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# Foundations Theological Journal

*Foundations* is an international journal of evangelical theology published in the United Kingdom. Its aim is to cover contemporary theological issues by articles and reviews, taking in exegesis, biblical theology, church history and apologetics, and to indicate their relevance to pastoral ministry. Its particular focus is the theology of evangelical churches which are committed to biblical truth and evangelical ecumenism. It has been

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foundations@affinity.org.uk

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## EDITORIAL

*Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good news; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good news; lift it up, fear not; say to the cities of Judah, "Behold your God!" (Isa. 40:9, ESV)*

This edition of *Foundations* brings together a number of articles which focus on contemporary theological issues and historical theology.

Sarah Allen's article on Sarah Coakley most overtly engages with contemporary theology as she considers Coakley's 2013 work *God, Sexuality and the Self: An Essay on the Trinity*. Engaging contemporary theological perspectives from a reformed and evangelical stance is important. Allen provides us with a helpful model to do that, interacting with Coakley charitably yet robustly. The theological topics touched on are important e.g. gender, desire, Trinity and, as such, Allen's review article repays careful reading.

Tom Underhill considers a matter which has been the subject of recent debate, namely a "Reformed Catholic" approach to theology. Underhill's contribution to this debate is to seek to provide "a theological justification for a presumption of trust towards tradition that is both consistently Protestant and persuasive to evangelical readers." He aims to do this via an in-depth interaction with the publication *Reformed Catholicity* by Michael Allen and Scott Swain. As a church historian who values highly the work of the Spirit through the ages, the overall case resonates. However, for me, questions remain around the contemporary applications to interactions with theological traditions (e.g. Roman Catholic) which have foundational divergences with reformed and evangelical belief on both the *principium cognoscendi externum* (the external principle of knowledge, namely revelation) and the *principium cognoscendi internum* (the internal principle of knowledge, namely faith). And questions remain around the balance of the "presumption of trust" and the ability to say with the Scots Confession, "if any man will note in this our Confession any article or sentence repugning to God's holy word, that it would please him of his gentleness, and for Christian charity's sake, to admonish us of the same in writ; and We of our honour and fidelity do promise unto him satisfaction from the mouth of God (that is, from his holy Scriptures), or else reformation of that which he shall prove to be amiss." I would welcome further exploration of these questions.

Stephen Steele's article is in the realm of church history, as he takes us back in time to the 17<sup>th</sup> century to consider how some key theologians at the Westminster Assembly responded to increasing knowledge of, and access to, variants within copies of Scripture in the original languages. Steel argues that there is evidence leading members of the Westminster Assembly were unperturbed by the emergence of divergent texts of the New Testament. This suggests that any attempt to "fix" the text of the New Testament to that known at the time of the Reformation and ignore

new manuscripts is historically as well as theologically misguided. Again, this is an area of contemporary interest and relevance.

John Ferguson continues the theme of church history and introduces us to the theology of one of the most brilliant of the theologians of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Free Church of Scotland, Hugh Martin. Martin is one of my personal favourite theologians to read; there is a freshness and power to his exegesis that few possess. Ferguson is a safe guide to Martin, and I hope this article encourages many to take up and read Martin. It will not be wasted time.

An article by Gary Brady closes out the article section of *Foundations*. In a sense is it unlike most articles in *Foundations*, in that it introduces us to a number of men in a specific time and place, who are largely forgotten and some of whom we can know little about. The question might be asked, what is the value of this? Well, primarily to remind us that God's work largely advances through unknown men and women who labour faithfully and whose reward is great in heaven. I hope this article is an encouragement to us all.

I trust these articles, and the book reviews in this issue, are all of help for the church.

**Dr Donald John MacLean**

*Editor of Foundations*

*Elder, Cambridge Presbyterian Church and Assistant Professor of Historical Theology at Westminster Seminary (UK).*

December 2023

# THINKING THROUGH DIFFERENCE AND DESIRE: A CRITICAL ENGAGEMENT WITH OF SARAH COAKLEY'S GOD, SEXUALITY AND THE SELF

## *Abstract*

This essay critiques the central arguments of Sarah Coakley's 2013 work *God, Sexuality and the Self: An Essay on the Trinity* from a reformed perspective and in light of current debates around sexuality and gender in the church. Coakley's methodology, trinitarian model and anthropology are explored, resulting in a concentration on the relationship between God, desire and gender. Conclusions are drawn about the important role of binaries and embodiment, and a careful use of metaphor in theological models.

## *I. Introduction:*

Gender, sex, and sexuality are focal points of debate and even outright conflict today in both Christian and secular discourse. This January, the Church of England's Bishops' announcement that prayers of blessing will be offered to same-sex couples has given rise to questions in Parliament and headlines in newspapers, while the Scottish approval of new Gender Self-ID rules has intensified protests at the resulting apparent erasure of women's and children's rights. For the evangelical church, these conflicts coincide with an ongoing reevaluation of attitudes to female and male identities. Not only are lines drawn between those with conservative and liberal attitudes, but increasingly in some of these discussions, second wave (now often depicted as 'radical') feminism which militates against objectification of women and for equal opportunities, emphasising women's collective needs, appears to be at odds with third and fourth wave feminism, influenced by poststructuralist gender theory which promotes diversity of self-expression and the breaking of norms.<sup>1</sup> Central to these, questions around the relationship between sex (biological identity of male and female) and gender (cultural expressions of masculinity and femininity) are the twin concerns of equality and difference.

These questions, however, are not primarily sociological, political, or even philosophical. Southern Baptist College Principal, Al Mohler, writes that "current debates on sexuality present to the church a crisis that is irreducibly and inescapably theological".<sup>2</sup> How men and women can be different and at the same time equal;

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<sup>1</sup> For example, over pornography. Second wave feminism opposed this in the 1980s, but third wave feminism of the late 1990s onwards, influenced by post-structuralism, embraced it. The debate is on-going.

<sup>2</sup> Al Mohler, *Biblical Theology and the Sexuality Crisis*. Cited 30 March 2018. Online: <https://www.9marks.org/article/biblical-theology-and-the-sexuality-crisis/>

whether observable gender differences and sexual behaviours are purely socially constructed or innate, and whether all have the same value, are not just questions which *can* be addressed by theology, but which *necessarily presuppose* an understanding of both humanity and God, whether this is acknowledged or not. As such, conversations in churches about these topics have relevance to the debates outside their walls.

*God, Sexuality and the Self: An Essay on the Trinity* (GSS) is, in part, an answer to this crisis.<sup>3</sup> Sarah Coakley, one time Honorary Canon of Ely Cathedral and until recently Norris-Hulse Professor of Divinity at Cambridge University, admits that “institutional Christianity is in crisis about ‘sexuality’” and confesses her aim “come at the issue...through a different route – that of the divine itself”.<sup>4</sup> However, her approach to issues of sex and gender is different from that of Mohler: her theological outlook is shaped by feminism and Platonism, convictions which lead her to the striking conclusion that:

*only systematic theology (of a particular sort) can adequately and effectively respond to the rightful critiques that gender studies and political and liberation theology have laid at its door. And only gender studies, inversely, and its accompanying political insights, can thus properly re-animate ‘systematic theology’.*<sup>5</sup>

Coakley’s theological method, therefore, provides Christians of reformed theological convictions an opportunity to see how a contemporary gender studies approach challenges some orthodox elements of doctrine, and at the same time, highlights questions around gender, sex, sexuality and power which require further careful thinking. Here, sex is taken to refer to biological sex, that is male and female, and gender to the expression of masculinity and femininity.

## II. Method as Message

Romans 8.26-7 forms Coakley’s starting point in *GSS*, and from these verses she develops a threefold thesis: first, that the Trinity is to be understood most profoundly through Spirit-led contemplative prayer; second, that “sexual desire finds its meaning *only* in the triune God”; third, that through encounter with the

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<sup>3</sup> Sarah Coakley, *God Sexuality and the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). Hereafter referred to as *GSS*. This is the first of four projected volumes which means that any assessment of Coakley’s theology is to a degree provisional and limited. Gaps and questions which are identified here may well be answered or closed in subsequent books. For example, whilst this first volume considers The Trinity, the subsequent volumes are expected to discuss Christology, soteriology and ecclesiology and along with them, issues of race and class. Having said this, much of the material of *God, Sexuality and the Self* can be found, either in full, or in fragments in her published oeuvre, so it can be confidently assumed that the book to a significant degree stands on its own and it is unlikely that its arguments will not be seriously mitigated by future writing.

<sup>4</sup> Coakley, *GSS*, 1.

<sup>5</sup> Sarah Coakley, “Is there a Future for Gender and Theology? On Gender, Contemplation, and the Systematic Task”, *Svensk Teologisk Kvartalskrift*. Årg. 85 (2009), 52; *GSS*, 9.



triune God, damaging binaries found in Church and society can be broken down or transcended.<sup>6</sup> Thus, Coakley's arguments about gender, sexuality and the Trinity are conceptually interdependent and structurally interwoven, even sentence by sentence creating a typically post-modern obscurity.

This integration of ideas stems in large part from an approach Coakley names *théologie totale*, which is simultaneously her "method, perspective and, even to some degree, message."<sup>7</sup> By *totale* she means an inter-disciplinary range: chapters on iconography, patristics, metaphysical poetry and practical theology are all included in *GSS* and in these she uses frames of reference from feminist ideology, gender studies and other branches of philosophy. At the same time, *totale* implies a uniformity of vision, despite the disparate material, which for Coakley comes from contemplation. Her breadth of interest provides a challenge to evangelicals who have, to their own serious detriment (see my review in the Spring 2023 edition of this journal) not sufficiently scrutinised the relationship between power and gender in culture or theology. However, this unifying methodological approach functions also to promote a theological emphasis on an erosion or minimisation of difference, which creates some serious doctrinal problems.

### 1. *The Contemplating Subject*

Coakley's contemplative method defines her anthropology, the 'self' of the book's title. In contemplation, she contends, human desire meets its reflection in God's desiring self. What she means by contemplation is wordless and silent reflection, "an attentive openness of the whole self...to the reality of God and the creation".<sup>8</sup> Though she draws this emphasis from pre-and post-Nicene writers, she misses out their insistence on scriptural exegesis and ultimate Christ focus. Ayres says that for Augustine "humility, desire for divine mercy and attention to the Scriptures are the sine qua non for being led toward contemplation", presenting contemplation as goal, rather than process.<sup>9</sup> This is starkly different from Coakley's apophatic method of "kneeling in the darkness", pursuing "a love affair with a blank".<sup>10</sup> Her connection of self-abnegation and unknowing leads theologian Linn Tonstad to claim provocatively that "the self-erasing human being ... comes to stand at the very center of her theological project".<sup>11</sup> This critique comes from a feminist perspective

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6 *GSS*, 15 italics mine. These divisions include those between eastern and western approaches to the Trinity (301); Church and sect (185); and equality and difference in reference to gender (273).

7 *GSS*, 43. As Miroslav Volf has said, "method is message" in that "all major methodological decisions have implications for the whole of the theological edifice". Miroslav Volf, "Theology, Meaning and Power: a Conversation with George Lindbeck on Theology and the Nature of Christian Difference" in ed. Timothy R. Phillips and Dennis L. Okholm, *The nature of Confession: Evangelicals and Post-Liberals in Conversation*, (Leicester: IVP, 1996) 45.

8 Koh, "Prayer as Divine Propulsion" n.p.; *GSS*, 89-88.

9 Ayres, *Augustine*, 131.

10 *GSS* 325; 342. She credits Dom Sebastian Moore with this phrase – see her footnote.

11 Linn Marie Tonstad, *God and Difference: The Trinity, Sexuality, and the Transformation of Finitude*,

and is driven by a conviction that kenotic interpretations of Philippians 2.6-7 are especially damaging for women.<sup>12</sup> While Coakley does not promote kenosis as self-erasure, still this embrace of “darkness” and some confusion around revelation may ironically generate a danger of both solipsism and/or loss of self-identity, for where else can one go for a sense of self within this scheme? In the light of recent discussions around abuse of women and minorities in the evangelical church, it is important to underline that although discipleship metaphors of slavery and self-denial are to be taken seriously, loss of self is presented as the opposite of salvation (Matthew 16.24-27).

If, in Coakley’s scheme, contemplation is the ideal mode for the self, it also expresses the central essence of the self. She writes that “desire is the constellating category of selfhood, the ineradicable root of one’s longing for God’ and again that “*desire is more fundamental than sex...desire is an ontological category belonging primarily to God, and only secondarily to humans*”, it is “the precious clue that ever tugs at the heart, reminding the human soul...of its created source”.<sup>13</sup> Reformed theology might agree with the centrality of desire to human experience, and its ultimate satisfaction in God, but Coakley goes further in attributing desire to God, and giving “new coinage to ...[the] tradition of Christian Platonism”.<sup>14</sup> We will consider this turn in later paragraphs.

## 2. *The Desiring Subject*

This understanding of desire as defining human experience, exposed in spiritual encounter and shown to be capable of transformation and sublimation, is to be welcomed in a secularised space where desires are rarely interrogated or denied. Coakley advocates for asceticism, as a practice of self-denial, or mortification, and this offers a significant avenue for reformed Christians to explore especially in the light of same-sex marriage debates.<sup>15</sup> It must be noted, however, that although she acknowledges the “crookedness” of the human heart and the necessity of

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(Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 108.

12 It is a common and valid critique that ideas of Christ-like self-emptying (kenosis) make the powerless in society more prone to exploitation and complicit in their own subjugation. Recognising that these verses do not teach that Christ emptied himself of his divine nature is an important safeguard against such a problem.

13 GSS, 58 and 10.

14 GSS, 8-9. For Plotinus, the key shaper of the Platonism which significantly influenced Origen, Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine, amongst many others, desire is central to life: “in the highest life, the life of Intellect, where we find the highest form of desire, that desire is eternally satisfied by contemplation of the One... Soul is the principle of desire for objects that are *external* to the agent of desire. Everything with a soul, from human beings to the most insignificant plant, acts to satisfy desire.... Soul explains, as unchangeable Intellect could not, the deficiency that is implicit in the fact of desiring.” Gerson, Lloyd. “Plotinus.” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2018 Edition), ed., Zalta, Edward N. Cited 12 May 2019. Online: <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2018/entries/plotinus/>.

15 David Bennet’s DPhil thesis may be a starting point for this process: *Queering the queer: an exploration of how gay celibate asceticism can renew and inform the role of desire in contemporary Anglican theology*.

grace, stating that “the Spirit progressively ‘breaks’ sinful desires, *in and through* the passion of Christ” (emphasis hers), these references to the processes of sanctification remain ambiguous, and the outcome she envisages is lacking, too.<sup>16</sup> Committed monogamous relationships, whether heterosexual or homosexual, are an ideal, to be worked towards, rather than a discipline to be adhered to. This sets Coakley apart from the historic Christian sexual ethic. As we shall see later in our discussion of gender, this highlights Coakley’s reluctance to consider embodied sex, and her related misplacement of Biblical marital metaphors.

In addition, Coakley’s understanding of desire for God, is much thinner than that of Augustine on whom she bases much of her argument. While he sees humanity as the “desiring animal”, he consistently unites desire with delight and love, implying desire less focused on possession (that is, more agape than eros), and which has been satisfied so produces joy.<sup>17</sup> Coakley’s anthropology lacks this vision of fulfilled desire, and of understanding which can shape and instruct desire. This appears to promote self-denial without God’s provision of satisfaction, a rather paltry offer.<sup>18</sup> A reformed construction of the training of desires must allow for delight as well as denial.

Related to this restricted view of desire, is an absence of the idea of union with God in Christ, and instead the presence of a version of participation which comes through graced contemplation. Though Coakley refers to Augustine and Gregory of Nyssa in some detail as exemplars of this sanctifying process of participation arising out of contemplation, the images of justification, union and imputed righteousness, as well as the language of forgiveness which they both use is absent.<sup>19</sup> Instead, Coakley offers participation which is “possible only in virtue of contemplative ‘effacement’” and which is significantly “a progressive – and sometimes painful – incorporation into the life of God”.<sup>20</sup> This is a strange departure from the protestant tradition Coakley serves within. Just as there is no idea of regeneration and union with God, there is no sense that participation has a corporate dimension. Her term ‘incorporation’ even suggests a dissolution of the self, a mystical merging with God, and thus a breaking of the binary creature-creator distinction which is alien to the doctrine of union with God, or to classical understandings of participation.<sup>21</sup> It may be that this is an issue of terminology, but such a breaking of binaries is in keeping

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16 GSS, 14. What she means here by the ‘the passion of Christ’ is unclear.

17 Michael P. Foley in foreward to Mark J. Boone, *The Conversion and Therapy of Desire: Augustine’s Theology of Desire in the Cassicacum Dialogues*, (Cambridge: James Clark & Co, 2017), viii.

18 That is, if the self is continually desiring, then it will inevitably be lacking, and in being without satisfaction will remain at the centre.

19 Gregory of Nyssa, Homily 1, 25-27, 14. Homily 2, 17. Augustine, *De Doctrina*, book 1, chapter 17.16.,27 and 16.15, 27 (No editor or translator mentioned in this copy) Online: <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/augustine/doctrine.html> This book was published the same year as the Confessions began to be written, 397 AD.

20 GSS, 23, 87.

21 This relates, too, to the hypostatic union, which is not clearly shown in her Christology, which I do not explore in this paper.

with other concerns throughout *GSS*. Thus, her discussion of the self's relation to the church is also largely neglected, other than to say that the contemplating soul might be a source of renewal for the church at large.<sup>22</sup> The individual's spiritual experience then, overrides both corporate and, through the exclusive focus on contemplation, corporal dimensions of reality. Contemplation may be an essential component of Christian discipleship, but it must reckon with the body, as God's good gift.

### *III. Divine Disruption*

Coakley's focus on spirituality determines her formulation of the divine, but so too does her commitment to feminism and gender theory. The result is a centring of the Holy Spirit as a means of resistance to any formulations which can be described as binary, hierarchical or patriarchal. Coakley centres her Trinitarian explorations in perceived oppositions between pre- and post-Nicene writers and between Paul and John, as well as drawing from visual representations of the divine over church history. John 14-16, she claims, offers a 'linear' model of authority which is in direct contrast to an earlier Pauline vision of 'mutuality' found particularly in Romans 8 and Galatians 4. She argues that this model was developed through fourth century creedal achievements which she claims marginalised the Spirit in "potential, at least, ironic *unorthodoxy*" as "the secondary communicator of an already privileged dyad" and then reinforced by western adoption of filioque.<sup>23</sup> Coakley then claims that this dominance of Father and Son, and diminishing of the Spirit, who in eastern formulations was depicted as female, or in the west substituted with Mary, resulted in a patriarchal hierarchy in Church life and doctrine. Steering away from common feminist responses to this, Coakley accepts gendered language for the Father and Son, but proposes the Spirit as leading and interrupting, so diminishing a sense of masculine authority, and uses this model to suggest that human fixities, including those of gender, can also be disrupted by spiritual encounter.

#### *1. The Interruptive, Leading Spirit*

In contrast to what Coakley sees as John's 'linear' model and as an attempt to avoid the "privileged male dyad", Coakley offers instead a trinitarian order in which, the Holy Spirit:

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<sup>22</sup> Coakley, *Powers*, 85-6 and *GSS* passim.

<sup>23</sup> *GSS*, 330; On page 101 she says that this is because of an "ambiguity" in Scripture. Here she means that a focus on Johannine writings to elaborate the equality and distinction of the persons meant that what she sees as Paul's model was not acknowledged. Whether this is a real ambiguity will be discussed below. Of course, she is not the first to say that the exclusion of the Spirit results in the oppression of women; we see this in other feminist writers like Elizabeth Johnson. & *GSS*, 101. Emphasis hers. Coakley's argument here is in some ways reminiscent of her arguments regarding onto-theology – that dogmatic certainty can bring about the marginalisation of the other.



*is ...the primary means of incorporation into the trinitarian life of God, ...as constantly and 'reflexively' at work in believers in the circle of response to the Father's call.*<sup>24</sup>

She dubs this schema “incorporative”, “reflexive”, “prayer-based” and “Spirit leading” and identifies the Holy Spirit the one who forms Sonship in the believer, through “interruption” and leads them to the Father in the act of prayer, bringing incorporation into the divine in Ro 8 and Gal 4:6.<sup>25</sup> The difficulty with this formula lies in what is absent, rather than what is present.

Her discussion of both the biblical and patristic sources as she develops this position is unconvincing. Coakley proposes opposition between a linear model, implying hierarchy, and one of incorporation, implying mutuality. However, in most examples we find the Father, Son, Spirit order integrated with language of indwelling; difference, indicated through the processions and economy, sits comfortably with equality.

Paul's depiction of what Leon Morris calls “mutual indwelling” in Romans 8 is still carefully structured.<sup>26</sup> The work of the Spirit in believers described throughout the chapter is predicated on the work of the Father through the Son, neatly summed up in Ephesians 2:18 where Paul writes “through [Christ] we ...have access to the Father by one Spirit”. When she turns to Athanasius, Coakley correctly argues that “incorporative ‘adoption’ into Sonship” in *Letters to Serapion* is concomitant with “the Spirit's ontological *equality* in the Godhead” and surmises that this resolution came through Athanasius' contact with the mysticism of Anthony.<sup>27</sup> Yet here also, the Spirit “proceeds from the Father, and, belonging to the Son, is from him given to the disciples and all who believe in him”.<sup>28</sup> The Spirit may lead believers to the Father, but first the Father sends the Spirit, and both always in and through Christ. Coakley's spirituality perspective which leads her formulations is not the one preferred throughout her sources, even those which are influenced by early mysticism.

What is also significant in Coakley's presentation of the Spirit is her absence of attention to repeated references in both John and Paul to the Spirit's teaching role: in John spiritual liberation comes through knowing the truth.<sup>29</sup> This gap is also evident as she considers patristic sources. Coakley asserts not only that the early Church made “a normative association of the ‘Spirit’ with charismatic

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24 GSS, 111.

25 For example: GSS, 316; 111; 89.

26 Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988. Repr. 1994), 307-8.

27 GSS, 136; 136-7.

28 *Letters to Serapion*, (translated C.R.B. Shapland, Epworth Press 1951) 46. Online: <http://thegroveisonfire.com/books/Athanasius/Athanasius-Letters-to-Serapion-CRB-Shapland.pdf>. 1.20, 43. In addition the pattern ‘from the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit’ is repeated numerous times: twice in 1.12 (page 38), twice in 1.14 (page 39), twice in 1.20 (page 43).

29 John 14:15, 21, 23; 15:4-7, 9-10, 12, 17 and John 8:32.

gifts, and especially prophecy” which, though it lacked “subtleties...[was] in line with...[the] prayer-based approach”.<sup>30</sup> Those “ecstatic” gifts, however, are in many places associated with wisdom-revelation, understanding, holiness and preaching, (implying reason and self-awareness), rather than an absence of rationality or self-transcendence.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, she is forced to concede that, rather than exclusively supporting her approach, most of the sources she cites are “a mixed type”, combining linear order and incorporation.<sup>32</sup> Even in Origen’s *On Prayer*, a treatise on Romans 8 which Coakley contends represents her model of trinitarian incorporation and accompanying ecstatic experience, the Holy Spirit and understanding are inseparable in prayer, and that understanding comes from the word.<sup>33</sup> If we are to centre contemplation, in the way that these sources do, then it has to be contemplation of God through reflection on his word, not on a “blank”.<sup>34</sup> Such a word focused contemplation will be instructive for thinking about sex and gender and provide believers with increasing clarity, rather than a confusing lability.

#### IV. *The God of Desire*

Coakley develops her argument by identifying in Augustine, and Gregory of Nyssa, “ecstatic moments...which converge towards a vision of God predicated precisely on the notion of incorporative, transformative, divine desire”.<sup>35</sup> Here, too, she overstates her case, and in the process she overrides one crucial elements of human/divine difference. At the end of *De Trinitate*, Augustine writes that “the love which is from God and is God is distinctively the Holy Spirit; through him the charity of God is poured into our hearts, and through it the whole triad dwells in us”. She is right that this is a joyful echo of Rom. 8:14-17 but hardly “a sense of even divine

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30 GSS, 116.

31 In GSS, 120 she claims that the Apostolic Fathers describe “ecstatic, visionary and prophetic activity”. Clement of Rome, however, relates that, “The ministers of the grace of God have, by the Holy Spirit, spoken of repentance” and “an abundant outpouring also of the Holy Spirit fell upon all; and being full of holy counsel” in other places he connects OT Scripture as well as his own writings and the preaching of the Apostles with the Spirit. *First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians, VIII, Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol 1* (ed Edited by Alexander Roberts, D.D. & James Donaldson, LL.D, Online: <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/lightfoot/fathers.pdf> )18; 3. Also see examples on 9; 23.

32 These are Irenaeus and Tertullian. GSS, 124. Also, note the quotation she uses on page 123 (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.XX.2)

33 Origen, *On Prayer*, VII, CCEL. Online: <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/origen/prayer.pdf>. Origen roots his argument throughout in detailed exegesis of various passages and directs his readers to use Scripture in prayer because they are “full of power [if] above all when praying “with the spirit,” they pray “also with the understanding”, 7, 21. Also note that “even our understanding is unable to pray unless the Spirit leads it in prayer” 1, 4; “truly prayers made and spoken with the Spirit are also full of the declarations of the wisdom of god” 1, 5.

34 GSS, 325; 342

35 GSS, 310.

'control' being released", or even a replication of her Spirit-led incorporation.<sup>36</sup> Coakley's reading of Gregory of Nyssa's later work as "an alignment of sexual desire and desire for God" is curious.<sup>37</sup> As for Augustine, in Nyssa, sexual longing is to be distanced from, even replaced by, the second.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, the metaphor of longing runs one way; the believer is to be in love with God, a love implanted by God, but God is not depicted as desiring the believer. Even, he says, "God, in contemplating Himself, has no desire".<sup>39</sup> Bom writes appositely that for Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine, "the desire for God is the result of the ontological distance of difference between humanity and God"; desire comes from the incomplete towards the complete, not vice versa, and not exist within the complete.<sup>40</sup>

In seeking to foreground the Holy Spirit as a representative of divine desire, Coakley disrupts these important divine distinctives. Rather than her schema coming from the pre and post Nicene sources she discusses, it seems to be rooted in the writings of later mystics. 6th century Pseudo-Dionysius writes in *The Divine Names*:

*the name of Loving- kindness [agape] and of Love [eros] is placed ...in the same category throughout the Divine revelations, and this is of a power unifying, and binding together, and mingling.*<sup>41</sup>

This Coakley rightly interprets as "a *divine* ecstatic yearning, meeting and incorporating a responsive human ecstatic yearning" and she goes further, stating,

*desire is an ontological category belonging primarily to God...[it] signifies no lack ...[it] connotes that plenitude of longing that God has for God's own creation and for its full and ecstatic participation in the divine, trinitarian life.*<sup>42</sup>

Like Dionysius, she imports ideas of possession and want. Coakley describes God's desire as a "longing" or "yearning", both words with connotations of absence, incompleteness and even possibility, claiming this is both ontological and directed towards the creation.<sup>43</sup> Her presentation is out of keeping with a classical understanding of God's aseity and potentially, his impassibility, diminishing a sense of God's freedom and grace, and replacing it with a kind of dependence on

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36 Augustine, *De Trinitate*, (trans. Edmund Hill O.P., New York: New City Press, 2015), XV.5.32, 542; GSS, 294.

37 GSS, 310.

38 This will be explored more fully in part 3.

39 Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and Resurrection*, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series II, Vol 5, ed. Philip Scaff. Online: <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf205.pdf>, 835.

40 Klaas Bom, "Directed by Desire: An Exploration Based on the Structures for the Desire for God". *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 62 (2009): 135-48.139.

41 Pseudo Dionysius, *Divine Names*, IV.xii, (Trans by John Parker, London: James Parker, 1897) Online: [http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/0450-0525,\\_Dionysius\\_Areopagita,\\_Works,\\_EN.pdf](http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/0450-0525,_Dionysius_Areopagita,_Works,_EN.pdf) page 36.

42 GSS, 295.

43 GSS, 333.

creation.<sup>44</sup> Rather than finding desire in the Trinity, we might more carefully say with John Webster, “God loves himself in the mutual delight of the three persons in which is his entire satisfaction”, noting the relationship of delight and love we saw earlier in Augustine.<sup>45</sup>

If we understand desire as a force sustaining difference, in that it causes the subject to see the desired as object, and bringing these together, and which can ultimately be reproductive, then human interpersonal longing and human desire for God can have stabilising effect. To transfer desire to inter and extra trinitarian relations, however, is destabilising, as we have seen. It seems far better to focus on the completeness and certainty summarised in John’s declaration that “God is love” and to recognise his will in loving humanity first (1 John 4.7-12).

### 1. *The Gendered God*

If Coakley offers us a God who confuses the boundary between created and creator, so too, she presents transgression of the “false divides” of gender boundaries.<sup>46</sup> Many 20th century feminist theologians have located masculine language for God as a source of inequity in the Church and world and proposed instead feminine language or a female divine. In a similar way, social trinitarians have responded to division by allocating gender identities to the persons of the Trinity, thus reinforcing gender essentialism. Coakley rejects both these approaches to the gendered names and metaphors found in the bible. Following Aquinas she first appears to see ectype in the language of Fatherhood, saying “the true meaning of father is to be found in Trinity”, supporting this from Matthew 23:9.<sup>47</sup> So far, so good; yet her aim to “slay patriarchy at its root” by letting contemplative encounter with the heavenly Father radically redefine understandings of masculinity and authority, gives rise to problems.<sup>48</sup>

Because her conception of prayer is of engagement with “unspeakable” “mystery”, the fatherhood of God is then defamiliarised, and becomes “a Life into which we enter...Fatherhood beyond all human formulations”; thus ectype breaks down.<sup>49</sup> Significantly, Coakley places the word father in inverted commas, to signify the distance of this term from typical understandings, and she does not offer an alternative definition or even the beginnings of a description. This means that

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44 For example, God is “a most pure spirit...without body, parts or passions, immutable...most free, most absolute...most loving, gracious, merciful Westminster Confession of Faith, Online: <https://www.pcaac.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/WCFScriptureProofs.pdf>, 2, 8-9.

45 John Webster, “Creation out of Nothing” in *Christian Dogmatics* (ed. Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain, Grand Rapids: Baker, 2016), 138.

46 *GSS*, 68 & 84.

47 *GSS*, 324. “Call no man Father except God alone” though Ephesians 3:14-15 could also be seen as upholding this view.

48 *GSS*, 327. Note the violence of this language!

49 *GSS*, 326, 7.



the good within human fatherhood, such as self-sacrificial guidance, protection, compassion and provision, implied in Scripture (for example, Psalm 103 and Luke 15:11–32), is set aside and the doctrinal significances of adoption and the begottenness of the Son, are muted.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, an ambiguity around human gender results. Separating divine names, metaphorical though they are, from their human referents (see Ephesians 3.15), leaves a gap in the meaning of masculinity.

### V. *Malleable Male and Female*

In *GSS* Coakley encourages readers to explore not only a disruption in gendered language for God, but also how encounter with the gender-less God can disrupt human understandings of gender too, even to the extent of rendering gender labile. She bases this idea first on the use of the birth pangs metaphor in Romans 8.22-23 and works out to look at Origen and Gregory of Nyssa's writings, on prayer and the Song of Songs, comparing these with Augustine's reflections on sex difference. Throughout this discussion, it is evident that Coakley misapprehends important metaphors. Paul in Romans uses the metaphor of female birth pains to describe the created order's struggle as it waits for God's kingdom to come, and he also writes about Christians as sons and children. This is not a "flipflopping" of gender, because the referents are different. Paul uses different metaphors to emphasise different aspects of reality, creation's pain is one, and believers' relationship with God is another; and in this last, the children and their father, he retains a hierarchical distinction between what is made, and its maker which is determined more by generation than by gender. Furthermore, it is important to remember that it is the nature of metaphor to liken two ultimately dissimilar things, rather than to transfer wholesale likeness. Dissimilarities are not dissolved by comparison of discrete features.

In her discussion of other sources, Coakley transfers her assumptions about the relationship between trinitarian and gender relations. She acknowledges that Augustine's understanding is of a paradox of equality and difference between men and women, and concludes that here, "what matters is harmony and order, unity and cooperation".<sup>51</sup> Yet, she also suggests that for him, "contemplative encounter ... will include the possibility of upsetting the 'normal' vision of the sexes and gender altogether", seemingly basing this on her own understanding of gender dynamics in contemplative prayer.<sup>52</sup> When she considers Nyssa's *On the Making of Man*, Coakley discovers a "fascinatingly labile perception of the role of 'gender'" implying "desexed equality".<sup>53</sup> This reading is, however, disputed. Rather than suggesting

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50 Feminist critics still complain that this approach reinstates an unequal divide, with both creation and individual believers as the submissive female and God as masculine authority, (Tonstad, *God and Difference*, 103). Coakley's vision however, is far from a reiteration of Ephesians 5.25-33 complementarian structure.

51 *GSS*, 293.

52 *GSS*, 310.

53 *GSS*, 274; 310. Though she carefully notes that he is not "going for non-binary in a "secular" sense"

a two-stage creation process of “angeloid” unsexed spiritual bodies, followed by sexually differentiated bodies, it can be read as indicating a simultaneous creation of two separate entities: rational, unsexed spirits and sexed bodies. This latter option would cohere to some degree with Augustine’s equal-and-different argument, as equivalent spirits dwell in differentiated bodies.

In contrast, within Nyssa’s Homilies on the Song of Songs we certainly see a fluidity of gender roles, as the soul seeking after God, takes a male voice, then female, sometimes singular, then plural, in a contemplative ascent towards participation in God. These movements, in however, instantiate the union of two *different* identities, as Cadenhead states, identifying in Gregory a rejection of Plato’s pederastic model: “the erotic relationship between God and soul is always metaphorically a male-female relationship”.<sup>54</sup> We might add, the metaphors work precisely because they use two distinct entities, male and female bodies, or rather, bridegroom and bride, for two distinct referents, God and his people. True fluidity of gender would break down the functioning of this metaphor. Here we must note that recognising bodies as *created male and female* (rejecting gender theories of bodies as neutral forms which are assigned or subvert socially constructed gender) allows us to describe gender not as a fluid performance, but as a function of those bodies. Do Vale, in his insightful analytic work on gender, argues that this position takes into account the good orderliness of creation and also undergirds the classical doctrine that God is genderless, as he is bodiless, and acts to rebut the idea that a belief in binary gender somehow results in a patriarchal God.<sup>55</sup>

One could argue that by adopting in *GSS* a view of “gender that is ...founded in bodily practices of prayer”, rather than the sexed body, Coakley contracts and concretises gender, and actually reinforces stereotypes, establishing a sort of female-dominant androgyny, for the pray-er is the receptive, bridal figure.<sup>56</sup> As she writes so provocatively in an earlier work, “only the feminised soul can fully respond to the embraces of the bridegroom”.<sup>57</sup> Removing the metaphor from its scriptural context of Christ’s loving self-gift for the Church and covenantal faithfulness, creates a problematically eroticised and individualistic model. Bridal imagery which is used throughout Scripture to describe first Israel and then the

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(282) adding: “his is a sui generis view of gender is not one subsumable into modern or postmodern secular categories” (304).

54 Raphael A. Cadenhead, *The Body and Desire: Gregory of Nyssa’s Ascetical Theology*, (California: University of California: 2018), 51.

55 Felipe, Do Vale, *The Ontology of Gender: An Analytic Theological Approach*. (MA Thesis, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2016), 189. His argument is dense, but worth including: “If gender is the proper function of the human body, then the only things that are gendered (in the strong, literal sense) are human bodies. Since God lacks a human body, then there is no possibility of his being strongly gendered (he could not possibly have the proper function of a human body if he lacks a human body)... Put simply, the only appropriate subject for gender is the human body”.

56 *GSS*, 34. In *Powers*, 68, Coakley claims “only the feminised soul can fully respond to the embraces of the bridegroom”.

57 Coakley, *Powers*, 68.

church, is always corporate, never applied to individuals, and focuses first on what the Lord has done, as covenant maker, before any bride-like behaviour of his people. Gender reference within the metaphor illustrates this distinction, as well as the loving security of union, far more than other aspects of gender. Male believers do not need to become “feminised” in prayer, though they do need to become dependent and submissive, features also of the child and the servant, which are non-gendered metaphors for believers. Collectively these images define ideas of the church, rather than masculinity or femininity, for the calling to submit to God is issued to all, male and female alike.

### *VI. Difference and Desire Reconstructed*

Returning to the current tensions in the church, we find that Coakley highlights areas which merit careful theological attention and may be of great help in producing a God honouring response. These include the relationship between human desires and our hunger for God, the use of prayer and self-denial in training desire, and the connection between conceptions of gender and abuse of power. While her methodology is certainly limiting, a willingness to centre prayer and also to explore wider Christian culture in our practice of theology is needed as we travel forwards.

In *GSS* Coakley exposes, perhaps inadvertently, the paradox of difference and equality worked through both her studies of trinitarian models and representations of gender. Her proposal, of offering resolution through an interruption of binaries and an embrace of gender lability, is, though instructive in exposing power structures at work, ultimately reductive. A kind of oneness emerges, which minimises the body that is the church and the differentiated human body, as well as the incarnate body of Christ. It seems that to address the current crisis of sexuality, as she aims to do, the reverse is required, for it is in facing up to difference through the body in these various forms, and in relation to God, the Church can properly deal with difference, order and equality, as well as sacrifice and power.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sarah Allen is a teacher, writer and northern director of London Seminary's Flourish Course. She is the author of *Resilient Faith* [Co-Author] (Crossway, 2022) and *Clothed with Strength* (10Publishing, 2022). Sarah is married to Lewis who pastors Hope Church in Huddersfield and mum of five. She has a MTh from UST and MA in English from Cambridge.

# EVANGELICALS, LET'S BE A LITTLE BIT MORE REFORMED CATHOLIC

Tom Underhill

## *Abstract*

What attitude should evangelicals, committed to *sola Scriptura*, take to extra-scriptural church tradition? This article, taking cues from the recent book *Reformed Catholicity*, argues that Scripture itself gives us reasons to cultivate an attitude of trust and receptivity to tradition (though not uncritically), and that it would be beneficial for UK conservative evangelicalism to recover such a posture.

## *I. Introduction*

Many evangelicals today are well-versed in C. S. Lewis's "sea-breeze of the centuries" argument for the value of tradition: reading the theological reflections of past ages grants us a different perspective from that of our current generation, revealing to us our assumptions with their limits and blind spots.<sup>1</sup> This is a fine pragmatic argument, but not a theological one, and therein lies a vulnerability. For without theological rationale, a posture of friendliness towards tradition is susceptible to criticism on the basis of anti-tradition themes in Scripture (particularly Jesus' condemnation of the Pharisees), and the historic precedent always near at hand to evangelicals who see themselves as heirs of Luther's stand on Scripture alone over and against church tradition. This article attempts to supply such a theological justification for a presumption of trust towards tradition that is both consistently Protestant and persuasive to evangelical readers. It takes the form of an analysis of the book *Reformed Catholicity* by Michael Allen and Scott Swain,<sup>2</sup> appropriating and bolstering their arguments along the way, and applying their conclusions to the context of UK conservative evangelicalism.<sup>3</sup>

*Reformed Catholicity*, published in 2015, is a defence of a certain kind of theological mindset. Allen and Swain argue for methods, habits and instincts in theological endeavour (at every level) that are friendly to and exploitative of tradition from a geographically, historically and ecumenically wide range of sources. This is what

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1 St. Athanasius and John Behr, *On the Incarnation* (Yonkers, N.Y.: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2011), From the preface by Lewis.

2 Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain, *Reformed Catholicity: The Promise of Retrieval for Theology and Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2015).

3 It would be tedious to keep repeating "conservative evangelicals/ism in a UK context", so I will speak simply of "evangelicals" and "evangelicalism" indicating primarily this subset of that wider culture.



Reformed catholicity is (a “sensibility, not a system”).<sup>4</sup> The authors note the recent popularity of projects of “retrieval”: attempts to address contemporary theological issues or resource church cultures using sources from the past. Their definition of retrieval projects is extensive, ranging from ressourcement Thomism<sup>5</sup> to the hymns of Keith and Kristin Getty. But the book aims to serve as a manifesto for specifically *Protestant* retrieval, by defending this posture towards tradition on the basis of Protestant theology and exegesis. Allen and Swain argue that it is consistent for Reformed theology to be properly “catholic,” that is, to affirm significant areas of continuity with the teaching of the church in all past generations and therefore make profitable use of resources from anywhere in time or location that shared doctrines are confessed. If Reformed theologians hold a doctrine of the Trinity essentially the same as that taught by the pro-Nicene theologians of the fourth century, there is much to be gained from reading those writers on the Trinity; if that same doctrine is confessed today by Roman Catholic theologians, they too can be read and quoted with profit.<sup>6</sup>

It may be that such a description (or even the book title) already sets the teeth of evangelical readers on edge. Isn't to be Protestant simply to be not-Catholic? Allen and Swain, however, argue that this was not how the Reformers themselves conceived of their identity. Their project is inspired by William Perkins, the original self-styled “Reformed Catholicke,” who emphasised that his theological starting place was the heritage of doctrine held in common by the church, from which the errors of Rome (and others) were to be pared off.<sup>7</sup> It should be noted that this is quite a different procedure from that, instinctive to much modern evangelicalism, which requires all doctrine to be immediately and directly generated from Scripture. In such a culture, the value of tradition (a creed, or doctrinal statement, for example) is reduced to functioning as a signpost to or patchwork of Bible verses. No person should be bound by such tradition unless they can come to the same conclusions by simply reading the referenced proof texts; the artefacts of tradition hold no authority whatsoever in themselves, but only as windows on to Scripture (and therefore the thinner and more transparent they are, the better). Again, it might seem to evangelical ears that this is the only possible position for those who hold to the principle of *sola Scriptura*. But the Reformers themselves reached precise conclusions about the ways in which Scripture both does and does not claim sufficiency. The shape to the doctrine - *sola Scriptura* being of course a doctrinal conclusion derived itself from more than a single text of Scripture - sketched above does not match that on which they took their stand.

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4 Allen and Swain, *Reformed Catholicity*, 3.

5 A movement of Roman Catholic theologians giving increased attention to the work of Thomas Aquinas. For definition, see *Reformed Catholicity*, 11.

6 While Allen and Swain work from a distinctively Reformed stance, their reasoning on the key points is more historically Protestant than theologically Reformed, and hence can be appropriated by evangelicals more broadly.

7 Allen and Swain, *Reformed Catholicity*, 3.

Our argument below, following the course of *Reformed Catholicity*, is that it is not merely pragmatically unwise, *a la* Lewis, but *unjustified on the basis of Scripture itself* to give a cast to the doctrine of *sola Scriptura* so as to exclude the necessary contribution of the teaching agency of the church, and the possibility of assigning secondary authority to the artefacts of tradition. We are talking here of the relation between tradition and Scripture, theologically and exegetically, and the implications for our practice of theology and exegesis. The contention is that the Reformed catholic sensibility, which receives theology and theologians of the past with thankfulness and a certain degree of trust (though not without critique, and not yielding the position and function of Scripture as single source and ultimate authority), and casts a wide net to do so, is a more biblical attitude.

It is also one which evangelicals need to recover. For, as Lewis' argument predicts, a church culture averse to the wisdom of the past suffers from blind spots. These come in the form of theological and practical conclusions that appear to a generation of evangelicals self-evidently based on Scripture, yet are novelties.<sup>8</sup> We also suffer from a lack of the kind of extended theological constructions that are only possible as multi-generational projects. If we can rely only on a single layer of exegesis that can be generated afresh by any competent pastor, we will not have the resources to meet the complex challenges of contemporary situations.<sup>9</sup> During the coronavirus pandemic, churches suddenly faced acute questions about the nature of their gatherings relating to the importance of embodiment to our human nature. Is "online church" truly church? Is there a more than pragmatic reason why we should meet physically rather than virtually (and what is the difference in any case, given the increasing power of technology to mediate presence more and more effectively)? Can the Lord's Supper be celebrated in a dispersed manner? Many answers given followed a minimal "the Bible doesn't say we can't" logic. A rich heritage of Christian thought on the importance of embodiment and the nature of immediate versus mediated presence was appropriated by few. Questions about the appropriate limits of political authority and Christian approaches to government were raised by the same exigency; the issue of human nature and of the meaning of humanity as male and female has been pressing with urgency for some decades now. We need to see it as worthy of our time as evangelicals to engage with and to produce writing that thinks deeply on these matters, and that can patiently hold off the demand for practical answers while giving careful and extended theological attention to the foundations. We need to license and resource efforts to construct rich and thoroughly biblical accounts of reality, which can only be done in conversation with the resources we possess already in the reflections of past generations. But all such endeavours will only flourish if evangelicals see

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8 The recent neglect or denial of the classic doctrines of divine simplicity and immutability comes to mind, as might contemporary attitudes to the connection between Sabbath and Lord's Day.

9 To say this takes nothing away from the vital importance and centrality of the exegesis of competent pastors. It is to question, however, if this is the only or omni-sufficient way in which the church is to be taught from the Scriptures.

proper theological and biblical warrant for them.

We will summarise and follow Swain and Allen's argument by means of four statements, assessing and supplementing where possible with a particular eye for how their arguments can be bolstered and rendered persuasive to the UK conservative evangelical context. These attempt to represent the argument of each of the first four main chapters of the book.

*II. As the teacher of the church, the Spirit's work is to enable the church to fully receive Scripture. The fruits of this work are the artefacts of tradition, which the Spirit also uses to teach the church across generations. As such, tradition should be received by each fresh generation with thanksgiving and a (qualified) presumption of trust.*

The first step in Allen and Swain's book is to describe theologically the activity of theology. Simply put, they argue that both the activity of theology and the products that result from the activity should be seen as the work of the Holy Spirit. The New Testament characterises the Spirit as the teacher of the church, the school of Christ. Firstly, the inspired Scriptures are given as the single, completed and sufficient source of theology; then in an ongoing way the Spirit works to bring the disciples of Christ into a fuller and more mature knowledge of Christ from that one source. They make a number of key theological claims underpinning this characterisation that appear fairly straightforwardly from the New Testament texts: the Spirit of Truth is the possessor of divine truth with the mission of revealing truth to the church (John 16:13-15, 1 Cor. 2:9-13); the church is enabled to understand by being born of the Spirit (John 3); the church is identified as the location in which believers will come to mature knowledge (Eph. 3:16-19).<sup>10</sup> This maturing is not a supply of new knowledge, which is given completely in Scripture, it is rather being led deeper into that same deposit.<sup>11</sup> But Scripture is given to be received, meaning not merely read but understood in all its manifold implications and applications. This the Spirit enables the church to do; this is the work of theology.

The products of the work of theology (artefacts like creeds, confessions, commentaries, treatises, prayers, liturgies, sermons and so on) should therefore be seen "not simply as human cultural activities and artifacts but also as fruits of the Spirit."<sup>12</sup> Even more strongly, their claim is that tradition is the goal of theology, for these artefacts are the necessary by-product of the church coming under the Spirit's teaching to fully receive (grasp, comprehend) what is given in Scripture.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Allen and Swain, *Reformed Catholicity*, 18.

<sup>11</sup> Allen and Swain consciously distinguish this from Roman Catholic approaches. Allen and Swain, *Reformed Catholicity*, 35.

<sup>12</sup> Allen and Swain, *Reformed Catholicity*, 25.

<sup>13</sup> "While Holy Scripture, as principium cognoscendi externum, is the divinely authoritative and sufficient source of theology, tradition, the Spirit-enabled reception of Scripture, is the divinely appointed goal of theology." Allen and Swain, *Reformed Catholicity*, 36. The strength of Allen and Swain's claim is not novel,

But the products of tradition are not only records of the understanding of the church at a given moment, merely evidence of a past layer of the Spirit's work: they are means by which the teaching work of the Spirit spans generations. Receiving Scripture is not a process that starts from scratch in each new generation; it is an activity extended through time. What is passed down is not the words of Scripture alone, which then need to be interpreted entirely anew, but the words of Scripture *and* the fruit of the Spirit's work teaching the church from Scripture. This whole process is part of Christ fulfilling his promise to build his church, which is put into place down the ages, by the Spirit, upon the apostolic foundation.<sup>14</sup>

Allen and Swain also suggest the necessity of a multi-generational aspect to the building process given the role of renewed reason in the maturing of the church. Reason is the divine gift given that we may know and love God. In the creation account, humanity is created differently to the other animals in that we have intellectual capacity that enables us to be true covenant partners with God: of mankind alone are we told that God speaks "to" them (Gen. 1:26-28), and to mankind alone is given a conscious task and a law (Gen. 2:15-17).<sup>15</sup> This gift of reason that serves fellowship with God is damaged at the fall and renewed by the Spirit. We do not receive salvation by a process in which our rational faculties are bypassed. Rather, our reason is (wholly and from outside) renewed and so grasps the gospel (2 Cor 4:6; Acts 28:23). We know Christ through understanding his words, we mature through searching and being taught the Scriptures given for our instruction. But there are no grounds for thinking that the role of reason should be purely individualistic or occasional. The church exercises reason collectively (cf. Paul's appeal in 1 Cor. 11:13-6). Tradition is "the temporally extended, socially mediated activity of renewed reason."<sup>16</sup> Allen and Swain point out that evangelicals are familiar with the "negative correlate of sola Scriptura": Scripture is the sole foundation for theology, so all theological tradition must be built solely upon it. But there is also, according to them, a "positive correlate...that has not always received due recognition in Protestant theology": "the Lord *authorizes the church to build* on that foundation."<sup>17</sup> Should we not expect collective maturing of the mind of the church, fruit from the collaborative exercise of renewed reason? In fact, whenever we gratefully receive a confession or a creed, a council verdict or even a pan-evangelical statement, we are tacitly accepting that such a process can take place.

The core of their argument thus laid down, what might be the likely evangelical responses to such a theological positioning of tradition? I can imagine three. In the

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however: Bavinck says the same. Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed by. John Bolt, trans by. John Vriend (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2004), 1:493-4.

14 That these artefacts are fruits of the Spirit does not imply their perfection or finality, just as we would not expect the fruits of the Spirit in the character of the believer to manifest perfection.

15 Allen and Swain, *Reformed Catholicity*, 36-41. Allen and Swain do not flesh this out; I am supplementing their argument here.

16 Allen and Swain, *Reformed Catholicity*, 36.

17 Allen and Swain, *Reformed Catholicity*, 42-3. Emphasis original.

first place, someone might question if such a posture is sufficiently justified only by extrapolation from the scriptural data about the Spirit's role teaching the church. Not entirely: Allen and Swain argue there is in fact an indication of these processes within Scripture itself, to which they devote their third chapter. But nonetheless, there is a certain willingness to make inferences and rest on good and necessary consequence in their construction, which itself is part of the theological sensibility for which they are advocating.<sup>18</sup> It would hardly be self-consistent to refute biblicism with biblicism, though those used to a shorter path between exegesis and conclusions will need patience to bear with their approach and judge the wisdom and persuasiveness of it as a whole.

Secondly, and rather more significantly, Allen and Swain assume without defence a significant kind of visible unity to the church. When they refer to "the renewed mind of the church," they presume both that there is such a collective thing, and that it can be known. Given the diversity of the visible church through history, this requires some justification. How does one know what the mind of the universal church thinks? To which, perhaps Allen and Swain would answer, tradition! But what of the "lively tradition of debate about what does and does not count as the faithful extension of tradition"?<sup>19</sup> What if one group claiming to belong to the visible church advocate the inclusion of some tradition that others reject, even to such a degree that they become, in the mind of some or the majority, outside the bounds; no longer a part (in Allen and Swain's language) of the school of Christ under the teaching of the Spirit? Such a situation, after all, is pretty much the short history of Christianity and certainly of the Reformation. If we grant that the Spirit is at work through the ages teaching the church, we still face the question of how we know where this is genuinely taking place, and where error has entered and is distorting, not clarifying, the truth of the gospel: how we identify the church. To evangelicals, Allen and Swain's picture of the church on earth as one school of Christ may appear an ideal construction at wide variance from reality.

However, unless committed to a radically atomistic ecclesiology such that no unity at all is conceived between the whole collective of Christians in the present, most evangelicals do speak generally and collectively of "the church" denoting something visible. And Protestants have usually allowed that the church, in this most general and collective sense, has been taught by the Spirit over the centuries in a cumulative manner. The results of controversies in the fourth and fifth centuries, for example, yielded greater insight over time as faulty trinitarian and christological conclusions were ruled out as un-scriptural by successive collaborative efforts. The results of these have had such an extensive and foundational impact that virtually every branch of the church has benefited (whether the source is explicitly acknowledged or not). A certain receptivity to at least this tradition as the work

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18 For a defence of the principle of good and necessary consequence, see Ryan McGraw, *By Good and Necessary Consequence* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Reformation Heritage, 2012).

19 Allen and Swain, *Reformed Catholicity*, 38.



of the Spirit has indeed been a mark of Protestant churches; witness the adoption of the traditional language of “one God in three persons” evidenced from the Reformed confessions of the sixteenth century down to evangelical doctrinal statements today. This kind of mere catholicity, some acknowledgement of the possibility of speaking of the church as visibly one, is all that is needed to sustain Allen and Swain’s case at a basic level.<sup>20</sup>

But how do we deal with “churches” that some Protestants have historically claimed are no such thing (pointedly, of course, the Roman Catholic church)? The standard Protestant response to this question is to reach for *sola Scriptura*: Scripture is the sufficient and clear guide that will enable us to discern the boundary of the visible church and the authenticity of all tradition that genuinely is the teaching of the Spirit. But while the Reformed catholic agrees, he or she also argues that one can reach too eagerly for *sola Scriptura*. If the Spirit’s teaching of Scripture is to be respected as having been at all successful (in any generation except our own!), what is passed down to us needs to be taken and sifted with patience and humility. If we have to justify any tradition entirely afresh from Scripture at every instant of adoption, we are not really receiving anything at all: the actual teaching and interpretation is done anew every time. Rather than stand alone and defined only against what has gone before, it is a consistently Protestant procedure to accept with gratefulness and trust a heritage of tradition received from the church of the past (generously so defined), and then to pare off as error that which has gone away, even up to the sad determination that a given error rules the originating branch outside the bounds of orthodoxy (as in the case of the original Reformers).<sup>21</sup> To consciously adopt this procedure is both more honest (for churches that claim to stand on the Bible alone almost always do so in some stream of interpretative tradition), and is the practical outworking of trust in the work of the Spirit as the teacher of the church.

Finally, the eschatological convictions (or merely inclinations) of some evangelicals might lead them to balk at the way in which Allen and Swain’s attitude to tradition requires a belief in overall positive doctrinal development: “Although the apostolic deposit cannot grow, the church’s understanding of that deposit can.”<sup>22</sup> A wholehearted embrace of premillennialism, for example, would be more likely to tell a story of the church that moved from the pristine apostolic era, through a subsequent decline into corruption, on through various downs

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20 It is noteworthy that some advocates of catholicity seem to recognise the necessity of making at least some minimal ecclesiological claims as part of their case. Kevin Vanhoozer, for example, seems to imply that catholicity is difficult without commitment to “one, translocal, visible church.” Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Biblical Authority after Babel: Retrieving the Solas in the Spirit of Mere Protestant Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2018), 198.

21 As Luther wrote concerning the Trinity: ‘We have precious books on this subject by St. Augustine, Hilary, and Cyril at our disposal. And this article of faith remained pure in the papacy and among the scholastic theologians, and we have no quarrel with them on that score’. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann, eds., *Luther’s Works*, 55 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1958), 15:310.

22 Allen and Swain, *Reformed Catholicity*, 43.

(medieval Roman Catholicism) and ups (the Reformation) to the present time, with no reason for optimism about the earth-bound end of this story (greater apostasy and persecution being the destination). Nor is it only premillennialism that leans in this direction: any more general conception of the true church predominantly as a permanently embattled minority, both in the world and amongst corrupted branches of the visible church, could make an upward story of doctrinal development less plausible. Such eschatological views may not have been held by the historic majority of Protestants, but can hardly be ignored given their widespread currency in 20th century evangelicalism. But aside from refuting the eschatological position, the advocate of Reformed catholicity can answer by pointing to the inherent inconsistency of tenaciously holding to Reformational gains such as *sola Scriptura* itself while denying the possibility of doctrinal advance. Surely despite (perhaps through) the constant multiplying and shedding of heresies along the way, there are some ways at least that the ongoing work of the Spirit has matured the mind of the church.

*III. Historically, the doctrine of sola Scriptura did not present Scripture as the only theological authority, but as the only supreme authority. A healthy Protestant approach to theology accords tradition a secondary, derivative, but real authority under Scripture.*

The second and third chapters of *Reformed Catholicity* are devoted to *sola Scriptura*. We have already noted the critical importance of the shape of this doctrine. Different ways of construing *sola Scriptura* will lead to different evangelical attitudes to tradition.<sup>23</sup> Allen and Swain first show that the principle of *sola Scriptura*, as historically articulated, did not imply an instinctive hostility towards tradition. Although the doctrine of *sola Scriptura* has often been taken as indicating exactly this, at both popular and more scholarly levels,<sup>24</sup> Allen and Swain's contention is that *sola Scriptura* is "frequently misinterpreted" and needs to not be "pulled loose...from its wider doctrinal context." In its best form, "*sola Scriptura* is meant to shape engagement of the catholic tradition as a theological authority, not to foreclose such retrieval."<sup>25</sup> The authors make both an historical and then a biblical case for this best form of the doctrine.

Their historical case rests on three strands of evidence that the original form of *sola Scriptura* envisaged the supreme authority of Scripture functioning in a "catholic context," in continuity with the way that the Church Fathers deployed

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23 The notion of the "shape" of the doctrine comes from Keith A. Mathison, *The Shape of Sola Scriptura* (Moscow, Id.: Canon, 2001).

24 Allen and Swain reference A. N. Williams as an example of one who, while recognising that some evangelicals have begun to appreciate tradition, thinks this is incompatible with *sola Scriptura*, because she believes that the doctrine originally "denied any authority to tradition whatsoever." Allen and Swain, *Reformed Catholicity*, 53–4.

25 Allen and Swain, *Reformed Catholicity*, 50.

Scripture and tradition. First, the Reformers typically discussed the authority of Scripture within a context of discussing Christ's rule over his church exercised through ministers and other forms of subordinate churchly authority.<sup>26</sup> But if church ministers and synods (or equivalent) exercise any authority at all in how Scripture is understood, then it is not the case that there is only one authority. These secondary authorities are always dependent on Scripture and to be judged by it, but the collective health of the church depends upon there being structures of subsidiary authority to whose teaching is accorded more weight than individual interpretation. It therefore is not the case that rejecting the authority of the Roman magisterium to define doctrine made all doctrinal formulation for Protestants a process of private judgement. To put it another way, Scripture is the authority that rules other authorities (there is one norming norm), *but other authorities do exist and function as such* (there are normed norms). Anyone who accepts the necessity of a doctrinal basis admits this to be the case.

Secondly, Allen and Swain note that the early Reformed confessions explicitly "received the pastoral witness of the catholic past with gratitude and thanks."<sup>27</sup> The magisterial Reformers accepted the doctrine of the Trinity as defined in the Nicene Creed, for example, as orthodoxy and considered deviation from such to be apostasy, in marked opposition to the radical Reformers. Notably, we might add, they did not do this only because they considered the verdict of Nicaea to be simply a summary of Scripture. They do refer to the basis of such tradition in right reading of Scripture, but, as the First Helvetic Confession puts it, "Where the holy fathers and early teachers...have not departed from this rule [i.e., Scripture], we want to recognize and consider them *not only as expositors of Scripture, but as elect instruments through whom God has spoken and operated.*"<sup>28</sup> The church's tradition, in such cases as it faithfully reflects Scripture, is a product of God's ongoing work to bring the church to maturity in her reception of Scripture. Such tradition is more than a signpost pointing to Scripture; it is a guide to the meaning of Scripture, a guide which the church subsequently is under obligation to treat with respect. The secondary authority of tradition consists in this claim upon the respectful attention of the church. The nature of the tradition would determine the level of authority (under Scripture) assigned to it, and the proper context for any proposed correction. If Scripture is truly to be the supreme authority, every subsidiary authority must be susceptible to such correction, but in an appropriate manner. The time-tested deliverance of an ecumenical council, for example, generates a very high bar for potential revision. Occasional declarations by single church bodies, though they may be binding on individuals in that church, bear far less authority in a wider context.

Finally, the authors note the widespread Reformation practice of producing

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26 They illustrate this particularly from the writings of Martin Bucer.

27 Allen and Swain, *Reformed Catholicity*, 67.

28 Emphasis mine, quoted in Allen and Swain, *Reformed Catholicity*, 67.

confessional and catechetical materials, and the passing down of Reformed liturgical traditions to be followed by subsequent generations. In practice, those who formulated the principle of *sola Scriptura* evidently considered that the production of tradition would not generate a burdensome layer through which their children would have to dig to recover the pure teaching of Scripture. Rather, they believed that such Reformed tradition would provide an aid and safeguard to right interpretation of Scripture, and to the maintenance of sound doctrine. Allen and Swain conclude that “[p]rincipled commitment to biblical authority as the ultimate determining factor for all faith and practice did not lead to diminishing concern for ecclesial authority or waning reception of church traditions.”<sup>29</sup> This is a conclusion that their historical evidence warrants, and against which it seems hard to argue. The attitude of the magisterial Reformers towards Scripture simply was not the same as that of the radical Reformers, despite the attempts of some historians to argue that their different attitudes amount to the same practical result. While it may well be true that strands of evangelicalism have been nervous of ascribing any real authority (even secondary and normed) to anything other than Scripture, the strength of Allen and Swain’s argument at this point is suggestive that such an instinct is fuelled more by late modern individualism than fidelity to the Reformation.

*IV. Exegetically, this tradition-friendly form of sola Scriptura is justified because Scripture itself does not speak of tradition in a uniformly negative way, but teaches that tradition will form a healthy part of the Spirit’s teaching of the church across generations.*

To claim that *sola Scriptura* is compatible with valuing tradition on the basis of the traditional meaning of the doctrine alone would be self-undermining. Hence Allen and Swain also offer a “biblical case...for locating the Bible alone as a final authority amid a catholic context of other, subordinate authorities in the church’s life.”<sup>30</sup> Their major evidence comes firstly from the biblical account of the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15. For Allen and Swain, the Jerusalem Council is a model for the exercise of authority within the church, in which Scripture is the foundational authority.<sup>31</sup> They are at pains to refute the suggestion that the council weighed spiritual experience as the sole or major grounds for its conclusions, as some recent interpreters have argued. Rather, Scripture was the source of the decisions of Council: “the words of the prophets are in agreement” (Acts 15:15). But the declaration of the Council, although an interpretation and re-expression of Scripture, is disseminated in its own authoritative form (Acts 15:23-29). As

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29 Allen and Swain, *Reformed Catholicity*, 70.

30 Allen and Swain, *Reformed Catholicity*, 72.

31 This is the “paradigmatic model of ecclesial authority exercised in the form of a church council.” Allen and Swain, *Reformed Catholicity*, 74.

such Acts 15 is both pattern and warrant for that which Luther also affirmed: “the necessity of church councils for Christ’s continued governance of his church.”<sup>32</sup>

Evangelicals might observe that the unique apostolic constitution of the Council of Jerusalem creates a problem for reading it as a simple paradigm for the exercise of ecclesial authority in the post-apostolic age. Though the judgement of the Council is founded on Scripture, as Allen and Swain show, the procedure cannot simply be transferred to later councils as if they were in complete continuity, for no subsequent councils contain apostles. However, there are also indications of continuity in the account in Acts that justify some application of principles to the ongoing government of the church. The inclusion of the elders in each description of the constitution of this council (Acts 15:2, 4, 6) demonstrates that it was not leaning on pure apostolic deliberation to the exclusion of other leaders. Furthermore, the description of the final judgement as that of “the apostles and elders, with the whole church” (Acts 15:22-3), show that the official authority to which the pronouncement appealed was not that of the apostles alone.<sup>33</sup>

A similar criticism might be levelled against their second major strand of biblical evidence in apostolic teaching on tradition, especially as evident in the Pastoral Epistles. According to Allen and Swain, Paul’s call on Timothy to “follow his authoritative example,” is a call “to maintain a catholic heritage.”<sup>34</sup> They claim that the “pattern of sound words” (2 Tim 1:13-14) refers to “a vibrant and ongoing interpretative tradition that serves to provide authoritative parameters for expositing those sacred Scriptures.”<sup>35</sup> They resist the idea that this represents an “early Catholicism” emerging in the Pastorals because the same documents strongly emphasise Scriptural authority: “biblical authority is not juxtaposed with but paired alongside thick practices of catholic traditioning.”<sup>36</sup> But Allen and Swain assume too quickly the meaning of “the pattern of sound words.” Is this some tradition that Paul has passed to Timothy outside of the now-inscripturated word of the New Testament? Or is it simply a reference to the content of the apostolic gospel, spoken to Timothy and contemporaries and now sufficiently communicated to us in the apostolic writings? It could well be countered that the interpretative choice here is between what they don’t want to acknowledge: an “early Catholicism” emerging in the Pastorals, or a reference purely to what is passed down in Scripture. John Stott’s commentary on 2 Timothy 2:2, for example, is striking in this regard: “Speaking ideally, ‘Scripture’ and ‘tradition’ should be interchangeable terms, for what the church hands down from generation to generation should be the biblical faith, no

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32 Allen and Swain, *Reformed Catholicity*, 78.

33 Allen and Swain do not address these issues in this chapter, although they do return to some of them later, where they make a similar point about the mixed constitution of the Council. Allen and Swain, *Reformed Catholicity*, 112-3.

34 Allen and Swain, *Reformed Catholicity*, 81.

35 Allen and Swain, *Reformed Catholicity*, 82.

36 Allen and Swain, *Reformed Catholicity*, 83.



more and no less.”<sup>37</sup>

But a positive function of tradition (in a slightly different sense to that of Stott) and the processes of traditioning is not necessarily at odds with the position that the content of what is passed down is simply the inscripturated apostolic word. When Paul exhorts Timothy to “entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” this inscripturated word, he surely imagines more than the physical act of handing them a Bible. They are to be taught the meaning and equipped to handle the word (2 Tim. 2:15). Such a process takes place by means of “tradition”: if by such we mean either the words or the writings of those faithful teachers in each generation who guard and pass on the truth of Scripture. Scripture is not transmitted sealed and pristine, but both geographically and chronologically by people and communities who give their understanding of the meaning of Scripture along with Scripture itself. This is a feature not a bug. According to the pattern Paul lays down to Timothy, this is how the gospel will be preserved (not the reason why it is constantly in danger of being obscured). Scripture does not function alone in God’s economy, as the importance of the people-gifts Christ gives to the church in Ephesians 4 also makes clear.

To admit this does not yield a Roman Catholic doctrine of unwritten tradition in the possession of the institutional church, nor does it foreclose the possibility of mistakes made by one generation and passed down in tradition. It merely points again to the living continuity of the work of the Spirit and the context in which Scripture is designed to operate: the proper transmission of Scripture will involve Spirit-enabled people in Spirit-born communities teaching the meaning of Scripture as they themselves were taught. Allen and Swain also point out that this language is frequent in Scripture: texts like Isaiah 59:2, Psalm 145:4, and Acts 2:39 demonstrate that it is a perennial characteristic of the church that one generation teaches the next. It is also true that the work of the Spirit will involve correcting mistakes in tradition by means of fresh exegesis of the Scriptural foundation.

*V. Reading Scripture in a way that is guided by tradition can be part of the church’s submission to Scripture, rather than a muting or eclipse of Scripture.*

Finally, *Reformed Catholicity* moves to the question of how this theological sensibility affects the practice of exegesis. Here the authors give a theological argument for the practice of “ruled reading”: exegesis done with the aid of the rule of faith. According to Allen and Swain, the rule of faith is “an ecclesiastically authorized re-presentation of scriptural teaching whose hermeneutical function is to provide not only a starting point for biblical exegesis but also to direct exegesis to its goal.”<sup>38</sup> Evangelical hackles, once again, might be raised by such a thought. Surely this process is the wrong way around: should not our doctrine flow from

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37 John Stott, *The Message of 2 Timothy* (Leicester: IVP, 1999), 52.

38 Allen and Swain, *Reformed Catholicity*, 99.

Scripture, rather than shaping the understanding of Scripture, still less exerting any kind of ruling function over what we might be allowed to find therein?<sup>39</sup> But once again the challenge is to more accurately specify the relation between our own doctrinal formulations and Scripture as their source and norm. The Reformed catholic claim is that this can be conceived in such a way as to envisage a healthy shaping influence in both directions (though not symmetrically). The notion of the rule of faith is a major way in which this has historically been attempted.

As Allen and Swain point out, Scripture itself contains such summaries of the sweep of Scripture (Deut. 6:4-5, 1 Cor. 8:6, Eph. 4:4-6), which provides important warrant for the practice of making summaries and using them as guides to the shape of Scripture as a whole.<sup>40</sup> Such a procedure is very similar to that to which Don Carson appeals when he states that theology and biblical interpretation must be shaped by “the non-negotiables of biblical theology.”<sup>41</sup> The idea of “the” rule of faith is an attempt to articulate some shared historical consensus of what these non-negotiables might be, what vital elements to the biblical story and articles of biblical faith centre and shape our reading of the whole. There is a limit to the consensus: the rule is not singular but is “found in various expressions throughout the life of the church,”<sup>42</sup> though there are common elements such as the Triune name and the outline of the gospel or redemptive narrative. But over time the witness of the church contributes a helpful pressure on fresh articulations of the rule: the Protestant creeds gratefully acknowledged and incorporated earlier summaries such as the Apostles’ Creed, often verbatim.

These summaries are always subject to Scripture, to which they do not claim to add but merely to re-present. But as such, they help us read the parts of Scripture in light of the whole by serving up the whole in precis form suitable for such use. When such a summary “reflects Scripture’s proportions and purpose,” it aids our interpretation of Scripture in varied ways: it “serves in training our senses to perceive Scripture’s fullness, order and beauty,” it “aids doxological reading,” and it serves as a “guard” against reductionism or hobby horse exegesis.<sup>43</sup> The authors remind us that as no reading can take place without pre-understanding, the rule of faith is a tool to shape that pre-understanding in a manner that will be most receptive to Scripture. It helps us to enter the hermeneutical spiral from a privileged starting point.<sup>44</sup> As well as immediately ruling out obviously heretical interpretations from the exegete’s consideration, having a miniature image of the

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39 Many may be familiar with the charge not to let one’s “framework” control the meaning of a given Bible text.

40 Expanding them is the “faithful extension of an inner-biblical impulse.” Allen and Swain, *Reformed Catholicity*, 109.

41 D. A. Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited* (Leicester: Apollos, 2008), 59.

42 Allen and Swain, *Reformed Catholicity*, 107.

43 Allen and Swain, *Reformed Catholicity*, 110–1.

44 Allen and Swain, *Reformed Catholicity*, 113, 115.

whole of Scripture at hand surely helps us to read the parts in light of the whole so as to “perceive Scripture’s fullness, order and beauty.” Good catechetical instruction should develop virtuous habits in our Scripture reading.

Once again, we must consider the possible evangelical objections. The notorious difficulty with the rule of faith, it might be pointed out, is identifying it. If it is something that is ecclesiastically authorised, as Allen and Swain claim, we are forced to ask: by which ecclesia? This could be a call for confessional reading of Scripture, where the rule of faith is the document or documents adopted as standard by a particular church; the rule of faith is, after all, “found in various expressions” according to Allen and Swain. Such a claim would be a natural extension of their argument for the propriety of secondary authorities in the life of the church in the previous section, and would point modern-day evangelicals to the value of the standards of their own church or denomination in their reading of Scripture. However, that would not in itself have much to do with catholicity. The Reformed catholic position pushes further to argue that the standards should be authorised in some way by the whole church (or should at least be based on, contain, or reflect such standards). The ecumenical creeds are the best candidates here (being verified by the widest and deepest range of church assent) and so we have an argument for contemporary church statements of doctrine to incorporate or echo the language of these symbols in their own standards (as Reformed churches historically did).

Another question that might be raised is whether a particular concrete version of the rule of faith is in practice (not just principle) errant. Certainly it must be in theory fallible if “the church can and has erred in its confession.”<sup>45</sup> But the reader of *Reformed Catholicity* is left unclear how to hold together the status of the rule as always in need of scriptural justification, and yet not open to “endless revision.” If “Dogmas... stand as ‘irreversible’ expressions of the rule of faith,” then is it or is it not true that the church can err? One can sympathise, as Peter Leithart puts it, with the tightrope the authors walk here.<sup>46</sup> If the teaching work of the Spirit is a cross-generational activity leading to stability, this seems to exclude endless ground-up revision. Yet if there is no possibility of adjusting fixed forms of the rule, they seem to have acquired a practical equality with Scripture. Moreover, the practical value of the rule can be overstated. If the ecumenical creeds are the core of the rule, much error as they exclude, they still leave plenty of room for heresy. And given the rule only sets broad parameters, as Allen and Swain acknowledge (per Augustine), it is possible to have a reading that is validated by the rule of faith and yet mistaken.<sup>47</sup>

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45 Allen and Swain, *Reformed Catholicity*, 111.

46 Peter J. Leithart, “The Word and the Rule of Faith,” *First Things*, 30 January 2015, <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2015/01/the-word-and-the-rule-of-faith> (accessed October 19, 2021).

47 Allen and Swain, *Reformed Catholicity*, 115. Allen and Swain make varied claims for the power of the rule of faith: their strongest is that “church dogmas provide...a divinely authorised interpretative key,” or that it is a “benchmark,” (115) but these are balanced by statements such as “the rule of faith offers an entry point into the hermeneutical spiral,” (113) or “promising orientation or starting point for the reading of Scripture,” (115) which seem rather more modest.

But these objections need not be fatal. They do not refute the basic contention that the Spirit's teaching of the church in the past should be privileged as the best starting point for formulating those summaries of Scripture that themselves are the best starting point for exegesis (and exegesis, after all, must start somewhere). Reading Scripture as one coherent whole is crucial to good exegesis and the formation of sound doctrine, and in this the rule of faith provides invaluable aid in forming precise summaries that serve as accurate keys to that whole (even if the rule itself does not answer many specific exegetical questions). The question of the stability of the rule and its revision in light of Scripture is not in principle more difficult than that of secondary standards and Scripture: to which the preceding argument about the validity of secondary authorities in the life of the church may be applied. It is worth nothing that for the Reformers and their heirs in the subsequent generation of post-Reformed theologians, the rule of faith was usually articulated as equivalent to the analogy of Scripture: it was seen as a part of the process of attempting to "explain the scriptures by the scriptures."<sup>48</sup> Van Mastricht's treatment of the means of interpretation, for example, moves fluidly and directly from the analogy of faith, to interpreting Scripture by Scripture, and on to the value of keeping in mind "the whole plan of Scripture."<sup>49</sup>

### VI. Applications and conclusion

It is the argument of this article that Scott Swain and Michael Allen are correct to argue that a posture of receptivity towards theological tradition from a wide range of sources is historically compatible with Protestant convictions (including *sola Scriptura*) and is biblically warranted. We have theological, not merely pragmatic, reasons to stand self-consciously in the stream of doctrine that has flowed down to us from the church through the centuries; it is there that we are best placed to seek faithfully and ever more fully to receive and inhabit the truth revealed in Scripture. If this is true, and if it is also true that evangelical attitudes to tradition have been at worse dismissive and at best uneven, then one of the needs of evangelical theology and evangelical church culture is a greater receptiveness to the value of the Spirit's work in the church that comes to us in the form of tradition. So, at this point, leaving Allen and Swain's book behind, we turn finally to ask what would it look like if we all became a little more Reformed catholic?<sup>50</sup>

First, and simply—if unnervingly—the scope of our influences would widen. It is generally acceptable in a wide swathe of evangelicalism, for example, to plunder Puritan writings at some length for wisdom. But a true Reformed catholicity will push us further than our favourites. Simply adopting one branch of tradition

<sup>48</sup> Quoting Whitaker. Allen and Swain, *Reformed Catholicity*, 102.

<sup>49</sup> Petrus Van Mastricht, *Theoretical-Practical Theology, Volume 1: Prolegomena*, ed by Joel R. Beeke, trans by Todd M. Rester (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Reformation Heritage Books, 2019), 194–5.

<sup>50</sup> Which, we should recall, is a "theological sensibility, not a system." Allen and Swain, *Reformed Catholicity*, 12.

(probably the closest to our own outlook) will not do justice to the work of the Spirit throughout the whole church, nor will serve to thoroughly highlight our own blindspots (Lewis' argument again).<sup>51</sup> So we would receive not merely the Puritans, but the desert Fathers; we would not only read John Owen on Song of Songs, but Bernard of Clairvaux; we would not stop at Calvin's exegesis, but would sample that of Aquinas or Chrysostom. Conservative evangelicals can learn from the Christology of Thomas Weinandy or the theology of the body of John Paul II. Reformed catholicity inspires evangelicals to think this can be done not only with a critical eye that measures what is received against Scripture (though this remains vital), but also with generosity and gratitude. Perhaps such is already happily and increasingly the mood within conservative evangelical academic and seminary contexts. If so, such resourcing needs not to be hidden from the wider church, but to filter through more or less transparently to the benefit of congregations. We should stop placing such sources on implicit prohibited indexes, which both cuts off much that might be beneficial and fails in the long run to guard the flock. Surely better is the attitude of confidence in sound doctrine that can engage with those outside our own immediate tradition, finding common ground to rejoice in as well as discerning error.

Secondly, we would develop a patience with extended theological reasoning. The truths of the supreme authority and clarity of Scripture would not be misused so as to give the impression that every truth that might be of use to the church is immediately available to the most recent convert by their own isolated labour, or even to the kind of exegesis appropriate to a sermon. The work of the Spirit teaching the church is far richer than this. His work takes place in community, so we will need different sorts of theological work: the individual reading of Scripture, the preaching of the pastor, the study of the scholar. His work takes place coherently over time, so each generation of the church will need to pick up and press on with labours begun long ago. His work is to lead the church into ever-deeper appreciation of the infinite subject matter of Scripture, God and all his works, so will generate lengthy, rich and complex reflections. His work equips the church with truth so as to guide our obedience in every situation, so we should expect to be able to formulate complex theological judgements fit to meet complex contemporary questions. A theological conclusion that is not evident from a single Bible passage would not be therefore immediately suspect. The positive contribution of well-formed doctrine to exegesis would be welcomed, helping us in what we already recognise to be good reading: that in which we treat Scripture as one coherent whole and seek to hold together the manifold truths taught by the various strands of the biblical witness.

Thirdly, our attitude to secondary authorities would be recast. Do we, as I recall

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<sup>51</sup> Of course, we are even selective about what parts of the Puritans we retrieve: their exegesis of the Song of Songs or their political theology is largely passed over because strange to our ears. In other words, precisely where we find stimulating challenge. Moreover, if we truly received the Puritans, we would follow their (Reformed catholic!) lead in benefitting from the Fathers, Bernard, Aquinas, Scotus and so on.



one teacher putting it, “receive Nicaea because Nicaea is biblical”? What might appear at first glance to be the only Protestant, *sola Scriptura*-honouring, attitude is not so clearly so on closer inspection. For as we have argued, treating traditional theological formulations as mere pointers to Bible verses is not to treat them with any authority at all, even secondary authority. Actually, I receive Nicaea initially on the authority of the united witness of the church that Nicaea guards and expresses biblical truth, not because by my own authority alone I can affirm the correlation with Scripture. The principle extends outward: the authority of the words preached to me Sunday by Sunday is not suspended pending the independent verification of my own exegesis. I take them substantially on trust, while acknowledging their authority is indeed secondary and in principle falsifiable against the touchstone of Scripture. This submission to the context in which the Spirit teaches the church from Scripture should breed humility and counter the pride of a culture in which the individual is lauded as the arbiter of truth (with which sometimes, perhaps, we have been complicit).

Finally, however, we return to the core of the preceding argument. Reformed catholicity is not held out here primarily for the benefits just listed. Still less is it offered as a panacea for perceived evangelical ills. Rather, Reformed catholicity is offered as a more consistent posture for evangelicals to take, because it is more scriptural and therefore more honouring to God than the alternatives.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tom Underhill is the Operations Director of the South West Gospel Partnership, and a PhD candidate in Systematic Theology at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary via Pastors' Academy, London. He's married to Katy and they have four children.

# THE WESTMINSTER DIVINES AND THE ALEXANDRIAN CODEX

## *ABSTRACT*

It has been assumed by those on both sides of the ‘Textus Receptus’ debate that the Westminster Divines did not have access to any of the Alexandrian manuscripts which later saw the dominance of the ‘Received Text’ overturned in critical editions of the Greek New Testament from the nineteenth century onwards. This article shows that, contrary to these assumptions, some Westminster Divines made use of a key Alexandrian manuscript which was gifted to England sixteen years after the publication of the KJV and originally intended for King James himself. Although Codex Alexandrinus was not published until 1786, various Westminster Divines had access to either the manuscript itself or collations of its readings. It is extensively cited in the ‘Westminster Annotations’ (a Bible commentary commissioned by the same Parliament that summoned the Westminster Assembly), while leading Westminster Divine Thomas Goodwin preferred its readings to the TR in a number of places in his published Works. The enthusiastic – and uncontroversial – use of this new manuscript by these Divines is one strand of evidence that, contrary to modern claims, Westminster Confession of Faith (and London Baptist Confession) 1:8 do not require the use of the Textus Receptus.

## *I. Introduction*

A key strand in the critique of modern Bible versions by some in the evangelical and Reformed world is the alleged superiority of the ‘Textus Receptus’ (TR) – the family of printed Greek editions which mostly lie behind the King James Version (and the New King James Version) – over against modern critical Greek texts.

This ‘TR-only’ position has been reinvigorated in some Presbyterian and Reformed Baptist circles in recent years by the emergence of ‘Confessional Bibliology’. This movement claims that subscription to the Westminster Confession of Faith or Second London Baptist Confession must include adherence to the ‘Textus Receptus’.<sup>1</sup>

After all, many of the Greek manuscripts used by modern Bible translations were not available to the TR editors in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Since the Confessions teach that God’s word has been ‘kept pure in all ages’ (1:8), surely more recently discovered manuscripts must be rejected where they differ from the TR – even if they are much older than those available to the TR editors.

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1 Confessional Bibliologists, however, often fail to give a direct answer to the question of which of the many differing TR editions has been kept pure in all ages. See Mark Ward, ‘Which *Textus Receptus*? A critique of confessional bibliology’ in *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal*, xxv (2020), 51-77.

But does ‘Confessional Bibliology’ actually represent the position of those who framed the Westminster Confession? How would the Westminster Divines have reacted to new discoveries of Greek manuscripts which only became available to scholars after the King James Bible was published? And what if those manuscripts had originally come from Alexandria in Egypt of all places?

The Divines, we are told, would have resisted all efforts to correct the received text based on discoveries of manuscripts which were much older than those available to Erasmus and the other TR editors. They would have rejected them as suspect – if not Satanic.<sup>2</sup> We are told that B. B. Warfield’s idea that ‘the autographic text of Scripture must be sought in all manuscripts, including those recently discovered’ was ‘a foundational departure from the views of Reformed orthodoxy and the Westminster Assembly’.<sup>3</sup>

Those on both sides have tended to assume, however, that the question of what the Divines would have done with newly discovered manuscripts is purely hypothetical. After all, an English Bible translation based on more recently discovered manuscripts – the *Revised Version* – was not published until 1881. The typical narrative, as taken from a recent book arguing for the TR-only position, is that ‘with the discovery of older manuscripts in the nineteenth century, textual critics were motivated to produce new, reconstructed editions of the Greek New Testament’.<sup>4</sup>

We are told by a leading Confessional Bibliologist that Westminster Divines like Daniel Featley, ‘do not teach that some of the Word of God was missing, yet to be located in long lost manuscripts’.<sup>5</sup> Whether or not that is an accurate summary of the Critical Text position, the claim being made is that the Divines would have seen no need for new manuscripts – because they believed that God had preserved every jot and tittle of his word in the *Textus Receptus*.

Those on the other side of the debate say that it is unfair to hold the Divines up as TR-onlyists, when that was the only Greek text they had access to.

However the works of a leading Westminster Divine – as well as the Westminster *Annotations* (a Bible commentary that various Westminster Divines contributed to) – actually show us Westminster theologians using a newly discovered manuscript in preference to the TR in places.

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2 Garnet Milne argues that ‘A fixed theology...requires a fixed text’, and so to accept a ‘previously unknown variant discovered at some future date’ which would change the meaning even “minutely” would ‘either be an addition or subtraction to the text, or an acceptance that the text up until that point had been deficient, corrupt and erroneous’. Garnet Howard Milne, *Has the Bible been kept pure? The Westminster Confession of Faith and providential preservation of Scripture* ([independently published], 2017), p. 145. Codexes Sinaiticus and Vaticanus are characterised as ‘Satan’s Bible’ in a recent work by ‘Confessional Bibliologists’: Jeffrey T. Riddle and Christian M. McShaffrey (eds), *Why I Preach from the Received Text* (Winter Springs, FL: 2022), p. 162.

3 Milne, *Has the Bible been kept pure?*, p. 301.

4 Gavin Beers, ‘From Atheism to the Authorized Version’ in *Why I preach from the Received Text*, p. 47.

5 Milne, *Has the Bible been kept pure?*, p. 135.

## II. Part 1: Thomas Goodwin

Thomas Goodwin (1600-1680) delivered approximately 400 speeches at the Westminster Assembly, was appointed to 35 committees, 'respected by the Scottish commissioners' and given oversight of printing of the assembly's papers. While he is sometimes described as the first congregationalist, 'Goodwin is more accurately remembered as one of the last of the puritans'.<sup>6</sup>

Goodwin was, additionally, one of those appointed by the Puritan-dominated Long Parliament to oversee the revision of the King James Bible in 1653 – something that had been called for by Westminster Divine John Lightfoot in a sermon to the House of Commons in 1645.<sup>7</sup> Others involved in the project included fellow Westminster Divines Joseph Caryl and William Greenhill, along with John Owen.<sup>8</sup> The attempted revision did not, however, survive the death of Oliver Cromwell and the restoration of Charles II.

In a posthumously published work, *The Glory of the Gospel*, Goodwin is enthusiastic both about the theoretical and actual discovery of ancient Greek manuscripts. Commenting on Colossians 1:26 – 'Which hath been hidden from ages and from generations' – Goodwin gives the following illustration:

*To have an old copy of the New Testament, though it doth not differ three words throughout the whole from what we commonly have, yet if it be an old copy (as lately one of the Septuagint, written thirteen hundred years ago, was sent over), what a value is there set upon it!*<sup>9</sup>

He also uses the illustration of scholars finding manuscripts by a church father, the rediscovery of the Book of Enoch quoted by Jude – rumoured to have been found in Goodwin's day, but not actually rediscovered until 1773 – and the discovery of Solomon's writings on herbs and plants.

The discovery of an ancient manuscript of the Septuagint was no small thing, particularly with regard to discussions about the authority of the Hebrew Bible. Indeed, 'Protestant scholars felt that Codex Alexandrinus could counter the Catholic possession of the other famous codex of the Septuagint, the Vaticanus'.<sup>10</sup>

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6 Chad Van Dixhoorn, *The Minutes and Papers of the Westminster Assembly* (Oxford, 2012), i, 213; T. M. Lawrence, 'Goodwin, Thomas (1600–1680)' in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008).

7 John Lightfoot, *The whole works of the Rev. John Lightfoot*, ed. John Rogers Pitman (13 vols, London, 1822-5), i, xv.

8 David S. Katz, *God's Last Words: Reading the English Bible from the Reformation to Fundamentalism* (New Haven and London, 2004), pp 88-90; John Eadie, *The English Bible: An External and Critical History of the Various English Translations of Scripture, with Remarks on the Need of Revising the English New Testament* (London, 1876), ii, 343-7.

9 Thomas Goodwin, *The works of Thomas Goodwin D.D., sometime president of Magdalene College, Oxford* (12 vols, Edinburgh, 1861-5), iv, 288.

10 Dirk van Miert, *The emancipation of Biblical philology in the Dutch Republic, 1590-1670* (Oxford, 2018), p. 117.

However, as the editor of Goodwin's *Works* notes, what the Puritan at that point in his life thought to be only an old copy of the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament), actually turned out to contain the New Testament as well. Goodwin's editor says that the author is 'Doubtless' referring to 'the famous Alexandrian manuscript, which was sent from Constantinople, as a present to Charles I., in 1628'. Today we know it as Codex Alexandrinus – an almost complete copy of the New Testament from the fifth century. It was sent to England by the Calvinist patriarch of Constantinople sixteen years after the publication of the King James Bible, and originally intended for King James himself.<sup>11</sup>

Along with Codex Sinaiticus, Codex Vaticanus and Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus, it is one of only four manuscripts from the first millennium which were originally whole Bibles. In the gospels it is the oldest example of the 'Byzantine' text, but in the rest of the New Testament 'it ranks along with Vaticanus and Sinaiticus as representative of the Alexandrian type of text'.<sup>12</sup> It has the distinction of being 'the first manuscript of great importance and antiquity of which any extensive use was made by textual critics'.<sup>13</sup>

Of course, Goodwin referring to Codex Alexandrinus is one thing. But would he have used it to correct the received text? When the Westminster Divines said that the Greek New Testament had been 'kept pure in all ages', did they mean that the Textus Receptus (first published 1516, at which point it lacked the Comma Johanneum) could not be questioned?

After all, does Goodwin not use the example of a hypothetical New Testament manuscript that 'doth not differ three words throughout the whole from what we commonly have'. But what if it did? Would he have rejected it as untrustworthy? And would he have considered the mention of textual variants from the pulpit as endangering his hearers' faith?

In fact, as becomes clear in reference to a number of different Biblical texts, Goodwin had no qualms about suggesting there were places where the true text of the New Testament was preserved in an Alexandrian manuscript, rather than in the received text.

After all, as Goodwin explained in a sermon, 'There are variæ lectiones of the New Testament, as well as of the Old; that is, various readings'.<sup>14</sup> In other words, all Greek manuscripts of any significant length vary from one another. Any printed Greek text must choose one reading over another (though will usually list alternatives in the 'apparatus'). Since infallibility is not promised to the editor of any printed Greek edition, Goodwin had no qualms about opting for readings

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11 J. H. Bowman, 'The Codex Alexandrinus and the Alexandrian Greek Types', in *British Library Journal*, xxiv, no. 2 (1998), p. 169.

12 Bruce Metzger and Bart Ehrman, *The text of the New Testament: its transmission, corruption and restoration* (4th edn, Oxford, 2005), p. 67.

13 *The harmony of the gospels: in the words of the authorized version: with an account of ancient manuscripts and of the various translations of the Holy Scriptures* (London, 1863), p. 359

14 Goodwin, *Works*, i, 299.



which are today found in the modern Critical Text, over against either the Textus Receptus or the Majority Text.

Goodwin explicitly appeals to Codex Alexandrinus against the TR on at least two occasions (comprising five variants). On another two occasions he opts for (or considers) readings found in Alexandrinus (and not the TR) without reference to it. Or perhaps without knowledge of it - Goodwin may only have had access to readings from Alexandrinus through the publication of Bishop Brian Walton's *London Polyglot* in 1657.<sup>15</sup>

As we will see below, fellow Westminster Divine Daniel Featley had access to Alexandrinus in the 1640s. In 1650, Edward Leigh, a lay theologian who served as a teller at the Westminster Assembly, referred to Alexandrinus to argue that the postscripts to some of the epistles in the Textus Receptus were not original. He described the Codex as 'the most ancient Parchment Manuscript Greeke Copy of the Bible, which Mr. Patrick Young hath to publish'.<sup>16</sup> A 1651 letter from Archbishop James Ussher (who turned down an invitation to participate in the Westminster Assembly) mentioned 'the Alexandrian copy...which [Young] intendeth shortly to make publick, Mr. [John] Selden [a lay member of the Westminster Assembly] and myself every day pressing him to the work'.<sup>17</sup> Young, the Royal Librarian, failed to achieve his goal of publishing the entire manuscript, but collated Alexandrinus for Walton's *Polyglot*.<sup>18</sup>

Whether Goodwin's access to Alexandrinus was to the manuscript itself, or via other means, the fact that he opts for some of its readings over the TR is very significant. While a handful of appeals to a newly discovered manuscript may not seem overly significant, TR-onlyism, by definition, must reject any reading that didn't make it into (certain) printed TR editions. For them, to admit that the TR is less than jot and tittle perfect, or to accept any non-TR reading, would be akin to giving up the epistemological foundation of the faith, and to deny that the Bible has

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15 Walton was assisted in this endeavour by Westminster Divine John Lightfoot, Archbishop James Ussher and others. Goodwin's sermons on Ephesians were preached in the early 1640s (ODNB). The debate between Walton and John Own is well known, though the differences between them are sometimes overstated. Owen praised 'the usefulness of the work' and held it in 'much esteem'. The most recent analysis of the debate concludes that 'although they differed, they actually agreed on the core issues'. See Russel T. Fuller, 'John Owen and the traditional Protestant view of the Hebrew Old Testament' in *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*, 20.4 (2016), pp 82-83.

16 Edward Leigh, *Annotations upon all the New Testament philologicall and theologicall: wherein the emphasis and elegancie of the Greeke is observed, some imperfections in our translations are discovered, divers Jewish rites and customes tending to illustrate the text are mentioned, many antilogies and seeming contradictions reconciled, several darke and obscure places opened, sundry passages vindicated from the false glosses of papists and hereticks* (London, 1650), p. 342.

17 Ussher, *Works*, xvi, 187. Ussher eventually received a copy of the readings and sent them to Henry Hammond, who used them for his *Annotations*. See Henry Hammond, *A paraphrase and annotations on all the books of the New Testament* (2nd edn, London, 1659), i.

18 Talbot Baines Reed, *A history of the old English letter foundries, with notes, historical and biographical, on the rise and progress of English typography* (London, 1887), pp 201-2; Elizabethanne Boran. 'Young [Junius], Patrick (1584-1652), librarian and scholar' in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004; online edn, May 2012)

been kept pure in every age.

This, we are told, was the position of the Westminster Divines. As will be demonstrate in this section, it was not the position of leading Westminster Divine Thomas Goodwin.

### 1. 1 Peter 5:10

*'The God of all grace...make' – KJV (TR and Majority Text)*

*'The God of all grace...will' – ESV (Modern Critical Text)*

As Goodwin explains, the question here is 'Whether these words be a prayer of the apostle's unto God, or a direct promise from God?'. The difference, as Goodwin elaborates on in a footnote, is one Greek letter in each of four words affected, for example: καταρτίσαι v. καταρτίσει.

He finds support for reading this as a promise from a number of manuscripts, including 'the ancient manuscript sent by Cyril into England', i.e. Codex Alexandrinus.

Goodwin then spends 1600 words arguing against defenders of the TR reading on the basis of internal evidence. He cites a number of other Scriptural passages where the same words used in 1 Peter 5 take the form of promises, and concludes: 'why therefore should not those copies that make it so here be esteemed genuine?'<sup>19</sup>

Why not indeed? Goodwin had no a priori commitment to the TR.

### 2. Acts 11:20

*'Hellenists' – NKJV, ESV, NRSV (TR, Majority Text, Westcott & Hort, Modern Critical Text)<sup>20</sup>*

*'Greeks' – Revised Version, NIV, NASB, CSB (Griesbach, Wordsworth, Lachmann, Tischendorf, Tregelles)*

Goodwin explains: 'There hath been a question among some interpreters, whether these Grecians to whom these Jews preached were of Grecian birth and race, or Jews by race... called Ἑλληνισταί, or Grecising Jews'.

As Goodwin points out, the context strongly suggests Gentiles as opposed to Jews. Given that context, he opts for the reading of Alexandrinus over against the TR and the vast majority of Greek manuscripts: 'The opposition clearly carries it; so accordingly in the manuscript copy sent by Cyril, that worthy patriarch of Constantinople, to king Charles I., they are expressly called (as it is here translated)

<sup>19</sup> Goodwin, *Works*, ix, 370.

<sup>20</sup> The KJV translation of 'Grecians' undoubtedly follows the TR reading, but for the purposes of comparison I have used the NKJV's less unambiguous translation. Most commentators who accept the majority reading resolve the difficulty of the verse by understanding 'Hellenists' as a reference to Greeks rather than to Greek-speaking Jews.

Ἕλληνές, Grecians by birth and extraction'.<sup>21</sup>

Goodwin not only argues against the TR, he also goes against the Majority Text and the reading found in the Modern Critical Text (though critical texts in the past have agreed with Goodwin).

The point is not that Goodwin always agrees with the Modern Critical text, but that he is willing to accept the reading of a newly available Alexandrian manuscript in place of the TR.

F. H. A. Scrivener (the nineteenth century editor of the TR edition published by the Trinitarian Bible Society – but who did not hold to the TR-only position) notes his disagreement with the TR here and agrees with Goodwin.<sup>22</sup>

### 3. *Jude 1:1*

*'sanctified by God the Father' – KJV (TR and Majority Text)*

*'beloved in God the Father' – ESV (Modern Critical Text)*

Goodwin explains: 'You have it indeed here read, and translated, "Sanctified by God the Father;" but if we consult both commentators and Greek original copies, as they are also cited by interpreters, we shall find that diverse, as authentic copies, as those that read it sanctified, &c., do write it beloved, in, or of, or by God the Father, ἡγαπημενοις, beloved, instead of ἡγίασμένοις.

(Although Goodwin doesn't explicitly cite Alexandrinus, it reads 'beloved' – as do the two codexes particularly disparaged by TR-onlyists, Sinaiticus and Vaticanus).

Goodwin then explains what he considers the proper procedure for deciding between the two options (significantly, it doesn't involve going with the TR no matter what). In cases 'where there are found two such readings in so many copies ancient, and but a small difference in the Greek words themselves, which might easily occasion a mistake in the writers', the question is to be decided by the context and comparing Scripture with Scripture (i.e. internal evidence).

Having weighed the evidence, Goodwin opts for 'beloved'. Even before coming across this alternate reading, Goodwin says that something had always seemed out of place to him with the TR reading.<sup>23</sup> But now, having come across an alternative that fits better, he is convinced that it 'hath far the advantage and appearance for it, to have originally fallen rather from our apostle's pen'.<sup>24</sup>

Goodwin's big concern is to discover what the Apostle originally wrote – and in pursuit of that desire he is willing to go outside the TR tradition.

21 Goodwin, *Works*, v, 475.

22 F. H. A. Scrivener, *A Plain Introduction to the Criticism of the New Testament* (London, 1894), ii, 371.

23 'this did always in former times in the reading of it breed some jar in my thoughts, as if the words had not been, at least, rightly and orderly placed'.

24 Goodwin, *Works*, ix, 218.

#### 4. *Ephesians 1:18*

*'the eyes of your understanding' – KJV (and TR)*

*'the eyes of your heart' – ESV (Majority Text and Modern Critical Text)*

This final example is significant – not because Goodwin comes down strongly on one side or the other – but because the TR and the Majority Text are often conflated. In fact, they differ in places – and where they do, TR-defenders are forced by their a priori assumptions to defend the TR reading over against the Byzantine one, even when there is little or no Greek manuscript evidence for it.

In this case, as the Lutheran Johann Albrecht Bengel noted in the first half of the 1700s: 'Rec. Text, without any of the oldest authorities, reads *διανοίας*, of the understanding'. However, as he goes on to note, Alexandrinus, Vaticanus and many others support 'heart'.<sup>25</sup>

As Princeton theologian Charles Hodge put it: 'Instead of *διανοίας* understanding, the great majority of ancient manuscripts and versions read *καρδίας* heart which is no doubt the true reading'.<sup>26</sup>

Goodwin cites 'the king of Spain's Bible' [ie the Antwerp Polyglot] in favour of 'heart' but then goes on to argue that there is not much difference between the two readings, concluding: 'I speak this to reconcile those diverse readings which the copies have'.<sup>27</sup>

A TR-onlyist, however, would not have the option of reconciliation – non-TR readings must be rejected. Goodwin was not a TR-onlyist.

#### 5. *Goodwin Summary*

In conclusion then, Goodwin explicitly cites Alexandrinus twice, both times agreeing with its readings over against the TR. On another occasion, he goes with the reading of Alexandrinus against the TR, without explicitly citing it. On a final occasion, he attempts to reconcile an Alexandrian (and Majority) reading and a TR reading. He has no a priori commitment to the TR. On 3 occasions, Goodwin opts for (or considers) a reading which we now know is also in Sinaiticus and Vaticanus.

A leading Confessional Bibliologist claims Goodwin for the TR-only position by citing his remark that when we read any epistle, 'the whole weight of their apostolical spirit and authority in them is to fall upon all our consciences and spirits...to assure our hearts of the unerring truth of every tittle of them'.<sup>28</sup> Goodwin however says this while commenting on the very same chapter of Ephesians in

<sup>25</sup> Johann Albrecht Bengel, *Gnomon of the New Testament*, ed. M. Ernest Bengel and J. C. F. Steudel, trans. James Bryce (Edinburgh, 1860), iv, 70, n. 2.

<sup>26</sup> Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians* (New York, 1858), p. 74.

<sup>27</sup> Goodwin, *Works*, i, 299-300.

<sup>28</sup> Cited in Milne, *Has the Bible been kept pure?*, p. 167.

which he would later cite a non-TR reading as potentially original. Given this is the same sermon series where he notes the reality that there are ‘various readings’ of the New Testament, Goodwin obviously believed that the first task of the expositor was to try and ascertain which reading is original. The only tittles which have ‘apostolic spirit and authority’ are those actually written by the Apostles – not simply any which happened to make it into the TR.

Significantly, Goodwin cannot even be claimed as a Majority Text advocate. Where the Modern Critical Text and the Majority Text disagree (two of the four examples), Goodwin opts for a reading now found in the Critical Text. Nowhere does he argue for a reading based merely on counting manuscripts. After Alexandrinus became available, it seems that the oldest and best manuscript he had access to took priority. As the KJV translator William Eyre wrote to Archbishop James Ussher in 1607: ‘The reading of a passage of the New Testament which can be proved by the authority and reliability of older and more correct copies, though they may perhaps be fewer in number, is (other things being equal) to be preferred.’<sup>29</sup>

### *III. Part 2: The Westminster Annotations*

The Geneva Bible, beloved of the Puritans, was famously disliked by King James I because of its marginal notes. James declared ‘I profess I could never yet see a Bible well translated in English; but I think that, of all, that of Geneva is the worst.’<sup>30</sup> When laying down instructions for a new version to replace it, James specifically ordered that ‘no marginal notes at all [are] to be affixed’.

When the new version (the KJV) was completed in 1611, one of the reasons for its initial unpopularity was its lack of notes. ‘The people complained that they could not see into the sense of the Scripture, so well as formerly they did, by the Geneva Bibles, because their spectacles of Annotations were not fitted to the understanding of the new Text, nor any other supplied in their stead’. As ‘the reading public had grown accustomed to having at their disposal scriptural aids for both private study and devotions’, they ‘therefore continued to use the Geneva Bible at home’, despite the printing of it being banned from 1616.

With the collapse of press censorship in 1640, a request was made to print the Geneva Bible notes (or a revision of them) in the margins of the King James Version. The theologians commissioned to the work by parliament soon found that the margins of the text were too confining, and it was agreed that the annotations should constitute a separate volume. The result was a work that became known as the ‘English’ (to distinguish it from Dutch and Italian equivalents) or ‘Westminster’ *Annotations*. They were ‘the product of some of the best Reformed minds in

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<sup>29</sup> James Ussher, *The Whole Works of the Most Rev. James Ussher, D.D.*, ed. by Charles Richard Elrington, 17 vols. (Dublin: Hodges, Smith, and Co., 1864), xv, 35. English translation taken from Elizabethanne Boran (ed.), *The Correspondence of James Ussher, 1600-1656* (3 vols, Dublin, 2015), i, 35.

<sup>30</sup> This and the next two paragraphs are based on Dean George Lampros, ‘A New Set of Spectacles: The “Assembly’s Annotations”, 1645-1657’ in *Renaissance and Reformation*, new series, xix, no. 4 (1995), pp 33-46.



England' and the preface to Matthew Poole's *Annotations*, a quarter of a century later, testifies to their popularity. The first edition was published in 1645, the same year the Westminster Assembly began work on the *Confession of Faith*, with a much-expanded third edition coming in 1657. This final edition 'became the closest thing to a comprehensive Bible commentary that English readers had yet seen'.

Although the *Annotations* 'have been little studied, whether historically, exegetically or theologically', their importance for understanding the theology of the Westminster Confession of Faith should not be underestimated. As Richard Muller has pointed out, there were 'two sets of normative documents commissioned by the Long Parliament, namely, first, the exegetical and interpretive conclusions embodied, for public use, in the *Annotations*...and second, the doctrinal standards embodied as the Westminster Confession of Faith and its accompanying catechisms'. Even though there was no official relationship between the *Annotations* and the Westminster Standards, the former 'provide a highly proximate index to the understanding of Scripture behind the doctrinal definitions and the biblical proofs found in the confession and catechisms'.<sup>31</sup> Half of the contributors (John Ley, William Gouge, Francis Taylor, Edward Reynolds, Thomas Gataker and Daniel Featley) were Westminster Divines.<sup>32</sup> Neither of the two studies on the *Annotations* (by Lampros in 1995 and Muller in 2007) make any reference to the fact that its pages repeatedly cite Codex Alexandrinus.

### 1. 'The most ancient Copie of Tecla'

The very title of the Westminster *Annotations* – a Bible commentary aimed at ordinary Christians – highlights the fact that the Biblical manuscripts which have come down to us all differ from one another. The same title that advertised 'doubts resolved' also advertised 'various readings observed' – apparently without any concern that these two goals might be in conflict. The *Annotations* reference various translations into other languages – such as Septuagint and the Syriac – but of particular significance for our purposes is its appeal to 'the most ancient Copie of Tecla'.<sup>33</sup> Tecla (or Thecla) was 'a fourth-century Egyptian martyr, often cited as the scribe for the Codex Alexandrinus'.<sup>34</sup>

The manuscript she was believed to have copied out was sent to England, as noted above, in 1628. It was regarded as 'a jewell of anitiquity not fit to be kept among Infidels'.<sup>35</sup> Brian Walton, who used it for his *Polyglot* in 1657, described it as 'one of the *Noblest MSS. in the world*...written in Capital Letters, without accents,

31 Richard A. Muller, 'Scripture and the Westminster Confession' in Rowland A. Muller and Rowland S. Ward, *Scripture and Worship* (Phillipsburgh, NJ: 2007) p. 5.

32 Muller, 'Scripture and the Westminster Confession', p. 21.

33 The wording is taken from the annotation on Romans 12:11.

34 Philip D. W. Krey and Peter D. S. Krey (eds), *Reformation Commentary on Scripture: Romans 9-16* (Downers Grove, IL: 2016), p. 140.

35 John Aubrey, cited in Reed, *A history of the old English letter foundries*, p. 203.

or distinction either of words or sentences, which kind of writing hath been out of use for above a thousand years'.<sup>36</sup> It was kept in the Royal Library at St. James's Palace.<sup>37</sup>

As noted earlier, the expectation by some of those present at the Westminster Assembly that this ancient manuscript would soon be published was disappointed. (This would be a recurring theme. After the Restoration, Charles II refused to grant permission for it to be engraved on copper plates, despite his librarian telling him that 'it would appear glorious in history, after his Majesty's death'. The King replied, 'Pish, I care not what they say of me in history when I am dead'.<sup>38</sup> It would be more than 150 years after Alexandrinus' arrival in England that its Greek text of the New Testament would finally be published, by Carl Gottfried Woide, in 1786.<sup>39</sup>

There was at least one Westminster Divine however who had access to Codex Alexandrinus way back in the 1640s. The Westminster *Annotations* on the Pauline Epistles, which explicitly reference 'Tecla' 118 times, were written by Daniel Featley. Featley was both a Westminster Divine and King James Bible translator, serving as part of the First Oxford Company.<sup>40</sup> He was 'the only leading Episcopalian' to accept a seat at the Westminster Assembly.<sup>41</sup> In his time there Featley 'was one of the vociferous advocates for the Imputation of the Active Obedience of Christ'.<sup>42</sup> His time at Westminster came to an abrupt end when he was caught in a 'sting' operation, expelled from the Assembly and imprisoned by the House of Commons for allegedly being a royalist spy. However 'even after imprisonment Featley continued to serve the Puritan cause' and 'at Parliament's request he wrote a learned treatise against Roman Catholicism, for which he was allowed three books at a time from his library'.<sup>43</sup> From prison he also wrote his most famous work, *The Dippers Dipt*, against the Anabaptists. It was published in 1645 – the year the first edition of the *Westminster Annotations* were published – and the final year of Featley's life. Edmund Calamy (son of the Westminster Divine of the same name) tells us that the annotations on St Paul's Epistles were by Dr Featley, but 'broken and imperfect on the Account of the Author's dying before he had revis'd or finish'd them'.<sup>44</sup> Featley

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36 Brian Walton, *The Considerator Considered: or, A brief view of certain considerations upon the Biblia Polyglotta, the Prolegomena and Appendix thereof* (London, 1659), pp 140-1

37 Reed, *A history of the old English letter foundries*, p. 201.

38 Reed, *A history of the old English letter foundries*, p. 203.

39 Bowman, 'The Codex Alexandrinus', pp 170-2.

40 While Featley's status as a KJV translator is debated, the most recent assessment of his life concludes that 'he was indeed a translator'. Greg A. Salazar, *Calvinist conformity in post-reformation England: the theology and career of Daniel Featley* (Oxford, 2022), p. 24.

41 Arnold Hunt, 'Featley [Fairclough], Daniel (1582-1645)' in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008).

42 J. V. Fesko, *The theology of the Westminster Standards: historical context and theological insights* (Crossway, 2014), p. 403.

43 William S. Barker, *Puritan Profiles: 54 influential puritans at the time when the Westminster Confession of Faith was written* (Fearn, 1996), pp 49-50.

44 Cited in Muller, 'Scripture and the Westminster Confession', p. 21.

was esteemed by most to be 'one of the most resolute and victorious champions of the reformed Protestant religion of any of his time; a most smart scourge of the church of Rome; a compendium of the learned tongues, and of all the liberal arts and sciences; and though of small stature, yet he had a great soul, and learning of all kinds compacted in him'.<sup>45</sup>

Lest any would downplay the *Annotations'* use of an Alexandrian manuscript simply because Featley was an Episcopalian, it should be remembered that the annotators were deliberately left anonymous 'despite the relative eminence of some of them as theologians and exegetes'. This was because the intention 'had not been to produce an original work, but rather standard commentary that drew on the already sizeable and significant Reformed exegetical tradition'. As Muller has noted, 'the impression that one receives from the prefaces to the *Annotations*, moreover, is of a corporate endeavour in which the names of the individual annotators were not to be highlighted in any way'.<sup>46</sup> Some of the contributors remain unknown.

The first reference to Alexandrinus in the *Annotations* (usually cited as 'Gr. Tec:') comes at Romans 1:8. Overall, Featley references Alexandrinus 44 times in his annotations on Romans. It is cited at least once in every Pauline epistle as follows: 1 Corinthians (27), 2 Corinthians (11), Galatians (7), Ephesians (11), Philippians (6), Colossians (4), 1 Timothy (3) and once each for 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 2 Timothy, Titus and Philemon. While Richard Muller leaves open the possibility that Featley also contributed the notes to 'The Epistle of Paul to the Hebrews', the absence of any reference to Tecla there, as well the fact that the notes on Hebrews were expanded in future editions (after Featley's death), means we can confidently say that he did not.<sup>47</sup>

## 2. *How did the Annotations use Alexandrinus?*

The vast majority of times Alexandrinus is cited, it is done so without comment. In other words, Featley does not usually tell us whether he prefers the reading of the Textus Receptus, or that of Alexandrinus. The title of the *Annotations* had advertised 'various readings observed', and most often the reading of Alexandrinus is simply observed. Just because Featley quotes a reading from Alexandrinus does not necessarily mean he agrees with it. Presumably however the variants listed are ones he considered viable. Only twice does he explicitly accept or reject a reading from Alexandrinus. The reading he rejects is also rejected by both the Textus Receptus and the Critical Text. The reading he accepts is, in today's language, an acceptance of the Critical Text over the Textus Receptus.

Is the Westminster *Annotations'* use of Alexandrinus insignificant therefore, since on most occasions the reading is just cited without a judgement as to

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45 Anthony à Wood, cited in Barker, *Puritan Profiles*, p. 50.

46 Muller, 'Scripture and the Westminster Confession', pp 19-20.

47 Muller, 'Scripture and the Westminster Confession', p. 21.

whether it is correct or not? Not at all. Leading TR-onlyists claim that the Textus Receptus provides us with the ‘perfect’, ‘preserved’, ‘certain’, ‘stable’, ‘settled’, ‘not changing’, ‘completed’, ‘agreed upon’, ‘fixed’ text of Scripture. If those involved in producing the Westminster *Annotations* believed those adjectives were true of the Textus Receptus, there would have been no point in listing alternative readings. Furthermore, TR-onlyists tell us that modern versions are questioning the Word of God simply by including footnotes. ‘The footnotes of many Bibles, including the New King James Version, actually undermine the unchanging nature of the text of Scripture to the common reader.’<sup>48</sup> By that standard, the Westminster *Annotations* – and the KJV itself which has a textual note saying that Luke 17:36 is missing from most manuscripts – are undermining the unchanging nature of the text of Scripture to the common reader. But perhaps they are just being honest.

The mere listing of readings from Alexandrinus is also significant because, to take Romans as a sample, out of 44 citations, around half make it into the Modern Critical Text. To extrapolate that out, of the 118 citations of Alexandrinus in the Westminster *Annotations*, it is likely that at least 50 make it into Nestle-Aland’s 28<sup>th</sup> edition of the Greek New Testament (published in 2012). Almost all the Alexandrinus readings which make it into the Modern Critical Text also made it into Westcott and Hort’s *New Testament in the Original Greek* in 1881. So despite all the advances in textual criticism since the *Annotations* were published and despite all the new manuscripts that have been discovered, a straight line can be drawn from half of the ‘various readings observed’ in a single manuscript by a Westminster Divine in the 1640s right through to the latest scholarly edition of the Greek New Testament in use today.

How significant are the variants simply cited by the *Annotations*? Particularly those that make it into the Modern Critical Text? The answer is that they are like most viable textual variants – not very significant (despite leading ‘Confessional Bibliologists’ claims that the Critical Text is ‘a completely different underlying text’ or ‘a radically different text’).<sup>49</sup> A couple of the variants do not even necessarily affect translation – such as περὶ (‘about’, ‘concerning’, etc) instead of υπερ (‘for’, ‘on behalf of’, ‘because of’, etc) in Romans 1:8. Another variant highlighted in the *Annotations* is simply a difference in word order: ‘indignation and wrath’ v. ‘wrath and indignation’ (Romans 2:8). Four of the variants are the difference between γαρ (‘for’) and δε (‘but’) – followed by the Critical Text in Romans 4:15 and 15:8, but not in 8:18 or 8:22. Another is whether ‘infirmity’ in Romans 8:26 should be singular (as per the CT) or plural (as the TR). The question at Romans 9:32 is whether Paul writes ‘works of the law’ as he does many times elsewhere – or if he simply wrote ‘works’ and later scribes conformed it to the other passages. In Romans 10:15 the

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48 Pooyan Mehrshahi, ‘The Christian Bible Can Be Trusted’ in *Why I Preach from the Received Text* (Winter Springs, FL: 2022), p. 148.

49 Jeffrey T. Riddle, ‘Book Review: Mark Ward, Authorized: The use & misuse of the King James Bible’, in *Bible League Quarterly*, No. 479 (October-December 2019), p. 30; Milne, *Has the Bible been kept pure?*, p. 90.

words translated ‘the gospel of peace’ are in the KJV but not modern translations; Alexandrinus does not contain them, and modern scholars believe that they were probably inserted to make the citation correspond more fully to the Septuagint.<sup>50</sup> Of course, whether something is an addition or omission depends on what you believe the standard is. If Alexandrinus (and the Modern Critical Text) represent the original reading of Romans 11:22, then the Textus Receptus removes the word ‘God’. Likewise, the TR omits the word ‘Jesus’ in Romans 8:34. On the other side of the coin, Featley is unafraid of listing variants that are potentially less ‘orthodox’ than the TR – such as in Romans 15:19 when Alexandrinus has ‘Holy Spirit’ rather than ‘Spirit of God’ (NA28 and THGNT both include ‘God’ – though NA28 does so in square brackets).<sup>51</sup> Incidentally, in all the examples above, Alexandrinus stands against not just the TR but also the Majority Text.

What of the variants which are discussed at more length? Romans 12:11 is significant because it is an occasion where different TR editions disagree with each other. The TR edited by Robert Estienne (Stephanus) in 1550 has ‘serving the time’, whereas that edited by Theodore Beza (1598) has ‘serving the Lord’. The KJV translators, as they did on 110 other occasions, went with Beza over against Stephanus (they did the opposite 59 times and differed from both 67 times).<sup>52</sup> (The ‘Textus Receptus’ that TR-onlyists use today is a reverse-engineered Greek Text produced in 1881, based on the text critical choices of an English translation, the KJV). Featley notes that ‘In some editions it is...serving the time: which reading if we should admit it, we must not understand the Apostle as if he commanded us to be *temporizers*’. ‘But’, he continues, ‘in the most ancient Copie of Tecla, and generally in the most correct Editions, the word is not *καιρω*, but *κυρίω*, not the time, but the Lord’.

Just as the various TR editions differ from one another at times, so do the various critical texts. A good example of this is at 1 Corinthians 2:1, where three Greek letters make the difference between ‘testimony’ of God or ‘mystery’ of God. Critical texts differ: Tregelles and THGNT (along with the TR and MT) opt for *μαρτύριον*, while WH and NA28 prefer *μυστήριον*. Featley gives both options: ‘That is, the Gospel which is the testimonie of God...Or if we admit of Tecla’s Edition, *When I shewed unto you the mysterie of God*, that is, revealed unto you the secret of the Gospel, or the hidden things of God’.

It is clear that Featley did not always see the need to decide between two variants, but there are occasions when he did. What were his criteria for doing so? Featley did not simply advocate for the majority reading. For example, he notes

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<sup>50</sup> Bruce Manning Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, (2nd ed., London, 1994), p. 463.

<sup>51</sup> TR-advocates often try to claim that the Critical Text is ‘less orthodox’, but that argument can work both ways – see for example Mark Ward’s interview with Paul Himes, ‘Places Where the KJV Is “Less Orthodox” in Jude’: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LJBp8uufkB8>.

<sup>52</sup> See ‘Appendix E’ in *The Cambridge Paragraph Bible: Of the Authorized English Version*, ed. F. H. Scrivener (Cambridge, 1873)



that in 1 Timothy 2:6, the word μαρτύριον ('testimony') 'is left out in the Greek Copie written by Tecla, and the sense is full without it'. He goes on however: 'if we retain the word because most copies have it, the meaning is...' Being willing to consider a minority reading because it is contained in an older manuscript points to a belief that manuscripts should be weighed, rather than simply counted. With so many more manuscripts collated in our own day, we now know that Alexandrinus stands alone in its omission of μαρτύριον, and so no critical text has ever excluded it. Indeed, in the case of 1 Corinthians 10:3, where Featley (rightly) believed that Alexandrinus alone excluded the pronoun αυτο, he was not willing to accept the reading of a single manuscript, no matter how ancient. 'Though the Pronoune αυτο be not in the addition [edition?] by Tecla, yet it appeareth by all other ancient Copies and the Commentaries of Augustine and Chrysostome upon this Text, that it ought to be added, and that our reading is the true'. In the one place where Featley explicitly rejects a Textus Receptus (and Majority Text) reading in favour of Alexandrinus, the reason is a combination of internal and external evidence. The occasion is 2 Timothy 4:14, where what is a curse in the TR ('the Lord reward him'), is a prediction in the CT ('the Lord will reward him'). The difference is the form of the verb: ἀποδώη v. ἀποδώσει. Featley states: 'This is not a curse, proceeding from anger, or a revengefull heart, which is contrary to the doctrine of Christ, Matth. 5.44. and of Saint Paul himself, Rom. 12.14. but a Propheticall commination out of a godly zeal, and a prediction inspired by the holy Ghost of the punishment which was ready to be executed upon him'. Featley therefore rejects a TR reading for doctrinal reasons, knowing that he has manuscript evidence for doing so: 'with this interpretation agreeth the Greek Copie, of great Antiquity, written, as it is supposed by Tecla'.

### 3. *How significant is all this?*

It would be easy for a TR-onlyist to claim that all the foregoing data proves is that there were a diversity of views on Scripture at the Westminster Assembly, as there were on a number of other matters. Goodwin and Featley are, after all, just two Divines out of a much larger number.

A number of factors would militate against drawing that conclusion however. Firstly, far from holding some sort of 'evolutionary', nineteenth-century view of Scripture, Featley is actually commended by 'Confessional Bibliologist' Garnet Milne as having a higher view of the preservation of Scripture than either John Calvin or TR editor Theodore Beza! When it comes to the apparent contradiction between Genesis 33:19 and Acts 7:16, Featley says that Calvin's solution 'that there is an error in all our copies of the New Testament, and ought to be corrected' is 'somewhat too peremptory'.<sup>53</sup> Featley also rejects Beza's proposed conjectural

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<sup>53</sup> Calvin says in his commentary: 'it is manifest that there is a fault [mistake] in the word Abraham... Wherefore this place must be amended'.

emendation here, stating that ‘unlesse he could produce some ancient copies, wherein such mistakes were not to be found, openeth a dangerous gap to Infidents and Heretickes, who hereby will be apt to take occasion to question the infallible truth of the holy Writ’.<sup>54</sup>

Another thing to remember is that the access most Westminster Divines could have had to Codex Alexandrinus was very limited. The only access to all its readings was through physical access to this ‘jewel of antiquity’ kept in the Royal Library. (A number of continental theologians working on commentaries requested, and obtained, limited collations from the librarian. One of these was the Dutch scholar Hugo Grotius, and so the publication of his *Annotiones* in the 1640s became the occasion when ‘hundreds of readings from Codex Alexandrinus’ were ‘broadcast for the first time’.<sup>55</sup>) The contributors to the *Westminster Annotations* were ‘furnish’d with whatsoever books were needful’ by order of Parliament’s Committee for Religion. Other Divines were unlikely to have had the same access to Alexandrinus as Featley – as indicated by the growing desire by some of them in the early 1650s that Alexandrinus would be published. By the time collations from it were finally published in the *London Polyglot* in 1657, many of the members of the Assembly had died.<sup>56</sup> Thomas Goodwin was one of the last surviving members of the Assembly, and lived long enough after the publication of the *Polyglot* to be able to make use of it. Even after the publication of the *Polyglot* however, when fellow Westminster Divine Anthony Burgess appears to reference Alexandrinus, his only information comes from Grotius: ‘Grotius speaketh of a Manuscript that readeth...’.<sup>57</sup>

Acknowledging that most Westminster Divines could not have had access to Alexandrinus is one thing. It could still be claimed that the vast majority of Divines would have rejected non-TR readings if presented with them. For that to be the case however, it would need to be demonstrated that a majority of Divines believed that the Textus Receptus was jot and tittle perfect. As far as I am aware, the only attempt to do anything like that is Garnet Milne’s *Has the Bible been kept pure?: the Westminster Confession of Faith and the providential preservation of Scripture*. Milne attempts to go back to the sources to prove a ‘consensus view’ in favour of a TR-only position, which was only later ‘disrupted’.<sup>58</sup> However none of Milne’s many quotations actually provide evidence that any Westminster Divine would have rejected non-TR readings out of hand. Milne in fact explicitly claims Goodwin,

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54 Cited in Milne, *Has the Bible been kept pure?*, p. 140. For Beza’s solution, see Jan Krans, *Beyond what is written: Erasmus and Beza as conjectural critics of the New Testament* (Leiden and Boston, 2006) pp 324-5.

55 Miert, *The emancipation of Biblical philology*, pp 117-8, 135.

56 For the years of death of the Divines, see Chad Van Dixhoorn, ‘Members of the Westminster assembly and Scottish commissioners (1643–1652)’, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004; online edn, May 2007).

57 Anthony Burgess, *An expository comment, doctrinal, controversial and practical, upon the whole first chapter of the second epistle of St Paul to the Corinthians* (London, 1661), p. 404.

58 Milne, *Has the Bible been kept pure?*, p. 301.

Featley and Leigh – all of whom this article shows appealing to Alexandrinus over the TR – for his position! Milne also devotes a chapter to Ussher, who was enthusiastic about Alexandrinus and helped in the publication of both the *Annotations* and Walton's *Polyglot*. Moreover, Milne's footnotes not only include appeals to the Westminster *Annotations* (whose very title, as we have seen, advertises 'various readings' observed), but also to Matthew Poole. While not a Westminster Divine, Poole was one of the most trusted Reformed commentators of that or any other century – and frequently cited Alexandrinus ('that most ancient manuscript').<sup>59</sup>

Even if it could be demonstrated that no Westminster Divine was a TR-onlyist, the final appeal of the 'Confessional Bibliologist' would be to the fact that the proof texts of the Westminster Confession contain verses which are in the Textus Receptus and not the Critical Text (or the Majority Text in the case of Acts 8:37 and 1 John 5:7 – which aren't even in every edition of the Textus Receptus!). The Divines however specifically refused to build any doctrine on a text when they were aware that Greek evidence for it was lacking. The 'Preface relating to the Author' in the *Works* of Westminster Divine John Lightfoot recounts: 'When some in the Assembly were for gathered churches, which must consist only of saints, and produced a place for that purpose taken out of the Revelations; chap. 15:3, "Thou King of saints" (Ἀγίων), Dr. Seaman [the second most frequent speaker at the Assembly and who served on 80 committees] well objected against it; because the reading was doubtful, some copies reading Αἰώνων instead of Ἀγίων, i.e. "Thou King of ages," or "everlasting." And Lightfoot backed him, by showing, that the Syrian and Arabic read to the same import'.<sup>60</sup> (Unlike those who framed the Confession, modern-day 'Confessional Bibliologists' will defend the 'King of Saints' reading to the hilt, even though it appears in no Greek manuscript prior to the publication of the Textus Receptus).<sup>61</sup>

Milne posits a consensus view in which the TR could not be questioned, but does not provide any evidence that such a view actually existed. If Goodwin and the Westminster *Annotations* were departing from the 'consensus view', surely we would expect their use of Alexandrinus to be controversial. There is no evidence that it was. Indeed, on the morning of 11 June 1641, 'The authority of that most ancient Parchment MS. copy of the Bible remaining in his Majesties Library at Saint James, being all written in great Capitall Greeke Letters, was vouched and asserted' in Parliament. The occasion was a bill about Bishops, and the appeal to Alexandrinus was to show that the postscripts included in the Textus Receptus at the end of the epistles to Timothy and Titus were 'but the bold and spurious

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59 Citing Grotius in his *Synopsis Criticorum* on Revelation 4:3, as translated by the Matthew Poole Project: <https://www.fromreformationtoreformation.com/post/poole-on-revelation-4-3-glory-of-the-covenant-god>

60 Lightfoot, *Works*, i, 149-50.

61 See, for example, Jeff Riddle (<http://www.jeffriddle.net/2016/03/word-magazine-50-review-james-white-on.html>) and <https://www.kjvtoday.com/saints-or-nations-or-ages-in-revelation-153>. Cf Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, p. 679.

additions of some Easterne Bishop or Monke'.<sup>62</sup>

The writing was on the wall for the Textus Receptus. It has been said that even in the next century, 'the Received Text was still treated with excessive veneration, and was not actually replaced in England until the nineteenth century. But events in the scholarly world had been gradually bringing about its decline, ever since the arrival of the Codex Alexandrinus (A) in 1627'.<sup>63</sup>

Some of the first to make use of Codex Alexandrinus were Westminster Divines. Richard Muller can describe an 'older exegetical tradition' including 'such massive compilations as...the so-called *Westminster Annotations*' and 'the major works of Matthew Poole'.<sup>64</sup>

Right there, on page after page of that older exegetical tradition, are readings from Codex Alexandrinus.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Stephen Steele is minister of Stranraer RP Church in Scotland. He has an MA from Queen's University Belfast where his focus was on nineteenth-century Presbyterianism.

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<sup>62</sup> Sir Simonds D'Ewes, *The Greeke postscripts of the epistles to Timothy and Titus cleared in Parliament. And an occasional speech touching the bill of acapitation, or poll-money* (n. p., 1641).

<sup>63</sup> B. F. Harris, 'Richard Bentley and the text of the Greek New Testament' in *Evangelical Quarterly*, xxxiv, no. 4 (1962), p. 214.

<sup>64</sup> Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics* (4 vols, Grand Rapids, MI: 2003), iii, 135.

# “IN DEATH ITSELF HE WAS LIVING”: HUGH MARTIN’S ATONEMENT THEOLOGY

John C. A. Ferguson

## *Abstract*

Hugh Martin (1822–1885) was a Free Church of Scotland minister whose writings chiefly focussed on the doctrine of salvation. Despite the high esteem with which his writings have been held among Scottish theologians such as John Murray and Donald Macleod his works are not widely known. I wish to offer an introduction to Hugh Martin, and his writings and offer reasons why I think his writings are valuable today for Scottish theology and more widely.

### *I. A brief introduction to Hugh Martin*

Martin was born in 1822 in Aberdeen, Scotland. He was educated in his home city and obtained an M.A. from Marischal College and a B.D. from Kings College, Aberdeen. He was raised in the Church of Scotland. His studies coincided with the Ten Years’ Conflict that preceded the 1843 Disruption and formation of the Free Church of Scotland. Martin attended Assembly debates and was influenced by William Cunningham to the views that would lead to secession from the Church of Scotland.

Martin was licensed to preach the gospel by the Free Church on 19th May 1843 – the day after the signing of the Act of Separation and Deed of Demission. He was called to minister in Panbride, a coastal farming and fishing community near Carnoustie, approximately 12 miles from Dundee, on the east coast of Scotland. He commenced his ministry in 1844. The area is exposed to the North Sea, and high winds and even in the summer can be bitterly cold. It is worthy of note that the landowner Lord Panmure (William Maule) was unsympathetic to the cause of the Free Church. It was ten years before permission was granted for a suitable building. When Lord Panmure died, his son (Fox Maule-Ramsay), a supporter of the Free Church cause, inherited his titles and land. The temporary wooden building Martin ministered in, ill-fitted for protection from the harsh weather, was finally replaced with more suitable premises. One of Martin’s successors later wrote that despite the hardship of those early years, ‘the congregation went on and prospered in the main under the faithful preaching of the Word and the healthful activity and hopeful perseverance of its people.’<sup>1</sup>

Martin married while in Panbride before receiving a call to Greyfriars Free

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<sup>1</sup> James Innes, *History of Panbride Free Church Carnoustie: A Memorial of the Disruption in 1843*, Delivered 14th May 1893 (Carnoustie: A. Reid, 1893), 23.



Church, Edinburgh in 1857. His ministry commenced there the following year. His time in Edinburgh was unhappy, he suffered poor health and separated from his wife. Within two years he, 'became mentally incapacitated for the duties of his office.'<sup>2</sup> There were protracted difficulties in arrangements for early retirement. He officially retired from pastoral ministry in 1865.

The bulk of his theological writings were composed during his retirement. He also excelled in his studies in mathematics. He was an examiner in mathematics at the University of Edinburgh. He continued to contribute to the life of the church, his speeches are recorded at later General Assemblies and he preached in Free Church congregations. Health was a constant difficulty throughout these years. Even at the best of times, Martin didn't seem to enjoy good physical health.

Martin was awarded a D.D. by the University of Edinburgh in 1872 in recognition of his theological achievements. He had a sad end to his life, his closing years residing in what we would describe as a psychiatric hospital but was then called a lunatic asylum. He died in 1885 at the Dundee Royal Lunatic Asylum. Notably, his death certificate attributes the cause to 'organic disease of brain for two years'.<sup>3</sup> Today, Martin is buried in the Grange Cemetery, Edinburgh with his wife and adjacent to George Smeaton and William Cunningham.

## *II. A summary of Martin's writings*

Martin wrote on a variety of subjects in addition to theology including scientific education and mathematics. Theological interests include the use of Psalms in worship and church and state relations, pastoral applications of doctrine and commentaries on characters of the Bible, e.g. he wrote a commentary on Jonah and a collection of articles on Simon Peter. His writings are found among books, letters, sermons, theological tracts and articles. Throughout his writings, the subject of chief interest to Martin was the atonement.

## *III. Martin's theology of atonement*

Martin's theology of atonement might be described as Calvinist, covenantal, or federal and confessional. He often refers to 'the Westminster doctrine' and it being the 'catholic' doctrine of the church. In his writings he refers to Christ's atonement as, a "satisfaction for sin"<sup>4</sup>; substitution<sup>5</sup>; "vicarious sacrifice"<sup>6</sup>; A "substitutionary

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<sup>2</sup> 'Dr. Hugh Martin', *Proceedings and Debates of the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland (1881)*, 46.

<sup>3</sup> Douglas Somerset, *Life of Hugh Martin, The Bulwark: Magazine of the Scottish Reformation Society (Oct 2008–Mar 2009)*, 25.

<sup>4</sup> Hugh Martin, *The Atonement: In Its Relations to the Covenant, the Priesthood, the Intercession of our Lord* (London: James Nisbet & Co., 1870. Repr. Edinburgh: Knox Press, 1976), 15.

<sup>5</sup> Martin, *The Atonement*, 53.

<sup>6</sup> Martin, *The Atonement*, 15–16.

oblation”<sup>7</sup>. As a propitiation for sin it is also an expiation of sin in the life of a Christian. In its extent Martin holds to a definite, limited atonement.

Martin’s understanding of the atonement is as a satisfaction for divine justice, yet he is not of the view that this theme exhausts the meaning of atonement, neither does he reject the validity of other metaphors that were used among contemporaries who took a different view. Instead he argues that where metaphors are appropriate, they derive their truth from Christ’s offering himself as a sacrifice to God as a reconciliation for the sins of his people.<sup>8</sup>

There is a twofold result for Martin: i) the study of atonement incorporates a full range of biblical concepts, however ii) when secondary themes are made to be primary and made to be the essence of atonement they turn into falsehood and error. He says, “when they claim to be of the essence of atonement, they fight against their own realisation.”<sup>9</sup>

To offer some examples as to how other metaphors graft into his understanding of atonement, Martin writes of the atonement being a “moral example”. It was by, “substitutionary sacrifice for sin, satisfying Divine justice, that Christ had scope for that un murmuring patience by which He left us an ‘Example’ that we should follow His steps (1 Pet. ii. 21-24).” The atonement as “a Governmental Display” is rooted in his propitiatory work (Rom. 3:25; 1 John 4:10). Christ’s atonement is a “moral influence”; “a fountain both of Moral Influence and of regenerating energy to turn us unto righteousness, only because He there gave Himself in justice-satisfying substitution, ‘the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God’ (1 Pet. iii.18).” [vv. 13-17 refer to a Christian’s behaviour].<sup>10</sup>

It’s noticeable that the Christus Victor motif is not one Martin mentions in his survey of other views of the atonement. It became more prominent again through Gustaf Aulen’s writings in the following century. But it does feature in Martin’s writings on the atonement. He frequently makes applications of the atonement towards Satan and demonic powers.<sup>11</sup>

Martin’s book “The Atonement” concentrates on three aspects of Christ’s atonement which he believes important for maintaining the church’s confessional doctrine in the face of diverse views of atonement promoted in his day, including ‘the moral example’; “the moral influence”; “governmental display” and “martyrdom” views.

In a bid to defend and promote the church’s confessional position, Martin emphasises three doctrines with reference to which he argues the atonement must be discussed. (1) the covenant of grace, (2) Christ’s priesthood and (3) Christ’s

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7 Martin, *The Atonement*, 69.

8 Martin, *The Atonement*, 69.

9 Martin, *The Atonement*, 71.

10 Martin, *The Atonement*, 69-70.

11 E.g. Martin, ‘Christ’s Victory over Death’, *The British and Foreign Evangelical Review* 29 (1880), 669–86, is an exposition of Hebrews 2:14-15.

priestly action in his death.

### 1. *The covenant of grace*

Martin's view of the covenant of grace is in keeping with Thomas Boston; for Boston, the substance of the covenant of grace between God and mankind and the covenant of redemption between God's three persons are best considered as a single covenant, the covenant of grace. A single covenant comprises the covenantal arrangements agreed in God's eternal counsel and his administration of the covenant in time.

The covenant is not designed to procure God's love or forgiveness for the lost but is rather the fruit of it, whereby sinners are saved and his holy justice upon sin upheld.

In addition to the positive Scriptural attestation to the covenant and its connection to Christ's atonement (e.g. Matt. 26:28 and Heb. 13:20), the covenant of grace offers defence against objections to the atonement as a satisfaction of divine justice. One objection Martin addresses is that Christ's atonement entails an injustice that the innocent are punished while the guilty escape. The objection falls away in view of Christ's covenant oneness with the church. Christ and the church are one and indivisible "so far as their legal standings and responsibilities"<sup>12</sup> by virtue of the covenant of grace. The objection depends on considering the two parties separately. The covenant views the two parties as one and indivisible. In so doing, Martin isn't arguing for any new point within the development of covenant in Scottish theology but is instead applying the theology to objections frequently heard in his own time.

### 2. *Christ's priesthood.*

A second emphasis in Martin's writing on atonement is with respect to Priesthood. The atonement ought to be discussed with respect to Christ's priesthood. I wish to focus on one aspect of Christ's priesthood that Martin draws attention to, but before doing so, on the general theme, it is worth noting John Murray's comment, in a reference he makes to Martin, that summarises the cause for drawing attention to priesthood. Murray writes in *Redemption: Accomplished and Applied*; "That Christ's work was to offer himself a sacrifice for sin implies, however, a complementary truth too frequently overlooked. It is that, if Christ offered himself as a sacrifice, he was also a priest."<sup>13</sup>

### 3. *Christ's action in his priesthood.*

A point Martin focuses on within Christ's priesthood is what he describes as

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<sup>12</sup> Martin, *The Atonement*, 15.

<sup>13</sup> John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished & Applied* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1955), 28.

Christ's action in his priesthood. That is Christ's voluntary, intentional, willing and living work as a priest, leading up to and in his death. Thereafter his priestly action continues in his intercession.

As with the covenant, Christ's action in his death is not a new point in theology. Martin's concern was it being overlooked in his time. His contribution is to recover the point and in detail show Christ's priestly action in his death.

The doctrinal point of Christ's action in his death is made in his book, *The Atonement* and is a recurring theme in his book *The Shadow of Calvary*. This book is a study of Gethsemane, Christ's arrest and trial. This study was originally offered in the form of the Scottish or Sabbath lecture. Martin observes throughout the Passion narrative Christ's intended, voluntary offering of himself to God. He aims to show throughout the Passion narrative that Christ is in command. Whether it is shown by his captors who fall away at his arrest when he speaks (John 18:6), the brevity with which he speaks to Judas (Matt 26:50; Luke 22:48), or when he rebukes Simon Peter for cutting off the high priest's servant's ear and in so doing also affirms again his authority over angelic beings and powers (Matt 26:52-54), or his words to Caiaphas, and the guard who struck him (John 18:19-23); or in his other interactions, Martin aims to show Christ's command – while he is also suffering – in these situations.

Christ's priestly action continues in his laying down his life on the cross. Martin describes this as the most powerful of his works. The atonement is, "the most livingly active work He has ever yet 'accomplished' (Luke ix.31)".<sup>14</sup> The title of this article is drawn from one of his expressions, "in death itself he was living".<sup>15</sup> The main point Martin wishes to convey is that Christ was not subjected to death, but death became his subject. His will was in his death. Paradoxically to us, he lives in his death. He draws from texts conveying the idea, such as Hebrews 7:16, Christ "has become a priest... by the power of an indestructible life" and Galatians 2:20 "I am crucified with Christ... and I now live."

Christ's action in his death points to the uniqueness of Christ's death, his death is unlike any other in that he was obedient unto death and that in so doing he gave himself. On his declarations on the cross, "It is finished" and "Father into thy hands I commit my spirit."; Martin comments,

*Manifestly He was master of His own life when he thus spake. No one was taking it from Him; He was laying it down of Himself: He was offering Himself to God, presenting His united soul and body to the sword of justice to separate them in death; and in testimony of this it is added that, having thus spoken, "he gave up the ghost"—He dismissed His spirit.<sup>16</sup>*

His priesthood continues in his death, his body and soul remaining in his

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14 Martin, *Christ's Victory*, 680.

15 Martin, 'Exchange of Places', *The British and Foreign Evangelical Review* 31 (1882), 465.

16 Martin, *Christ's Victory*, 677; Martin references John 19:13 and Luke 23:46.

possession, being his body and his soul, united to his Godhead and therefore remaining in his power. And so Martin would write, regarding Christ's death, "Even when he died in his human nature, he was living. He was always the Living One, yea, the Life, the very Life; and never more gloriously so than in his death-destroying death."<sup>17</sup>

I recall my late doctorate supervisor John Webster especially appreciating that last quote during my research on Martin's theology, describing the point as a hallmark of a reformed theology. In a draft chapter he wrote beside the quote, "This is very good!"

Martin's attention to Christ's priestly action isn't intended to hide Christ's sufferings, minimise or set them aside. His aim rather is to observe his life and death as a priestly offering to God, in keeping with texts such as Psalm 110:4 "You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek" and Hebrews 5:2, "every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins". Dogmatically, Christ's action, his offering, is observable throughout his earthly ministry. It is bonded together with his sufferings. Martin refers to the atonement as "an *offering in suffering*, and as *suffering in offering*."<sup>18</sup> The offering is not to suppress Christ's suffering, hide it or take away from it. Indeed for Martin, the nature of the offering heightens the suffering. This is brought to light when Martin discusses Christ's sorrow and affliction in Gethsemane. An example of where he emphasises Christ's suffering while speaking of his offering, he says, "in offering himself a sacrifice to God's justice he should at the same time fall a victim to man's hatred and hostility, his death being not only voluntarily endured but also brought about by violent and wicked hands".<sup>19</sup> Christ's suffering – as his offering – is also unique and Martin speaks of the difficulty of inquiring into both.<sup>20</sup> But the main point is that the atonement is both an offering and suffering and not a suffering only.<sup>21</sup>

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17 Martin, *Christ for Us: Sermons of Hugh Martin* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1998), 53.

18 Martin, *The Atonement*, 86.

19 Martin, *The Shadow of Calvary: Gethsemane—The Arrest—The Trial* (Edinburgh: Lyon & Gemmill, 1875), 295.

20 See Martin's discussion in *The Shadow of Calvary of Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane*; and also Martin's comments as to why the books ends before the cross, Christ's sufferings being so severe.

21 Martin's observations on Christ's death can be contrasted with depictions by FW Robertson's description which he critiques in *The Atonement*, 'Christ came into collision with the world's evil, and He bore the penalty of that daring. He approached the whirling wheel, and was torn in pieces.' (Martin, *The Atonement*, 248–49). Also the 44th Paraphrase,

*Behold the Saviour on the cross,  
a spectacle of woe!  
See from his agonizing wounds  
the blood incessant flow;*

*Till death's pale ensigns o'er his cheek  
and trembling lips were spread;  
Till light forsook his closing eyes,  
and life his drooping head!*



I have found the point of Christ's priestly action made in *The Atonement* and then shown through the passion narrative in *The Shadow of Calvary* most helpful for observing Christ's intentional work in the hours leading up to the cross and then on the cross, thereby demonstrating the uniqueness of Christ's death. His writings have assisted me to see, more comprehensively than before in the gospels, the fulfilment of Jesus' sayings of John 10:17-18.

In application of this point of Christ's priestly action today, I think Martin would urge caution when speaking of the atonement primarily as a penal substitution, not that the doctrine necessarily implies a suffering-only on the cross; but it *could* be construed that way; the substitution being in his suffering, when the substitution is also in his offering. He would agree that the atonement is a penal substitution, but I think he would counsel care in the use of the term, that it is made clear that the atonement is both Christ's suffering and offering. Accordingly, I think he would wish for the term to be supplemented concerning his priestly action on the cross. He might wish for it to be said in explanation of the term, penal substitution, that it is a priestly offering; or in explanation of it being a priestly offering, it is a penal substitution. Doing so would serve to buffer against characterisations of Christ as "only a victim" which plays into the hands of those who have described the atonement as a divine abuse. He writes:

*If He died a mere passive victim, He did not die a victor: and no subsequent glory can in that case redeem what in that case was defeat[ed]. But He died a triumphant agent. He prevailed against death to live until He said, "Tis finished," and then to die, not merely voluntarily, but by positive priestly action, giving Himself to God.<sup>22</sup>*

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*'Tis finished—was his latest voice;  
these sacred accents o'er,  
He bowed his head, gave up the ghost,  
and suffered pain no more.*

*'Tis finished—The Messiah dies  
for sins, but not his own;  
The great redemption is complete,  
and Satan's pow'r o'erthrown.*

*'Tis finished—All his groans are past;  
his blood his pain, and toils,  
Have fully vanquished our foes,  
and crowned him with their spoils.*

*'Tis finished—Legal worship ends,  
and gospel ages run;  
All old things now are past away,  
and a new world begun.*

Martin comments on the second verse, "The impression which such phrases are fitted to make upon the mind is just this, and nothing more,— that our Lord uncomplainingly endured inconceivable sufferings,—that He was being subjected to death as the penalty due to sin. All which is true. But they also suggest the idea, that whereas formerly He had been engaged in positive duty, going about doing good, the time for positive and active duty was now passed, and the time for simply suffering had come." (Martin, *The Atonement*, 82).

22 Martin, *The Atonement*, 74.

Martin's observation was that these 3 points – covenant, priesthood and Christ's priestly action – had fallen out of view in his time, which is why he found the need to highlight them. Of these three, I think the third point – Christ's priestly action – is the best entrance into Martin's theology today, as it tracks along repeatedly in the gospel narratives.

In drawing this part to a close, I think it fair to say that for Martin the wonder of Christ's work on the cross is comparable to and even exceeds that of the incarnation. So for Martin, the study of the cross elicits worship to God and Jesus Christ. Christ's death is unique and divine both in its accomplishment and in its achievements.<sup>23</sup>

#### *IV. Reasons why Martin's writings are not so well known*

##### *1. Martin's theological positions declined in popularity in his time.*

In *The Atonement* (1870), he writes regarding an objection that the doctrine of the covenant of grace is 'old-fashioned', with the perception that the doctrine of the covenant of grace taught by the Disruption ministers and esteemed by their parishioners is falling out of view among the next generation of Free Church ministers.<sup>24</sup> In *The Shadow of Calvary* (1875) he comments, "in many quarters the covenant of grace seems to be forgotten. But the theology of Confession of Faith and the pages of Boston and the Erskines are still dear to the Scottish people."<sup>25</sup>

##### *2. The difficulty of reading Martin's writings.*

This is partly due to form and partly to content. In form, for example, in *The Atonement*, Martin readily admits in the preface, that it's not as much a book on the atonement as it is a collection of papers on the atonement, some of which are directly connected, others being more miscellaneous in their nature. In terms of content, I find myself having to reread his writings more than once to grasp his arguments and am not always successful in doing so. In reference to Christ's action in his death, he writes of, "the severe mental exercise for which there is in this simple familiar truth such manifest scope".<sup>26</sup> This intensity of study is reflected in his writings and felt by his readers. Most I know who have read Martin say have found his books a very challenging read.

##### *3. Martin's engagement with contemporary theologians.*

Martin's interest in defending the doctrines of atonement in its time resulted

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23 See e.g. Martin, *Shadow of Calvary*, vii–viii.

24 Martin, *The Atonement*, 26–27.

25 Martin, *Shadow of Calvary*, ix.

26 Martin, *The Atonement*, 80.

in his engagement with theologians such as Ralph Wardlaw, F. D. Maurice, F. W. Robertson, Horace Bushnell, who are not so well-known today as, for example, Schleiermacher and John McLeod Campbell. Consequently, some of the debates that he enters into would be unfamiliar to many readers now, though for those accustomed with the range of views there are on the atonement, the concepts involved, if not the names would be familiar.

## V. *Strengths and weaknesses of Martin's writings*

### 1. *Strengths*

Martin's study of the atonement leads to a detailed opening up of the subject that yields depth in understanding and a multi-faceted view of the atonement in its accomplishment and applications, including pastoral applications and theological implications. He applied the powers of his intellect to the study of the cross, and at the same time he also devoted his energy to the study, so that when he speaks of "the severe mental exercise"<sup>27</sup> previously described I take it as a partly autobiographical statement. If a downside is the challenge in reading his works, an upside is the benefits gained from studying them.

### 2. *Weaknesses*

- i. Martin's theological writings are mostly systematic in their nature, but he didn't write a systematic theology. Nor did he write a systematic theology of atonement. It would be desirable for instance to have more from Martin on the relationship of the threefold office of Christ as prophet, priest and king and as to why the priesthood is foundational to the royal and prophetic offices for atonement. Priesthood is foundational in his theology of atonement, but the point is not developed in "The Atonement" as thoroughly as might be hoped for.
- ii. Martin builds upon and applies the theology of those who have gone before him. It means however that some of his positions are – on the page – inherited rather than argued. For example his view of the covenant of grace as a single covenant in contrast to a separate covenant of grace and covenant of redemption. He doesn't offer an argument as to why one is preferred to the other.
- iii. As mentioned before, his concentration on contemporary voices. Martin's writings may be more widely known had he offered critiques of earlier nineteenth-century theologians who have proven more influential over time, such as Schleiermacher and McLeod Campbell.

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<sup>27</sup> Martin, *The Atonement*, 80.

- iv. Martin's style of writing. In places can come across as overly harsh towards those with differing views, even at times on matters that are not confessional<sup>28</sup>

### VI. *Martin in the broader setting of Scottish theology*

Martin's writings stand in the long tradition of federal theology, his writings build upon, develop and apply his church's theological tradition. The divergent paths in theological commitments of Martin's writings may be observed upon comparing John Macleod's *Scottish Theology* with T.F. Torrance's volume by the same name. Macleod's book concludes with Martin's theology along with John Kennedy of Dingwall, while T. F. Torrance's does so with John McLeod Campbell.<sup>29</sup> Corresponding to the divergence of two camps, each claiming "reformed theology" there has been a gravitating towards one or the other. In terms of the present day, it appears to me these two schools only comprise a small minority within Scottish evangelicalism, and federal theology is less widespread now than in Martin's day. Yet Martin has also had a lasting influence in Scotland, evident in the writings of John Murray and Donald Macleod and largely, while not exclusively, among the churches that trace their roots through the formation of the Free Church of Scotland in 1843 where his writings are still highly revered.

### VII. *Subjects that arise for further research in Scottish church history and theology*

Subjects that arise from my studies of Martin for further research in the field of Scottish church history and theology

#### 1. *Theological method.*

Martin's writings lend themselves to the study of theological methods in the nineteenth century. His theology is of interest with respect to Bavinck's critique of Hodge's theological method, for Martin employs the same methods as Hodge.<sup>30</sup> A method of arriving at the doctrine of the covenant of grace is by induction, "Scientific or Baconian induction",<sup>31</sup> "principles analogous to those of truly

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28 E.g. see Martin's critique of the view that God is related to prelapsarian man as a father; Martin, *Candlish's Cunningham Lectures*, *The British and Foreign Evangelical Review* 14 (1865), 720-87. At the same time, Martin's survey in this article regarding the absence of treatment of the doctrine of adoption in reformed theology is worthy of note. It offers a nineteenth century example of an observation on reformed theology more frequently made in recent times (see pp. 724-28).

29 Of interest is that a copy of *The Atonement* available to view on <www.archive.org> belonged to T. F. Torrance, inherited from his father, Rev Thomas Torrance. It is uploaded by Princeton Theological Seminary.

30 See Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* (gen. ed. John Bolt; trans. John Vriend; 4 vols.; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003-2008), 1:93-94.

31 Martin, *The Atonement*, 33.

Baconian philosophy”.<sup>32</sup> It seems to me Martin’s theology lends support to Paul Helm’s appeal that “Hodge’s references to induction should not be misunderstood. This cannot [be] the logic of general induction, but the induction in question is from the bounded set of expressions in the canonical scriptures.”<sup>33</sup> Helm’s appeal is in keeping with Martin’s comments on the inner logic of Scripture and the relationship between theology and philosophy in *The Atonement*.<sup>34</sup> In brief, I think Martin’s writings could help address the matter that Bavinck is concerned with in Hodge’s method.

## 2. Christology

A key theological point in Martin’s writings concerns the threefold office of Christ and it raises the question of how Christ’s priesthood is appropriated to his royal and prophetic office in nineteenth-century Scotland. A study that would also be of interest is Martin’s understanding of Christ’s divine and human natures.<sup>35</sup>

## VIII. Conclusion

Overall, Martin’s significance for Scottish theology is bound up with the time in which he ministered and demands the study of the period in which he lived. Simultaneously, his theology serves today as a model of atonement – his defence of age-old doctrines of atonement, while allowing for new veins of thought, not displacing the old – and warning against doing so – instead viewing aspects of the atonement in their relations to one another; as such his theology models a bringing out of treasures old and new (Matt 13:52). Martin’s writings offer a significant correction where the emphasis has been what happened to Christ on the cross rather than what he did on the cross, the value of this point, again, not a new point in theology, but one he brings to light, transcends his time period. Where the evangelical church today is proclaiming Christ’s action in his death then Martin’s writings are not rendered obsolete, but I believe those who do, would find Martin’s writings valuable for his deliberations upon both Christ’s work on the cross and how the whole of Christ’s life was an offering to God. For these reasons, I believe Martin’s writings will continue to influence the field of Scottish theology, be of service to the church and are deserving of widespread attention.

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32 Martin, *The Atonement*, 36.

33 Paul Helm, ‘Charles Hodge & the Method of Systematic Theology’, Online: <http://paulhelmsdeep.blogspot.com/2007/09/charles-hodge-method-of-systematic.html?m=1> [Accessed 9 November 2022].

34 ‘The science of theology is perfectly competent within her own sphere for discharging all the duty which lies to her hand. She is under no necessity to confess inadequacy of materials in her own proper department for her own proper work: and when she is tempted to feel under any such necessity, it must be either because she has carried her investigations and efforts outside her own proper sphere, or has not exhausted the materials within it.’ Martin, *The Atonement*, 12.

35 Thanks to John McClean for raising this point in response to the paper.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr John C. A. Ferguson is minister of Inverness Associated Presbyterian Church and former editor of the Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology.

# A RED LETTER DAY IN BOURTON ON THE WATER, AUGUST 1765

Gary Brady

## *Abstract*

This study in eighteenth century Particular Baptist history hones in on one day in 1765 when Benjamin Beddome and 29 other like minded ministers gathered together at an association meeting. These men vary in their importance and in how much information is available about them. The essay seeks to gather what is known in order to paint a picture of a significant day in the life of that particular community. It is hoped that the description of such a gathering in the past may encourage such gathering and such interaction among evangelical ministers, especially, but also others on our own day and age.

The following article exemplifies the interconnectedness experienced by Particular Baptist ministers in the Georgian era. No doubt today different patterns of association will be worked out by various people but fellowship and friendship is a good thing to pursue. "A cord of three strands is not quickly broken." (Ecclesiastes 4:12b)

Benjamin Beddome was pastor of the Baptist cause at Bourton on the Water, Gloucestershire, for over fifty years. In his lifetime, the church, a founder member of the Midland Baptist Association, hosted the annual meeting of ministers and messengers on three occasions - in 1753, 1765 and 1785.<sup>1</sup>

Bourton was and is a village and so in some ways unsuited to hosting such gatherings, although there is a coaching inn in nearby Lower Slaughter.<sup>2</sup>

When the association was elsewhere, attendees were accommodated in local inns. For example, in Warwick, attendees could put up at The Marlborough Head, The Cross Keys or The Three Tuns, as they did in 1728, 1742, 1750 and 1778. In Birmingham, there was The Castle, used in 1764, or The Anchor, Spinall Street, used in 1752, or the Union Tavern, Cherry Street, used in 1793.<sup>3</sup>

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1 The Midland Association of Particular Baptist Churches was formed at Warwick in 1655. Founder members - Bourton, Warwick, Alcester, Derby, Hooknorton, Moreton in the Marsh and Tewkesbury.

2 *The Coach and Horses* is still there on Stow Road, Lower Slaughter.

3 Such information can be gleaned from Annual Association reports. Note The Red Lion (1736) The Talbot (1747, 1757, 1769) Upton upon Severn; The Crown (1745) The Sceptre near the Bridge End (1756) Bridgnorth; The King's Head (1749) The Angel (1773) Pershore; The Crown, between High Street and Church Street, Bromsgrove (1755, 1768, 1783); The Boar (1758) Alcester; The Unicorn (1760) The Three Horse-Shoes (1772) Leominster; The Hop-Pole, Foregate Street (1754) The Unicorn, Broad Street (1767, 1780) Worcester; The Unicorn (1774) Bengeworth; The Ram (1779) Cirencester; The Fleece (1776, 1790) Tewkesbury; The George (1791) Ross on Wye. Beddome was born in a former inn, in Henley-in-Arden. His father had had it converted into a family home and place of worship. Beddome's manse in Bourton on the Water is today The Manse Hotel.

The 1765 meetings in Bourton were planned for the usual Whitsuntide period at the end of May but the new chapel, completed that year, was not ready in time so meetings were deferred to August.<sup>4</sup> People gathered on Tuesday, August 13 and the main meetings were the next day, Wednesday, August 14, with a final session on Thursday, August 15. Quite where everyone was accommodated is unclear but nearly a hundred years later, Thomas Brooks, in his local church history, *Pictures of the past*, drawing on Beddome, listed some thirty ministers present on that occasion.<sup>5</sup>

As Brooks notes, only fourteen of these were ministers of Association churches<sup>6</sup> with more than twice that number of ministers present.<sup>7</sup> He calls it a "red-letter-day" in the memory of the "saints and faithful brethren" at Bourton and concludes by saying that it was no mean gathering for a country village, in an age when railways were unknown.<sup>8</sup> There was a large congregation of hearers, as well as a great company of preachers.<sup>9</sup>

Beddome, 48 at the time, wrote that in addition to vehicles of all other kinds, "there were eleven or twelve post-chaises at our Association".<sup>10</sup>

### I. Benjamin Beddome

**Benjamin Beddome (1717-1795)** was born in Henley-in-Arden, Warwickshire, and was the son of pastor John Beddome (1674-1757). When Benjamin was

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4 Whitsun 1765 was May 26. Correspondence between Frances Snooke (1732-1766), a member of the congregation, and her brother-in-law Richard Hall (1728-1601) reveals that the new chapel was first used July 21.

5 Thomas Brooks, *Pictures of the past: the history of the Baptist Church Bourton-on-the-water* (London, Judd & Glass, 1861), 53.

6 Bewdley is mentioned in the association letter but not by Brooks. At that time, the minister was James Kettleby (1697-1767) who began there in 1718. He was first a member, then an occasional preacher, then pastor. After extended probation, he was ordained in 1725 remaining until his death. He published a Hebrew grammar (1762). Dudley sent apologies that year, their first. In 1780 they called their first pastor, northerner Abraham Greenwood (1749-1827).

7 Association ministers: Skinner, Alcester; L Butterworth, Bengeworth; Turner, Birmingham; Beddome, Bourton; J Butterworth, Bromsgrove; MacGowan, Bridgnorth; Whitmore, Hooknorton; J Thomas, Leominster; Carpenter, Middleton Cheney; Ash, Pershore; Woodman, Sutton-in-Elms; Haydon, Tewkesbury; Jones, Upton and Knight, Warwick. Daniel Thomas, Henley-in-Arden, can also be included here as Henley was under Alcester's oversight. The Davises, Evans, Ferriby and Francis all belonged to Western Association churches.

8 Bourton-on-the-Water railway station opened in 1881 and closed in 1964. It was on the [Banbury and Cheltenham Direct Railway taken over by The Great Western Railway in 1896](#).

9 Missing names? John Poynting (1719-1791) Worcester, moderator in 1764. Also three more Bourton men: John Collet Ryland (1723-1792) Northampton, John Haynes (d 1768) Bradford on Avon, Nathaniel Rawlins (1734-1809) Trowbridge. Ryland's father farmed land near the now abandoned village of Lower Ditchford, about 10 miles west of Bourton. Ryland and Haynes were baptised in Bourton in 1741 and Rawlins in 1750. Rawlins ministered in Trowbridge, except for a brief sojourn in Broughton or Broughton Gifford. Jacob Mower, Bengeworth and Evesham, died the year before; William Christian, Shepshed, suddenly on January 1, 1765, at a gathering of ministers.

10 A post-chaise was a closed body on four wheels sitting two to four persons and drawn by two or four horses.

seven, the family moved to Bristol where he was educated locally, before being apprenticed as a surgeon apothecary. He then studied theology under family friend Bernard Foskett (1685-1758).<sup>11</sup> After a year or so he went to London to study at the Independent Academy, Mile End. He was baptised in London, at the church in Little Prescott Street, Goodman's Fields, in 1739. The following year, he became pastor of the Baptist church in Bourton-on-the-Water, Gloucestershire, in the Cotswolds, being ordained in 1743. Despite calls elsewhere, he ministered in that same place for some fifty-five years and became a well known preacher and a leading figure in the Midland Baptist Association, acting four times as moderator (1746, 1749, 1761, 1771), twice being author of the association letter (1759, 1765) and preaching a record 17 times over the 46 years, 1743-1789.<sup>12</sup> In 1749 he married Elizabeth Boswell (1732-1784), daughter of a Bourton deacon. Typically, they had many children but many died young. In 1770 he was awarded an MA by Providence College, Rhode Island. In 1752, he had published *A Scriptural Exposition of the Baptist Catechism, by Way of Question and Answer*, which was reprinted in 1776. A prolific hymn writer, a collection of 830 of his hymns was published posthumously as were several volumes of sermons based on his notes.<sup>13</sup>

## II. Harmony and variety

Brooks' list contains relatively well known and unknown names. No doubt they formed a sombrely dressed group, perhaps a periwig or a three cornered hat in evidence. Average height in those days was around five feet six inches. In only six cases do portraits appear to exist. Portraits of Evans, Francis, Macgowan, Reynolds, Joshua Thomas and Stanger are probably the only ones.<sup>14</sup>

All thirty appear to have had all their limbs and eyes intact.<sup>15</sup> Some perhaps

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11 Surgeon apothecaries were fully trained in the dispensing and use of medicine and were permitted to perform surgery. Like other ministers, Beddome probably continued some form of medical practice after becoming a pastor.

12 Preaching dates include 1743 Leominster; then possibly 1746, 1749, 1752, 1755, 1758 and 1760 Leominster; 1764 Birmingham, 2 Cor 1:14; 1767 Worcester, Lk 24:29; 1770 Bewdley; 1773 Pershore, Jas 1:26; 1776 Tewkesbury; 1778 Warwick, 1 Kgs 18:17; 1780 Worcester; 1784 Hooknorton; 1786 Alcester; 1789 Evesham, Php 4:3, his last.

13 There is a brief biography of Beddome by Michael Haykin in Michael Haykin and Terry Wolever (eds.), *The British Particular Baptists Vol 4* (Springfield: Particular Baptist Press, 2018). Wallin, Francis, Ash, Evans and J Thomas also have biographies in the same series.

14 Four portraits are online at [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Portrait\\_of\\_Reverend\\_Caleb\\_Evans\\_D.D.\\_\(4674112\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Portrait_of_Reverend_Caleb_Evans_D.D._(4674112).jpg), Francis ([File:Portrait\\_of\\_The\\_Revd.\\_Benjamin\\_Francis,\\_A.M.\\_\(4670733\)\\_cropped.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Portrait_of_The_Revd._Benjamin_Francis,_A.M._(4670733)_cropped.jpg)) Macgowan ([File:John\\_Macgowan\\_1825.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:John_Macgowan_1825.jpg)), J Thomas ([File:Portrait\\_of\\_Joshua\\_Thomas\\_\(4673043\)\\_cropped.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Portrait_of_Joshua_Thomas_(4673043)_cropped.jpg)). For Reynolds see <https://www.nationalgalleries.org/art-and-artists/56961/rev-john-reynolds-about-1731-1792-baptist-minister-cripplegate-london>; Stanger [http://www.airgale.com.au/stanger-t/pictures/rev\\_john\\_stanger\\_1743-1823.jpg](http://www.airgale.com.au/stanger-t/pictures/rev_john_stanger_1743-1823.jpg) There is a portrait of John Butterworth if not of his brothers. Memorial plaques or tablets exist or existed in at least two cases. Beddome's is still in the Bourton church; there was also one for Turner in Cannon Street, Birmingham. Francis wrote elegies for Evans, Jones and Joshua Thomas.

15 Unlike Thomas Wilbraham, a blind Baptist minister in this period who became a Sandemanian and left

showed the ravages of age or disease, however. By 1765, Beddome was suffering from the gout that would later mean sitting to preach at times. Perhaps the marks of lameness with which Wallin was born still evidenced themselves. Sickly Samuel George would be dead from TB within two years and may have looked pale and thin. Almost certainly, Daniel Thomas bore visible marks of his persecution as a young man. Reynolds' difficulties would have become apparent only once he began to speak.

Life expectancy in 1765 was only 39, yet of twenty whose lifespan is known, only George would die young (33). Another Welshman, Daniel Thomas, died at 49. The rest died between 54 and 88, average age of death being between 66 and 67 (nearly 70 if you exclude George and Thomas).

In most cases, if not all, the men appear to have been married with children.<sup>16</sup> Three, including Beddome, had direct connections with Bourton and fourteen were association men.<sup>17</sup> Over half served long pastorates in one place.<sup>18</sup> At least eight had studied for the ministry in Bristol. Six or seven were Welsh and five were from the north of England.<sup>19</sup> Another five, at least, were sons of ministers. Philip Jones and Joshua Thomas had sons who were ministers. Jones also had a nephew who entered the ministry, as did Sleep.<sup>20</sup>

Particular Baptists almost to a man, Stanger began as a General Baptist and was probably in a state of theological flux at this point. Darby was minister at an Independent church. Both MacGowan and Daniel Thomas had begun as Methodists.<sup>21</sup> Philip Jones was a seventh day Baptist by conviction and perhaps

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the ministry to become a schoolteacher. Welsh Baptist preacher Christmas Evans (1766-1838) famously lost an eye as a young man.

16 In some cases, the wife's name is known. Beddome, Ash, J Thomas - Elizabeth; Reynolds, Overbury and others, Mary; Wallin, Whitmore and others, Sarah; Ferriby, Hannah. Some remarried after the first wife died. This is so of Evans (both Sarah) MacGowan (Esther then Mary) and Haydon (unknown then Joan). Stanger, probably unmarried at this point would have two wives in due time, both called Mary. Francis also married two women called Mary. At this time he was a widower but remarried the following year. Wallin had been a widower many years by 1765.

17 The other two are Reynolds and Strange.

18 The men and approximate years served: Stanger (over 60) L Butterworth (60) Beddome (over 50) Ferriby (52) T Davis, Whitmore (50) J Thomas (43) J Butterworth, Carpenter, Francis, Turner, Wallin, Jones (40) Ash (33) Woodman (27) Reynolds (26) Sleep (22).

19 Bristol men: Ash, Beddome, T Davis, Evans, Ferriby, Francis, George, Knight, Reynolds, Woodman. Welshmen: T Davis, Francis, George, both Thomases and perhaps D Davis. Jones and Evans had Welsh roots. The northerners: Turner, the Butterworths, Tommerson and MacGowan, born in Scotland.

20 Beddome, Wallin, Francis, Evans and Stanger were all sons of the manse. Stanger appears to have had a son (William Stanger 1779-1834) and a grandson in the ministry. Overbury's uncle, John Overbury (d 1764), was minister in Alcester 1729-1764. Edmund Jones 1722-1765 son of Philip ministered in Exeter. Timothy Thomas 1753-1827 son of Joshua succeeded MacGowan at Devonshire Square Baptist, London; James Sleep 1742-1811 succeeded his uncle Samuel; Thomas Hillier (d 1790) was nephew to Philip Jones and followed him at Natton. Beddome's son Boswell Brandon Beddome (1763-1816) trained for the ministry in Bristol but never became a minister. Like the Butterworths, J Thomas and Francis had brothers in the ministry - Timothy Thomas (1720-1768) and Jonathan Francis (1722-1801).

21 The Anglican Methodist leader William Grimshaw (1708-1763) once remarked with rueful humour that "The worst of it is that so many of my chickens turn ducks". He was not the only Methodist seeing converts



Hitchman too.<sup>22</sup>

A number had served an apprenticeship before entering the ministry - Beddome as a surgeon apothecary, MacGowan as a weaver, Ash as a blacksmith, Joshua Thomas as a silk mercer and Stanger in hosiery. We do not know the nature of Wallin's apprenticeship. Particular Baptist ministers were notoriously poor and used various means to supplement their income.<sup>23</sup> Ash, Hitchman, Francis, Joshua Thomas, Stanger and maybe others ran schools. Ash and Stanger would both also try running shops to support themselves. Reynolds may have been a bookseller. MacGowan had also been a baker. Overbury, though a pastor, probably continued to work in the wool trade.

Four years after the gathering, Ash and Evans would publish the first Baptist hymn collection, *Hymns adapted to public worship*, the Bristol Collection. It would include hymns by Ash, Beddome and Wallin. In 1787, *Rippon's Selection* would include hymns by those three and Francis.

There is reason to believe that Ash, Beddome, Evans and Reynolds, if not others, were able to read the Greek New Testament. In 1770, the college of Rhode Island, New England, later Brown University, honoured Beddome, Reynolds, Wallin and Woodman with MA degrees. They did the same for Ash and Evans in 1774 and 1789 respectively and for Francis in 1792. Ash and Evans, in addition, were honoured by Aberdeen University with a LLD and DD respectively when they were given their Rhode Island MAs.<sup>24</sup>

It is unclear in what order Brooks lists the pastors, although it may be by remoteness from Bourton. Two obvious ways to list them today might be by distance or by age.<sup>25</sup>

### III. Distance from Bourton

By distance from Bourton, one would note first those farthest away - men such as Thomas Ferriby, born and baptised in Horsley but by then on the other side of

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turn Baptist. See Faith Cook, *William Grimshaw of Haworth* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1997), 234.

22 Such people observe the Sabbath on the seventh day of the week, Saturday, as a holy day to God. They take a Baptist view of covenant theology, practice baptism by immersion and accept congregational church government and recognise Sabbath keeping to be a matter of obedience not salvation. Historically, most Christians and churches have rested on Sunday but always some have arrested on Saturday. The first to adopt Baptist doctrine and keep the seventh day arose mid-17th century in England and were a significant minority in the 18th century. Even today more than 500 such churches exist worldwide with some 45,000 members. See <https://www.seventhdaybaptist.org/> (Accessed Aug 3 2022)

23 Francis apparently tried keeping pigs, growing vegetables and fruit and made an unsuccessful foray into the wool trade in order to stay afloat. See the appendix by Thomas Flint to *The Presence of Christ the Source of Eternal Bliss* A funeral discourse by John Ryland jr Bristol, 1800.

24 A list of honorary degrees given by Brown University in the 1700s can be found online here - <https://www.brown.edu/about/administration/corporation/1700s> (Accessed Aug 3 2022)

25 Those present in alphabetical order: Ash, Beddome, J and L Butterworth, Carpenter, Darby, D and T Davis, Evans, Ferriby, Francis, George, Haydon, Hitchman, Jones, Knight, MacGowan, Overbury, Reynolds, Skinner, Sleaf, Stanger, Strange, D and J Thomas, Tommerson, Turner, Wallin, Whitmore, Woodman.

the county, in Chipping Sodbury; James Butterworth, Bromsgrove, Worcestershire; John Stanger, Towcester, Northamptonshire; Samuel Sleaf, Princes Risborough, near Chesham, Buckinghamshire; Isaac Woodman, Sutton in the Elms, near Leicester; Caleb Evans, Bristol; James Turner, Birmingham; Joshua Thomas, Leominster, Herefordshire; John MacGowan, Bridgnorth, Shropshire;<sup>26</sup> Benjamin Wallin, London, and the real outlier, Thomas Tommerson or Thomason, near Macclesfield in Cheshire.<sup>27</sup>

At the other end of the scale would be those who had travelled twenty miles or less, people such as David Davis, the new pastor at Chipping Campden, Gloucestershire; Thomas Davis, Fairford, Gloucestershire; Benjamin Whitmore, Hooknorton, near Banbury, Oxfordshire; John Haydon, Tewkesbury, Gloucestershire; Lawrence Butterworth, Bengeworth, Worcestershire.

#### *IV. Ages*

If we attempt to arrange them by age, most of the data is available, except for eight men whose ages are unknown.<sup>28</sup>

In 1765, the younger men were John Stanger 1743-1823, 22 in 1765; Lawrence Butterworth 1740-1828, 25; Caleb Evans 1737-1791, 28; Samuel George 1734-1767 and Isaac Woodman 1715-1777, both about 30; Benjamin Francis 1734-1799, 31, Thomas Ferriby 1733-1808, 32.

A little older were John Reynolds 1730-1792, 35; William Hitchman c 1728-1802 and Benjamin Whitmore 1728-1804, both about 37; John MacGowan 1726-1780 and James Turner 1726-1780, both 39; Thomas Davis, c 1724-1784 and John Ash 1724-1779, both about 41.

In the oldest group (45-65) were Daniel Thomas 1720-1769, about 45; Joshua Thomas 1719-1797, 46; Benjamin Beddome, 48; John Haydon 1714-1782, 51; Benjamin Wallin 1711-1782, 54; Philip Jones c 1700-1771 and Nathaniel Overbury 1700-1766, both about 65.

#### *V. The three preachers*

Appropriately, Beddome was deputed to draw up the circular letter, published

<sup>26</sup> Bromsgrove, Sutton, Birmingham, Leominster, Bridgnorth, were Midland Association churches.

<sup>27</sup> A complete list with approximate mileage: D Davis, Chipping Campden, 12; T Davis, Fairford/Whitmore, Hooknorton, 18; Haydon, Tewkesbury 19; L Butterworth, Bengeworth, 20; Darby, Witney, 21; Ash, Pershore, 25; Overbury, Tetbury, 26; Carpenter, Middleton Cheney and Strange, Stratton St Margaret, near Swindon and Knight, Warwick, 28; Jones, Upton on Severn, 29; Francis, Horsley and Skinner, Alcester, 30; D Thomas, Henley-in-Arden/Reynolds, Oxford, 33; George, Wantage, 36; Hitchman, Hillesley, 37; Ferriby, Chipping Sodbury, 41; J Butterworth, Bromsgrove, 43; Stanger, Towcester, 45; Sleaf, Princes Risborough, near Chesham, 52; Woodman, Sutton in the Elms, 54; Evans, Bristol, 55; Turner, Birmingham, 60; J Thomas, Leominster, 61; MacGowan, Bridgnorth, 63; Wallin, London, 88; Tommerson or Thomason, Cheshire, 133.

<sup>28</sup> Dates for Carpenter, Davis, Knight and Tommerson are unknown. Birth dates for J Butterworth, Skinner, Sleaf or Strange likewise. Within five years of 1765, George [1734-1767] Strange [d 1768] D Thomas [1720-1769] were dead.

in due time.<sup>29</sup> Three ministers took a special part in proceedings by preaching - MacGowan and Turner, association men, and Wallin, from London. Also taking part, besides Beddome, were association men, Francis, Ash, Evans and Jones. Ash was the moderator.

On the Wednesday morning, Francis opened proceedings and Ash led in prayer before MacGowan preached from Psalm 45:13 *The King's daughter is all glorious within; her clothing is of wrought gold*. Caleb Evans concluded in prayer.

Next, Turner preached from Romans 4:20 *He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God*. Jones concluded in prayer.

The third and final preacher was Wallin who preached in the evening on Acts 11:22-24, about Barnabas and the church in Antioch.

On the third morning, the Thursday, Beddome's circular letter was read and approved and he closed the meeting in prayer before the crowds began to disperse.

**John MacGowan (1726-1780)** born and educated in Edinburgh, was apprenticed to a weaver. He had early become a Wesleyan and a Methodist preacher. However, later, having become a Calvinist, he was attracted first to the Independents, then became a Particular Baptist, settling in Bridge Street, Warrington, Lancashire, as a baker and as pastor of the old Baptist chapel, in nearby Hill Cliff. He then moved on to Bridgnorth, Shropshire. He was not particularly successful there and a year after preaching in Bourton, in September 1766, he went to pastor the church that met at the old Baptist meeting-house, Devonshire Square, Bishopsgate, London, the church begun by William Kiffin (1616-1701) in 1687. He was moderator for the Midland Association in 1766 but was inducted to the London pastorate that year by fellow London ministers, John Gill (1697-1773), Wallin and Samuel Stennett (1727-1795).<sup>30</sup> There he knew better success and there he remained the rest of his life. On their behalf, he signed the petition of the Protestant Association of London, in the prelude to the Gordon Riots of 1780. His first wife, Esther, died in 1762. His second wife, Mary outlived him. He had eight surviving children. He was buried in Bunhill Fields, Wallin preaching at the funeral. MacGowan authored several, sometimes anonymous, volumes that could be quite caustic. He wrote to defend the Methodists expelled from Oxford in 1768 and was author of *Dialogues with devils*, a Bunyanesque work. His *Works* were published in two volumes in 1825.<sup>31</sup>

29 To access online, see [shorturl.at/dBLRU](http://shorturl.at/dBLRU).

30 Gill, Horsleydown, Southwark; Wallin; Stennett, Little Wild Street. Also taking part: Samuel Burford (c 1726-1768) Little Prescott Street, Goodman's Fields; William Clarke (1732-1795) Unicorn Yard.

31 There is little biographical material for MacGowan. As with other subjects, some material can be found in Joseph Ivimey, *History of the English Baptist* (4 vols.; London, 1811-30); Arthur S Langley "Baptist Ministers in England about 1750 AD", *Transactions of the Baptist Historical Society* 6 (1918-1919); *Baptist Autographs in the John Rylands University Library of Manchester 1741-1845* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2009); *Dissenting Academies Online Database* (<https://dissacad.english.qmul.ac.uk/>); Georgia Southern's *Dissenting Studies 1650-1850* (<https://sites.google.com/view/dissenting-studies-1650-1850/biograph>). (Both accessed Aug 3 2022). Also, William Stokes, *The History of the Midland Association of Baptist Churches, from Its Rise in the Year 1655 to 1855* (London and Birmingham, 1855). This lack of material is true of all the men except

**James Turner (1726-1780)** was another northerner. Born in Stack, Lancashire, he became a member of the Baptist congregation in nearby Bacup, Rossendale, where he was baptised by Henry Lord (d 1780). In 1755 he was called south to be the second pastor of the church at Cannon Street, Birmingham, founded in 1737. At that time, the church was failing and the congregation numbered only about 14. However, under Turner's ministry, the work flourished and in 1763 the chapel was enlarged, with a further enlargement set to begin at about the time of his death in 1780. By then, membership had reached over 150. In 1775, fellow northerner John Sutcliff (1752-1814) worked alongside him as his assistant for six months, before going to Olney. Turner was succeeded by Henry Taylor in 1782 but Taylor became an Arminian. However, in 1789, Samuel Pearce (1766-1799) followed him, his brief pastorate making a deep and orthodox impact. Between 1765 and his death, Turner preached another twice (1769, 1762) at the Association and was moderator four times - 1768, 1770, 1774 and 1778. A tablet erected in Turner's memory in the chapel notes that "he was a clear, judicious, acceptable, and successful preacher and he was a defender of all the doctrines of the everlasting Gospel." In Turner's lifetime some few small items were published but did not long remain in print.<sup>32</sup>

**Benjamin Wallin (1711-1782)** son of pastor Edward Wallin (1678-1733) was born with what was assumed to be incurable lameness but, thanks to the medical expertise of the Hertfordshire Baptist minister, Jonas Thorowgood (1678-1753), he was enabled to walk. Educated under John Needham (d 1743) of Hitchin, Hertfordshire, Wallin was later greatly helped by Dr Sayer Rhudd (d 1757) and Dr Joseph Stennett (1692-1758).<sup>33</sup> Baptised in 1725, Wallin worked in business for many years but in 1740, after a great inward struggle, he agreed to become pastor of Maze Pond, London, the church where Beddome was baptised. This was some time after the death of his father, who had pastored the church and was first succeeded by Abraham West (1712-1739) who died prematurely after a short time. The idea of Wallin entering the ministry had been mooted from before the time of his father's death but the son had always resisted the idea. His eventual forty year ministry was successful and greatly appreciated by many. His successor was Abraham Booth (1734-1806). In 1752, Sarah, Wallin's wife of 19 years, had died. He never remarried. They had two sons and three daughters. In 1770, like Beddome, he was awarded a Rhode Island MA.<sup>34</sup> Like so many Baptist pastors of the period, he wrote hymns and in 1750 published a collection of them. He also published more than forty sermons and other items - more than any other Baptist of the time, except Gill.

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Beddome, Wallin, Francis, Ash, Evans and Thomas.

32 There is also little biographical material for Turner.

33 Rhudd later became unorthodox with regard to the Trinity.

34 There is a brief biography of Edward and Benjamin Wallin by Terry Wolever in Haykin and Wolever, *The British Particular Baptists Vol 4*.

*VI. Four others taking part*

As for Ash, Evans, Francis and Jones.

**John Ash (1724-1779)** was Dorset born and apprenticed to a blacksmith before studying for the ministry. He apparently had a blacksmith's physique. He was a member of Loughwood Meeting House, near Dalwood, Dorset, and may have worked alongside the pastor, Isaac Hann (1690-1778), for a short time. Like Beddome, he studied in Bristol under Bernard Foskett and in 1746 settled in Pershore, the compromise candidate for a previously divided congregation.<sup>35</sup> He followed another Bristol student, Edward Cook (d c 1746) who had led the previously mixed church into becoming exclusively Baptist. In 1752, Ash married a wealthy orphan in the Pershore congregation, Elizabeth Goddard (1728-1764). A lengthy prenuptial agreement governed the marriage to some extent but they were happily married and had six children. They supplemented their income by running a shop and were eventually able to buy their own property. Ash also probably ran a school. Like his predecessor, he remained in Pershore until his death. In 1774, he obtained a LLD from Aberdeen. At his funeral, Evans said of him that the world has seldom known "a man of a clearer head, a sounder heart, or a more amiable, steady, happy temper". A lexicographer, grammarian and educationalist, he published a dictionary, a grammar and works on education. With his friend Caleb Evans, he created a first Baptist collection of hymns, containing hymns by himself, Beddome and Wallin.<sup>36</sup>

**Caleb Evans (1737-1791)** was, like Beddome, Francis and Wallin, the son of a minister. Hugh Evans (1712-1781), originally from Wales, came to Bristol to study and first assisted Foskett, before succeeding him as principal. Caleb followed a similar trajectory, first assisting his father from 1758, then succeeding him after his death. Caleb was very much aware of his Welsh roots, although, unlike his father, he spoke no Welsh. He would attend Association meetings in Wales and preached six times. No doubt Hugh and Caleb were part of the reason why so many came from Wales to study in Bristol. Like Beddome, Caleb studied at the Mile End Academy. Also like Beddome, he was baptised and called to the ministry in London, in Little Wild Street, and was sought as a pastor by a London church, namely Unicorn Yard. His work with Ash on the hymn collection has been mentioned. No doubt it was his friendship with Ash that led to his marrying Ash's wife's cousin, the short lived Sarah Jeffries (1738-1771). They had five children together. After her death he remarried - to Sarah Hazel from Bristol. In 1780 he was awarded an MA by Providence College, Rhode Island and a DD by Aberdeen University. On his death in 1791, Benjamin Francis composed an elegy in his honour. He published

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<sup>35</sup> The other candidates were Bourton men John Collett Ryland and Richard Haynes. Ryland became pastor at Warwick, Haynes at Bradford on Avon.

<sup>36</sup> There is a brief biography of Ash by G H Taylor in Haykin and Wolever (eds.) *The British Particular Baptists Vol 2*.



several books and is remembered for championing the American colonists contra John Wesley (1703-1791) in 1778.<sup>37</sup>

**Benjamin Francis (1734-1799)** was another Welshman and, like Beddome and Wallin, a son of the manse. His father, Enoch Francis (1688-1740), was a well known preacher in West Wales. Benjamin was only six when his parents died. He was brought up in Swansea and baptised at 15, in 1749, by Griffith Davies. He and his older brother, Jonathan Francis (1722-1801), were baptised the same day. Both became preachers. Benjamin studied in Bristol, where he acquired English. In 1740, he became pastor of the Baptist church in Horsley, Gloucestershire, also known as Shortwood. Francis was not only successful in building up the materially poor church in Horsley but had a remarkable itinerant ministry, preaching the gospel in many places in Gloucestershire, Worcestershire, Wiltshire and beyond. He made trips down into Cornwall, across to Ireland and back home to Wales. On fourteen occasions he preached at the Welsh Association.<sup>38</sup> He also appears to have been moderator of the Western Association in 1777 and 1787 and author of the circular letter in 1765, 1772, 1778, 1762 and 1796. Twice married, Francis married a Mary Harris from Wales in 1757. By her he had several children but none survived long, except a daughter, Mary, who died aged 31. In 1766, after his first wife's death, he remarried, this time to a Mary Wallis, who outlived him. By her, he had ten children. Only three survived him. In 1792, like Beddome and others before him, he was honoured with an MA by Providence College, Rhode Island. In 1795 he preached Beddome's funeral sermon. He was another hymn writer, in English and in Welsh, and published many poems, especially elegies marking the deaths of Gill, Whitefield, Samuel Pearce and many others. Pertinently, he also wrote a poem celebrating the Association.<sup>39</sup>

**Philip Jones, Upton upon Severn (c 1700-1771)** was the long serving pastor at Upton, Worcestershire. He appears to have had his roots in Wales but his father moved to Gloucestershire, where Philip grew up. Joshua Thomas says he served the Upton church "with deserved repute about forty years" and was the father of Edmund Jones, "a very respectable minister and pastor of the Baptist church at Exon, Devon" that is Exeter. Philip Jones also served a seventh day Baptist cause ten miles south of Upton, in Natton, Gloucestershire. This appears to be the church in which he grew up. One source says "it is said that he was a holy man of God, a good

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37 There is a brief biography of Evans by Kirk Wellum in Haykin and Wolever (eds.) *The British Particular Baptists Vol 5*.

38 Joshua Thomas, *A History of the Baptist Association in Wales: From the Year 1650, to the Year 1790* (London, 1795). 1760 Cilfawr Tit 2:14; 1762 Pentre 1 Pt 2:2; 1765 Dolau, Radnor Mic 2:7; 1769 Aberduar Rv 3:19; 1771 Pen-y-fai Ps 126:8; 1774 Ebenezer 1 Co 15:58; 1776 Panteg Php 1:27; 1777 Caerleon 1 Co 2:2; 1778 Salem Lk 10:2; 1780 Llanwenarth 1 Thes 2:13; 1781 Llangloffan Mt 25:21; 1782 Blaenau Zc 14:3; 1789 Maes-y-Berllan Ro 6:15; 1790 Dolau Php 3:16.

39 There is a brief biography of Francis by Michael Haykin in Haykin and Wolever (eds.), *The British Particular Baptists Vol 2*.

and lively preacher of the gospel".<sup>40</sup> His nephew, Thomas Hillier, who had been under Abraham Booth in London and became pastor at Tewkesbury, succeeded him at Natton. Jones had preached at the association as far back as 1736 and was moderator in 1738. He was moderator four further times, 1745, 1751, 1754, 1756.<sup>41</sup> When he died, Benjamin Francis, in an elegy for him, wrote:

And could I draw his charming picture true

*You'd think an angel not a man I drew  
Celestial love within his bosom glow'd  
And from his lips celestial tidings flow'd  
... In him calm patience, lowliness of mind,  
Faith, knowledge, zeal and charity combined ....*<sup>42</sup>

### VII. Six other notable individuals

As stated, of some of these men we know next to nothing but in some cases we know some things. Here are six more pen pictures.

**Joshua Thomas (1719-1797)** is another Welshman and another celebrated in an elegy by Francis (The Lamentation of Friendship). The two were good friends and corresponded a great deal.<sup>43</sup> Born in West Wales, Thomas moved to Hereford when young to be apprenticed as a silk mercer to his erudite uncle, Simon Thomas (d c 1743), a Presbyterian minister. There were no Baptists in Hereford so Thomas regularly walked the thirteen miles to Leominster to worship. There he was baptised in May, 1740. On the death of his uncle, he returned to Wales and began to preach. He first ministered at Hay and preached in many other places in the locale. He enjoyed talking to older folk in the area who knew their Baptist history. In 1753 he was called to Leominster and started there in 1754. He remained there 43 years. Like others, he supplemented his income with a school. In 1746, he had married Elizabeth Jones from Lampeter and they had three surviving children. One of them, Timothy Thomas, became the long serving pastor at the Baptist Church in Devonshire Square, London. Joshua Thomas was an influential figure in the Midland Association, being moderator five times (1769, 73, 86, 90, 93) and writing the circular letter three times. He maintained his links with Wales, however, and early translated Welsh works defending Baptist tenets into English. In 1778 he published a ground breaking volume of history of the Welsh Baptists, in Welsh. He

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40 United States: Board of Managers of the Seventh-Day Baptist Missionary Society, *Jubilee Papers: Historical Papers Commemorating the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Seventh-Day Baptist Missionary Society, and the Centennial of the William Carey Foreign Mission Movement* (New York, 1892).

41 Stokes, *The History of the Midland Association of Baptist Churches*.

42 There is very little biographical material for Jones.

43 The Leominster church has a ms transcript *Queries and Solutions of Joshua Thomas and Benjamin Francis of Horsley 1758-70, being the answers of one to questions posed by the other on matters of theology, church government, preaching*. There are about sixty items.

started this back in 1745 and corrected and expanded it in 1780. He also published in English, *History of the Welsh Association, 1650-1790*. Slowly his work became known in England and was used by Ivimey and others. In 1791, he published a Welsh translation of the 1689 Confession and in 1794 of a book on the Trinity by Robert Hall (1764-1831).<sup>44</sup>

**James Butterworth (d after 1794) and Lawrence Butterworth (1740-1828)** were two of five brothers, the sons of Henry Butterworth (1702-1785), a godly blacksmith at Goodshaw, Rossendale, on the edge of the Pennines in Lancashire. Henry Butterworth was a member at Cloughfold, a church pastored by Richard Ashworth (c 1667-1751), a Baxterian, but also benefited from the ministry of the Calvinist evangelist David Crosley (1670-1714) who had been in London, a big man in every sense. Henry's eldest son followed his father into the blacksmith trade but the other four became ministers. John Butterworth (1727-1803) became pastor in Coventry in 1752. He opposed the heretic Joseph Priestley (1733-1804) in print. The youngest, Henry Butterworth (d 1808) succeeded MacGowan at Bridgnorth. James Butterworth served in Bromsgrove forty years, from 1755, and Lawrence Butterworth served at Bengeworth sixty years, from 1764. Both churches were members of the Midland Association. Lawrence was moderator seven times (1777, 1789, 1790, 1792, 1804, 1808, 1821) and James twice (1782, 1797). Both preached more than once. We know that James was still alive in 1794 because by that year he had made himself obnoxious to the "Church and King" party by stating his honest convictions respecting the French Revolution. He gave up his long pastorate at Bromsgrove 'through a violent persecution from the ungodly of this place, by which his health and life were in great danger', and went to live near his brother John in Coventry. A story is preserved of the Bromsgrove chapel door opening during a service one time and a pistol being fired at Butterworth in the pulpit! The same period saw a secession from the church, perhaps over Butterworth's revolutionary sympathies, leaving the church very weak.<sup>45</sup>

**Thomas Davis (c 1714-1784)**, yet another Welshman, was from Pentre, Radnorshire, near Llandrindod Wells. This is where Hugh Evans had lived before moving to Bristol. Davis studied in Bristol under Evans and Foskett, then spent some fifty years ministering in Fairford, Gloucestershire. When he came, the church had about 60 members but he maintained it and built it up, by God's grace. From 1774 to 1788, Fairford, Bourton and other churches held, April to September, double lectures in their chapels.<sup>46</sup> An older and a younger man would preach at

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44 There is a brief biography of Joshua Thomas by Kennedy Hart in Haykin and Wolever (eds.), *The British Particular Baptists Vol 4*.

45 A. Betteridge, *Deep Roots, Living Branches: A History of Baptists in the English Western Midlands* (Leicester: Troubador Publishing Ltd, 2010). There is little biographical material for James or Lawrence Butterworth but their older brother John merits a brief biography by John F Jones in Haykin and Wolever (eds.) *The British Particular Baptists Vol 5*.

46 The other churches involved were Abingdon, Cote and Wantage in Oxfordshire and Cirencester in Gloucestershire. By the end, Wantage and Cirencester were no longer involved.

each church in turn. It was no doubt at one in Fairford that a famous exchange between Davis and Beddome took place.<sup>47</sup> En route from pew to pulpit Beddome leaned over and asked, 'Brother Davis, what must I preach from?' Thinking it an odd remark, Davis replied, in rebuke, 'Ask no foolish questions'. Misunderstanding, Beddome, whose enquiry had been genuine, went on to deliver what John Rippon (1751-1836) calls a 'remarkably methodical, correct, and useful' sermon on Titus 3:9 *Avoid foolish questions!*<sup>48</sup> Following Davis's death, the Fairford pulpit was supplied by Joseph Kinghorn (1766-1832), then studying in Bristol. Writing home from Fairford he remarks, "The minister had been with them forty years and from what I learn was a man of great sense. ... His library is still here, there are many of Jonathan Edwards Treatises, Sermons, &c which I never saw before but intend to read as much as may be."<sup>49</sup> In the end, Kinghorn went to Norwich and they called a Daniel Williams (1759-1841), a Welshman previously at Unicorn Yard, London.<sup>50</sup>

**John Reynolds (1730-1792)** the son, it seems, of one of Beddome's deacons, was baptised in Bourton aged 14. He prepared for the ministry in Bristol, then ministered in Cirencester, 1750-1761, while often preaching at Bromsgrove, Bratton and Cheltenham. He was pastor in Oxford, 1762-1765, then, in 1766, the church at Curriers' Hall, London, called him, with Bourton's approval, to succeed John Brine (1703-1765). Gill, Stennett and Wallin again did the business.<sup>51</sup> Ivimey says "nothing very remarkable attended" his labours. "His sermons were methodical, and appeared to be delivered memoriter, with a considerable degree of earnestness, which was generally conspicuous, notwithstanding the injury his voice had received." Apparently, one day he was dressing and for convenience held his shirt studs in his mouth. A sudden unintended intake of breath meant that he swallowed one and from then on found it difficult to make himself heard, especially if he had a cold. Ivimey suggests "his success was far from being equal to his wishes, but probably greater than his own modest opinion would suffer him to judge." Rippon says of him "he has been heard in the private circles of his friends to speak with a peculiar solicitude for the conversion of souls - if it were but one soul under his own ministry."<sup>52</sup> He was considered a very good counsellor and many would resort to him for advice. He put on weight in later years and, towards the end, becoming rather languid, was housebound. However, he remained serene and was often happy to the end. Like MacGowan, he is buried in Bunhill Fields, near his predecessors Brine and John Skepp (1675-1721). Booth preached at his funeral.

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47 It was probably in 1781, the only recorded time that Beddome preached in Fairford for a double lecture.

48 Ivimey, *A History of the English Baptists*, 4:462. The sermon appears to be Sermon X of Beddome's *One Hundred Village Sermons Vol V* (London: Samuel Burton and Simpkin and Marshall, 1825), 84. The anecdote and the sermon are preserved as an appendix in Haykin and Wolever (eds.), *The British Particular Baptists Vol 5*.

49 M H Wilkin, *Joseph Kinghorn of Norwich: A Memoir* (Norwich: Fletcher and Alexander, 1855).

50 As with others, there is very little biographical material on Davis.

51 Also taking part was William Anderson (d 1767) pastor of what became Grafton street, Soho, London.

52 Ivimey, *A History of the English Baptists*, 4:321.

In 1770, like Beddome, he received an MA from Rhode Island. His only publication was a 1762 sermon for the *Bristol Education Society* on Ephesians 2:8.<sup>53</sup>

**John Stanger (1743-1823)** born in Moulton, near Towcester, Northamptonshire, was at first a General Baptist. Baptised in 1759 while learning the stocking making craft in Oadby, Leicestershire and attending Earl Shilton General Baptist Church, he was drawn to Calvinism reading *Dialogues of Theron and Aspasio* by James Hervey (1714-1758). Befriended by Bourton man, John Collet Ryland (1723-1792) at Northampton, he attended his school and began to court one of Ryland's church members, Mary Smith (1746-1776), who later became Stanger's wife. Mary's father disapproved of John so Ryland suggested a spell in London. On returning, Stanger began preaching in Northamptonshire General Baptist churches and, in 1766, went to work alongside Samuel Bengé in Bessels Green, near Seven Oaks, Kent, a church that became part of the new connexion movement.<sup>54</sup> Tensions over baptism, election, communion and Trinitarianism led to a split and Stanger began to head a new work from December, 1770. Eythorne new connexion church gave support,<sup>55</sup> as did Booth and Samuel Stennett in London, but money was tight. Having tried running a school, Stanger then unsuccessfully took on a shop. In 1775, after the birth of a sixth child, his first wife died. Stanger remarried to Mary Lindridge (1748-1835) in 1768. Six more children arrived in due time. Meanwhile, he made "begging tours" to various places. He was only financially stable after his widowed mother's death in 1781. In 1787 he saw his friend William Carey (1761-1834) ordained in Moulton. In 1790, Bessels Green joined the Kent and Sussex Particular Baptists, Stanger becoming very involved in association life.<sup>56</sup> Not a great preacher, Stanger, nevertheless, preached 1,877 sermons in Kent villages and planted several churches.<sup>57</sup> In 1813 he was at the first Baptist Union assembly. Though infirm, he preached almost to the end, delivering his final sermon in Maidstone shortly before he died. He wrote against the universalist Elhanan Winchester (1751-1797).<sup>58</sup>

### VIII. Six more men

Of the other ministers present on that day, very little is known. With some, we

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53 Again, there is little biographical material on Reynolds. The main source is Ivimey, *A History of the English Baptists*, 4:322-325.

54 The New Connexion - a General Baptist movement, a revivalist offshoot in the Arminian Baptist tradition, one of two main strands within the British Baptist movement. Formed 1770 and always well organised, its leader was Yorkshireman Dan Taylor (1738-1816). Its roots were chiefly in the East Midlands. In 1832 it merged with the hitherto Calvinistic Baptist Union.

55 Eythorne, like Bessels Green, became Particular Baptist in 1790.

56 When Bessels Green applied to join, there were only five other churches.

57 Preaching venues include Brasted, Peshurst, Westerham, Downe, Tatsfield, Crocken Hill, Ide Hill, Borough Green and Seal. Churches were planted in several of these places.

58 See E. A. Payne, "The venerable John Stanger, Bessels Green", *The Baptist Quarterly: Incorporating the Transactions of the Baptist Historical Society* 27.7 (July 1978).



know only their dates and a little more.<sup>59</sup>

**Abraham Darby d 1782**, Witney, seems to have become minister of an Independent church in Beaconsfield, Buckinghamshire, in 1767. A popular and evangelical preacher, the chapel needed to be enlarged in his time and continued to grow after that. In 1769 an adjoining cottage was purchased and a vestry erected. Some of Darby's wealthy supporters, however, were drawn to Arianism and he suffered from their unkindness. It left the cause in a precarious state. On November 24, 1782, while preaching from Isaiah 17:7, he was suddenly taken ill and a minute or two after being brought down from the pulpit, he died in the arms of his friends.

**Thomas Ferriby 1733-1808**, Chipping Sodbury, Gloucestershire, was born and baptised in Horsley, Gloucestershire but ministered the other side of the county. While a student at Bristol, 1759-1761, every two months Ferriby would ride over to the church in Thornbury to lead the communion service. He would put up at an inn in Thornbury. Ordained in 1766, he served in Chipping Sodbury 52 years. He probably taught handwriting in the Chipping Sodbury grammar school. In 1774, he married a woman with the delightful name of Hannah Heaven. He was one of six pall bearers at the funeral of Benjamin Francis, December 20 1799.<sup>60</sup> On his own death, it was said that his "sterling piety and unblemished reputation" was acknowledged by all who knew him.<sup>61</sup>

**Samuel George (1734-1767)**, a Welshman from Panteg, near Newcastle Emlyn, West Wales, was one of the last of Foskett's students in Bristol. He went first to Salisbury, Wiltshire, but then went on to Wantage, Oxfordshire, following the death of the previous pastor, Samuel Bowen (c 1727-1764). He began as a probationer and was then ordained in 1765 by Hugh Evans of Bristol and Daniel Turner (1710-1798) of Abingdon. Sadly, George was suffering from consumption or TB and by May 1767, he was dead. On his grave are these words:

*To the memory of the Rev Samuel George pastor of the Christian church at Wantage in this county. He lived justly esteemed for his piety and usefulness and died justly lamented in the 33d year of his age May 14 1767.*

*The preacher whose so early death we mourn*

*Here in deep silence speaks our great concern.*

**John Haydon (1714-1782)** was the pastor in Tewkesbury from 1771, where he stayed until his death. He had previously been in London, in Little Prescott Street, where Beddome had been baptised and where they so wanted him as their minister, following the death of Samuel Wilson (1702-1750). It was Haydon, however, who went there in 1752, from Horsley, where he had been from 1737.

59 What little there is has been found chiefly in the sources cited above

60 The others were Baptists, Joseph Burchell, Tetbury and Thomas Simmonds, Wotton under edge and three Independents - Jones, Thomas and Harris.

61 See *The Monthly Magazine: Or, British Register*, Vol. XXVI (London: Richard Philips, 1808), 290.

While at Horsely, Haydon had taken part in Beddome's ordination. He later moved from London to Tewkesbury because he was struggling with his health. Haydon had been Midland Association moderator in 1755 and wrote the circular letter in 1763 when they met at Tewkesbury. In November, 1771, Haydon had married his first wife but she had died not long after, in February, 1774. He soon remarried, this time to a woman called Joan Hague. In his life time he published five volumes and left behind a handsome legacy for the support of a charity school at Westmancote, near the church.

**William Hitchman c 1728-1802** from Hillesley, near Wotton under edge, Gloucestershire, was the pastor of what was then a mixed Baptist church but that later became a Particular Baptist church. Hitchman came there in 1761. He was from the seventh day Baptist church in Natton, where Philip Jones was pastor. His assistant or co-pastor in latter years was his long serving deacon Joseph Rodway (1742-1799), father of the ministers James Rodway (d 1841) and Joseph Rodway (d 1843). The three became ministers the same day. For eight years Rodway Senior would preach in the morning and Hitchman in the evening. Hitchman kept a school in Hillesley. One of his pupils was the Independent minister, Charles Buck (1771-1815). Buck later wrote of Hitchman:

*In addition to his labours as a preacher he laid himself out for general usefulness in this and the surrounding places There was hardly anything that he could not do. The weak and superstitious consulted him in the hour of alarm, parents sent their profligate sons to him to be instructed and reformed, the watchmaker employed him to make calculations, farmers engaged him to measure their lands, in which I often used to assist him. He studied pharmacy and could mix a medicine, extract a tooth and use the lancet as well as many gentlemen of the profession. He gave advice to the poor, made the wills of those who possessed property and was ready to do good to all. He could construct a weather glass, draw a map and make an almanack. He was a very assiduous cultivator of his garden and orchard and was no stranger to the science of botany. Above all he was a good man and shone as a light in a dark village for many years.<sup>62</sup>*

**Daniel Thomas (1720-1769)**, Henley-in-Arden, appears to have been born into a leading family in Carmarthenshire, South Wales. He first heard the gospel through Methodists in the area and came to the attention of Griffith Jones 1683-1761 of Llanddowror, a pioneer in Welsh education. Thomas became a schoolmaster across country in Monmouthshire, where he also became a Methodist exhorter, at the same time becoming well known among the Baptists. At some point, while still in his twenties, he was encouraged to leave teaching and focus on the ministry. He was then appointed as a missionary to North West Wales, where "the inhabitants were very hostile towards religion. He was beaten and injured, greatly abused

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<sup>62</sup> John Styles, *Memoirs of the Late Rev. Charles Buck in The Works of Charles Buck Volume 1* (Philadelphia: M'Carty & David, 1822), 13-14.

and nearly lost his life among them". He suffered as a result of the injuries then sustained for the rest of his life. Having been a minister for some time and having come to Baptist convictions, he was baptised in Penygarn, Pontypool, in 1753, by Miles Harry 1700-1776. Two years later he accepted a call to the Baptist church, Bridgnorth, Shropshire, where he was for three years before being succeeded by MacGowan. Thomas moved next to Moreton Hampstead, Devon. Again, still suffering with ill health, he was there only a relatively short time before moving back in 1761 to another Midland association church, Henley, where he remained until his death at the young age of 39. Henley is where Beddome was born and where his father was minister in a previous generation.<sup>63</sup>

### *IX. The ten others*

***Nathaniel Overbury (1730-1805)*** Tetbury, was the first minister of the church in the place where he was born, his family having begun the work. He probably carried on in the family business as a wool stapler, as well as ministering. He was married to Mary Roper (1740-1815) from Bengeworth. They had a number of children who lived to adulthood. Overbury was a signatory, with Beddome, Gill, Jones, Mower and others to the will of Elizabeth Seward (d 1753) whose bequests were a help to several churches.

***Benjamin Whitmore (1728-1804)*** Hooknorton, Oxfordshire, pastored the church there fifty years, 1754 to 1804. He succeeded Daniel Evans and John Nottage who both served only a short time, 1743-1747 and 1747-1753. In Whitmore's time the chapel was rebuilt (1778-1781). He would write the circular letter for the association in 1766 (*A consistent walk*) and was moderator when the association was at Hooknorton in 1784. His wife, Sarah, died in 1792.

***Isaac Woodman (1715-1777)*** Sutton in the Elms, was a contemporary of Beddome in Bristol, and was baptised there in 1735. He was at Warwick, 1740-1746, where he succeeded Job Burt (d 1739) and where a new meeting house had been built in his time. In 1743 he preached at the Association meetings there. He was at Colnbrook, Berkshire, at some point, probably 1748-1750 but went to Sutton in 1750, where he was ordained in 1753. In 1750, he was in contact with the Baptist Board in London seeking funds to erect a building in Harvey Lane, Leicester. That happened in 1756 and in 1760 several Sutton members left to form the Leicester congregation, initially under Christopher Hill (1724-1786), older brother of Robert Hall Sen (1728-1791) of Arnesby. In 1765 Woodman was also moderator at the Northamptonshire Association and again in 1771. He wrote the circular letters in 1771 and 1775. In 1770, at the same time as Beddome, he was awarded an MA from the college in Rhode Island.

***Thomas Skinner (d 1782)*** Alcester, went there in December 1766 and was ordained September 7, 1768, remaining in Alcester the rest of his life. He preached

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<sup>63</sup> See David Jones, *Hanes y Bedyddwyr, yn neheubarth Cymru* (Carmarthen: John Thomas, 1839) 692, 693.

at the association in 1766 on Philippians 1:6, also in 1769 and in 1772 on Acts 20:21. Skinner's ministry in Alcester followed the lengthy one of John Overbury, uncle to Nathaniel, and was followed by the brief one of the heretical Benjamin Spencer (c 1755-1822) who became Unitarian.<sup>64</sup>

**Samuel Sleap (d 1774)** was pastor of the church in Princes Risborough, near Chesham in Buckinghamshire. The church dates back to about 1714 or earlier and Sleap was preceded by three other men. He became pastor in 1752 and was himself succeeded, following his death in 1774, by his nephew, James Sleap (1742-1811).

**Richard Strange (d 1768)** Stratton St Margaret, was, like Reynolds, originally from the Bourton church. He became pastor at Stratton St Margaret, now a suburb of Swindon, Wiltshire. He was probably the son of Joseph Strange (d c 1781), one of Beddome's deacons. In January, 1751, Strange, with a certain William Lawrence, applied to the Baptist Board in London for help to build a meeting house in Stratton.

These last four men we know next to nothing at all about, not even their dates.

**Nathaniel Carpenter** Middleton Cheney was born in Thorpe Mandewille, where he lived and died. Thorpe Mandewille and Middleton Cheney are next to each other. Both places are near Banbury, Oxfordshire. Carpenter was the first minister of the church there. It began about 1740 and joined the association in 1762. Carpenter took part in Ryland's induction after his move to Northampton in 1759. Carpenter remained as minister of Middleton Cheney forty years.

**David Davis** Chipping Campden, Gloucestershire, appears to have come to the church the same year as the Bourton Association. The name possibly suggests a Welsh connection of some sort.

**James, John or Joseph Knight.** This could be the man in Warwick, who succeeded Ryland in 1759, the latter having gone to Northampton five years before. This Knight was in Warwick until 1777 and was succeeded by Joseph Stennett (d 1781). It is more likely that this is James Knight, a Bristol student from Moretonhampstead, near Newton Abbot, Devon. There was a Knight in Cork, Ireland at some point. In 1755, James Knight wrote the circular letter for the Western Association, which met at Exeter that year.<sup>65</sup>

**Thomas Thomason** from Cheshire appears to have been the first pastor in a work started in 1759 in Bollington, Millington or Rostherne, near Macclesfield. He was succeeded in 1766 by Isaac Cheetham (d 1800) who remained there until his death. Tommerson's connection to others present on this occasion is something of a mystery, although it may have to do with the fact that Beddome's mother Rachel Beddome (1695-1758) had been a member, as a girl, of a church in Nantwich, 30 miles west of Macclesfield.

## X. Conclusion

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<sup>64</sup> Not to be confused with Devon born Thomas Skinner (c.1752-c.1795) a Bristol student at Towcester then Newcastle.

<sup>65</sup> Langley, "Baptist Ministers in England about 1750 AD".

So a snapshot of a day or more of friendship and fellowship in 1765 in the depths of the Cotswolds. What a delight such days were, a foretaste of heaven to come.

The last words they would have heard from Beddome would be these:

*And now may the adorable and ever blessed Jehovah come leaping over the mountains of your sins and iniquities, and visit you with his salvation. May he pour down in an abundant measure his Holy Spirit upon you. May he bless you and keep you, lift up the light of his countenance upon you and be gracious to you. Under his divine influence, may you stand fast in the faith, quit you like men and be strong. Forgetting the things that are behind, may you press towards them that are before and labour that, whether present or absent, living or dying, in the flesh or out of it, prostrate before the Throne of God's Grace here or standing before the throne of his judgment, hereafter, you might be accepted of him. Finally, Brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace and the God of love and peace shall be with you.<sup>66</sup>*

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gary Brady ThM has been Pastor Childs Hill Baptist Church since 1983. Contributor to *Glory to the Three Eternal: Tercentennial Essays on the Life and Writings of Benjamin Beddome (1718–1795) (Monographs in Baptist History)* Haykin, Paul & Yoo (eds) Pickwick Publications 2019

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<sup>66</sup> *The Primitive Church (or Baptist) Magazine, Volumes 17-18 (No. 203, 1st November 1860), 243.*



## BOOK REVIEWS

### PERSONALITY & WORLDVIEW

J. H. Bavinck, Translated by James Eglinton, Crossway, 2023, 208pp, h/b, £18.69  
([hive.co.uk](http://hive.co.uk))

J.H. Bavinck (1895–1964) was the nephew of Reformed theologian Herman Bavinck (1854–1921). He was a professor of missiology at Kampen Theological School and later at the Free University of Amsterdam. He had also been a pastor and missionary in Indonesia, so, he was no armchair missiologist. This book, a translation of Bavinck's 1928 volume *Persoonlijkheid en wereldbeschouwing*, was originally a set of lectures for engineering students. It is thus not overly technical, it is clear, accessible, and straightforward in its approach.

While the concept of worldview has been an important part of various fields, including philosophy, anthropology, and religious studies, there has been a growing trend in recent years to move away from the term and towards alternative frameworks. Worldview is a concept that is seemingly starting to go out of fashion. Keller, in his preface, notes some key reasons for this – particularly in North America: it is individualistic, rationalistic, simplistic, and triumphalistic. To this, we could add that it has recently lost favour due to concerns about its ambiguity, and connection to Western-centric and imperialist methods of analysing culture and society. Bavinck's approach provides an important correction to all these misconceptions regarding worldviews, not least because Bavinck was fully acquainted with East Asian culture.

One of Bavinck's main theses is the intriguing distinction he makes between a worldview and a worldvision. He maintains that we all have a worldvision but only a few move to a worldview:

A person without a worldview is a person without a firm foundation, without a compass, without a vista. He may have a worldvision; he might live, for example, as though there are no norms. But such a worldvision proceeds from himself and is rooted in his nature. He cannot pull himself upward on it, and with it he always remains on the same plane. A person with a worldview, in all cases, has light, sees more widely, more broadly, more deeply. And however much deeper and more objective that worldview is, the more it gives him stability to leave this maze of subjective inclinations and climb up to the height of the life that is grounded in the truth.

Unfortunately, this insight is left largely undeveloped – it would be interesting to trace what mileage this distinction had in Bavinck's further writings.

In exploring the relationship between personality and worldview, he notes two positions that must be guarded against: that they are one and that they are utterly different. By "personality", Bavinck means "an organized soul that has come to consciousness of

itself”.

In Chapter 3 especially, we can see in Bavinck two important neo-Calvinist themes: the distinction between creator and creation, and a disdain for dualism. He makes some important points regarding dualism: it disjoins personality, it means that salvation is only possible through world flight, and it leads to mysticism and asceticism.

Chapter 4 provides some fascinating insights into the distinction between Eastern and Western thinking and an overview of the impact of the Renaissance on British empiricism in particular. Here he provides a devastating critique of the poverty of empiricism in that it devours itself.

Chapter 5 exposes the problems with rationalism, Descartes, and Spinoza. He makes the interesting point that pantheism is a presupposition of rationalism: “Pantheism is not the conclusion of rationalism, but it is its presupposition. Reason only has such power when it is itself god.”

Chapters 4 and 5 show that neither empiricism nor rationalism have explored the depths of personality. Kant attempted to reconcile empiricism and rationalism, but as Chapter 6 shows, this project was unsuccessful.

Mysticism, a topic Bavinck studied for his doctorate and while he was in Java, comes under scrutiny in Chapter 7. As he observes, mysticism is difficult to define as it is not a single worldview. It is an emphasis on the being of God, and yet he is a formless and utterly other divinity. There is no comfort or salvation in such a god. It results in self-withdrawal from life and groping after eternity. He notes that Christian mysticism is differently focused and maintains the boundary between God and creation.

The final Chapter provides an overview of the main themes. Most people live as if there is no worldview, although it is there in seed form, worldview is the revelation of the personality, although there is often tension between the two. We all need a worldview, as it provides norms, direction, and unity in living. He contrasts two common Western worldviews, atheistic materialism and positive Christianity. Atheistic materialism is never accepted unreservedly, and Christianity, a relationship with the living God, depends not on us but on revelation.

Bavinck's work is always well worth reading. He was a careful and thoughtful scholar who engaged deeply with the biblical, theological, and cultural dimensions of mission. His writings reflect a nuanced understanding of the complexities of cross-cultural communication and evangelism, as well as a deep appreciation for the diversity of global Christianity. In this book, he shows that worldview/vision, while it may be going out of fashion, is still an important concept. Bavinck's writing is always fresh and insightful, and this volume is no exception.

### ***Steve Bishop***

*An independent researcher based in Wales, and maintains the neo-Calvinist website [www.allofliferedeemed.co.uk](http://www.allofliferedeemed.co.uk).*

## BUDDHISM, ISLAM AND RELIGIOUS PLURALISM IN SOUTH AND SOUTHEAST ASIA.

*Evans, J., Starr, K. J., Corichi, M. and Miner, W. 2023.*

Online: <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2023/09/12/buddhism-islam-and-religious-pluralism-in-south-and-southeast-asia/>

I suspect that some readers of *Foundations* rely on one or other of the excellent publications from *Operation World*,<sup>1</sup> that give an information-based prayer guide to every nation. I remember the late Errol Hulse telling me that he took a country each day to guide his prayer. In a different way, this Pew Research Center report gives a picture of religion in three Buddhist-majority countries (Cambodia, Sri Lanka and Thailand) and two Muslim-majority countries (Malaysia and Indonesia), as well as Singapore, the last being by careful estimates perhaps the most religiously diverse country in the world.<sup>2</sup> The Center is a Washington DC based nonpartisan ‘fact tank’ that informs the public about the issues, attitudes and trends shaping the world, and this is the latest of a series of careful reports, including one several years ago that studied ‘being Christian in Western Europe’.<sup>3</sup>

In general, these are all, by Western expectations, very religious countries. Almost all people in each of the countries identify with one or other religion. Even in Singapore, this is the case for four out of five of the population.

The research strategy was strong, and in that regard is a model for Christians who often treat such questions as needing basic skills that most people possess. 13,122 interviews with adults were conducted face-to-face in Cambodia, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Thailand. They were conducted via mobile phones in Malaysia and Singapore. Local interviewers administered the survey from June to September 2022, in eight languages.

There are a number of stand-out findings. In the five Buddhist or Muslim majority countries, religious adherents share a strong link in their minds between their religion and their country. To ‘deviate’ from the majority religion may therefore be seen as a form of betrayal of the nation. In the most recent constitution in Thailand, for example, the state is required to ‘have measures and mechanisms to prevent Buddhism from being undermined in any form.’ In a similar way, nearly all Muslims in Malaysia and Indonesia say being Muslim is important to be truly Indonesian or Malaysian.

Those who want their society’s laws to be based on their religion, i.e. ‘religion-

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1 <http://operationworld.org/publications/>

2 For a recent account of Singapore, where about one in five identify formally as Christian, my ‘The church in Singapore’ is in #307 of *Reformation Today* (2023).

3 <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2018/05/29/being-christian-in-western-europe/>

state integrationists', are more likely than other Buddhists or Muslims in their countries to support religious leaders' involvement in politics; less likely to want neighbours from minority religions; and slightly more likely to see threats to their religion from minority religious communities. This is strongly the case with regard to how Thai Buddhists regard the growth of Christianity in Thailand. With the exception of Singapore, with its growing Christian community, most respondents considered it unacceptable for someone to try to persuade others to join their religion.

The evidence about attitudes toward those who do not share one's religion is not straightforward. In Malaysia, for example, over 60% claim to believe that having people of many different religions, ethnic groups and cultures makes their country a better place to live, yet about a quarter of people in Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand believe that using violence against people because of their political beliefs or religion can at least sometimes be justified. It is Buddhists and Muslims who are most likely to see other religions such as Christianity as a threat to their faith.

Free speech and democracy are not always widely embraced in the region. Perhaps surprisingly, Indonesia was the only country with a clearcut majority of people supporting the view that democracy was to be preferred to having a leader with a 'strong hand.' Oddly to some eyes, it was Singaporeans, comfortable in their soft authoritarian, economically prosperous state, who were the *least* likely to agree that adults should be free to publicly criticise the government.

There was, as these results begin to show, diversity between countries. For example, Buddhist monks are not allowed to participate in politics in Thailand, whereas in Sri Lanka there is a long tradition of such action for monks. Of particular interest is the evidence that there were recurring elements of religious syncretism. We read that in Sri Lanka between 40% and 60% of professing Christians pray or give respect to the Buddha, Allah or Ganesh. Conversely almost half of Malaysian Hindus and three out of five Singaporean Hindus say they pray or offer respects to Jesus Christ, while 'About one-quarter of Christians in Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore – and fully two-thirds of Sri Lanka's Christians – have a shrine at home.' The report also is helpful in showing how there is considerable diversity of practice within religions between countries. Having attended a Christian funeral in Singapore I know that how this is practised is very different from a Christian funeral in the UK.

The question of how far religious allegiance is only formal does raise its head. This is partly because for a very large majority a religion is not only religion, but also "a family tradition one must follow, an ethnicity one is born into, a culture one is part of". Roughly half of professing Christians in each country agreed that 'many religions can be true.' Christians are numerically the strongest in Singapore – the least religious of the six countries surveyed. In some countries, substantial numbers express negative feelings about Christianity. In Indonesia, for example, a

fifth of Muslim adults surveyed say Christianity is not peaceful. Alongside this, it was Indonesia where Christians were most likely (82%) to think it unacceptable to leave Christianity for another religion, suggesting perhaps the cost of being a Christian in the country with the largest Muslim population in the world.

The report is invaluable as a basis for understanding the context for the work of gospel churches and missions in these nations. The report does not make any distinction between Catholics and Protestants, and so we have to live with some generalities when we may wish to understand more. However, the report well repays careful reading and would, along with one or two other reports in the series, make an excellent basis for meetings of ministers' fraternals, mission gatherings, seminary classes and theological study conferences.

**Ian Shaw**

Emeritus Professor, University of York



## CLASSICAL THEISM: NEW ESSAYS ON THE METAPHYSICS OF GOD.

*Edited by Jonathan Fuqua and Robert C. Koons, New York: Routledge, (2023), 344pp.*

The last thirty years has seen a renaissance of interest in Trinitarian theology, and with that a renewed concern for historic orthodoxy in understanding the divine nature. Harnack's Hellenisation thesis<sup>4</sup> has long since been discredited as historically inaccurate, and Patristic usage of Greek philosophy is viewed with decreasing scepticism. The desire to understand what the Scriptures teach us about God is profoundly helped by the great theological minds that the Lord has given to the Church, and the way she has historically, led by the Holy Spirit, understood the doctrine of God in creeds and councils. This book is a welcome addition to that renewal in historic orthodoxy.

That being the case, an ambitious book like this is still more likely to fail than to succeed, because it demands historical erudition and philosophical clarity in equal measure. Good analytic and historical theology rarely coincide, in part because forcing philosophical argument through the twists and turns of the historical development of a theological set of concepts often just doesn't work. But the authors of this volume are impressively nuanced in setting out the background developments, while maintaining their analytic rigour.

The book is divided into two parts, the first sets the scene. It overviews and describes Classical Theism and offers some preliminary supportive arguments for its various forms in Aquinas and Anselm, and explorations of its influence in Judaism, Islam and Eastern religions. Of the essays in the first part, I particularly benefited from Daniel De Haan's argument for Aquinas' *triplex via* theology. He writes as an 'unabashed Thomist'<sup>5</sup> and sets out Aquinas' use of the way of causation to establish God's existence and independence; the way of negation, to affirm divine aseity and simplicity; and the way of super-eminence to establish that God has all perfection. This is an excellent primer on both Aquinas and the approach of Classical Theism to the doctrine of God.

The second part addresses particular difficulties that are thought to be either entailed or implied by the constellation of doctrines around Classical Theism. The objections are met either by full endorsement of strong Classical Theism or, in some cases, by slight modifications of classical understandings of immutability and impassibility. The modifications, however, do not slip into Barthianism, or more

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4 Adolf von Harnack, *Ausgewählte Reden Und Aufsätze*, eds. Agnes von Zahn-Harnack and Axel von Harnack (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1951), 191-192.

5 Daniel de Haan, *Thomist Classical Theism: Divine Simplicity within Aquinas' Triplex Via Theology*, in *Classical Theism: New Essays on the Metaphysics of God*, eds. Jonathan Fuqua and Robert C. Koons (London: Routledge, 2023), 109.

recently, the various degrees of neo-classical theism seen in authors like Cross,<sup>6</sup> McCormack<sup>7</sup> and Craig.<sup>8</sup>

Of particular note in the second section, Christopher Tomaszewski's defence of Classical Theism against the modal collapse argument is excellent. The standard modal collapse argument runs from the premise that God is a necessary being who is identical to his acts, and that creation is an act of God, to the absurd conclusion of the necessity of creation.

Tomaszewski first expands the modal collapse argument to include in its scope all theists who posit the necessary existence of God. If God necessarily exists and if God is the creator, then the creator necessarily exists. The conclusion seems to imply the non-contingency of creation, which is absurd. But he demonstrates the invalidity of the argument by comparing it to a Quinean invalid syllogism with the following premises: there are eight planets; the number eight is necessarily greater than the number seven. The conclusion in this example would be that the number of planets is necessarily greater than seven. If the two referents of the digit eight are identical, then the conclusion is valid, but as Tomaszewski shows, it commits the 'formal fallacy of substituting a contingently co-referential term into the scope of a modal operator.'<sup>9</sup> When applied to Tomaszewski's argument, the fallacy covertly introduces another premise that God is identical to his act of creation. The hidden premise, which is contingently true, is not a commitment to Classical Theism and divine simplicity. Therefore, the modal collapse argument against Classical Theism is invalid.

I have picked out two chapters that particularly impressed me, but the whole book is well worth reading. I also want to highlight the chapters on the doctrine of divine ideas in relation to impassibility and knowledge, along with the cutting-edge development of the truthmaker account of divine simplicity and Platonic property theory.

Throughout, it is technically and philosophically demanding, but the authors are clear and explain most technical terms. As an edited volume, each chapter is valuable and worth reading, but as a resource the book is excellent as a reference work on the current state of the doctrines of Classical Theism.

In addition to the philosophical content, the authors consistently demonstrate that the commitments of Classical Theism to divine simplicity, immutability, impassibility and timelessness are abundantly supported in the history of the New Testament Church. Theologians from the early generations after the apostles from Irenaeus and Hilary of Poitiers, and Church councils from Ephesus (431),

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6 Richard Cross, *The Metaphysics of the Incarnation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 205. 317-318.

7 Bruce L. McCormack, *The Humility of the Eternal Son: Reformed Kenoticism and the Repair of Chalcedon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

8 J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Illinois: IVP, 2003).

9 Tomaszewski, CT, 236-237.

Chalcedon (451) and Lateran IV (1215), all uphold Classical Theism as biblical historic orthodoxy.

The elephant in the room is surely the cost of the current hardback at over £100! The online version is quite a bit cheaper. If you are working on any of these topics in an academic context, it is a must read. Otherwise, although the content greatly strengthens the arguments for Classical Theism, many who are interested in these areas may want to wait for the cheaper paperback edition.

**Revd Dr Thomas Brand**

Ministry Director of the Evangelical Fellowship of Congregational Churches and currently serves as the chairman of the Affinity Council.





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[www.affinity.org.uk](http://www.affinity.org.uk)

  @affinitytalks

[office@affinity.org.uk](mailto:office@affinity.org.uk)

PO Box 905  
Haywards Heath  
RH16 9TJ

07936 048259

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