Easter sermon of 1855, he preached on John 11:25-26 and quoted indirectly from article 37 when explaining the manner in which the Supper brings the resurrection into view.⁶⁶ Just six months later, in “Communion with Christ” Monod quoted extensively from articles 36-38 of the Confession.⁶⁷ He described the words as “beautiful” and said that they “express just what I would like to tell you myself”.⁶⁸

Since the Confession bears the hallmarks of Calvin's contribution, Monod was teaching not just consistently with the Confession but also with Calvin's doctrine. This is significant because, at the same time as Monod was expounding the doctrine, Charles Hodge (with whose writings Monod was

by Ministers at the Council January 16, 1537”, in *Calvin: Theological Treatises*, Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia, Pa.: Westminster Press, 1954), 49.

⁶² Robert Letham, *The Lord's Supper* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2001), 37, 58.

⁶³ John Calvin, *Calvin's Bible Commentaries: Acts, Part I*, trans. John King (Forgotten Books, 1847), 104.

⁶⁴ Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.17.39, 4.14.11.

⁶⁵ See: Calvin, “Short Treatise”, 153; Monod, *Hope of Glory*, 64-65.

⁶⁶ Adolphe Monod, *An Undivided Love: Loving and Living for Christ*, ed. Constance K. Walker, trans. Constance K. Walker (Vestavia Hills, AL: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2009), 127.

⁶⁷ Although some words were omitted at the beginning and end of the articles, this seems to have been done to facilitate the oral presentation of the Confession in the sermon. There is no suggestion that he derogated from any part of it.

⁶⁸ Monod, *Hope of Glory*, 65.

familiar)⁶⁹ was describing it as an “uncongenial foreign element” in Reformed theology; and a little later in the same century Robert Dabney described it as “not only incomprehensible but impossible”.⁷⁰ In deciding to follow Calvin and the Confession, Monod set off on a very different path to his North American contemporaries.⁷¹ As we shall see, this manifested itself in a number of significant ways.

3. *The relationship between sign and reality*

Article 37 of the French Confession states: “We believe... that in the Lord's Supper, as well as in baptism, God gives us really and in fact that which he there sets forth to us; and that consequently with these signs is given the true possession and enjoyment of that which they present to us.”⁷² This echoes Calvin's teaching on the matter: “[T]he sacraments of the Lord ought not and cannot at all be separated from their reality and substance... If God cannot deceive or lie, it follows that he performs all that it signifies.”⁷³

We find the same understanding of the relationship between sign and reality in Monod. Not only did he cite article 37 of the Confession in “Communion with Christ”,⁷⁴ he also spoke of communion bringing the promise of union with Christ “into view, placing it in our hands and before our eyes.”⁷⁵ This was in stark contrast to Dabney and Hodge who described the Supper as a “commemorative seal”,⁷⁶ a sign that merely presented the “efficacy and virtue”

⁶⁹ Monod had translated Hodge's commentary on Romans into French (Archibald Alexander Hodge, *The Life of Charles Hodge - Professor in the Theological Seminary, Princeton, N.J.* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1880), 277). While Adolphe never met Hodge, his elder brother, Frédéric, had spent time with him in 1826 (*Ibid.*, 110).

⁷⁰ Charles Hodge, “Review of John Williamson Nevin, *The Mystical Presence: A Vindication of the Reformed or Calvinistic Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*”, *The Princeton Review* 20 (1848): 251; Robert Lewis Dabney, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1972), 811.

⁷¹ At the same time in Scotland, William Cunningham referred to the doctrine as “perhaps the greatest blot on the history of Calvin's labours as a public instructor” (*The Reformers and the Theology of the Reformation* (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1967), 240).

⁷² Cochrane, *Reformed Confessions*, 157.

⁷³ Calvin, “Short Treatise”, 123. See also Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.14.16; John Calvin, *The Gospel According to John*, ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance, trans. T.H.L. Parker, Calvin's New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1961), 170; John Calvin, *The First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance, trans. Johnston, William B., Calvin's New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1996), 245-246.

⁷⁴ Monod, *Hope of Glory*, 65-66.

⁷⁵ “I am the Resurrection and the Life” in Monod, *An Undivided Love*, 127. In a similar vein, in his farewell sermon on “Seeing the Invisible” Monod spoke of the Supper putting “the object of our faith... vividly before our eyes” (*Hope of Glory*, 94).

⁷⁶ Dabney, *Systematic Theology*, 801.

of Christ's work.⁷⁷ Using Brian Gerrish's taxonomy, Dabney and Hodge held exclusively to "symbolic memorialism" – the view that the Supper is a sign that points to something that has happened in the past.⁷⁸ While both Monod and Calvin agreed that the Supper signified a past event, they refused to accept that this exhausted its significance.⁷⁹ Calvin saw both "symbolic parallelism" (God working the reality alongside the sign) and "symbolic instrumentalism" (God bringing the reality about through the sign) in the sacraments.⁸⁰ The Confession appears to accept the former and this is the emphasis we find in Monod's preaching.

4. Feeding on Christ

What is the reality that takes place alongside the sign? The Confession is clear; it is our spiritual sustenance through feeding on the body and blood of the ascended Christ. Article 36 states, "we believe that by the secret and incomprehensible power of his Spirit [Christ] feeds and strengthens us with the substance of his body and his blood." That this takes place alongside the Supper is clear from article 37: "all who bring a pure faith like a vessel, to the sacred table of Christ, receive truly that of which it is a sign; for the body and the blood of Jesus Christ gives food and drink to the soul, no less than bread and wine nourish the body."

Monod agreed that this lay at the heart of the Supper. In his sermon "I am the Resurrection and the Life", Monod discussed the promise of life in John 6 and asked: "[W]hat does [communion] show us if it is not that the One who gave his flesh and blood for us is also the One whose flesh and blood, when they are received by us as food and drink, will surely communicate this life and immortality to us?"⁸¹ This emphasis is again apparent throughout the Farewells. In "Measureless Word, Measureless God" Monod begins, "I am so happy and grateful to be able to receive with you the body and blood of our Savior – that flesh which is 'real food' and that blood which is 'real drink' (see

⁷⁷ Hodge, "Review of Mystical Presence", 245; Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. III (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003), 641.

⁷⁸ B. A. Gerrish, *Grace and Gratitude: the Eucharistic Theology of John Calvin* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1993), 167.

⁷⁹ Monod wrote of communion placing "before our eyes a remembrance of the deepest joy that ever was" ("Rescue from the Depths of Sin" in *Hope of Glory*, 12); and he also described the Supper as "recalling all that God has given us in his beloved Son" ("Two Natures of Christ" in *Ibid.*, 18). Similarly, Calvin wrote of the Supper "exercising us in the remembrance of Christ's death" (*Institutes*, 4.17.37).

⁸⁰ See: Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.17.3, 4.17.10; Calvin, "Short Treatise", 147; and my discussion in: Ralph Cunnington, "Calvin's Doctrine of the Lord's Supper", *Westminster Theological Journal* 73 (2011): 220-221.

⁸¹ Monod, *An Undivided Love*, 127.

John 6:55)".⁸² Similarly, in "Demonstrating God's Love", Monod begins by asking God not to withdraw from him the consolation of each Sunday receiving "the body and blood of my Savior, which strengthens my body and soul in him."⁸³ This message of gratitude for spiritual nourishment is repeated on two further occasions.⁸⁴ Monod, like Calvin before him, believed that, in the Supper, Christ feeds all those who come to him with faith.⁸⁵

Calvin's teaching on this was subjected to sustained criticism by both Hodge and Dabney. They focused particularly on Calvin's exegesis of John 6, arguing that "eating" in this context simply meant believing and that Calvin's reading led to "the unscriptural doctrine that a soul cannot be saved without the sacraments".⁸⁶ I have responded to these criticisms elsewhere and shall not repeat my arguments here except to note that, in relation to the second, Dabney seriously misrepresented both Calvin and (indirectly) Monod.⁸⁷ The criticism rests upon the assumption that Calvin believed Jesus to be referring directly to the Lord's Supper in John 6, but neither Calvin nor Monod held to this. Calvin expressly acknowledged that John 6 did not refer to the Lord's Supper but to the "continual communication which we have apart from the reception of the Lord's Supper".⁸⁸ His point was simply that "there is nothing said [in John 6] that is not figured and actually presented to believers in the Lord's Supper."⁸⁹ Monod agreed: "[John 6:52-58] does not refer to the Lord's Supper. For if it did, one must say, according to verses 53 and 54, that everyone who receives the communion has eternal life, which is contrary to Scripture. That which is here spoken of it *spiritual* communion with Jesus Christ, which is realized by faith."⁹⁰

5. Union with Christ

The central point at which Calvin (and Monod) departed from Hodge and Dabney was on their understanding of union with Christ, particularly in its relation to the Lord's Supper. In words echoing Calvin, Monod insisted that we receive nothing while we remain outside of Christ.⁹¹ In "All in Jesus

⁸² Monod, *Hope of Glory*, 3.

⁸³ Ibid., 80.

⁸⁴ See "The View from Beneath the Cross" in Ibid., 104; "When God Seems Absent" in Ibid., 112.

⁸⁵ Calvin, *1 Corinthians*, 246.

⁸⁶ See particularly Hodge, "Review of Mystical Presence", 247; Dabney, *Systematic Theology*, 812-813.

⁸⁷ Cunningham, "Calvin's Doctrine of the Lord's Supper".

⁸⁸ Calvin, *John*, 169.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 170.

⁹⁰ Monod, *Life and Letters*, 283.

⁹¹ For this point in relation to the resurrection, see: "I am the Resurrection and the Life" in Monod, *An Undivided Love*, 112-115. In Calvin, see particularly *Institutes*, 3.1.1.

Christ” Monod declared: “When we possess Jesus Christ by a true faith, we possess nothing less than God himself, and in him eternal life... Having Christ we have all things, but deprived of him we have absolutely nothing.”⁹²

The concept of union that Monod had in mind was a union with Christ’s humanity. When speaking about perseverance through suffering Monod declared, “it is through close union with the Lord, it is through the possession of his body and blood that we are called to do this work”.⁹³ This same emphasis is evident in his description of the invisible grace which is displayed in the Supper. It has two parts: firstly there is the atoning sacrifice of Christ’s death; and secondly there is “this dead Jesus penetrating inside of us and nourishing us; communicating life to us by his flesh and blood” making “us to be participants in his nature just as he is a participant in the Father’s nature.”⁹⁴ Such statements clearly echo Calvin’s view that it is Christ’s flesh which acts as “a channel to pour out to us the life which resides intrinsically... in His divinity”.⁹⁵ All this is a far cry from Hodge and Dabney’s conception of union, which bifurcated the forensic and spiritual aspects,⁹⁶ and effectively equated union with faith.⁹⁷

Monod’s understanding meant that it was necessary for Christ’s humanity to be present in the Supper while Christ himself remained in heaven. He recognized that a tension existed here, observing that “[t]hough absent, he is present with us, and more present being absent than if he were here.”⁹⁸ It is not clear that Monod entirely resolved this tension although he recognized that the Holy Spirit had a seminal role to play.⁹⁹ It is quite likely

⁹² Monod, *Hope of Glory*, 46-47.

⁹³ “All by the Holy Spirit” in *Ibid.*, 37.

⁹⁴ “Benefits Hidden in Pain” in *Ibid.*, 100.

⁹⁵ Calvin, *John*, 167; See also John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians*, ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance, trans. T.H.L. Parker, Calvin’s New Testament Commentaries 11 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1965), 209.

⁹⁶ Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, III:105-106; Dabney, *Systematic Theology*, 613-614.

⁹⁷ Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, III:104-106; Both Hodge and Dabney explicitly repudiated the notion of a union with Christ’s humanity or with the substance of the Godhead in Christ. Dabney wrote: “We see nothing in the Bible to warrant the belief of a literal conjunction of the substance of the Godhead in Christ with the substance of the believer’s soul; much less of a literal, local conjunction of the whole mediatorial person, including the humanity, with the soul.” (*Systematic Theology*, 616). Hodge agreed, writing that, “believers are one body and members of one another, not in virtue of their common human nature, nor because they all partake of the humanity of Christ, but because they all have one Spirit.” (“Review of Mystical Presence”, 246). For criticisms of Hodge’s view, see: William B. Evans, *Imputation and Impartation: Union with Christ in American Reformed Theology* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008), 220-227; Cunningham, “Calvin’s Doctrine of the Lord’s Supper”, 233-235.

⁹⁸ “All by the Holy Spirit” in Monod, *Hope of Glory*, 37.

⁹⁹ See, for example: “Communion with Christ” in *Ibid.*, 67-68. It should be noted that Monod comes close here to seeing the Spirit as the presence of Christ himself - a view much closer to

that Monod simply accepted Calvin's explanation of the real spiritual presence of Christ through the believer's spiritual ascent into heaven.¹⁰⁰ There are two pieces of evidence that support this. Firstly, it is the view that is reflected (albeit in abridged form) in article 36 of the French Confession which Monod quoted in "Communion with Christ". Secondly, and more significantly, it appears to be the view he expounded in his Christmas Day sermon of 1851 titled "The Incarnation of the Son of God: The Realization of the Invisible World".¹⁰¹ Monod's text was John 3:11-13 but towards the end of the sermon Monod turned to consider what relation Jacob's ladder bore to the opening of the heavens at Stephen's martyrdom. Monod exclaimed: "The ladder set up from earth to heaven, is no longer needed; the soul that Jesus Christ incarnate redeemed by his blood and baptized by his Spirit, touches and ascends to heaven, by a spiritual ascension... Heaven is open, seized, possessed by 'the faith of Jesus' and by the light of the Holy Spirit."¹⁰² Monod clearly understood that it was the *incarnate* Christ who had opened up the way to heaven – to the invisible world – and just one paragraph later he related this to the sacrament: "Well, let our Christmas and our communion this day be for us that which it was for Stephen – a solemn day of contemplation. Let the Holy Spirit fill us in our turn, let him show us Jesus seated at the right hand of the Father in the open heavens... They are open, I tell you, for us as for him."¹⁰³ On its own, this would probably not be enough to link Monod's thought with Calvin's but when we turn to Calvin's commentary on Jacob's ladder, clear connections emerge. Commenting on Gen. 28:12, Calvin writes: "It is Christ alone who joins heaven to earth. He alone is Mediator. He it is through whom the fullness of all heavenly gifts flows down to us and *through whom we on our part may ascend to God*."¹⁰⁴ Just five verses later Calvin connects this ascension to the Lord's Supper: "the sacraments may be called the gates of heaven because they admit us to God's presence".¹⁰⁵ The parallels between Monod and Calvin's thought are striking and they give us good grounds for concluding that Monod also believed that we feed on Christ in the Supper through a spiritual ascent into heaven.

Hodge than to Calvin. The comment is, however, brief and it would be wrong to read too much into it.

¹⁰⁰ See in particular: Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.17.10, 4.17.31; Calvin, *1 Corinthians*, 247.

¹⁰¹ Adolphe Monod, *Le Trois Sermons De Noël* (Paris: Librairie De Ch Meyrueis et Comp, 1863), 87-111. For a study of the sermon see: Old, *Reading and Preaching*, 6:25-31.

¹⁰² Monod, *Le Trois Sermons De Noël*, 109 (my translation). See also: Old, *Reading and Preaching*, 6:30.

¹⁰³ Monod, *Le Trois Sermons De Noël*, 110.

¹⁰⁴ John Calvin, *Genesis*, ed. Alister McGrath and J. I. Packer, *The Crossway Classic Commentaries 1* (Leicester: IVP, 2001), 249 (my emphasis).

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 251.

6. *The Place of Faith*

In agreement with Calvin and the Confession, Monod insisted that the grace received in the Supper resides in Christ and is made efficacious through the Spirit.¹⁰⁶ Moreover, he emphasised that it is received by faith alone: “we should receive him in faith, in particular in the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, which puts the object of our faith so vividly before our eyes.”¹⁰⁷ This emphasis upon faith is unsurprising given that it was the same concern that motivated him to preach “Qui Doit Communier?” at the beginning of his ministry.

7. *Monod’s ecumenical concerns*

We have already noted that Monod invited various pastors from other Protestant denominations to preside over communion at his bedside meditations. This was a manifestation of his broader concern for Christian unity which also contributed to his decision to remain in the Reformed Church during the crisis of 1849. Shortly after the first meeting of the Evangelical Alliance, Monod had the opportunity to share communion with members from various denominations and he described the experience as “a touching and solemn scene which I shall never forget”.¹⁰⁸ His desire for the sacraments to unite rather than divide was also evident in the comments he made following his quotation from the French Confession in “Communion with Christ”:

To this admirable quotation I would only add that after Pastor Verney read it one day to several Lutheran friends who were discussing communion with him, his friends said, ‘That is the exact expression of our faith’, to which Mr. Verney replied that these words were taken from the confession of faith of the reformed churches. This proves that by holding strictly to Scripture, as is done here, faith and love prevail in the field of controversy.¹⁰⁹

This is an intriguing comment. One of the major criticisms leveled against Calvin’s doctrine of the Lord’s Supper is that it was borne out of a desire to conciliate Luther and the Lutherans.¹¹⁰ While it is certainly true that Calvin hoped that his doctrine could be embraced by all sides, it is a mistake to

¹⁰⁶ “Communion with Christ” in Monod, *Hope of Glory*, 66-68. For Calvin on this, see: Calvin, “Short Treatise”, 149, 157; Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.17.5. Also see article 38 of the Confession (Cochrane, *Reformed Confessions*, 157).

¹⁰⁷ “Seeing the Invisible” in Monod, *Hope of Glory*, 94. See also “Communion with Christ” in *Ibid.*, 68.

¹⁰⁸ Monod, *Life and Letters*, 155.

¹⁰⁹ Monod, *Hope of Glory*, 66.

¹¹⁰ See for example: Cunningham, *The Reformers and the Theology of the Reformation*, 240; Hodge, “Review of Mystical Presence”, 230.

assume that he conflated it with the doctrine of the Lutherans.¹¹¹ Calvin was very clear about where he disagreed with the Lutherans, describing consubstantiation as a “monstrous dogma” and a “damnable error”.¹¹² This makes the response of the Lutherans in Monod's sermon rather surprising. It is possible that they had already rejected the doctrine of consubstantiation and had found Calvin's doctrine persuasive. Alternatively they may have been unsure about exactly what their own church standards taught. If this was what had happened, then Monod was absolutely right to rejoice at their having been convinced of the Scriptural integrity of the Confession. If, however, Monod believed that the Confession was broad enough to accommodate the Lutheran doctrine as well as the Reformed, then this is highly dubious. Article 36 of the Confession explicitly states that Christ remains in heaven until his return and that the feeding that takes place is “by the secret and incomprehensible power of his Spirit”.¹¹³ There is no room in this wording for the Lutheran doctrines of ubiquity or consubstantiation. On balance, and particularly in light of Monod's teaching elsewhere, it is highly unlikely that Monod adopted a broad reading of the Confession. Far more probable is that his brief anecdote expressed a desire which he shared with Calvin; that the French Confession articulated a biblically faithful position around which all parties could unite.

IV. Conclusion

The Lord's Supper played a seminal role in Adolphe Monod's ministry and particularly in the sermons for which he is best known. While contemporaries in North America were rejecting Calvin's doctrine in favour of a modified Zwinglian view, Monod remained committed to it. For Monod, communion was “the Lord's love feast” and it was a feast he could not bear to see profaned through distribution to unbelievers.¹¹⁴ He cherished the spiritual nourishment that the Supper provides and it was quite fitting that he should spend his final months expounding and celebrating it with his family and co-workers in Christ.

¹¹¹ See my arguments in: Cunningham, “Calvin's Doctrine of the Lord's Supper”, 223-224.

¹¹² Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.17.30; Calvin, “Short Treatise”, 159.

¹¹³ Cochrane, *Reformed Confessions*, 157.

¹¹⁴ Monod, *Hope of Glory*, 161.

RESPONSE TO JOHN STEVENS, “NOT REFORMED ENOUGH: CRITIQUING CONTEMPORARY PRACTICE OF THE LORD’S SUPPER”, *FOUNDATIONS* 68

Robert Strivens^{*}

This article is a response to John Stevens’ contribution to “Foundations 68” (Spring 2015), in which he argues that the NT views the Lord’s Supper as a new covenant community celebration meal. It argues from systematics, church history and biblical exegesis that the Lord’s Supper does not require a full meal but that, as one of the two new covenant sacraments, it is a visible sign which points to gracious spiritual realities and by which believers participate in those realities by faith. It is argued that John over-emphasises the horizontal aspects of the Supper at the expense of the vertical element by which believers together in the Supper come to Christ himself and partake of him by faith. At the same time, it agrees with some of John’s reservations as to the manner in which the Supper is sometimes conducted in evangelical churches, particularly to an overly morose approach which also does not reflect the corporate nature of the Supper. Reform in these areas would be most welcome.

John Stevens has written a carefully argued and thought-provoking article on the contemporary evangelical understanding and practice of the Lord’s Supper.¹ John challenges us to re-think biblically our theology of what is involved in the Supper and how we go about celebrating it. This article is intended to be a friendly response, disagreeing with and critiquing some important aspects of what John says, but agreeing with other parts of his argument. In particular, I agree that the Lord’s Supper as currently practised in evangelical churches needs re-examination and reform. It is true that, in the way in which the Supper is often conducted, an overly individualistic view of the Supper prevails along with a rather morose atmosphere. We need, as John cogently argues, to regain a much greater sense of the corporate nature of the event, together with a focus on the joy of the work

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¹ John Stevens, “Not Reformed Enough: Critiquing Contemporary Practice of the Lord’s Supper”, *Foundations* 68 (Spring 2015): 26-56.

accomplished by Christ in his death and resurrection. John's description, at the end of his article, of how City Church Birmingham at one time celebrated the Supper, in the context of a meal, is in many ways an attractive one. At the same time, I have concerns about John's arguments on the nature of what is happening in the Supper and it is these concerns that I want principally to articulate in this response.

In the abstract at the start of his article, John states that his contention is "that we need to recover the New Testament practice of the Lord's Supper as a community celebration meal of the New Covenant, eaten in the presence of the Lord Jesus as he dwells with his people by his Spirit in the new temple that is his church".² While I can agree with this statement as far as it goes, I believe, in essence, that John's understanding of the Supper as he expounds it in his article:

- wrongly insists on the Lord's Supper as involving a full meal, and
- over-emphasises the horizontal element in the Supper at the expense of the vertical

I will deal with each of these points in turn, taking in historical, exegetical and theological points and addressing some other more minor issues of agreement and disagreement along the way. First, though, the debate needs to be set in the wider context of biblical teaching on the nature and purpose of sacraments.

Sacraments in Scripture

Not everyone likes to use the term "sacrament", as it can be reminiscent of ritualist, high church or Roman Catholic theology. The term need not, however, be used or understood in this way. It is used in Protestant Reformed theology without ritualist connotations and that is the way in which I shall use it here. We need not avoid the term simply because we do not find it in Scripture: the church has, in the course of its task of defending and articulating biblical truth, had to develop many terms that are not themselves in the Bible. An obvious example is "Trinity". Such terms are simply a shorthand, convenient way to refer to biblical truth.

Throughout the Old and New Testaments, we see God providing his people with signs and symbols which point to aspects of his gracious acts towards them. One of the clearest examples is circumcision. Male circumcision was required for all those in covenant relationship with the Lord, from Abraham onwards. It was an essential part of that relationship,

² p. 26.

yet it was a symbol, a sign which pointed to the reality of God's gracious work in the heart. It was a seal of the believer's faith: an outward and visible symbol confirming the reality of an inward work of grace. The institution of the Passover under Moses can be understood in the same way: the symbolic element of the blood on the doorposts was connected with the promise of deliverance from the angel of destruction, with the meal providing a reminder in future years of the gracious deliverance which the Lord accomplished for his people in bringing them out of Egypt. An earlier sign with sacramental significance, as some would argue, was the rainbow: a symbol of God's grace to the world in never again bringing a universal flood upon it. Again, the sign – the bow in the heavens – points to a gracious reality. Here, it is clearly connected with a promise, in the same way that circumcision was connected with the promises of the covenant: in the case of the rainbow, the promise that the Lord would never again destroy the whole world in that way. Still earlier, some Reformed theologians have argued that sacramental significance can be seen in the tree of life in Eden, a sign (real enough in itself) pointing to and connected with the promise of life that God made to Adam. In each case, we find a sign or symbol, pointing to the gracious acts of God towards his people, connected with a promise in the context of a covenant which he makes with them.

Coming to the New Testament, Protestant theology has generally identified just two sacraments: baptism and the Lord's Supper. Each is a sign or symbol: like circumcision, or the rainbow, it does not, in and of itself, accomplish that to which it points. But it is a visible, material sign pointing to a gracious work of God in his people and connected with a covenantal promise. Baptism points to the washing from sin and regeneration; the Lord's Supper points to the death of Christ for his people. Baptism is connected with the promise of forgiveness of sins upon repentance and faith in Christ. It happens (or should happen) to a believer just once. The Lord's Supper, as I argue below, is connected with the believer's feeding by faith upon the crucified Christ as his or her spiritual nourishment. It is to be repeated throughout the believer's life. There is thus in Scripture, Old and New Testament, a succession of sacraments, of visible signs and symbols established by the Lord for the benefit of his covenant people, pointing to spiritual realities connected with his gracious promises and work on their behalf. It is in this context that the sacrament of the Lord's Supper needs to be understood.

Should the Lord's Supper be a full meal?

John argues that the Lord's Supper is a meal, in the sense of a full meal. It is, he says, not simply a snack or the sharing of a few symbolic items, but the

kind of meal that we would normally eat as "dinner". The Lord's Supper should therefore involve a proper meal, eaten together as a communal celebration by the whole church. The Supper must consequently consist of more than simply the bread and the wine, though it does not omit those elements: "it is the meal as a whole, incorporating the sharing of the bread and the cup, that constitutes the sacrament of the Lord's Supper".³ John's argument seems to lead to the rather startling conclusion that the vast majority of churches today are probably not holding the Lord's Supper at all, in any truly biblical sense, for "the Lord's Supper is never truly celebrated when there is no real presence of a supper!"⁴

John's argument for this contention is that the Greek word used in the New Testament for the "supper" of the Lord's Supper, *deipnon*, is the normal word used to designate the main meal of the day. The forerunners of the Lord's Supper – the Passover and the Last Supper – were full meals and the historical evidence, both in the Bible and elsewhere, shows that the early church treated it as such. Furthermore, John argues that Paul's teaching about the Supper in 1 Cor 11:17-34 supports his contention that the Supper consisted of a full meal, not simply of the elements shared in the context of a meal.⁵ I will address each of those points in turn.

deipnon, "meal"

It is certainly true that the Greek word *deipnon* means "meal", usually in the sense of a full meal or main meal of the day. Words, however, gain their precise meaning in a particular context. In the sole occurrence of this word in the New Testament to refer to the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11:20), it is qualified by the adjective *kuriakon*, meaning "belonging to the Lord, the Lord's". This in itself could indicate that we are dealing with a technical term, as used today when we refer to "the Lord's Supper", and that we cannot necessarily conclude from the simple use of the word *deipnon* that a full meal is required. The context in which the Lord's Supper was instituted, at the Last Supper, supports the view that it is the elements of the broken bread and the shared cup which constitute the Lord's Supper and not the entire meal. This seems clear from the Gospel accounts of the Last Supper. In Matthew's account, it seems that Jesus and the disciples had reclined for the meal and were already eating at the point at which Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it and shared it with the disciples, followed by the cup.⁶ Matthew (and the other synoptic accounts) clearly distinguish the Lord's blessing and sharing out of the bread and the cup from the other elements of the meal. It

³ p. 33.

⁴ p. 33.

⁵ pp. 30-33.

⁶ Matt 26:20, 26. See also Mk 14:17, 22.

seems fairly clear that the intention is to mark out these elements – the bread and the cup – as the significant elements for the purposes of what later came to be known as the Lord's Supper. It is not to the meal as a whole that Jesus refers in the words of institution, but to the bread and to the cup. It is, specifically, the bread which he refers to as his "body" and the cup as his "blood". Matthew and Mark seem to underline this by separating the account of the blessing and sharing of bread and cup (in 26:26-29 in Matthew's account, for example) from the earlier statement (in vv. 20-21 of Matt 26) that Jesus and his disciples had reclined to eat the meal together. Luke's account and the similar account of Paul in 1 Cor 11, though somewhat different in certain respects, are perfectly consistent with this understanding. The meal is the background and context in which the Lord shares out the elements, but it is to the bread and the cup particularly that the synoptic accounts and Paul accord significance.

History

It is true, as John says, that the Passover and the Last Supper were meals and both form the biblical background and context for the institution of the Lord's Supper. However, the fact that the forerunners of the Lord's Supper were meals, though potentially indicative, cannot definitively settle the question of the precise nature of the Supper. Although related to the Passover, the Supper is clearly a new covenant institution. Its nature and how we are to practise it must be taken, primarily, from the data of the New Testament rather than from those of its Old Testament forerunners. The fact that the Passover was a meal cannot of itself determine that the Lord's Supper too must be a full meal.

John also argues that, in and since New Testament times, the Lord's Supper was celebrated in the context of a meal. This is undoubtedly true, though it is noteworthy also that the Christian church has practised the celebration of the Lord's Supper separately from a full meal for a very long time. Within a hundred years after the close of the New Testament age, there is evidence that the celebration of the Lord's Supper was being separated from the sharing of meals for fellowship. Justin Martyr in Rome, in the middle of the second century, described how, after a baptism,

there is then brought to the president of the brethren bread and a cup of wine mixed with water; and he taking them, gives praise and glory to the Father of the universe, through the name of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, and offers thanks... The deacons give to each of those present to partake of the bread and wine mixed with water.

There is no mention of a full meal here, or in the following paragraphs which describe the regular celebration of the Eucharist and of the Lord's Day

services.⁷ I suggest that we need to be very slow to overthrow what has been the practice of the church for such a very long time, unless we are sure that the Scripture requires us to do so. It is my argument that the Scriptures in this case give us no such warrant.

Though it is true, therefore, that in New Testament times and for a period thereafter, the church seems to have celebrated the Lord's Supper in the context of a full fellowship meal, this does not mean that the Bible defines that full meal to be the Lord's Supper nor does it mean that Scripture requires us to celebrate the Lord's Supper as such.

1 Corinthians 11

John finally argues that the words of institution as recorded by the apostle Paul in 1 Cor 11:17-34 indicate that "the entire meal constituted the Lord's Supper". He points to the words "after supper", which Paul inserts when he refers to the cup but which were not there in the previous two verses referring to the breaking of the bread. John infers from this that the "bread is shared at the beginning of the meal, and the cup is then shared 'after supper'".⁸ Matthew's and Mark's accounts however seem to contradict John's assertion. According to them, it was during, or maybe towards the end, of the meal that both elements were shared at the Last Supper, bread as well as cup (see, e.g. Matt 26:20, 21, 26). Howard Marshall says that the "argument that the breaking of bread and the drinking of the cup were separated by the length of the meal is not convincing".⁹ Paul's use of the phrase "after supper" in the context of the cup but not the bread is reflected in Luke's account of the Last Supper (22:20). As Matthew and Mark seem to rule out the idea that the bread was shared at the start of the meal, it may be that all that is meant by this phrase in Luke and Paul is that the cup was shared at the end of the meal, with the bread having been shared a little earlier, but not, it would seem, at the beginning of the meal.

In conclusion, it would seem that the elements identified by the Lord Jesus, in the synoptic gospel accounts, and by the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 11 as making up the Lord's Supper are the broken bread and the cup, each shared among the believers present. Whether that is done in the context of a fuller meal is not, I suggest, the point: it is the sharing of those elements themselves which constitutes the Lord's Supper. Whether or not done in the context of a fuller meal, it is to the bread and the cup specifically that the phrase *kuriakon deipnon*, Lord's Supper, refers.

⁷ Justin, *First Apology*, 65-67.

⁸ p. 32.

⁹ I Howard Marshall, *Last Supper & Lord's Supper* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1980), 172.

This understanding of the “meal” of the Lord’s Supper coincides fully with the theology of sacrament briefly outlined above. The meal, the *deipnon*, is a sign or symbol, pointing to a spiritual reality connected with the Lord’s covenant promises to his people. The point of it is not, as John argues, a social experience of fellowship with God’s people in Christ’s presence, so requiring a full meal. The symbolic significance of the Lord’s Supper is then lost – it becomes its own reality and ceases to point to anything else. Rather, we can see the visible, material signs of the bread and the cup in the Supper as pointing to the spiritual realities of the broken body and shed blood of Christ. It is these elements that are significant for the Lord’s Supper, not the social event of a full fellowship meal.

Horizontal or vertical?

The biblical requirement, as I see it, to distinguish (though not necessarily separate) the bread and the cup, for the purposes of the Lord’s Supper, from any accompanying meal thus plays against John’s characterisation of the Supper as a “community celebration meal”,¹⁰ a characterisation requiring that the Supper itself constitute a full meal. This brings us to the second of the two points with which I took issue at the start of this response. John argues strongly that the Lord’s Supper is a community celebration meal in the presence of Christ dwelling among his people. There is a strong horizontal element, therefore, in the Supper. It is, crucially, in the Supper that the people of God are to express their unity and where all social, racial and similar distinctions are to be shown to be of no consequence for those who are joined to Jesus Christ. That, argues John, is why the abuses at Corinth were so serious: the disregard of the poor by the wealthy cut right across the very point of the Lord’s Supper and that is why Paul rebukes them so strongly and, he says, why there has been such dreadful consequences for them (1 Cor 11:30). That too, John argues, is what Paul has in mind when he urges the Corinthian believers to discern the “body” (v. 29): the body, here, refers to the body of believers in the church rather than to some form of presence of Jesus in the Supper.

With these arguments I largely agree. It is quite clear that there is to be a strong horizontal element in the Lord’s Supper. We celebrate it together, as the local church. It is not an individual rite. That is one reason why Protestants have generally been very wary of offering communion to individuals privately. It is a churchly act, not that of an individual Christian. I wholeheartedly endorse John’s strictures against the overly individualistic manner in which the Lord’s Supper is often shared in evangelical churches today, where all the emphasis appears to be on the individual believer’s

¹⁰ p. 26.

dealings with his or her Lord and there is no, or almost no, focus on the fact that we do this together, as the body of Christ.

These matters need to be urgently addressed. Returning to the New Testament practice of celebrating the Supper in the context of a meal may be one way of addressing this issue, but I do not believe that it is the only way, or indeed that having a meal together would necessarily address the issue at all: after all, we are perfectly capable of expressing our individuality rather than our corporate sense of concern for others, when it comes to eating and drinking. We may, in fact, find ourselves once again in danger of perpetrating the very abuses which Paul seeks to correct in the Corinthian church. Rather, to address the overly individualistic way in which we take the Lord's Supper requires, first and foremost, good, prolonged and consistent teaching on the subject. The matter needs to be addressed, from the pulpit, in small groups, in prayer meetings, at whatever is the most appropriate and effective occasion. The Lord's people need to be shown from the Scriptures the corporate nature of what is happening at the Lord's Supper.

Nevertheless, there are practical changes that can be made as well, to help to bring home the corporate nature of what we are doing. If those participating in the Lord's Supper are relatively few, compared with the size of room in which they are meeting, they can be encouraged to sit closer together, rather than spread out thinly around the entire seating area. A corporate sense can be engendered by a thoughtful and deliberate approach to the singing and prayer elements of the meeting. The use of a loaf which is physically broken by the leader of the meeting during the meeting itself, before being shared out, reminds us that we participate as those who belong to one body (1 Cor 10:16). Again, to have one cup, at least at the front and preferably shared around those participating, reminds us that we are sharing in the one cup of blessing (1 Cor 10:16). The sooner we rid ourselves of the pre-shredded bread and the individual mini-goblets, the better, in my view. An individualistic approach to the Supper is so engrained that a great deal of effort on the part of church leaders and teachers is required to bring us to a more scriptural understanding of the corporate nature of the event.

I largely agree too with John's remarks about the overly morose manner in which the Supper is sometimes celebrated today.¹¹ We can be far too introspective and subjective. We can dwell on our sin and sense of unworthiness to the exclusion of the joy and victory which the cross achieved for us. This too needs to be put right. Believers in former generations often seemed to have a far better sense of the joyfulness of the Lord's Supper, as well as a true sense of repentance. Charles Spurgeon wrote in a communion hymn,

¹¹ pp. 46-47.

What food luxurious loads the board,
 when at His table sits the Lord!
 The wine how rich, the bread how sweet,
 when Jesus deigns the guests to meet!

William Williams spoke of the “unmolested, happy rest, where inward fears are all suppressed”, experienced by the believer at the Supper. Horatius Bonar wrote of “the hour of banquet and of song”, the “heavenly table spread for me; here let me feast”. Allowing for the out-dated style, these writers grasped the essential joy and gladness which should be central to a true celebration of the Supper. Whether we necessarily should have “exuberance”, as John suggests,¹² at an occasion which necessarily does still rightly remind us of our sin and the seriousness of the penalty which Jesus had to pay to redeem us from that sin, it is certainly the case that the note of joy and victory needs to be clearly heard whenever we join together in the Lord’s Supper.

Having said all that, however, I believe that John unduly downplays the vertical element in the Supper. In the Supper, in my view, the Lord’s people together come to the Lord to enjoy communion corporately with him. John’s article seems to lack, or at least underplay, the element of coming to the Lord and enjoying communion with him. John speaks of Christ’s presence with his people at the Supper, but not so much of our communion with him. Indeed, John appears to be reacting against an overly subjective, introspective manner of partaking of the Supper, where perhaps some unusual, personal spiritual feeling or experience is expected. I am not arguing for that. I do, however, believe that in the Supper the Lord’s people should expect to meet with Christ and enjoy fellowship with him, not simply rejoice together in his presence. The Lord’s Supper, in my view, is a corporate coming to Christ, to enjoy him together as his people in joyful communion with him.

I believe that this is clear, in the first place, at the Last Supper itself, where the Lord was ministering to his disciples. They were not simply enjoying a meal together in his presence. They were certainly conscious of one another’s presence there and were no doubt sensitive to the fact that they were there as a body of Jesus’s disciples, not simply as a random collection of individuals. Nevertheless, their focus was not primarily on one another but on Jesus. They had come because he was there and they had come, in that sense, to him. They spoke with him and asked him questions and he spoke to them and instructed them. So it is, or should be, at the Lord’s Supper: the Lord’s people gather to come together to their Lord and commune with him. There is a real experience of the Saviour that takes place, by faith, at the Supper, though this does not necessarily manifest itself as some kind of inner religious feeling or heightened spiritual sense.

¹² p. 47.

It is here, I believe, that the sixth chapter of John's gospel is relevant. I agree with John that that chapter is not "about" the Supper.¹³ The chapter is about faith in Christ: the startling language towards the end of the chapter, about eating the flesh and drinking the blood of the Son of Man (vv. 53-56), is an expansion of earlier verses which speak of the Son of Man as the bread of life and which urge faith in him. However, that does not mean that John 6 is entirely irrelevant to our understanding of the Supper. Without entering into the debate that John recounts between Calvin and Zwingli, I would argue that it is surely difficult to avoid making some connection between the strong language of John 6, particularly vv. 53-56, and the Lord's Supper. Both explicitly concern the body and blood of Christ and both speak, metaphorically but nevertheless truly, of our eating and drinking of them. Just as, in accordance with John 6, we are to come to Christ by faith, so in the Supper too we come together to Christ by faith in him and thereby appropriate him. Without necessarily going all the way with Calvin as to the nature of precisely what occurs in the Supper, it is surely not too much to assert that there is, for those who come in faith, a true partaking of Christ by faith, a real participation in him, in the consuming of the elements. There is of course no change in the constitution of the elements themselves. But there is, no less surely, a real communion with and partaking of Christ himself, by faith, as we partake in the Supper.

The nub of the argument here centres on the language of "participation" in 1 Cor 10:16, which John unpacks at some length in his article.¹⁴ Here, I agree with what John affirms, that in the Supper Jesus is present with his people and that, as they meditate on his work at the cross their faith is strengthened and they are encouraged to press on. "The benefits of the Lord's Supper are appropriated by faith as we hear the gospel word that is made visible to us by the sharing of the bread and the wine."¹⁵ That is all most certainly true and an essential part of what occurs in the Supper. However, John goes on to dispute that the language of "participation" involves "some kind of special mystical communion with Christ by reason of eating the consecrated bread and drinking the consecrated wine".¹⁶ John questions whether "eating the bread and drinking the wine are in themselves the cause of an experienced communion with Christ".¹⁷ Rather, what Paul is arguing in 1 Cor 10 concerns identity and association at the ecclesial level: believers already have a share (participation, *koinonia*) in Christ and, because of that identity, must be careful with whom they associate, particularly in meals of a sacred, or supposedly sacred (where idols are

¹³ pp. 44-46.

¹⁴ pp. 47-54.

¹⁵ p. 47.

¹⁶ p. 47.

¹⁷ p. 48.

concerned) nature. He cites in support of his rejection of the idea that participation here means “a participation in Christ himself through the meal” two of the leading contemporary evangelical commentators on 1 Corinthians, Gordon Fee and Anthony Thiselton.¹⁸

Without denying the existence of an important horizontal element in Paul’s argument in 1 Cor 10:14-22, I find it impossible to eliminate a strong vertical element also in the thrust of what he says there. When Paul speaks in v. 16 of our “participation”, *koinonia*, in the body and blood of Christ, when we partake of the cup and bread, he is certainly affirming that we belong to one another because of our pre-existing unity in Christ. Yet to leave the matter there and exclude from the meaning of the verse any sense of present communion with Christ in the Supper seems unduly reductionistic. The whole context of the passage is that of worship: whether the worship of Christ or the worship of idols. The worship is corporate, but it is nonetheless worship, a vertical activity. We are coming to Christ. In the second half of the passage, where Paul is contrasting Christian practice with idol worship, he speaks expressly of what is offered to idols – again, a vertical expression. In v. 20, he speaks of how he does not want them to have *koinonia*, “participation”, with demons, an expression which seems to come very close to indicating some kind of communion or fellowship with demons. In all these ways, Paul here envisages a strong vertical as well as horizontal element when he speaks of “participation”, whether in the bread and the cup or in what is offered to demons. In the Lord’s Supper, God’s people experience communion or fellowship with the Lord himself, as well as with one another.¹⁹

John resists the idea of some kind of “mystical” experience in the eating and drinking of the Lord’s Supper. If by “mystical” he means some necessarily felt subjective experience, I agree with him. But John seems to want to restrict our experience of Christ at the Supper to an appropriation of the truths to which the Supper points: we meditate on those truths, we are reminded of them, we are pointed to the privileges of our sharing in the blessings of the covenant which Christ won at the cross, and so our faith is strengthened and we are encouraged to persevere. I agree with all of that. I question, though, whether it provides a complete account of what Paul is teaching about the Supper in 1 Cor 10-11. After all, a good sermon can provide all the elements which John argues for, without the need for the Supper. Is the Supper then, effectively, simply a visual aid, which drives home more forcefully the truths that we hear preached from the pulpit each Sunday? Why place such emphasis on this additional rite, if we can gain all its

¹⁸ p. 50.

¹⁹ See further Ralph Cunnington, “Calvin’s Doctrine of the Lord’s Supper”, *Westminster Theological Journal* 73 (2011), p. 233.

benefits from an effective preacher? The language of participation in 1 Cor 10 coupled with the forceful manner in which the Lord presents the elements to us as his body and blood, underpinned by the shockingly explicit language of John 6:53-56, seem to point to something more: that in the consuming of the bread and the sharing in the cup at the Lord's Supper, when done in faith, we are encountering Christ in a way in which we do not encounter him when the Word is preached. Again, understanding the Supper in accordance with Reformed sacramental theology, in our consuming by faith the symbols of bread and wine we experience the realities of the covenantal promises to which they point – in this case a very partaking of the crucified, risen Christ himself.

Consequently, without necessarily agreeing with all that Calvin teaches on the Supper, there seem to be good grounds in Scripture for understanding it as a strongly vertical event, in which a church together and corporately comes to Christ by faith and receives him by faith, in the bread and the cup of the Supper. They feed on him by faith and are strengthened inwardly. This is not irrational or anti-rational – it needs to be accompanied by the preaching of the Word and the exposition of the work of Christ and its application to the sinner. An understanding of that and its apprehension by faith must accompany participation in the Supper, for it to be of value. But its value, I argue, is not confined purely and exclusively to the rational. Rather, I suggest that the biblical data indicate that there is something additional, supra-rational, going on when believers partake of the Supper by faith: they partake of Christ by the Spirit as food for their souls to strengthen their faith and enjoy fellowship with him.

Conclusion

As I have made clear, I agree firmly with John's call for a greater sense of the corporate in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. We tend to be far too individualistic at present. Use of a single cup and a single loaf, rather than individual cups and diced bread, would help. Sitting together rather than scattered around the church would also help. But the prime means for inculcating a more corporate sense is by the teaching of the Word.

I agree also with John's call for a greater sense of joy at the Supper (as the best hymns and sermons of reformed preachers of the past recognise), though I would question whether it need always to be "exuberant". Repentance from sin and a recognition of the reality of and reasons for Christ's death are surely a necessary part of the occasion, as well as a sense of victory and a remembrance of his resurrection. It is possible to have a solemn, rather than an exuberant, joy and this maybe better reflects what is

being done at the Supper. Again, teaching on this, as well as use of appropriate hymns and Scripture readings, is required.

By all means enjoy a church meal together, before or after the Supper, but the Bible does not, in my view, require this and we are not to confuse a church social occasion (which is of great value) with the Supper: they need to be kept distinct.

But above all we cannot neglect the vertical – there is in the Supper an encounter with Christ, by faith. This encounter is corporate and not merely individual. It is something we do together, as a local body of believers. It is rational, but not merely rational: there is a supra-rational element involved. We are inwardly strengthened in the Supper by the Spirit as in it we partake of Christ by faith. It is a sacramental act, in the sense developed by Reformed theologians, as by means of a visible sign God's people partake of and have sealed to them the spiritual realities to which the sign points.

The Lord's Supper is a time when the local church together and by faith comes to Christ, in obedience to him, to fellowship with and feed spiritually on him in a corporate act of remembrance and proclamation of Christ's death and all that it means, looking forward to his coming again in glory.

BOOK REVIEW

Preaching with Spiritual Power:

Calvin's Understanding of Word and Spirit in Preaching

Ralph Cunnington, Mentor, 2015, 144pp, £9.99

This is an important and valuable book because it sheds level-headed light on a topic which conservative evangelicals have debated with some vigour in recent decades: the role of the Holy Spirit in relation to the Word of God in preaching. The topic is a significant one because various tribes within evangelicalism have taken it to be a major point of disagreement among them, often regarding the other tribes' views on the matter as dangerous for ministry. Cunnington succeeds in picking his way thoughtfully through these debates. It is also a significant topic for reasons which go much deeper than contemporary evangelical spats. What a preacher assumes to be the role of the Holy Spirit in and through his preaching will have a significant impact on the way in which he prepares both a sermon and himself for preaching, and on the approach he brings as he comes to the act of preaching. Cunnington's insights help the preacher think with clarity about this, too.

He establishes his focus at the beginning. It is to answer the question "Is the Spirit present whenever and wherever the Word is preached?" (1). He then narrows his intention further. He is conducting a historical investigation, enquiring whether the Protestant Reformers, and in particular John Calvin, "not only distinguished Word and Spirit but separated them" (3). The answer, we discover in the case of Calvin, is no.

In chapter 1 he notes that a number of recent writers who would identify with the Lloyd-Jones tradition argue that Calvin did indeed separate them, and that therefore their understanding of the topic has the best claim to be the legitimate heir of historic Reformation Protestantism. Such writers (he refers to Philip Eveson, Robert Strivens, Stuart Olyott and Hywel Jones) think, variously, that so-called "Moore theology" from Sydney (represented in this work by John Woodhouse) teaches that accurate exposition in and of itself brings with it the Spirit's saving efficacy, and therefore falls into an (allegedly) Lutheran position. They worry that this leads preachers to rely for the effectiveness of their preaching rather more on the exegetical skill they put on display in the sermon than on heart-felt prayer for the Spirit to come and do his work.

This very specific focus is all to the good as it keeps the argument streamlined. Cunnington knows that he is not settling the issue and that much careful exegesis and theology is needed. Now of course it may be that not every participant in the debate thinks that much will be decided by haggling over historical theology. But Cunnington is right to point us back to

our historical forebears, if only because a number of recent writers attempt to bolster their argument by appealing somewhat loosely to Calvin to support their own position and to Luther to criticise others, and therefore some historical ground-clearing needs to be done if the debate is to continue in an informed way.

Chapter 2 gives brief portraits of the views of Word and Spirit held by a range of sixteenth-century figures: those Radical Reformers with whom Luther most engaged, Luther himself, and the Swiss Zwingli and Bullinger. This inevitably covers complex ground sketchily, but it is sufficient to establish what seems to be Cunningham's primary intentions in the chapter: to show that Luther's view was rather more nuanced than the portrait of it painted by some in contemporary debates, and therefore to warn against damning anyone's position by labelling it "Lutheran", since to do so trades on a number of historical inaccuracies. (However later it emerges that post-Reformation Lutheranism did flirt with a failure to distinguish Word and Spirit, even if Luther did not, 122.)

In chapter 3 Cunningham turns to a discussion of Calvin's view of the Spirit's role in the Lord's Supper. Why this apparent detour, in a short book on preaching? Because, as he will shortly argue, Calvin's view of the nature of spiritual presence in the sacraments bears very closely on his view of the Spirit's role in preaching. The key point that emerges is this: Calvin views the relation of sign and reality in the sacrament as one of "distinction without separation", says Cunningham, through analogous appeal to Chalcedon. Thus for Calvin the Spirit is not sporadically present in the Supper, but always accompanies it; the only question is whether his presence is met with faith and so brings blessing, or with unbelief and so brings judgment. The alert reader probably sees where this is heading in relation to preaching.

The central concern of the fourth and final chapter is to demonstrate that Strivens is mistaken in supposing that Calvin did not tie the Spirit "irrevocably" to the Word and therefore mistaken in supposing that there is such a thing as preaching "bereft" of the Spirit. (I take it that it is to Strivens' credit that he provides a warm commendation on the back cover of a book in which his own work is regularly taken to task.) Cunningham uses a familiar concept to express his understanding of Calvin on this matter: in regeneration the word is the instrumental and the Spirit the efficient cause (95). His summary of Calvin's view covers these points: the Word and Spirit in preaching are distinct yet inseparable (98); preaching is never without accompanying spiritual effect, whether that be of humbling or hardening (108); preachers themselves are God's chosen means for bringing blessing, with the Word as the instrumental cause (114). This latter point, says Cunningham, lies at the very heart of the debates to which he is contributing. Although he does not explore it further, this may well be the one point he

draws from Calvin that is most alien to most modern evangelical preachers' self-understanding.

Cunnington notes in conclusion three particular points: (a) the post-Reformation histories of both Reformed and Lutheran theologies, down to the nineteenth century, demonstrate that one's view of Word and Spirit in preaching is significantly related to one's understanding of the sacraments. (b) Prayerlessness in the preacher is indeed lamentable, but it is oddly unbiblical to imagine that it can be remedied by believing that the Spirit does not promise always to accompany preaching. (c) A view such as Calvin's allows both preacher and listeners to come to preaching with great confidence in the Lord, that this his appointed means of blessing.

Who is this book addressing? Primarily it has in its sights those in the Lloyd-Jones tradition who want to think of the Spirit as accompanying preaching in power only occasionally and sporadically. Cunningham has done a brief but effective job of calling seriously into question the legitimacy of wheeling in Calvin as support for such a view (and of throwing the accusation of "Lutheranism" at dissenters). There is always more to be said on Calvin on any issue, of course, but someone who disagrees with Cunningham on this is going to have to demonstrate better work on Calvin.

Of course in arguing against the "occasional and sporadic" view there is much more to be said, both in exegesis and theology, as Cunningham rightly acknowledges. To my mind an additional crucial issue to be addressed is one's basic and unquestioned understanding of what constitutes the very essence of the function of preaching. The "occasional and sporadic" view has arguably driven the longing for preaching to be again the means for mass conversions in new periods of revival (and this is very evident in Lloyd-Jones' *Preaching and Preachers*). By contrast, the view of men like Woodhouse is much more driven by the notion that the essence of the function of preaching is to be the means of edifying believers through the semantic content of Scripture.

Perhaps because this book addresses mainly the arguments presented by the Lloyd-Jones tradition, only one representative of the opposing view, John Woodhouse, is quoted, and he only briefly. From the brief discussions of him, I did wonder if he could lay better claim to being closer to Calvin on this issue, although expressing himself at times with a slightly overheated anti-charismatic edge. Be that as it may, it would only be fair to point out for any reader who might not be aware of it, that Woodhouse's views on the matter seem not to be shared universally, to put it mildly, at Moore College and in Sydney diocese. Not all British critics and aficionados of (what they take to be) "Moore theology" realise this.

All this may make it seem that the focus of the book is very narrow, but the nature of the subject matter means that that is not so. I found myself constantly wanting to go back to the many biblical texts referred to, and on

which Calvin's commentaries are often cited, to see if what I assume they say – and what Cunningham says Calvin says they say – is in fact what they do say. That is surely the right way forward, and I am grateful to Cunningham for clearing away some confusions and inaccuracies in current debates and so making that task a little easier.

One further virtue of this book ought to be mentioned. Although some may be surprised by the level of attention Cunningham gives to the Lord's Supper, he makes a good initial case that one's theology of preaching is fundamentally linked to one's theology of the sacraments. The adherents of the strong anti-sacramentalism in much contemporary evangelicalism may not thank him for raising the issue, but I think he is right to point out that the close links between preaching and Lord's Supper in our Protestant heritage mean that we are unwise to assume that we can reach a rich theology in one without due consideration of the other.

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BOOK REVIEW

The Plausibility Problem: The church and same-sex attraction

Ed Shaw, IVP, 2015, 160pp, £8.99

Ed Shaw addresses what is arguably one of the most talked about subjects within the Christian Church at the moment – the compatibility of homosexuality and Christianity. The author is open about his own experience of what he refers to as “same-sex attraction” in what is a carefully thought-through, sensitive and helpful book for a wide readership. To ensure an approach that is balanced, gracious and loving, he interacts with the thoughts and reflections of others and this definitely enhances the book.

Shaw starts by outlining “the plausibility problem”: He gives two examples of people who feel same-sex attracted and for whom it is implausible to think that a life of following Jesus is possible. For the author, the common approach of many churches – “Just say no” – simply does not address the real issue. How we love such people and show them Christ, he says, will show how a life following him is not only plausible, but the best way for all of us. Using the example of his own experience, along with that of nine others, he addresses a range of missteps that people make about homosexuality. The questions raised are answered in a way that keeps the reader mindful of the real people with whom the author has engaged. In so doing the book is open and raw. The reader is encouraged to show Christ to others so that following him is seen to be perfectly plausible, regardless of sexual orientation.

At the end of each example there is an application question. These are useful for group study. They also stimulate thinking about how outsiders view the church and how we should relate to them when they come into our lives or through the doors of our churches.

Some people I have spoken to regarding this book believe that the author is being over-cautious in some of the words and phrases he uses. For example, he does not use the word “gay” as he believes it is misleading, in that it carries with it political and other connotations. Wes Hill, on the other hand, author of *Washed and Waiting: Reflections on Christian Faithfulness and Homosexuality*, does use the word to describe his own same-sex attraction and does not see using it as a hindrance.

This book is the best that I have read on the topic, and it reminds us, too, that many other factors, not just sexuality, affect people’s lives and can make Christianity seem implausible. Ed Shaw’s responses have application, therefore, to a much wider set of cases.

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