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The Lord's Firestorms: God the Holy Trinity and the Experience of Religious Revival in Australia

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I. WHY FOCUS ON THE HOLY TRINITY?

Let me explain why I want to focus on the Holy Trinity in this address on Australia's revival experience. In 1995 I gave a course on revival at Regent College, Vancouver. It was at the height of excitement caused by the Toronto Blessing and the completely independent American college revivals. At the end of the course I asked the students to discern the times. Tell me, I said, what will be the characteristics of the next great awakening which the Lord will send to bless his church? It would be characterized, some thought, by a revived confidence in God's Word; an interesting view—and timely—given the undermining of that confidence due to postmodernism. Others suggested that the next great awakening would see Christians more involved with the needy in their communities, while the underprivileged themselves, the poor and the hungry, the underclass and the underdogs, the marginalized and the relegated, the unnoticed, the unseen, and the ignored, would be empowered to help themselves. That, too, is interesting considering the current moves towards reconciliation in South Africa and in Australia which I am sure have much to do with the Spirit of God. Others thought that the next great awakening would be characterized by a revived concentration by the church on the centrality of Christ and his gospel. Revival will be seen again, as it was in the days of Wesley, Whitefield and Edwards, as the fullest flowering of the gospel plant, as the most abundant harvest of the doctrines of grace, as the most gracious manifestation of biblical Christianity. This revival would restore to the church vital orthodoxy, healing the current division between rational orthodoxy and irrational vitality. This too is interesting given the tragic stand-off between the Reformed and the Charismatic branches of Christianity.

But the most persistent feeling among my Regent students was that the next great revival would awaken Christians to the glory of the Holy Trinity. While Christ and salvation would be seen as central, the place of the work of Christ within the Father's cosmic purpose for the recreation of the universe and the Spirit's ministry to broken-hearted individuals would become luminous. This I found the most intriguing of the four suggestions about the characteristics of the next great awakening. I believe that it is an awakening which will not pass Australia by. I say this for two reasons. Some of the most

important literature bearing on the subject of the Holy Trinity and revival has been written recently in Australia. I refer to Allan Norling's, *Jesus the Baptiser with the Holy Spirit* (published by the author, 1994¹), which I regard as a very remarkable study of the role of Jesus in movements of the Spirit, and also the many studies of patrology, the theology of the Father, in the writings of Geoffrey Bingham, who has been blessed by God in being the instrument of revival in parts of Australia and overseas.² My second reason for getting excited about the next revival, and Australia delighting in the glory of the Holy Trinity, is that in a decade-long refinement of my definition of revival, I had already concluded before I went to Vancouver that it must focus on the Trinity. Far from being simply the extraordinary activities of the Spirit, or a time of refreshing from Jesus, revival is a Trinitarian gift, and it is a gift not only to the church, but to the community in which the churches have their being. This would involve a recovery of an understanding of the work of God the Father in salvation and revival.

II. DEFINING REVIVAL

Currently, I define revival in the following way.

Revival is a sovereign work of God the heavenly Father, manifesting his glory on the earth. It consists of a powerful intensification by Jesus of the Holy Spirit's normal activity of testifying to the Saviour, accentuating the doctrines of grace, and convicting, converting, regenerating, and sanctifying large numbers of people at the same time. It is therefore a community experience. It is occasionally preceded by an expectation that God is about to do something exceptional; it is usually preceded by an extraordinary unity and prayerfulness among Christians; and it is always accompanied by the revitalization of the church, the conversion of large numbers of unbelievers, and the reduction of sinful practices in the community.

III. THE ROLES OF DOCTRINE AND EXPERIENCE IN REVIVAL

Another reason why I want to explore the role of the Holy Trinity in revival is that it will give us the opportunity to reflect on the role of religious experience in arriving at our theological convictions. This is a critical issue for Christians in a postmodernist age. We evangelical Christians say that we base our theology solely on the Bible. That is why we build bible colleges. We do not want to see the foundation of the Christian Tradition College of Victoria or the Christian Experience College of Victoria. I doubt if the BCV will ever be challenged by the CTCV or the CECV. The Bible, however, is a record of the religious experience of a people. While allowing it to be solely determinative of our theology, it is incomprehensible that we can interpret it in any way except by reference to the experience of the church or our own experiences.

Theologian Donald Bloesch contends that the distinctive genius of evangelicalism lies in doctrine plus experience: 'My contention is that to be evangelical means to hold to a

¹ 1. . Allan Norling, PO Box 219, Beecroft, NSW 2119.

² 2. . See especially *I Love the Father* (Blackwood: New Creation Publications, 1974, 1990); *Oh, Father! Our Father* (Blackwood: New Creation Publications, 1983); *The Day of the Spirit* (Blackwood: New Creation Publications, 1985).

definite doctrine as well as to participate in a special kind of experience'.³ In commenting on this Stanley Grenz suggests that the order should be reversed: experience is primary and doctrine secondary.⁴ I am not yet ready to concede that without further explanation, but I do like very much Albert Outler's statement of John Wesley's understanding of the foundations of our theology. For Wesley, all theology 'is the interpretation of spiritual and moral insights sparked by the prevenient action of the Holy Spirit, deposited in Holy Scripture, interpreted by the Christian tradition, reviewed by reason, and appropriated by personal experience.'⁵ We might be even more comfortable with this when we learn that, when Wesley talked about experience as a guide to theological truth, he meant the inner witness of the Spirit. So, when we seek to understand the work of the Holy Trinity in Australian revivals, we will take *scriptural data* as the main signpost to the direction in which we must travel, the *tradition* of revivals since the New Testament era as helping us to understand what we are looking at as we proceed in that direction, the *history* of Australian revivals as giving us the data to which to apply the understanding we derive from history and tradition, and our own *experiences* to appropriate the truth about God the Holy Trinity which Australian revivals have manifested.

IV. THE BIBLE

The Bible tells us that, whatever else revival is, it is a sovereign work of God the heavenly Father, manifesting his glory on the earth. It is 'a visitation from on high' ([Isa. 32:15](#); [Lk. 1:78](#)); it is a *heavenly* light; a *divine* fire; a river of water *from God's sanctuary*; a dayspring from *on high*. Genuine revival cannot be worked up from below. It must come down from above. So the authentic prayer for revival is 'Come down, Lord. Come down from where your glory fills the heavens and let your glory fill the earth.' We learn to pray this way not only from the prophet Isaiah, but also from the Lord Jesus himself. ([Matt. 6:9, 10](#)): 'This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." ' The apostle James reminds us ([Jam. 1:17](#)) that 'Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.' If we understand Pentecost as a prototype of revival, then we need to remember that the Spirit comes, not only as Jesus promised, but also as the Father promised ([Lk. 24:19](#); [Acts 1:4](#)) and that the Spirit proceeds, as the creed says, not only from the Son, but also from the Father ([Jn. 14:26](#); [15, 26](#); [Acts 2:33](#)). If we understand revival as an anticipation of the second coming, then we need to note that when Jesus comes again, he will come again 'in the Father's glory' ([Mk. 8:38](#); [Rom. 6:4](#)); revivals are always manifestations of the Father's glory. If revivals are understood as times when the dead are raised, then the Bible tells us that it is the Father who raises the dead ([Jn. 5:21](#)). If revivals are understood as times when people come to the Saviour in significant numbers, then we need to remember that it is by the Father's will that they come and by the Father's will that, in coming, they will receive eternal life ([Jn. 6:40, 44](#)). And if revivals are understood as the energy by which the church expresses its love by caring for the poor and needy, then we must remember that this desire originates in the Father's care ([Matt. 6:26](#); [6:32](#); [7:11](#); [10:29](#)). And if you are habituated to

³ 3. . Donald Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 2 vols, 1978, 1979), p. 1 ix.

⁴ 4. . Stanley J. Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the 21st Century* (Downers Grove, III: InterVarsity Press, 1993), p. 30.

⁵ 5. . Albert C. Outler, *The Works of John Wesley, I, Sermons I, 1–33* (Nashville: Abington Press, 1984), p. 60f.

thinking of revivals as the Spirit's work, you should never forget that the Spirit is the 'Spirit of your Father' ([Matt. 10:20](#)). Revival, we must conclude from the Scriptures, is the work of the omnipotent sovereignty of God, of God the Father, who sends the Son, who pours out the Spirit, whose almighty energies convert the soul.

V. THE HISTORY OF REVIVALS

The First Great Awakening (approximately 1734–44) produced the church's greatest theologian of revival, Jonathan Edwards. His mature reflections on that revival are foundational to the evangelical understanding of revival, and from this we learn that the second person of the Trinity, perhaps in contradistinction to the Holy Spirit, is the real hero of revivals. In his *Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God*, Edwards said that the first of the distinguishing marks was that, if a spiritual movement raised our esteem for Jesus as Saviour, then it was a genuine movement of the Spirit. But with reference to [Philippians 2:11](#), Edwards observes that when every tongue shall confess that Jesus is Lord, thereby shall the Father be glorified.⁶

The glory of God the Father was never far from Edwards' thought. The more the Son was esteemed and exalted, the more the Father was glorified. The first sermon Jonathan Edwards preached at Northampton, Massachusetts, in 1734 when revival broke out in that town, was on justification by faith alone. But the emphasis was not on justification understood in an abstract, forensic manner. It was on that faith which unites our heart with Christ's. In that famous new language, which was one with experience, which appealed to the senses, and which was addressed to the affections, Edwards explained that 'justifying faith ... is that by which the soul, which before was separate and alienated from Christ, unites itself to him. ... it is that by which the soul comes to Christ, and receives him'.⁷

That does not sound like a verdict in a law court, does it? It sounds more like a love story. It is the means by which lonely and broken hearts are brought into a relationship so intimate that it can be described only in marital terms. Edwards even went beyond orthodoxy in daring to suggest that the loving relationship which we describe as the Trinity would be squared by the inclusion of the elect. Father, Son and Holy Spirit would bring into itself holy church, the bride of the Son, whom the Son will present to the Father as the radiant beauty redeemed by his own blood. It is this prospect which, when allowed to sink into our psyche, gives us a powerful motivation to work for reconciliation and community to reflect the loving relationship of the Trinity and the purpose of God's whole scheme of redemption, which is to bring us into that holy triangle.

The future prospect that we shall one day be the holy bride of the Lord Jesus, and thus share in the love which the Father bestows on his Son—indeed in our perfected state we will be part of the love gift which the Father gives to the Son—is supplemented by a present prospect of equal delight, namely that we are the beloved children of an infinitely, caring Father, not just the humble subjects of an omnipotent king. This fact, too, is well illustrated by the first great awakening.

On 25th May 1735, in Talgarth Parish Church, Wales, Howell Harris was converted. If it had ended there we would never have heard of him. But three weeks later, on 18th June 1735 he had a second experience which was critical in making him the flaming evangelist

⁶ 6. . Yale edition of Edwards Works, vol 4, p. 249.

⁷ 7. . Banner of Truth edition of Edwards, Works (Edinburgh, 1974), 1, p. 625f.

of the Welsh Revival. He was reading and praying in the tower of the church at Llangasty when, to quote him:

Suddenly I felt my heart melting within me like wax before a fire, and love to God for my Saviour. I felt also not only love and peace, but a longing to die and be with Christ. Then there came a cry into my soul within that I had never known before—Abba, Father! I could do nothing but call God my Father. I knew that I was his child, and He loved me and was listening to me. My mind was satisfied and I cried out, Now I am satisfied! Give me strength and I will follow Thee through water and fire.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones does not hesitate to label this a baptism of fire or of power subsequent to conversion which gave Harris an indomitable compassion for the lost. When he preached, Harris always looked for this unction of the Holy Spirit. He would write in his diaries of ‘the authority’ when preaching or the coming down of ‘a strong gale’. Such anointed preaching also empowered him to withstand extraordinary persecution with that supreme disregard which stamped him as an aristocrat of the Spirit. Such anointed preaching, which Martyn Lloyd-Jones describes as ‘prophesying’, is a sign that the Lord purposes revival.⁸

We do not have time to speak of other revivals, but let me just make this observation about the so-called ‘Toronto Blessing’. I have read scores of testimonies from people who claim to have been helped by that movement. What is so striking about those testimonies is how much pain people are in today. They testify to anxiety in the work place, unhappiness at home, the limitations of human rationality, the deprivation of love, and exhaustion from working too hard. They confess to stressed, joyless lives, and a lack of self-esteem. The so-called ‘manifestations’ appear to have addressed needs such as those. Now we may be confident that a loving heavenly Father would be interested in giving his family the resources to address such needs, and critics of the Toronto Blessing need to be concerned that the church has not helped people to cope better with these genuine human problems. They need not only a Saviour to save them from their sins, but also a present, accepting, loving Father to give them a family and a Holy Spirit to warm their cold hearts and revive them from the death of despair.

VI. REVIVALS IN AUSTRALIA

When it comes to Australia, how in need we are of revival, and how we need to have a revived delight in the Holy Trinity. Perhaps the majority of Australian Christians attend liturgical churches which have had little experience of revival in their heritage, and they need to discover the joys of finding Jesus as their personal Saviour as well as appropriating the benefits of his passion in the sacraments. Then there are many evangelicals who have the doctrine straight, but whose hearts are as cool as their heads, and who do not have either a passion for souls or compassion for the needy. Our aboriginal brothers and sisters are at this very moment deeply distressed by the fact that it is the evangelical churches who are so little committed to identifying with them in their hour of need, and who look like allowing the present opportunity for reconciliation to slip through our fingers through sheer apathy; or worse, the conviction that we are not called to have such a concern. How can we expect the Lord’s blessing while the gross sin which we have committed against our aboriginal brothers and sisters through the dispossession of their land goes undealt with? This is the original sin of all non-aboriginal Australians,

⁸ 8. . D.M. Lloyd-Jones, ‘Howell Harris and Revival’, in his *The Puritans: Their Origins and Successors* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), pp. 282–302.

and no-one else will solve the problem if we do not. We evangelicals might need to recover a revived understanding of the Father as a God who demands justice and truth and a revived appreciation of the Spirit of God who longs for us to appropriate in warm hearts the fruit of grace. And then there are many charismatics in Australia today who, perhaps hurt by their experience in evangelical churches and starved to spiritual death by the poor diet they have received there, have developed an appetite for words which will not bring eternal life, who ignore the cross of Christ, and the call of the Father to holiness of life. We need to have our faith in the Holy Trinity revived.

Well, the Holy Trinity knows all that. God has not given up on any of us who profess to be called Christians. The Anglican Bishop Hamish Jamieson testifies that in his Diocese of Bunbury, as a result of the movement of the Spirit, people have become more sharply focused on Jesus as Lord, rather than on the church. In traditionally high church dioceses, he observes, that is a very significant development. He has witnessed particular blessing in the town of Manjimup, with a population of about 5,000, which held the first Anglican Renewal Ministries of Australia (ARMA) conferences in Australia and has sent five men into the ordained ministry since 1983.⁹

Bishop Ralph Wicks' testimony is similar. I remember one evangelical Anglican from Brisbane telling me of the change brought to the cathedral ministry in Brisbane because of Bishop Wicks' experience of the Spirit of God. And in his autobiography he wrote after his experience of renewal; 'Some clergy regarded me as a "weirdo" but one thing they could not deny: The proclamation of Jesus and God's gift of salvation by grace through faith became key features of my preaching. I was reminded by Scripture that the work of the Holy Spirit is to glorify Jesus.'¹⁰ Bishop Wicks took many missions. He particularly remembers one at Stratford, a small town between Sale and Bairnsdale in Gippsland, which was a total failure on the first night, but by the fourth night scores of people who had never heard of the charismatic movement were 'hungry for the Spirit, begging for the anointing'.¹¹ So strong has been the testimony of Bishop Wicks to the lordship of Christ that he has been a blessing to many evangelicals who have come to realize that they have been more in love with the Bible than with Jesus. He reports that he was invited to address a conference of evangelicals in Melbourne, but they were no doubt nervous of this weirdo charismatic, so they limited him to six minutes. Bishop Wicks wrote:

Then the Archbishop of Melbourne, Bob Dann, kept reminding me about the 'six minutes'. I put away my prepared text and simply shared with the conference what spiritual renewal meant to me: how my ministry was enriched, how I came to understand and love Jesus more. The response of the delegates was very moving to me. They rose in acclamation. I went backstage and wept. God has done something beautiful.¹²

God had indeed done something beautiful. He had brought those evangelicals close to one who was on fire, and, in his grace, he had made their hearts combustible. They had made the priceless discovery that it was not gospel preaching that is required, but anointed gospel preaching.

The best recent Australian example of revival is the aboriginal revival which began on Galiwin'ku (Elcho Island) on 28th March 1979. From the historian's point of view, it is a delight because we now have so much data on it. In two recent studies, John Blacket's *Fire*

⁹ 9. . Conversation with Bishop Jamieson, 1st April 1997.

¹⁰ 10. . Ralph Wicks, 'Reflections on Renewal', *Renewal Journal*, No 2, p. 32.

¹¹ 11. . Conversation with Bishop Wicks, 1st April 1997.

¹² 12. . Ralph Wicks, 'Reflections on Renewal', *Renewal Journal*, No 2, p. 33.

in the Outback (Sutherland: Albatross, 1997) and Max Hart's *A Story of Fire, Continued* (Blackwood: New Creation Publications, 1997), the aboriginal people have been allowed to speak for themselves. John Blacket participated in the revival and interviewed many of the aboriginal people who led and benefited from it, and Max Hart, another participant, who though himself incapacitated by Parkinson's disease, was assisted by Bryce Clark who interviewed many of the leaders.

Our aboriginal brothers and sisters certainly experienced the coming of the Spirit at this time and had a lot to say about the evidence that he had come. Nyiwula Dhurrkay at Galiwin'ku one week before the revival began reported that at an all night prayer meeting at 4 a.m. the Spirit came. How did they know? Because a cloud came from the east and rested upon them and they were in the mist of God's presence and they became cold, which in a hot climate is the way the Spirit graciously presents himself.¹³ But the reason why we must regard this aboriginal revival as the real thing and not just a bout of pentecostal delirium is that it is not the Holy Spirit, but Jesus who is its hero and its focus of attention. Visions of Jesus are the most reported of all the visions in a revival characterized by scores of visions. In 1983 a small aboriginal boy in kindergarten at Yarrabah, south of Cairns in Queensland, did a butterfly painting, putting paint on a piece of paper and folding it in half. When he opened it he gazed on a remarkable likeness of Christ with crown of thorns.¹⁴ Revival came to Yarrabah immediately.

When they experienced the phenomenon which has been labelled 'slaying in the Spirit', the aboriginal evangelists did not like the term, preferring to describe it as 'resting in Jesus'.¹⁵ The leaders had not witnessed anything like these revival experiences before, and white missionaries did not seem to be able to give any help, and therefore aboriginal pastors became extraordinarily dependent on stories of Jesus in the Bible to guide them to know what to do next. They read what Jesus did in the gospels and they believed that Jesus was doing it all over again in Australia. They interpreted the Bible literally and pictorially and they expected to witness miracles and to see visions as Jesus walked with them on Australian soil. Aboriginal Christians thus affirm that it is Christ himself, rather than a phenomenon called revival, who is helping them to transform a world which had been death to them into a life-giving synthesis of old culture and new challenges. Bob Williams, a tribal leader from Carnarvon, spoke of Jesus as 'the in-between one' or the one who stands between the races, discerning the truth in aboriginal law by interpreting it in the light of the law which the Lord Jesus came not to destroy, but to fulfil.¹⁶ Behind these generalisations lie the individuals whose pain the Lord healed. There was Willy, a timid aboriginal man who had spent a lot of time in gaol for drunkenness. The revival not only dried him out, but made a man of him as well. In his simple, moving testimony to his church, he gave the glory to Jesus: 'A lot of people think I'm rubbish. I'm not rubbish anymore; I've got Jesus Christ inside me.'¹⁷

One Solomon Islander who experienced revival in the endemic revival in the Solomon Islands, which began in 1970, said 'Revival is Jesus': it is what 'goes on in the soul when

¹³ 13. . John Blacket, *Fire in the Outback* (Sydney: Albatross, 1997), p. 90.

¹⁴ 14. . John Harris, *One Blood* (Sydney: Albatross, 1990), facing p. 783 and p. 850.

¹⁵ 15. . Blacket, *Fire in the Outback*, p. 211.

¹⁶ 16. . Blacket, *Fire in the Outback*, p. 188.

¹⁷ 17. . Blacket, *Fire in the Outback*, p. 200.

Jesus comes into right focus'.¹⁸ More precisely, revival is what goes on in the soul when the cross of Christ comes into right focus. *A revival is a manifestation in this world of a divine victory in the supernatural world.* A revival is an outbreak in the present world of the great victory over Satanic and demonic forces which took place in the past on the Cross and which will receive its most visible and permanent manifestation when Christ returns again to bring in a new heaven and a new earth. Revivals, then, are re-enactments, not of Calvary, but of the victory won at Calvary.¹⁹ Djiniyini Gondarra, the aboriginal theologian who was the pastor at Galiwin'ku when the revival began, had a remarkable vision of crows and flying foxes (which are totems of himself and his wife) and of a beautiful girl wearing lots of bangles, namely Queen Jezebel. Gondarra called out to his wife, 'Go to Jerusalem, get the blood and wash the cross'. She did so and, when she washed the cross with the blood, it turned into a flaming two-edged sword, and she thrust it through Jezebel who turned back into a flying fox and exploded. Then God said to Gondarra:

You lay down every totem and ceremony. In each of them there is good and bad. All of them must come under my Lordship, be washed by the blood of Jesus Christ, and then you will see a new Aboriginal culture. I don't want to destroy and leave you empty. I will restore and renew what is good.²⁰

Jesus is the hero of the aboriginal revival. But it is significant that the one who came to glorify the Father is still doing it today. The theme hymn of the aboriginal revival is the quiet worshipful hymn 'God Bapa'.

<i>God</i>		<i>Bapa,</i>		<i>God</i>		<i>Bapa,</i>
(God	the	Father,		God	the	Father),
<i>Garray</i>	<i>Djesu,</i>	<i>Garray</i>		<i>Djesu</i>	[=Lord	Jesus]
(God	the	Son,		God	the	Son)
<i>Dhuyu</i>	<i>Birrimbir,</i>	<i>Dhuyu</i>	<i>Birrimbir</i>	[=	Holy	Spirit],
(God	the	Spirit,		God	the	Spirit)
<i>Nhuma</i>		<i>lurrkun,</i>				<i>wanganyngur.</i>
(You in all, three in one). ²¹						

One of the white missionaries, Herbert Howell, reports a conviction which recalls that of his namesake, Howell Harris: 'I used to address God as Lord God Almighty, quaking in my boots lest he might zap sinful me, but after the revival I found myself addressing him as *Father*.'²² At the annual Revival Thanksgiving weekend in 1990 Djiniyini led a victory march to 'Lift up Father God the Creator', thus affirming Christ's victory over Satan, which reveals a developed Trinitarian understanding.²³ And of all the many visions reported in the revival, at least one was about the Holy Trinity. At the 1991 Convention, the aboriginal people went out into a desert place and there set up a cross two metres high. One of them

¹⁸ 18. . George Strachan, *Revival—its Blessings and Battles: An Account of experiences in the Solomon Islands* (Laurieton: South Sea Evangelical Mission, 1984, revised, 1989), p. 2.

¹⁹ 19. . Blacket, *Fire in the Outback*, p. 98.

²⁰ 20. . Blacket, *Fire in the Outback*, p. 248.

²¹ 21. . Blacket, *Fire in the Outback*, p. 91.

²² 22. . Blacket, *Fire in the Outback*, p. 167.

²³ 23. . Blacket, *Fire in the Outback*, p. 249.

saw three lights, one on each point of the cross, and identified them as the light of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.²⁴

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The Mystery of Salvation: The Story of God's Gift

Trevor A. Hart

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It is recounted of the Scots Enlightenment philosopher David Hume that, upon hearing of a sermon by Jonathan Edwards on 'The Usefulness of Sin', he erupted with the indignant inquiry, 'But what the devil does the fellow make of hell and damnation?' I must confess that it was with a similar burden of curiosity that I initially approached and interrogated this book, a hermeneutical strategy shaped in large measure by media responses to the volume's publication. I ought to have known better. Those wishing to discover the answer to Hume's question may turn to paragraph one on page 199 where it is (I think) answered. But be warned; whatever the curious principles of selection employed by religious correspondents in their frenzied bid for air time and column inches may suggest, the key to this book certainly does not lie here.

This report is the third in a series (following *We Believe in God* [1987] and *We Believe in the Holy Spirit* [1991], treating core doctrines of the Christian faith, and doing so in a particular way. Unlike some Doctrine Commission reports of the past there are no signed chapters; instead the entire report is owned and presented to the Church by the Commission as a whole (x). Its pages reflect a lengthy and constructive process of writing, discussion, reflection and reworking, out of which there emerges a remarkable degree of broad consensus in relation to the major themes treated. Of course there will have been many differences of understanding and expression among the Commission's members, and to some extent one may engage in a crude source-critical exercise, tracing particular distinctive emphases and concerns, and identifying the points at which one voice seems to have been modified and qualified by another. But such differences are enveloped and held together convincingly (rather than artificially) within what is apparently a clear shared commitment to the broad incarnational and trinitarian structure of catholic Christianity. Some may lament the absence of maverick voices and perspectives in the text, and think the final result oppressive or contrived. Such readers would doubtless have preferred the public jousting and open disagreements which characterized the format of some past reports. Others will find the consensual approach here altogether more

²⁴ 24. . Blacket, *Fire in the Outback*, p. 253.