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SCOTTISH NATIONHOOD

No editor will dare to pontificate on the future of Scotland as a nation only a few weeks before a general election, although he may be safe in assuming that the election will leave many questions unresolved. Yet all readers of this *Bulletin*, within and without Scotland, will share a concern that Scotland's national future, whether in independence, devolution or union, be informed by 'a Christian vision'. This is the sub-title of as timely a book as one could hope for, to help shape a Christian mind about the nationhood issue – *Scottish Identity*, by William Storrar (Handsel Press, Edinburgh, 1990; 258pp., £6.95; ISBN 1 871828 01 5).

Evangelical sentiments about Scotland have sometimes smacked of a kind of Scottish Israelitism, as though the country enjoyed the status in the eyes of heaven of specially favoured elect nation. The authentic universalization of the Christian church in the twentieth century leaves no place for a Scotto-centric perspective on the missionary task. It was a shock to learn – not from the newspapers, even the Scottish ones with pretensions to national status – that the short-lived bill for Scottish home rule promoted at Westminster a few months ago by a Scottish MP explicitly excluded any law establishing the Christian religion. The drifting patterns of social and commercial life in contemporary Scotland should deflate any complacency about an assumed Christian identity for Scotland's future.

It is earnestly to be hoped that those churchmen prominent in planning Scotland's constitutional destiny, whether they belong to the national Kirk or, however puzzlingly, to one of the country's non-conforming minorities, are giving no less energy to securing its Christian identity. They will do well, as will all concerned with the unfolding fortunes of Scotland, to wrestle with the tough intellectual meat of *Scottish Identity*. With a breadth of sympathy and an almost poetic sensibility that

few evangelical writers command, Willie Storrar offers a biblical and theological understanding of nationhood, which sees 'the question of human and Christian identity in Scotland as central to rethinking what it means to be Scottish'. With this widely acclaimed book in our hands, we have no excuse to be unprepared for a debate over the shape of our national life that will run and run.

Honouring an Evangelical Heritage

Virtually the whole evangelical movement in modern Britain is immensely indebted to the doctrinal testimony of the Inter-Varsity Fellowship, latterly known as the Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship. None played a more significant role in the formative decades of the Fellowship than Douglas Johnson, who died last December. His CV listed very few publications (but see below), and he was no public speaker or preacher. Yet he must have been one of the most effective 'back-room boys' in the story of modern Christianity, a visionary and strategist of quite extraordinary single-mindedness and skill.

He was a voracious reader of theology, and one of his greatest contributions was, as John Taylor, Bishop of St. Albans, put in in *The Independent*, to recall 'evangelicals from anti-intellectualism to taking doctrine seriously'. As the reviser of T.C.Hammond's *In Understanding Be Men*, first published in 1936 and still doing yeoman service in several languages as an introduction to Christian doctrine, I was intrigued to discover from another obituary that its real author was largely Douglas Johnson, who persuaded T.C.Hammond to vet it and lend it his name. Such a man deserves to be honoured in his death, and the *Bulletin* is glad to be able to reprint the tribute that follows.

DR DOUGLAS JOHNSON (1904-1991)

Douglas Johnson was the first General Secretary of the IVF (Inter-Varsity Fellowship, now Universities and

Colleges Christian Fellowship). After graduating at the University of London in history, theology and medicine, he undertook the leadership of IVF, and was also to contribute greatly to the creation of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students, London Bible College and the Christian Medical Fellowship (of which he was also General Secretary). He retired from IVF in 1964 and from CMF in 1974. His history of the IVF, *Contending for the Faith*, was published in 1979.

It was Douglas Johnson's initiative which led to the formation of the IVF Biblical Research Committee in 1938. The committee met first at St Luke's Vicarage, Hampstead, under the chairmanship of G. T. Manley. A. M. Stibbs, Norval Geldenhuys, J. W. Wenham and Douglas Johnson were present. Out of the Biblical Research Committee, seven years later were to come Tyndale House and the Tyndale Fellowship.

J. W. Wenham has written the following:

It gives me great pleasure to pay tribute to DJ (as he was commonly known), since his name is unknown to many of the younger generation, yet (in my considered judgement) he has almost certainly been the greatest single influence on the course of British Christianity this century. He would make a wonderful subject for a doctoral thesis and then a book.

I worked closely with him as a student member of the IVF executive committee for three years, after which my contacts were quite sporadic, but I saw enough of him to realise that he probably deserved the title of genius. When he took over as secretary of the IVF, evangelical fortunes were at their nadir. The little company was despised and even hated in the church at large. But now at the end of the century there can be little doubt that Evangelicalism is the most dynamic force in the Christian scene. We owe this to one man above others – Douglas Johnson.

He of course built up what is now the UCCF with its network of Christian Unions all over the British Isles,

sending out a stream of educated people into all walks of life trained in Christian leadership. With it came IVP with its high standard of Christian publishing. His was the main part in setting up IFES as a world-wide student fellowship. Then there was the more difficult field of theology which was for long Evangelicalism's weakest area. He pushed the Theological Students Fellowship along; he roped in G. T. Manley and H. E. Guillebaud to establish the Biblical Research Committee; and he was largely instrumental in getting the Tyndale Fellowship and Tyndale House off the ground. But he was into a multitude of other initiatives. I was with him when he persuaded the owners of the Beddington Free Grace Library which was stored in what he called Noah's Ark at the bottom of Geoffrey Williams' to convert it into the Evangelical Library, and when he plotted to set up a Bible college with first-class standards in London. In these endeavours he worked closely with Martyn Lloyd-Jones among others.

Where did all this prodigiously successful effort stem from?

First, from a simple desire to proclaim Christ. He worked with a passion which almost killed him, yet he had a great sense of humour which delivered him from an impression of tenseness. To him direct prayer, faithfulness to the Word and evangelism were always in the forefront.

Secondly, he felt a call to organise. Medical missionaries were commonly held to be top of the ladder of esteem. Frustrated in this direction he took the lowly stance of secretary to help Christians to help one another evangelise the world. It was making bricks without straw, but he gained the confidence of many and just enough money kept coming in to advance the work. His approach was statesmanlike – he believed in the essential unity of all Bible-believing, gospel-preaching Christians, and he worked to develop that.

Thirdly, he was a theologian. He had read theology as well as medicine, and was always reading widely in the

subject. I think it was a means of relaxation in his busy life. When condemned to rest in hospital after a heart attack, he asked the doctor if he could read biography, and then proceeded to devour Edersheim's two volumes on *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah!* On his shelves were not only a row of Warfield, but a great variety of books ancient and modern. He realised that theology, including apologetics, was essential to a healthy church.

Fourthly, he was a personal worker. He not only organised people, he talked to them one at a time; and he wrote letters. In an obituary it was said that on a conservative estimate he wrote a thousand letters of encouragement a year. These letters carried with them his enthusiasm, but they were also meaty with ideas – not pious clichés, but theology and practical application. His home welcomed a stream of visitors from all over the world. His wife Dorothy who provided the peaceful, secure base from which Douglas worked, is one of the unsung heroines of the modern church.

Fifthly, he was a man of humility. He did not like the limelight and genuinely did not seem to want the praise of men. He has assuredly earned his 'Well done' from the Master he served so faithfully.

**MODERN CELTIC CHRISTIANITY:
THE CONTEMPORARY 'REVIVAL' AND ITS
ROOTS**

DONALD MEEK, UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

It is always exciting, and sometimes a little confusing, to live through a revival of any kind, when something long forgotten rises from oblivion, and gains a fresh and potent currency. Those of us who can lay claim to being Celts – in the strictly linguistic sense, I hasten to add, as speakers of a Celtic language (Scottish Gaelic, Irish, Welsh, Manx, Cornish or Breton) – are well used to revivals. Since at least 1800 Celtic revival movements have become almost commonplace. *Celti semper revivendi*.

What revivals do we have? Some come from within our own communities. We have had, and continue to have, our political revivals: I speak of the resuscitation movements that have come to Ireland, Scotland, Man, Wales and Cornwall. Other revivals are externally initiated, and are placed to our account, whether we want them or not. These external revivals come when we are 'discovered' and 're-discovered' by a sympathetic lobby among those who have sometimes been the means of our downfall and disintegration. Across the years – I might even say across the centuries – at the same time as we have declined in numbers and suffered all sorts of indignities at the hands of professedly superior peoples and powers, we have had our revivals. Concussed by many battles, we, the Celts, who are 'down and out' in the eyes of many, are suddenly permitted to make a staggering come-back to the stage of world history, and, for a glorious moment, when the stagger becomes a stand, we are 'up and in'. The eyes of all knowledgeable people are upon us as we stumble forward, groping for a hand-hold, and they even tell us, just to help us a little, that we definitely have something they have not got!

Recreating the Celts

Revivals can, of course, be good times, but they can also be dangerous, especially if they are of the non-indigenous type. Bodies of very enthusiastic supporters, who may or may not know much about us, put their noses to the grindstone, and when the grindstone gets under way, a few more take the risk, and put their noses on it, and some go flat on their faces as a result. It is catching, I say, and not a little dangerous, because we – especially the professional academic Celts who know our Ps and Qs – have to live with the consequences. These consequences include quite a lot of plastic surgery and the reshaping of our general cultural contours to accord with the prevailing Celtic identikit. Some of us, enjoying the heady power of the revival, join in the fun, and, admitting that we stand in much need of some beautifying, reshape our own faces. Just occasionally, as the process threatens to obliterate our real identity, our Celtic crania cry out in pain. Then, in the hope of regaining our lost faces, we split lances with the surgeons as we participate in what is called a ‘damage limitation exercise’.

Of course, our really potent revivals are not political, cultural, or linguistic. They are religious. The Celtic Fringe has been noted for its religious revivalism, and the revivals have taken many forms over the last couple of centuries. Generally, these revivals have been of the Protestant type, and have been promoted by ‘enthusiasts’ (in the full and original sense of that word), and they have had their results in fuller churches, individual conversions, and greater activities of various sorts. These revivals, some would say, have helped to create a certain image of the Scottish Highlands and of Wales: the Highlands of strict, censorious sabbatarianism and unending psalmody, and the Wales of innumerable chapels and male-voice choirs. Ireland, it would seem, has by and large escaped this sort of blight, and rejoices for the present in its broad catholicity.

Reconstructing the Saints

Now, there has been another Celtic religious revival going on for some time, and this revival is certainly not on the Celtic Fringe. In fact, the real day-to-day speakers of Celtic languages in Pontypridd and Blaenau Ffestiniog and Ros Muc and Ballybunion and Ardhasaig and Kilmuir and Tiree and Islay have probably not heard much about this one. Nevertheless, it has a very definite existence. It has a distinctive ambience, with a touch of class: it flourishes across the social divides, goes well up the social ladder, links Protestant and Catholic, and has a faint whiff of incense around its outer edges. It seems to have something for everyone, from the Buddhist to the Baptist, and it is called by some – as the title of one book proclaims – *The Celtic Alternative*. ‘Alternative to what?’ you ask. That is not defined clearly in the book, but we will try to answer that question later.

This revival, a revival of ‘Celtic spirituality’ (as it likes to suppose, ‘spirituality’ being one of our ‘in’ words these days), believes that it is taking us back to the Christian religious experience of the Celts who occupied the islands of Britain and Ireland in the period from about 500 A.D. to 1066 A.D., and whose descendants continue to occupy Wales and Ireland and Gaelic Scotland. It probably sees itself as deriving from what is sometimes termed the ‘Age of the Saints’ in the so-called Celtic church, from about the sixth to the seventh century. The Celtic church and the saints associated with it – among them such famous national figures as St David of Wales, St Columba of Iona, St Nynia or Ninian of Whithorn and St Patrick of Ireland – are peculiarly susceptible to revival and have been revived and reinterpreted many times in the course of the centuries.

The Celtic church, in its resurrected form, has a special penchant for matching the mood of the age and, indeed, the mood of the reconstructionist. It is often seen as the ‘ideal’ church by both Roman Catholics and Protestants. In fact, there are those in the Free Church of Scotland, no

less, who look to that Celtic church of monks, anchorites and ascetics – that church of island fastnesses, hermitages, wheel-headed crosses, crucifixes and round towers – as its own lineal ancestor.¹ The Celtic church and its supposed theological ideals are generally envisaged as ‘pure’ and ‘clean’ when set against the excesses of the Middle Ages and the Reformation, to say nothing of the failures of our modern day. Revivalism, in that sense, all too frequently becomes revisionism, and leads to the rewriting of history to the advantage of the denomination represented by the writer.

I believe that we are living through one of the peaks of this revival at present. However, it is far from being a revival of angry saints cursing the water-beast of the River Ness, as St Columba did. The new movement is remarkably tolerant of animals of whatever kind, and is rather unworldly in its aspirations. It has a relaxed, benevolent feel to it, which is very different from the world of those irascible Celtic saints whose curses were at least as strong as their blessings. The movement has little, if anything, to say about the painful penitentials drawn up by some Celtic saints, who believed in giving the penitents the occasional crack of the whip. It is gentle, or, as some would say, ‘soft’, avoiding the less congenial aspects of our Celtic religious heritage. Few of the movement’s advocates have yet taken to living on Rockall or the Old Man of Hoy, although such eremitic sites offer stacks of potential, in keeping with the aspirations of several Celtic saints. In fact, the movement expresses itself most effectively on paper. One of the characteristics of this revival or ‘new religious movement’ – the Celtic NRM, as some might call it – is that, although it is concerned with

¹ Susan Parman, *Scottish Crofters: A Historical Ethnography of a Celtic Village* (Fort Worth, 1990), p.132, contains the following information: ‘According to one Free Church minister, the Free Church is descended from the Celtic Church founded by St. Columba, which never obeyed Roman Catholic law. It is the heart of Celtic/Highland/Scottish purity.’

the rediscovery of 'Celtic spirituality', it is quite a bookish affair. I have watched its progress over the years in terms of the publication lists, and have found that in itself a fascinating experience.

Old Prayers for New

When I was a student back in the 1970s, in the depths of deepest, darkest Cambridge, on the very fringe of civilisation, I found a little book that promised to throw some light into the pervading fenland gloom. It was called *The Sun Dances* and was a collection of 'Prayers and Blessings from the Gaelic', based on the earlier volumes of Gaelic prayers gathered by Alexander Carmichael mainly in the Outer Hebrides (especially South Uist and Benbecula) and published initially in the opening years of this century under the Latin title *Carmina Gadelica*. *The Sun Dances*, edited by Adam Bittleston, was first published in 1960 by The Christian Community Press, and, in many respects, set the stage for the publications that were to follow. It is noticeable that several of the books produced were collections of prayers derived directly from Carmichael's *Carmina*. In 1961 the SPCK began its long association with such material by publishing the Revd G.R.D. MacLean's volume, *Poems of the Western Highlanders* (1961). MacLean's presentation entailed a reworking of Carmichael's translations, which were recast to provide rhyming couplets and other stylistic enhancements.

After what appeared to be a rather fallow decade in the 1970s, the 1980s have witnessed the publication of several new selections of this kind. One of the most recent examples is Esther de Waal's volume, *The Celtic Vision: Prayers and Blessings from the Outer Hebrides*, published in 1988 by Darton, Longman and Todd (reprinted 1990). There have been smaller re-issues too, like *Praying with Highland Christians*, published in 1988 by SPCK, with a foreword by Sally Magnusson. This is a selection of the poems published in MacLean (1961).

One important general point emerges from the titles of these books. The first one mentioned – *The Sun Dances* – made it clear that the prayers were from Gaelic. *Praying with Highland Christians* avoids any symbolic ambiguity, but practises some mild deception by making you think that all Highland Christians pray (present tense?) in the manner of the prayers in the book. Try the Free Church of Scotland, or the Free Presbyterian Church! De Waal's title, on the other hand, departs from the Gaelic and Highland definitions, and proclaims boldly that these prayers are part of a Celtic (not Gaelic) vision, and so implies that they are at the heart of 'Celtic' religious experience, although they have been collected in Gaelic Scotland, and are, to some extent, shared with Ireland. In other words, the prayers have been moved from the 'fringe' as it were, to a central place within 'Celtic' culture, even though Wales, Cornwall and Brittany have contributed little.

New Prayers for Old

In the 1980s another development was taking place, which was more creative than the volumes of Bittleston and De Waal. It brought the Celts from the farthest Hebrides and put them right inside the worship structures of at least one large denomination – the Church of England. This development was the composition of prayers in the style of Carmichael's translations. In other words, Carmichael's volumes had become a pattern for liturgical experimentation, and the net was being widened to include such models as the Old Irish hymn known in translation as 'St Patrick's Breastplate'. All of this is reflected in the little volumes compiled by David Adam, *The Edge of Glory: Prayers in the Celtic Tradition* (published by SPCK in 1985, with a foreword by the Most Reverend Stuart Blanch, Archbishop of York) and *Tides and Seasons* (published 1989). According to the publishers, the first of the Adam volumes achieved an 'instant popularity': and that popularity has continued unabated, it would seem, as

Adam's output has increased, and diversified. His volume, *The Eye of the Eagle* (published 1990) consists of 'Meditations on the hymn "Be thou my Vision"'. This volume is based on the translation of the Old Irish version of the hymn by Mary Byrne (1880-1931) and Eleanor Hull (1860-1935), which is very well known through its incorporation in many hymn-books. (See now *Border Lands: The Best of David Adam*, SPCK, 1991.)

It must be said, however, that David Adam's prayers and meditations are much more than a literary experiment. They aim to teach and to edify. The meditations, often beautifully crafted, glow with a vibrant and attractive devotion which attempts to show the relevance of these early hymns to our secular age. While having my reservations at the theological, historical and textual levels, I confess to having enjoyed them thoroughly as 'homiletic spirituality'. The prayers, too, have a profoundly religious motive at their heart. Nevertheless, they have a restorationist aim, and are advertised as an attempt to fill out what was felt to be a declining or forgotten dimension of spiritual experience; the biographical note in the first volume tells us that Mr Adam - now Vicar of Holy Island, Northumberland - 'has a particular interest in Celtic Christian traditions, of which he detects traces still lingering on in the Northern church'. It is not clear what is meant by 'the Northern church', but the phrase may reflect an awareness that monks from the Columban monastery at Iona, notably Aidan, took Christianity to the old kingdom of Northumbria in the seventh century A.D. Quite some 'lingering', I would say! More particularly, the author himself tells us that the point of inspiration came at Lent in 1984 when he and a group of parishioners, searching for patterns for prayer and aware of the earlier Anglo-Saxon and Celtic religious history of the area, found what they wanted in MacLean's book, *Poems of the Western Highlanders*. They embarked on a voyage of discovery, and participated practically in it by composing the prayers. The Archbishop of York commended the

enterprise for 'the new insights that it offers into the faith of our northern forefathers who did so much to shape the religion of this land. Their faith awaits a revival in our somewhat tired, over-formalized, despairing society.'

Eastern Approaches to Celtic History

So there it is: even the Archbishop of York, in giving these new 'Celtic' prayers his *imprimatur* and putting them firmly under the wing of Anglicanism, was talking in terms of a possible 'revival', and that is what appears to be taking place, bit by bit, although the extent and effect of the revival remain to be seen. The scope of the revival is certainly broadening. It is penetrating more fully into other fields at present, and we are being offered new quasi-historical interpretations of the Christianity of the Celts who occupied these islands (Britain and Ireland) in the centuries before 1066. Shirley Toulson's book, *The Celtic Alternative: A Reminder of the Christianity We Lost* (published by Rider in 1987) is a 'radical' history of the Christianity of the Celts, which opens as follows: 'In the so-called Dark Ages, a religion flourished in the islands of Britain which had more in common with Buddhism than with the institutional Christianity of the West. It was based on a church founded without martyrs, and one that neither inflicted suffering nor encouraged bitter theological disputes.' (If only all of that were true!) She concludes by referring to the manner in which the Greenham Common women modelled some of their liturgies on Jewish and Celtic models, and states that those who establish peace groups can be compared directly to the Culdees, a monastic reform movement within the Irish (Celtic) church. From this, you will readily conclude that the 'revival' of interest in Celtic religion goes hand in hand with an attempt to provide a religious base for some of the protest movements that have sprung up in our own time, and that it co-exists with a growing awareness of Eastern religions. Eastern religions are likewise adjusting their profiles to accommodate Celtic perspectives. Buddhists in

particular are discovering – and even buying – common ground with the Celts. The *Scotsman* reported (23 November 1991) that Scottish Buddhists had bought the historic Holy Isle off Arran, in order to provide ‘a centre for spiritual contemplation by establishing a religious retreat on the rocky outcrop said to have been the home of a 6th-century Irish saint.’

As East meets West once again through the reconstructed Celtic church, the range of Celtic texts being offered to would-be meditators and pilgrims has also increased beyond the constant recycling of prayers from Carmichael’s *Carmina*. More ambitious translation-anthologies of prose and verse texts are coming from the presses. One of these is *Celtic Christianity: Ecology and Holiness*, compiled by Christopher Bamford and William Parker Marsh (Floris Classics, 1986), which (in passing) compares early Irish religious houses to Zen (Buddhist) monasteries. Another is *Celtic Fire*, published by Darton, Longman and Todd in 1990. It is edited by Robert Van de Weyer, ‘founder of the Community of Christ the Sower, based in Little Gidding’ [in Huntingdonshire] – a point that demonstrates the link between this Celtic revival and the contemplative communities that have arisen on the fringes of the larger denominations in recent years. The blurb on the back of the book does not inspire confidence in the editor or the publishers, since it contains two massive misconceptions: ‘Composed in languages long extinct,’ it says, ‘Celtic literature has been inaccessible for many centuries.’

Scholarship versus Spirituality?

Both of these claims – about the extinction of the Celtic languages and the inaccessibility of the literature – are manifestly incorrect. What they do tell us is that Celtic literature is falling into the hands of some people who know nothing about its background, and assume that nobody else does either. Precise scholarship is generally not one of the hallmarks of this movement. Scholarship

seems to be a bit of a drag on 'popular' writings of this kind, and some of its practitioners might ask what scholarship has to do with spirituality. To be fair, however, the more significant writers within the movement have a concern for proper historical perspective, and it is encouraging to see that, as the movement develops, it is gradually catching up with another revival that seems to have emerged contemporaneously – namely the growth of academic research into the Celtic church. This awakening has flourished likewise since the 1960s, and is associated with the names of Nora Chadwick and Kathleen Hughes, among others. There may be a connexion, although it must be stressed that the academic writings have no obvious link with the Celtic interests under consideration here. There is, nevertheless, retrospective discovery of the Celtic academics, and occasionally there is a 'spiritualised' accommodation as they are brought within the 'fold'. Esther de Waal, herself a Cambridge historian, has utilised much scholarly material in her latest book, *A World Made Whole: The Rediscovery of the Celtic Tradition* (Harper-Collins, 1991), and confesses that, while writing the book – a very readable and attractive volume – she was 'haunted' by Nora Chadwick, author of the influential study, *The Age of the Saints in the Early Celtic Church* (O.U.P., 1960).

It is not unfair to say that one or two writers of the modern neo-Celtic genre do try to suffuse their understanding of the Celts in a psychic sense of personal otherworldliness, believing perhaps that this is appropriate to the Celtic spiritual persona.² Thus Esther de Waal discloses that she was brought up in Shropshire, on the Welsh border, and goes on to comment that

² See further Patrick Sims-Williams, 'The Visionary Celt: The Construction of an Ethnic Preconception', *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 11 (1986), pp.71-96. In a wry footnote, the writer comments: 'Most of us would rather trust a seer in South Uist than South London!'

'Borderlands are ambiguous places in which different cultures and traditions meet, frontiers from which the new can open up',³ and a similar perspective is evident in the title (and introduction) of David Adam's anthology, *Border Lands*. One presumes that this aids the transition on the physical/spiritual border and authenticates at the personal level the type of sacred/secular interaction for which such writers argue. As for Mrs Chadwick, she certainly had her own mystique, but, if it was romantic at times, it was grounded in a very deep familiarity with the original Celtic sources.

Knowing the broader historical perspectives is one thing. Familiarity with the original languages, so that one can enter into a meaningful dialogue with the texts themselves, is another, and it is at this point that the movement is perhaps at its weakest. None of the modern participants mentioned in this paper appears to have had any training in Celtic languages or in the scholarly interpretation of Celtic religious texts in Old and Middle Irish. At a time when modern Irish scholars are looking afresh at the relationship between the early Irish religious movement and the secular world, and calling into question some long-treasured assumptions, the producers of our 'new' movement are discovering the translations of the early 1900s and the scholarship of the 1960s and 1970s, so that there is at least a twenty-year time-lag in the process. They can talk happily about Columba's poems (as if he himself composed them) and raise no question-marks over early Irish nature poetry and its alleged association with hermits.⁴

Unfamiliarity with the original Celtic sources is not, however, something that causes too much heartache. The movement has an important agenda which transcends

³ *A World Made Whole*, p.9.

⁴ The hermits are having a hard time these days. See Donncha O Corráin, 'Early Irish Hermit Poetry?', in D. O Corráin *et al.* (eds), *Sages, Saints and Storytellers* (Maynooth, 1989), pp. 251-67.

language. *Celtic Fire* sets it out: 'As Christians today seek a "creation spirituality", the Celts provide a perfect model. And as we yearn for wholeness of mind and body, the Celts help us to find it.' How so, you ask? Is Little Gidding going in for a little kidding?

The Celts and their Charms: Carmichael and the *Carmina*

Before considering the values and emphases that emanate from Little Gidding and other power-points of this neo-Celticism, it will be very appropriate to say something about the man who set up the initial vibrations, namely, Alexander Carmichael, and to consider his aims in collecting the *Carmina Gadelica*. He had his own agenda too.

Alexander Carmichael was a native of Lismore, an island not far from Oban, where he was born in 1832. He became an Inland Revenue Officer – an exciseman, in fact – and went to work for many years in the Uists, among other places. Alongside his work, he was engaged in collecting Gaelic folklore, as part of a wider movement which aimed to collect tales, poems and other traditions. Carmichael's special interest lay in the prayers, charms and incantations that he sometimes heard on the lips of people in the Hebrides. He became aware that there was, in these prayers, an unrecorded heritage which was in danger of being lost. So he set to work to preserve them for posterity, obtaining the bulk of his material from the Roman Catholic population of South Uist, but with Protestant contributors too.

It needs to be stressed, and stressed very hard, that Carmichael faced huge difficulties in his labours. There were no tape recorders in those days, and he had to use pencil and paper, writing quickly in badly-lit houses, and listening to what he himself claims to have been the almost inaudible voices of his informants, who were often advanced in years. Having gathered the material, which was often in fragments, like shards from a clay pot, he had

to decide how to present it to the public in a manageable form. So, like a literary archaeologist, he set about rebuilding some of the fragments into seemingly reconstructions. Some fragments needed more rebuilding than others; but it was evident that restoration was the keynote of his presentation. Having restored the Gaelic models where necessary, he then translated them into English, in the beautiful, measured cadences of nineteenth-century English and in a way which often reflected very sensitively the rhythms and tones of his reconstructed originals.

Now, we live in a changed world, in more ways than one, and Carmichael's editorial principles do not please all modern scholars. For example, I once had a close friend at Glasgow University called Hamish Robertson, who, as I was finishing my Celtic Honours degree, was embarking on an editorial study of Carmichael for his PhD. Many a talk we had about Celtic literature, and about Alexander Carmichael in particular. As he got closer to Carmichael, Hamish became progressively more disillusioned with Carmichael's methods, and eventually abandoned his research. This, I may say, was a great tragedy, because we remain in need of a proper, scholarly study of the *Carmina*. However, some of the drafts of Hamish's work were published in a scholarly journal some years later, and I will quote one of his comments on Carmichael's reconstruction of a charm. This was what he said:

The charm in its original form came from a Benbecula man, and affords us an instance of how a defective original has been cast anew, like a disused Ford rescued off the scrap heap and dolled up with appurtenances designed to make it appear like a Daimler.⁵

This was Hamish at his most disillusioned, and I would want to add that the tradition that Carmichael was tapping

⁵ Hamish Robertson, 'Studies in Carmichael's *Carmina Gadelica*', *Scottish Gaelic Studies* 12 (1976), pp.220-65.

was, indeed, a real one, despite the literary polish that he applied to the original fragments. Other collectors were active around the same period, although – significantly – they applied less polish and achieved less status than Carmichael. Among the latter was William MacKenzie, the Secretary of the Crofters' Commission, who contributed a fine (but little known) paper on Gaelic charms and incantations to the Gaelic Society of Inverness (published in its *Transactions* XVIII (1891-92), pp.97-182).

Of course, Carmichael's work must be set in the context of its own day at various levels, and space forbids me to do that here. However, one of the points that needs to be made in any such contextualisation is that Carmichael did have his own agenda in presenting the prayers as he did. In literary terms he was a 'restorationist', but in terms of religion he was a restorationist too. He was restoring 'primitivism' as he saw it, and he believed that some of these prayers may have had their origins in the Columban monasteries at Iona and Derry. Here was an opportunity to show how the Gaels had retained their pre-Reformation beliefs, at least in the Uists. Here too was the opportunity to demonstrate that there was once a splendid harmony between the sacred and the secular, between the Creator and the creation and the ordinary people, who invoked God and his saints into every aspect of their working lives. They lived close to God, whose Spirit imbued everything; immanence rather than transcendence was his chief attribute. By taking this position, Carmichael was reacting against the enormous divorce between sacred and secular that was progressively appearing in the Highlands as Protestant Evangelicalism took ever firmer hold.

The Great Divorce

We have now perhaps perceived the point at which Carmichael's *Carmina* have become very meaningful to those who have rediscovered them since 1960. Although few would now accept that the composition of the *Carmina*

can be linked specifically to Derry and Iona, the general thrust of Carmichael's case has been widely accepted, and the prayers are seen as forming some sort of continuum with the period of the Celtic saints. Their testimony to the interaction of sacred and secular has been particularly well received. This is expressed very effectively by Esther de Waal in her *Celtic Vision*: 'These Prayers,' she writes, 'can help us to see as the men and women from whom Alexander Carmichael collected them saw: to see creation and God the creator in and through that creation; to see the material things which they handled in their daily lives as a way to God; to see beyond this world to the next so that the barriers go down between earth and heaven.' She goes on to say, very significantly: 'Here is something as true in a tower-block or a suburban house as in a crofter's cottage.'

This is perhaps a key statement in explaining the popularity of the *Carmina*, as Carmichael called them. By the second half of the twentieth century, the great divorce is being felt not merely in the Highlands, but throughout Britain. People have become tired of separating religious experience from ordinary human existence, as if rationalism and supernaturalism cannot co-exist; and behind all of that, it seems to me, is a deep disillusionment with the existing structures of organised religion and the sheer godlessness of what has passed for theology in the later twentieth-century. Secular society too, in erecting the tower-block, shows the decline of that most important cement – community life.

Personally, as a conservative Evangelical and a nonconformist to boot, I feel great sympathy with this view, although I recognise its dangers, particularly in its tendency to pantheism and, at times, in its almost animistic approach to the world. (These dangers are also recognised in some of the writings of David Adam.) I also find it difficult to accept any romantic view of Hebridean life in the aftermath of the terrible Potato Blight (1846) and the Clearances and other horrors. I suspect that, as

they took passage in the emigrant ships, some of the Hebridean people must have called upon their Creator in less kindly tones than these prayers suggest. I suspect too that they must have asked why he permitted such things to happen. Let us not suppose that life was all roses when the Hebrides were full of Celtic prayers.

But we must consider other possible reasons for their popularity. Why, in the early 1960s, did Carmichael's prayers become so important? And why all the reprinting subsequently, and what has led to the growth of a neo-Celtic movement based on their rediscovery?

The Ecumenical Columba

Ecumenism, I suspect, has contributed much to our new Celticity, and in particular the ecumenical experiments that were going on in 'communities', notably the founding body, the Iona Community, established by the late Lord MacLeod in 1938. This experiment brought Columba and the so-called Celtic church to the awareness of many people throughout Britain. It is not clear how George MacLeod himself 'discovered' the Celtic church, but he became interested in it long before 1938, perhaps because of his Highland roots in Morvern and the associations of the church in which he first served, St Cuthbert's, Edinburgh, which bore the name of an early Celtic saint. Govan, too, his first charge as a parish minister, was an early Christian site. MacLeod's espousal of Celtic matters was whimsical, romantic and well-laced with his own interpretations – a point well made in Ron Ferguson's recent wry and brilliant biography.⁶

Notwithstanding the embroidery, St Columba – who had almost become St George! – was given a splendid *parousia*. The fourteen-hundredth anniversary of the arrival of the saint in Iona in 1963 was a great celebratory event. It was a time of mysticism, Pentecostal winds

⁶ Ronald Ferguson, *George MacLeod: Founder of the Iona Community* (London, 1990).

(experienced at least by Dr MacLeod) and massive pilgrim bands from the four corners of the globe, converging on Iona, courtesy of the mechanised coracles of David MacBrayne. The re-publication of Carmichael's prayers in the early 1960s was well timed.

In addition to the 'Columba consciousness', the Iona Community established a kind of corridor between Presbyterianism and Anglicanism (for example, through MacLeod's friendship with influential Anglican figures such as William Temple, later Archbishop of Canterbury, and Mervyn Stockwood, later Bishop of Southwark). Indeed, as we have already noted, it was the Anglican publishing body, SPCK, that most readily took up the challenge of printing volumes of Celtic prayers. (SPCK has also provided us with some fine, scholarly studies of the real Celtic churches, in the work of such writers as Kathleen Hughes, Siân Victory and Leslie Hardinge.⁷) Oddly, Presbyterianism has been much less receptive, and Lindisfarne has outstripped Iona in productivity of this kind. This may be because Anglicanism has retained liturgy, and is more responsive to experimentation of this sort. Perhaps it is also because, at its highest points, Anglicanism is a sort of buffer between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism, capable of retaining a broad catholicism which suits the *Carmina* and their successors. All the main editors and composers of the new post-1960 collections have been, or are, Anglicans: G.R.D. MacLean, David Adam, Esther de Waal, Robert Van de Weyer.⁸ Presbyterian interest in the history of

⁷ Hardinge's book, *The Celtic Church in Britain* (London, 1972), provides a very useful overview of the theology of the 'Celtic Church'. It is unfortunate that the writer confuses Ireland with Britain.

⁸ It is one of the ironies of this Anglican neo-Celtic movement that its protagonists have, to a considerable extent, underplayed the rich resources of pre-Conquest English (*i.e.* Anglo-Saxon) 'spirituality'. In England there are several early medieval church buildings which are still used regularly by the Anglican Church, and

Celtic Christianity is growing, however, as is evident in Andrew Patterson's recent booklet entitled *Whithorn, Iona and Lindisfarne: A Celtic Saga* (Saint Andrew Press, 1991). This is a piece of 'historical' narrative, aiming to show that Whithorn is central to the matrix of Celtic Christianity. The many difficulties and vexations involved in establishing an appropriate chronology and context for Nynia/Ninian are deftly avoided.⁹

The communities established through and by ecumenical ventures have been an important catalyst not only in the 'anglicising' but also in the 'easternising' of the new Celtic movement. Their frequent emphasis on contemplation and meditation provides a link with non-Christian faiths which have a strong contemplative element. For such, the lure of the 'remote Celtic island' is very attractive. Thus, in making a case for buying Holy

at least one of these is pre-Viking. There is an extensive Anglo-Saxon literature of spiritual experience, ranging from homilies (by Aelfric, Wulfstan *etc.*) to poetry, some of it carved occasionally on magnificent Anglo-Saxon crosses (*e.g.* the famous excerpt from 'The Dream of the Rood' on the Ruthwell Cross). An awareness of the Anglo-Saxon heritage is certainly evident in the work of David Adam, who includes prayers by Anglo-Saxon saints in his *Edge of Glory*. However, the Anglo-Saxons play second fiddle to the Celts, and some writers confuse the cultural identities of the saints. This is to some extent understandable because of the interaction of Celtic and Anglo-Saxon missionary endeavour in such areas as Northumbria. However, it looks as if cultural assimilation has gone further in the minds of some writers than the evidence warrants. David Adam seems to regard Guthlac as a Celtic saint, when he was in reality an Anglo-Saxon one (*The Eye of the Eagle*, p.35). The apparent displacement of the Anglo-Saxon heritage is hard to explain. Perhaps Canterbury and its Rome-ward drift is both the problem and the inspiration to look elsewhere! Is it possible that, as ecumenism moves ahead within Anglicanism and as distinctive features are increasingly at risk, the Celts are brought on stage as a kind of cultural and emotional counter-balance? If only the Celts had won the day at the Synod of Whitby.... But they are winning now!

⁹ For an excellent academic treatment of Nynia, see John MacQueen, *St Nynia* (2nd edition, Edinburgh, 1990).

Isle off Arran, Buddhists stated that 'the island would make a perfect retreat island – open to all faiths – because it offers an atmosphere of sacred calm, unspoilt beauty and peaceful isolation'. Here, surely, is an extension of the 'Iona model'. Its potential has been welcomed by one Scottish churchman, Bishop Michael Hare Duke, who claims that it offers 'tremendous attractions' (*Scotsman*, 23 November 1991).

Celts, Cults and Ecology

With the wider religious world in mind, we must return from Iona and Lindisfarne to Little Gidding, and consider a final, broader perspective on the matter. Over the last twenty or twenty-five years there has been a massive change in the religious complexion of Britain.

I became aware of it in 1972, when my good friend, Hamish Robertson, left his research on Carmichael's *Carmina* and joined the World Unification Church of the Korean leader, Sun Myung Moon. From those early days of the '70s, the number of cults and sects and 'alternative religions' has mushroomed in Britain, to the extent that even HMSO has published (1989) a superb book by Dr Eileen Barker entitled *New Religious Movements: A Practical Introduction*. Dr Barker reckons that there are about 500 such groups in Britain, and had to be selective in including 100 in the immensely useful appendix at the back of her book.¹⁰

It seems to me – and I make this claim rather hesitantly, pending further research – that there is a relationship between our neo-Celticism, as it has developed, and the concerns of some of these groups. I find the most interesting parallels between the Celtic evidence and what is collectively termed the 'New Age Movement', a conglomeration of old ideas and new, in effect the ecumenical movement of the cults. Dr Barker shows how it links with various -isms of the present day, and

¹⁰ *New Religious Movements*, p.148.

summarises its main concerns: ‘Ecological issues take a high priority; one finds vegetarianism, “back-to-earth” communes, organic farming, home-spun textiles, cottage industries, alternative technology – usually with the conviction that “small-is-beautiful”. The feminine is stressed; politics are decidedly Green.... Self-expression through dance, drama, pottery, or poetry is believed to promote creative energy – or enable the individual to tap into cosmic energy.’¹¹

Now, it would be very wrong of me or Dr Barker to suggest that anyone who supports the Green Party or who enjoys making pottery is participating in the New Age.¹² There are many people who are properly concerned about the misuse of our environment and who have nothing to do with the New Age or indeed the Green Party; even Mrs Thatcher ‘went green’ in the midst of what I would call the ‘Ecological Eighties’. It would be equally unwarranted to assume that our neo-Celticism is a branch of New Age thinking just because it shows characteristics of this astonishing medley of ideas and ideologies. It would, however, certainly be fair to say that, at the very least, both are reflecting contemporary concerns.

The view from Little Gidding, represented in Van de Weyer’s introduction to his book, seems to me to read many of the burning issues of the present day into the Celtic literature that has been discovered. These concerns also surface in works by David Adam and Esther de Waal, but they are particularly prominent in Van de Weyer’s

¹¹ See *ibid.*, pp.188-92, for a very useful summary account of New Age concerns, including links with Zen Buddhism. There is, in fact, remarkably little in New Age thought that is truly new: it accommodates old heresies (Gnosticism) and the basic ideas of many ancient non-Christian world religions. It assimilates itself to Christianity too. The term ‘New Age’ refers to the Age of Aquarius, which has succeeded that of Pisces. No prizes for guessing that there is some astrological significance there!

¹² In fact, Dr Barker gives strong warnings about the dangers of generalisation when handling this sensitive subject.

introduction. Indeed, perhaps the main aim of introductions of this kind is to programme the mind so that the accompanying texts will be seen to be 'in tune' with modern concerns, whether or not these are integral to the texts. The environmental question comes first: 'As the scale of our ecological crisis becomes apparent, men and women are seeking a spirituality which embraces the natural order, kindling our love for the animals and birds, trees and insects with whom we share this fragile planet.... The Celtic fire had three main sources. The first was the ancient Druid religion....'

Enter Druids

Druids are the darlings of several writers of the neo-Celtic literature, but they are portrayed in a very different light from the rather lurid hue which characterises the 'real' Druids observed in their proper Celtic context by the classical writers (Strabo, Caesar, Pliny, Tacitus, *etc.*). According to Van de Weyer, 'Druidic philosophy placed great emphasis on love and on forgiving the wrongs of others, and taught that those who were loving and merciful on this earth would receive eternal bliss. So conversion to Christianity involved no change in moral belief.... The Druid priesthood included both men and women, enjoying equal status; and this was maintained in the Celtic church....' This caricature of the Druids and their philosophy, which resembles the depiction of Getafix and Valuaddetax in *Asterix the Gaul*, curiously overlooks the evidence of the classical sources for the Druids' involvement in human sacrifice and divination based on the observation of human entrails. Are we to suppose that Celtic clerics continued these practices? The view that Celtic Christianity was another version of a happy, jolly-oak-groves sort of Druidism is simply not tenable. Although it is true that Christian clerics appear to have taken over some of the offices previously held by Druids, that is a far cry from the type of wholesale continuity envisaged by such writers as Van de Weyer. Such

speculation is to be taken with a pound of acorns. It shares its presuppositions with the fictitious neo-Druidism which emerged in the eighteenth century, particularly through the labours of the Welsh forger, Iolo Morgannwg. In reality, we know next to nothing about the existence of female Druids and comparatively little about any systematic Druidic philosophy within the ranks of the proper 'classical' variety of Druids.

Druids have, of course, a much more sinister alignment in the contemporary cults, where they are hardly the friends of the Christian faith. Dr Barker notes their connection with occultism and neo-paganism, the latter locating its power-points at Glastonbury and Stonehenge – names which must surely reverberate in the Celtic consciousness.¹³

The contemporary debates of Anglicanism may well colour Van de Weyer's interpretation of the Druids and of much else that is allegedly Celtic. Concerns about the role of women in the church, the need for simpler structures, the question of authority – all of these peep out from the burning embers of the Celtic fire.

...Exit Celts – Towards the New Age?

Modern problems afflicting Western humanity have undoubtedly boosted the revival of Celtic Christianity. Nevertheless, it would be unwise to claim dogmatically that modern Celtic Christianity is little more than New Ageism in disguise, any more than we can say that early Celtic Christianity was merely a variant of Druidism. Perhaps those who promote the neo-Celtic movement do so, not because they are New Agers or crypto-Druids, but because they see the Celtic path that they have discovered as a healthier, more 'holistic' way to travel, avoiding the dangers of neo-paganism, occultism and the New Age itself. They may also believe very sincerely that there is such a thing as a 'native spirituality' (native to

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 195-200.

the British Isles, that is), and that it can be reconstructed. It may be the merest coincidence that the concerns of certain writers reflect those of the New Age – a coincidence that can happen all too easily because of the pervasiveness of such ideas within modern society.

Even so, I have the feeling – just occasionally – that, however unwittingly, the Celtic movement, in some of its manifestations, is travelling towards the New Age. New Age buzz-words like ‘consciousness’ have come into discussion of Celtic matters, even at the scholarly level, and, like Shirley MacLaine,¹⁴ Celts and neo-Celts can listen to their own ‘reverberations’ or (according to Esther de Waal) ‘fraternize with obscure parts of oneself, with one’s own depths’.¹⁵

If this is the case, one wonders where some of our neo-Celtic adventurers are going on their pilgrimage. Who is leading whom? And to what destination? When will Celtic prayers eventually be superseded by their New Age successors? I ask this question in all seriousness, because of a poem published in the *Scotsman* (8 September, 1990), by Bishop Michael Hare Duke of the Episcopal Diocese of St Andrews, Dunblane and Dunkeld. Note the question-mark in the title. The composer is asking the Iona community if it is going to accept the ‘New Age’ as a welcome visitor, if not a resident, within its walls.

Iona: Womb for a New Age?

Abbey or fortress?

Garrisoned by the encircling sheep

are your cloisters fenced

to shelter a fragile faithful?

Or is your table set

¹⁴ For a succinct introduction to Shirley MacLaine’s ‘spiritual adventures’ (*ipsa dixit*), see her *Going Within* (London, 1989). It is central to her thinking that she seeks the Higher Self within herself, and therein lies her concept of ‘God’.

¹⁵ *A World Made Whole*, p.88.

with banqueting rites for all
who stir at the quest
of being?

When gnostic intellect,
born again to a New Age, knocks
should outraged divinity bar the door?
Beyond the wall
will demons snare
the incautiously inquisitive?
Or has faith designed an open house
to fold the thoughtfully deviant
and the unbridled pilgrim?

There is a confidence in questions.
Ancient wisdom lights torches
to probe the shadows of hidden places
not mark salvation's flare path.

Fear cries 'crusade!'
and under the banner of assurance
rallies the anxious to the ramparts
against the insurgent Spirit.

Heritors of the open sky,
the fellowship of the Dove,
lift, wheel and play,
wings spread to catch the wind
that blows
over the risky deeps of liberty.

Conclusion

The 'movement' surveyed in this article is seen to be such only when its various parts are brought together. These parts are certainly different in style and content, from the penetrating reflections of David Adam and the quiet explanatory expositions and anthologies of Esther de Waal, to the rather less cautious statements of Robert

Van de Weyer. In between these markers, we find collections of reprinted prayers, volumes of special pleading on behalf of sacred sites, 'historical' narratives *etc.* It is perhaps too much to say that we have everything from the sublime to the ridiculous, but the spectrum of writing is certainly broad. In fairness, each item needs to be assessed in its own right. Some might argue that there is no 'movement' of any kind, but a series of personal, individualised expressions of wonder at the beauty of the Celtic treasure-house, and an attempt to attract the attention of our godless world by displaying the glory of that house. Others might say that there is no revival either: just a few isolated outbreaks of spiritual Celtomania.

Nevertheless, in several writers there is a general consistency of approach, both in what is contained in their work and in what is omitted. Evangelical scholars will notice that there is much in the latter category: a theology of redemption through the atonement is not prominent; Pelagius is preferred to Augustine; and Celtic understanding and expression appear to have higher authority than the Scriptures. Again, generalisation of this nature has its dangers. David Adam, for example, frequently relates his Celtic explorations to the Scriptures, and, for this reason, his writings will be very meaningful to evangelical readers, who will surely appreciate much of his godly concern to find a way through the wall of modern unbelief.

In the lack of a scriptural foundation, so evident in several writers, lies a challenge to evangelical scholars and to evangelical churches. The balance needs to be redressed on the basis of Scripture. We must find ways of addressing the angsts of our age, using arguments that are both Bible-based and relevant. It is to the credit of the proponents of our neo-Celtic movement that they have tried to find a theology which accommodates and addresses the thorny issues of our time. It is a measure of our failure that they have found it necessary to build neo-

Celtic constructs of the kind that we have considered in this article. The challenge to Celtic scholars is no less. If we remain in the top storey of our round towers obliviously copying our parchments, who is to blame if we ignore the treasure buried beneath our foundations, and suddenly find that somebody with a metal-detector has discovered it and presented it for exhibition in a sparkling display-centre? Can we complain if that centre is equipped with a range of modern mirrors which enlarge – and distort – the artefacts?¹⁶

¹⁶ This article was first presented as a talk to the Church of Scotland Society at the University of Edinburgh in October 1991.

JAMES DENNEY'S DOCTRINE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN RELATION TO THE INSPIRATION OF SCRIPTURE

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James Denney was born on the 5th February, 1856, at Paisley, near Glasgow, and grew up in the seaport of Greenock, on the Firth of Clyde, where, at the Highlanders Academy, he received his early education. This large school provided a thoroughly sound but plain education at low cost, and he later became a pupil teacher there.¹ He matriculated as an Arts student at Glasgow University in November 1874, took an eminent position from the beginning, studied there for five years, and had the rare distinction of gaining a 'double first' honours degree in Classics and Philosophy. This was followed by four years' theological training at the Free Church College, later Trinity College, Glasgow, where he acquitted himself well in his studies. His teachers, under whose stimulating instruction he came, included Professors A. B. Bruce, J. S. Candlish and T. M. Lindsay, though it was perhaps Bruce who most influenced Denney.²

During an eleven-year ministry at Broughty Ferry, Dundee, he wrote his commentaries on *The Epistles to the Thessalonians* (1892) and *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (1894) and gave his theological lectures in Chicago, which were later published in 1895 under the title *Studies in Theology*. He was then elected to the chair of Systematic and Pastoral Theology in the Free (later United Free) Church College, Glasgow in 1897, and two years later transferred to the New Testament chair, which was his field of specialism. Then followed his commentary

¹ An appreciation of Denney by W. Robertson Nicoll, *The Letters of Principal James Denney to W. Robertson Nicoll, 1893-1917* (London, 1920), p.xiii.

² *Ibid.*, p.xv.

on the Greek text of *St Paul's Epistle to the Romans* (1900), *The Death of Christ* (1902), *Jesus and the Gospel* (1909), and many other books, plus articles and reviews in numerous magazines. He occupied his chair until his death in 1917, and was also Principal of the College for his last two years.

James Denney has had much influence for good in his capacity as a writer, and is widely quoted in numerous scholarly books and journals. Yet whilst his works have provided intellectual stimulation for many theologians and preachers down the years, his doctrine of Scripture is somewhat unorthodox. He tried to hold to a middle way between an orthodox understanding on the one hand and the findings of nineteenth-century higher criticism on the other.

I wish in this article to set out Denney's doctrine of the Holy Spirit, and in so doing to demonstrate the inter-relatedness between this and his doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture. Denney's doctrine of Scripture seems to be that it is 'inspiring' rather than 'inspired' in the sense of having been 'breathed out by God'.³ He defines inspiration as 'the power Scripture has to lodge in our minds Christianity and its doctrines as being not only generally but divinely true'.⁴ Inspiration is thereby defined in terms of the function of Scripture. It is only as we *use* Scripture that its inspiration becomes clear. For him, it is our experience of the power of Scripture that gives words like 'inspiration' any meaning. But this is something that could equally well be said of the 'scriptures' of any of the world's great religions. If, as we read them, our minds and hearts are gripped by their power, then we may conclude that they, too, are inspired. But by whom? Denney's theology at this point robs Christianity of its distinctiveness, uniqueness and exclusiveness.

³ *Theopneustos*, 2 Tim 3:16.

⁴ *Studies in Theology* (London, 1895), p.204.

J. I. Packer and C. H. Pinnock hold the view that contemporary conservative evangelical scholars need to give much more place to the work of the Holy Spirit in their formulation of the doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture than has normally been done. The tendency has been, and to some extent still is, to deal with this crucial subject in such a way as virtually to eliminate the Spirit's work altogether. This omission is not a new one, however, for in his understanding of the inspiration of Scripture, Denney also sought to exclude the ministry of the Holy Spirit from his doctrine of Scripture. Now the problem is compounded when we study Denney's doctrine of the Holy Spirit, for he is somewhat unorthodox at this point in his theology as well. It is of note that theologians whose doctrine of the Holy Spirit is orthodox, and who have written on the inspiration of Scripture, have generally produced an orthodox understanding of Scripture at the end of their studies, without incorporating in their work any major treatment of the Holy Spirit. The reason seems to be that since their basic convictions were right, and in due biblical proportion, the end result was also right. Their understanding of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit evidently so permeated their entire theologizing of Scripture to make any explicit mention redundant. This observation also explains why the Westminster Divines did not include a section in their Confession and Catechisms on the person and work of the Holy Spirit; they knew that his presence suffused all their thinking and writing.

However, when Denney's understanding of the Holy Spirit is grasped, one is amazed that he remained as theologically conservative as he was. His doctrine of the Holy Spirit, then, must be examined as an integral part of his belief about the nature of Scripture.

Denney's Doctrine of the Holy Spirit

In order to grasp what is meant by the inspiration of Scripture, there is need for a clear understanding of the person and work of the Holy Spirit, who was instrumental

in the production of Scripture. These two doctrines cannot be separated without a resultant loss in our comprehension of the biblical doctrine and the biblical balance. To this particular matter we now turn in our investigation.

Denney surprisingly does not come to an orthodox doctrine of the Holy Spirit from his study of Scripture. At times he refers to him as 'it', and does not acknowledge his personal being; rather, he is viewed as being 'equivalent to divine'.⁵ The Spirit is an exhaustive description of God, who alone is holy. To Denney, the Spirit is merely divine activity, God at work, the Spirit of Jesus.⁶ He is prepared to assert that the New Testament is the work of the Spirit.⁷ He holds that the Spirit is a divine power or influence, but he stops short at this, and generally refuses to attribute to the Spirit the nature and characteristics of God himself. So, for Denney, it was this divine power that gave the Scriptures to us, but not God the Holy Spirit. This explains why Denney was unable and unwilling to embrace the orthodox doctrine of Scripture as held historically.

William Cunningham writes:

[there was a] constant maintenance, during the first three centuries, of the supremacy and sufficiency of the sacred Scriptures, and the right and duty of all men to read and study them. There is no trace of evidence in these first three centuries that these scriptural principles were denied or doubted, and there is satisfactory evidence that they were steadily and purely maintained.⁸

Cunningham also states that the same could be said, without exception, of the writings of many succeeding

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.159.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.186.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.159.

⁸ *Historical Theology* (Edinburgh, 1862), Vol. 1, p.185.

centuries.⁹ In those days, he says, it was the heretics who were accustomed to decline or evade an appeal to Scripture, by denying their genuineness or authenticity; or by alleging that they were corrupted or interpolated. The fathers of that period, in other words, all referred to Scripture as the only real standard of faith and practice, and asserted, both directly and by implication, their exclusive authority, and their perfect sufficiency to guide men to the knowledge of God's will; 'the exclusive supremacy and perfect sufficiency of Scripture' is a commonly expressed sentiment among the biblical theologians at that time. This was so because of the biblically-balanced and proportioned theology held by these divines. Those who held a deficient view of the Holy Spirit correspondingly held a deficient view of Scripture, and *vice versa*. At least in Denney's theology he was consistently in error with regard to these two cardinal and necessarily related doctrines.

Denney draws attention to the fact that in the historical Christian confessions, the Holy Spirit has been merely mentioned. He contends that the only basis of union broad enough and solid enough for all Christians to meet upon is the confession: 'I believe in God through Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord and Saviour.'¹⁰ It will be noticed that in this minimal confession of faith, no mention is made of the Holy Spirit. However, Denney formulates his position in this manner because he believes, correctly, that 'the ultimate object of faith is always God'; but what he refuses to acknowledge is that the Holy Spirit is truly and fully divine, and is one of the three persons in the Godhead. Scripture presents the Holy Spirit as a real and divine person who speaks (Heb. 3:7), with whom believers can have intimate fellowship (2 Cor. 13:14), who can be grieved by disobedient Christians (Eph. 4:30), lied to as to God (Acts 5:3,4), who leads God's people (Rom.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.185, 186.

¹⁰ *Jesus and the Gospel* (London, 1909), p.398.

8:14), searches human hearts (1 Cor. 2:10), prays for the saints (Rom. 8:27), gives testimony to the truth (Rom. 8:16), is to be pleased by God's people (Gal. 6:8), teaches them (1 Cor. 2:13), has desires (Rom. 8:5), and so on. All this accumulated scriptural evidence proves the personality of God's Holy Spirit. But furthermore, God's Word also states in Hebrews 3:7 that the Spirit is truly and fully God, where the words of Psalm 95 are equated with the speech of the Spirit; and also in this verse, the words of the Spirit are regarded as the very words of God himself. When one considers the solemnizing teaching of Jesus on the awful possibility of sinning against the Holy Spirit and thus committing the unpardonable sin, the eternal consequences of such persistent resistance of the Spirit places him in exactly the same category as God himself (Mk. 3:29). Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, which is an expression of defiant hostility toward God, removes one forever beyond the sphere where forgiveness is possible.¹¹

Since the Spirit is God, he then belongs to the same essence as the Father and the Son, and is to be worshipped and honoured together and equally with them. Denney refuses to go this far in his understanding of the biblical teaching on the Holy Spirit. Therefore he fails to attribute to him the same characteristics as he attributes to the other two persons of the Trinity. This also explains why he does not see that since God has revealed himself mysteriously as a Trinity of persons, the Holy Spirit is also, in a certain economic sense, the object of the believer's faith. He chooses to hold that 'Christian faith in God is faith which is determined by Christ, and which would not in any respect be what it is but for him'. Denney is correct in this assertion. His justification for adopting this position is that 'faith in God must be so described as to bring out this specific character. It must be defined as

¹¹ W.L.Lane, *Commentary on the Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids, 1974), p.145.

faith in God through Christ.' This Christ so described 'is to God what no other can be; ...He is also what no other can be to man.' God was to him Father, and he was to God Son.¹² The relationship was and is truly filial.

But no place is given to the Holy Spirit in these statements. Denney foresaw that certain objections would arise in many minds at this point, but these would be 'mainly due to prepossessions or assumptions which reflection will lead us to discount.'¹³ Denney was obviously unaware of the depth of opposition that this position would provoke, and was somewhat naive to dismiss it with such brevity.

The matter needs further investigation. Denney concedes that believers from the earliest days of the church have been baptized in (or, into) the triune Name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, whereby they are united in the one family of God. This unity is dependent upon the one Spirit, because there is but one Body. Denney points out that it is the unity of the Spirit that the New Testament exhorts us to maintain. He does not wish to minimize the importance of this truth, and explains his approach not so much as one of antagonism, but of order. He points out that 'the New Testament nowhere speaks of faith in the Holy Spirit'.¹⁴ It is to faith in God through Christ that sinners are called in the proclamation of the gospel, not to faith in the Holy Spirit. The expression 'I believe in the Holy Spirit' is never found in the Bible. He takes the statement in Acts 19:2 as a further justification for his position, and makes the point that the apostles never asked, 'Do you believe in the Holy Spirit?', but 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?' – believed, that is, in Jesus. Denney rests his case on the biblical evidence here, saying, somewhat disarmingly, that

¹² *Jesus and the Gospel*, p.398.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p.399.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.400.

'it is better, in thinking of what is essential to a Christian confession, to keep to New Testament lines'.¹⁵

What do the Ancient Creeds Teach?

Denney proceeds to call in other witnesses allegedly to strengthen his argument, and enlists the help of the Apostles' and the Nicene creeds, which, says he, 'all betray a certain degree of embarrassment in their treatment of the article on the Spirit which they nevertheless agree to introduce.'¹⁶ But what Denney evidently forgot was that these creeds, together with the other catechisms and confessions, were utterly bound up with their scriptural foundations, making the authority of the Bible, if not a soteriologically indispensable belief, then certainly an epistemologically crucial belief.¹⁷ Without belief in the authority of the Bible, there would not have been any credal backbone to the Christian movement. The measure of the seriousness of the debate with Denney, and with later theologians, may be gauged by the fact that belief in the atonement and resurrection of Christ unquestionably stands or falls with belief in the reality of the Bible's authority. Denney's grasp of the doctrine of the atonement is masterful, generally speaking, yet his grasp of Scripture's own nature has been missed amid all his undoubted excellence. Let us examine briefly these historical creeds and confessions in turn.

The Apostles' Creed, the most ancient of the extant creeds, has definite affirmations and expansions to make about the Father and the Son, but, argues Denney, when it comes to the Spirit, it has not a word to add, simply the bare statement, 'I believe in the Holy Ghost.' John Burr, in his book, *Studies on the Apostles' Creed*, says that in dealing with the Holy Spirit, the compilers of this ancient

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.401.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ See C.H.Pinnock, *The Scripture Principle* (London, 1985), p.x.

credal formulation, after affirming their faith in the Holy Spirit, go on to spell out the administration of the Spirit in terms of his being

sent to build up and sanctify human character, to bind men together in the fellowship of the Catholic Church and the Communion of Saints – the Church visible and invisible, Militant and Triumphant, and so bring home forgiveness to the hearts and consciences of men, that they may have peace with God here, and may in their flesh see God hereafter, and be prepared for fellowship with Him eternally.¹⁸

This sets out the position of the Apostles' Creed on the Holy Spirit in a clear manner, and enables what follows the simple statement 'I believe in the Holy Ghost' to be related to the soteriological work of the Spirit. So the Apostles' Creed says more about the Holy Spirit than Denney is prepared to admit, despite his concession that what Burr has written, he also holds.¹⁹

A similar position was originally taken in the Creed of the Council of Nicaea (A.D. 325) at this point, which simply ended with the words, 'and in the Holy Ghost'. A decisive expansion of this statement was advanced by the Constantinople text (A.D. 381), '(I believe) in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and the Giver of Life; who proceeds from the Father [and the Son]; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spoke by the Prophets.' Denney describes these additions to the creed (our Nicene Creed) as 'haphazard and incongruous' and needing no comment.²⁰

But the matter just cannot be dismissed in such a cavalier manner. Denney descends to the very thing that he abominates in others – an arbitrary selectivity in dealing with historical documents. His preference for the earlier version of this creed was evidently a deliberate

18 London, 1931, p.173.

19 *Jesus and the Gospel*, p.402.

20 *Ibid.*, pp.401, 402.

decision to back up his own opinions and to enable him to give a semblance of historical substantiation to his own views.

The Nicene Creed cannot be employed to teach that the Holy Spirit is not co-equal or co-eternal with the Father and the Son, for this clearly is the case. His person and position are set out in terms that are reminiscent of those used in dealing with the Father and Son. In fact, this creed follows the Apostles' Creed, where in each case, the verb 'believe' is followed by the object of faith – the Father and the Holy Ghost. Faith in the Son is associated with faith in the Father. If any of the three persons were to have their deity questioned on the basis of statements in these two ancient credal documents, that of the Son could well be. But Denney accepts the full divinity and humanity of Christ as taught in the Bible and in these historical documents. Therefore, he is logically if not morally bound to accept the equal status of the Spirit on the same grounds.

It is one thing for Denney to marshal arguments from those ancient documents that suit his purpose; but it is quite another to neglect the rest which do not. An examination of the third of the classical and ecumenical creeds of Christianity, the Athanasian Creed, which may be dated about the late fifth or early sixth century AD,²¹ will reveal that great care is taken to state what its authors believed about the Holy Spirit. It is impossible to believe that Denney was unaware of this document, and therefore one must assume that his decision not to use it was deliberate. The precise formulation of the creed was designed on the one hand to exclude unorthodox viewpoints, and on the other to express the insights explicit in the church under Augustine's influence.²²

21 J.N.D.Kelly, *The Athanasian Creed* (London, 1964). Denney accepted an earlier date, *Jesus and the Gospel*, p.401.

22 J.F.Johnston in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. W.A.Elwell (Basingstoke, 1985), pp.94, 95.

What do the Reformation Documents Teach?

The Belgic Confession (1561, but revised at Dort) is not called by Denney as a witness, yet it is to be observed that it has a brief article on the Holy Spirit,²³ where the teaching is in complete harmony with other Reformation documents. There are references to his person and work in the Confession (Art. IX), and his deity is affirmed. The Heidelberg Catechism (1563), also neglected by Denney, has no article on the Holy Spirit, though reference to him is scattered liberally throughout the document. He is viewed consistently as fully God,²⁴ is the author of prayer, of faith and of the new birth, is promised to adult and infant members of the covenant of grace,²⁵ assures the believer of eternal life, and enables him to live for Christ. So references to the Spirit are neither lacking nor embarrassed.

The Canons of Dort (1618-19) had their origin during a period of controversy in the seventeenth century, when a section of the church drew up a set of propositions which were then rejected by the divines who met in this Dutch village. Their purpose was two-fold: to present the clear teaching of Scripture in answer to the propositions set forth by the Arminian party, and in so doing, to refute their errors of understanding and interpretation of Scripture. Consequently, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit was not at issue, though the work that he was sent to do was. Hence, no separate section on the Holy Spirit was deemed necessary. That is not to say, of course, that he is not mentioned in the course of the document. Like its other Reformed companions, it, too, breathes the Spirit of God continually. His work of regeneration is emphasized, as is his operation in the sinner's heart through the word or ministry of reconciliation. It is he who illuminates the

²³ Questions 24, 25, 53.

²⁴ Question 74.

²⁵ Art. XI.

minds of the elect that they might rightly discern the mind of the Spirit of God.

When the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms (1643-7) are examined, the same absence of a formal treatment of the Holy Spirit is to be observed. But like the other confessions referred to, there are numerous references to him in the queen of confessions. For example, the opening chapter describes the Holy Spirit as the one who speaks 'in the Scripture'. His personality and divinity are clearly affirmed, and he stands in juxtaposition with the Word, effectually calls and sanctifies the elect, and so forth. These documents experience no embarrassment whatever in dealing with the Spirit, but rather confidently affirm who he is and what he came to do.

Denney's Explanation of the Apparent Absence of the Holy Spirit from these Documents

What Denney is arguing is that the lack of specific treatment of the Holy Spirit in these great creeds and confessions implies that the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is not to be made an article of faith for the church. He claims to be following the New Testament in this, and therefore declines to set the Spirit apart for special discussion. It is true that the ministry of the Holy Spirit is self-effacing, his role being to glorify Christ, and not to draw attention to himself.²⁶ So successful has he been that in the church he has virtually been forgotten altogether.

While there is certain credibility in Denney's viewpoint, it leaves the church in the potentially dangerous position of having no doctrine of the Holy Spirit at all. This comes out clearly in Denney's doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture. Because the person and work of the Holy Spirit do not have much place in Denney's thought, his thinking on Scripture is to that extent defective. Yet, the

²⁶ Jn. 15:26; 16:13, 14.

interesting thing is that Denney's practice, or use, of Scripture is superior to his theory.

For Denney to have excluded any treatment of the Holy Spirit in his understanding of the inspiration of Scripture was, therefore, not to have adopted an unusual practice at that time or since, yet such a discussion would have thrown much light on his somewhat unorthodox views on God's Word. In fact, in his *Studies in Theology*, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is not dealt with at all, and anything he has to say about this subject has to be gleaned from his writing on various subjects in this and his other books.²⁷ Since he views the Holy Spirit in such an inadequate manner, it is to be expected that his resultant understanding of the Scriptures as a theological doctrine is similarly deficient. How Scripture can demonstrate the authority of Christ to the believer's consciousness, when no room can be found for the personal and necessary activity of Christ's Spirit in the production of those Scriptures, is difficult to see. Yet this is the unhappy position in which Denney leaves us.

Also, the fact that he did not separate these two notions in his own thinking bears eloquent testimony to the truth that the one is indispensable to the understanding of the other. Had Denney held to a true position on the nature of Scripture, he would have espoused an equally true position on the author of Scripture and *vice versa*.

²⁷ For example, see *The Epistles to the Thessalonians* (London, 1892), pp.233-247.

'INTO ALL THE WORLD' – IN A SCOTTISH HOUSING SCHEME

GORDON R. PALMER, RUCHAZIE CHURCH, GLASGOW

When I was first becoming interested in the mission of the church to the poorer urban parts of our cities, I found it difficult to find others I knew who shared an interest in the church's apparent lack of impact in inner-city areas. I also found it difficult to discover much in the way of constructive debate and helpful literature on the subject. It was not that the subject matter was entirely new (Thomas Chalmers and Patrick Brewster, for two, were important earlier figures), but it certainly was not in fashion. However, since then greater attention has been given to the church and its mission in the sprawling cities.

We have seen the emergence of journals such as *Third Way* and *City Cries* and groups such as the Evangelical Urban Training Project, Careforce, Oasis, the impact of the Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission Report *Faith In The City*, a number of important books (e.g. *The Urban Christian* by Ray Bakke, *Into the City*, by John Vincent), the influence of social issues on the evangelical agenda that was substantially highlighted at and following the Lausanne Congress in 1974, and the involvement of relief agencies such as TEAR Fund, which is now recognizing that the poor are not all overseas. In a number of ways, then, there has been an increasing interest in and attention to the church in the poor urban areas of the world as a whole, and in our own land too.

Since such material is now more readily available, this article is not offering an analysis of the city, nor a theology of urban mission, nor a discussion on 'who are the poor?' Nor is it a story of hope and revival amid the slums, but simply a reflection upon a few years of engagement in urban mission through the life and witness of a small parish church in the east end of Glasgow. The main contention is that although a better selection of literature is now available, more aid and help is being offered, and

more groups and organisations are involving themselves in poor city areas, we are still only scratching the surface. There are many issues and questions that we are only learning to ask, far less answer; there are still too few resources at the disposal of those working in urban priority areas; there is still enormous indifference and misunderstanding in the church at large. Most of all, while we hear a lot of sympathy and sometimes admiration expressed, the majority of the church still wishes to keep its distance.

Our community, Ruchazie, is a small part of Greater Easterhouse. It was built in the 1950s, is entirely local authority housing (at the moment), has poor facilities, high unemployment, crime, truancy, one-parent families, incidence of illness, housing turnover, *etc.* There are a large number of empty houses, some of which the council find impossible to let, and a large number of local people have their name on a list to be re-housed elsewhere. It is a fragmented community, with no focal point, no local industry, no great sense of belonging. In this context we seek to serve God and further the mission of the church. As we do so, we find a number of difficult questions coming back at us, and challenging us to relearn, to rethink our position and approach.

What is the Gospel?

One of the important changes that has affected Evangelicalism in recent times is the recognition that the gospel is understood and presented with a good deal of cultural baggage. 'The writing and reading of the Bible, the presentation of the gospel, conversion, church and conduct – all these are influenced by culture. It is essential therefore, that all churches contextualise the gospel in order to share it effectively in their own culture' (*Willowbank Report*, Lausanne Occasional Paper No.2, p.33). This raises a challenge to those working in poor urban areas, as we quickly find that our background is so different that there are a lot of cross-cultural steps to

take. Furthermore, the church culture in Scotland as a whole is alien to the urban poor and so it is not appropriate simply to transplant models and practices that have worked elsewhere and expect them to take proper root in parishes such as Ruchazie. But in addition to the cross-cultural challenge there is a more fundamental question: what is 'good news to the poor' (Luke 4:18)?

As well as having many cultural aspects that we have mistakenly confused with what is vital to the being of the church, we have explored the question 'what is the gospel?' from the vantage point of those who have, rather than the have-nots. We have not sought to see the other perspective, to listen to the issues and questions of the poor, despite the fact that the vantage point of Christianity is the stable at Bethlehem and the cross at Golgotha. How many evangelistic events have well-known, prominent persons on the platform and testimonies from the famous? In doing so we play the worldly status game.

Many are poor because of the disadvantages that have surrounded them from birth. In order to be good news for them, the gospel must address their being sinned against as well as their being sinners; it must say something to them as victims. While my middle-class training often addressed questions about *e.g.* whether or not God existed, it never asked 'Whose side is he on?' There was more in my background about how we can maintain belief in a world that has come of age, than how we maintain belief in a world that is inhumane. Some of what we have sought to do in Ruchazie could, I suppose, be seen as reflecting a social emphasis and give rise to the question of the relationship between evangelism and social action. What we have sought to do with things such as the Credit Union (a financial co-operative, owned and run by local people) which tries to help people have greater control of their finances and reduce the temptation to go to money-lenders or the finance companies (who are just as oppressive in their own way), is not a service additional to our preaching – social action on top of evangelism – but a

direct attempt to speak to people in their 'sinned-againstness'. It is more integral to the gospel than an added social element, or a bridge between church and community, because the gospel says something to us as people who have been sinned against and not just as sinners.

While the usual gospel presentation that I had heard was about law (our being sinners) and grace, in a community where guilt and despair were already so powerfully present as to have squashed any notion of self-worth out of people, perhaps themes like breakdown and reconciliation, or despair and purpose would be more like good news.

What about Worship?

It is certainly clear that preaching was an integral part of worship in the New Testament period, and in the early church, and it is something which I am still keen to maintain and devote time and energy to. Nevertheless, the style and form of preaching to which I was accustomed were cerebral, and also left a lot of responsibility to the congregation to make their own application of the principles being expounded. For those who have no background of thinking in a conceptual manner this will not do. People in our parish think more in concrete, specific terms, more in pictures than in principles. To expect them to take and apply general principles from a sermon when in no other situation in their lives do they ever think in such a pattern, is not good preaching. Preaching must be more visual, pictorial, concrete. It was our recognition of this and of the different ways in which people learn that led to our starting a 'worship workshop' midweek. At this we outline the theme of the coming Sunday's service and its Bible base, and in different groups follow this theme by writing prayers, doing a sketch, a discussion, finding appropriate songs, building some illustration, drawings, *etc.* In one group, of children, we did a sketch of the woman caught in adultery and in the following week when

a school teacher was mentioning the story in class, those who had been in our group were able to correct her and in fact acted it out again for the whole class! But not just children, adults too remember more when it is something they have been involved in, and been given help to make the connections between the passage and their own life and context.

More fundamentally, the whole format of worship as it is widely practised within the Church of Scotland is very different to anything and everything else that people in urban priority areas experience in their lives. There is no other time or occasion when they go into a room that is anything like our churches in size and shape (when I made the point once to another minister he said to me 'what about the library?'!), and since the local houses are small and families big, people are used to noise, movement and bustle. Due to constraints of finance we have not been able significantly to adjust the building. (Once it is built you are stuck with it – unless you are as privileged as our neighbouring church across the M8: their sanctuary became unfit for use and grants became available to augment local effort and a far better sanctuary was made from an upstairs hall.) Nevertheless, items like banners, visual displays and models can provide colour, images and illustrations as well as make the place less empty and cold. This is also a way of saying to people that their talents in making these things are valuable and can be offered to the congregation and to God as part of our celebration. And in a place like Ruchazie this is very important as people have been made to feel in a whole range of ways that they do not count, that they have nothing of substance to offer.

Music played before the service, and songs of worship sung during the distribution of the bread and wine are also ways in which the large emptiness of silent big buildings is made more accessible to people. Silence is something that we have regarded as integral to religious life: even the notion of a personal 'quiet time' emphasizes this. For

many of us silence is a welcome, profitable and sometimes all too rare feature of life. But in Ruchazie, for so many people there is constant noise and activity in the house, with people coming and going all the time, and to go to church and have a spirituality practised that starts with silence as a prerequisite is both forbidding and unrealistic.

Music is an important aspect of worship and we find ourselves more and more looking around for suitable items of praise. As time passes I am increasingly frustrated with the unsuitability of the *Church Hymnary*. Its vocabulary is archaic, often obscure, and esoteric. There remain within Scottish Evangelicalism many who are suspicious of choruses (the words are, I am told, flippant and shallow – even though so many of them are the words of Scripture put to music) and of the use of instruments other than an organ. Yet the organ is not the most suitable musical instrument for every musical style, and its predominance has wedded us to a style that satisfies the musically highbrow but does nothing (and rightly so!) for many in communities such as ours. The organ is also less effective than a piano in teaching a congregation new tunes. Furthermore, by concentrating on one instrument only to lead praise, we are departing from biblical example (e.g. Psalm 150) and ignoring those who have other musical gifts.

Far too often Christian praise has depended on rural images and if that is what predominates in our worship, it only serves to reinforce the notion that Christianity has little to do with everyday life, or is suited for those surrounded by beauty, peace and leisure. Modern hymns may be more suitable, but are still generally at a highbrow pitch in terms of style and vocabulary (good content and extensive vocabulary are not the same thing).

There is a lot to be said for people in a congregation writing their own. We now have a number of songs to well-known tunes, written locally, which use familiar words and images to express the gospel. When one sees this done it is surprising how many profound gospel truths

can be expressed in ordinary, everyday language. Our assumption that the big words – the good solid religious words – are necessary is not a sign of maturity, but of laziness, in not taking the trouble to express the meaning and significance of the gospel in a different style.

Questions of Lifestyle

The first challenge and problem for us here is to ask honestly if our ideas of right and wrong, acceptable and unacceptable behaviour are based on solid Christian ground or on middle-class norms. Now drunkenness is not something to be commended, but we readily express horror at what we consider bad drinking habits (especially among the poor, despite Proverbs 31:4-7) and yet say a lot less about, for example, over-eating, a subject on which the Bible is not silent. We are more shocked by a four-letter swear word than by hearing someone in polite tones run down someone else – yet there is more biblical teaching condemning the latter. Gambling on horse-racing, for instance, is deplorable, but stock-exchange speculation is not. For years we have complained about people who drop litter, but been unconcerned about the use of CFCs.

The image and impression that we have put across, albeit unconsciously at times, is that the kind of living required is one beyond the reach of many in poor urban areas. Some, for example, do not get married not because they are in favour of trial marriage or serial monogamy but because they have got the impression that to have a 'proper wedding' you need to be able to afford the white dress, hymn sheets, big cars *etc.* There is of course the registry office, but we have some people in the parish who, because they believed in God, wanted more than a quick office ceremony but, because they could not afford the full-blown circus that plagues the run up to every wedding, if not the wedding day itself, thought that they could not have a church wedding.

Patterns of dress are another way in which we have created a particular impression of who the church is and is

not for, not only in terms of how 'smartly' some dress (and moan at others not doing the same) but also how boring and grey is so much church dress. In a community where so much is so dull and weary and grey, there is a good opportunity for the church in a variety of ways, including decor and dress, to say that we are not going to give in, we are wishing to be bright, to celebrate, to counter dullness and depression.

It is not enough to deplore and condemn aspects of life in poor urban areas without trying to fight back at causes. For instance, noticing the loan sharks at work and being approached by people looking for money have brought home to us the problems that people have in managing their finance. One way we have sought to help is by establishing the Credit Union. Our nearest bank is miles away, and no one is going to go there to put in £1 or to empty the week's collection of small change: but some now do come along on Monday nights to the Credit Union to do just that. Low-cost loans are available, but perhaps more important is the opportunity to learn to save and budget, so that these loans are paid back at the agreed rate. Similarly, the problems of diet and poor shopping facilities caused one church member to get some people around him and work towards forming a food cooperative, which now provides fresh fruit and vegetables at lower prices than local shops.

Of course, there is much in the lifestyle of communities like ours that is at odds with all that Christianity stands for. It is chauvinistic, violent, unhygienic, lazy..., although it is a travesty to suggest that everybody is like that, or that these are the only features. I have witnessed incredible generosity and great determination against terrible odds: it is a wonder how so many survive so well. One of the reasons for the entrenched opposition to Christian values is the low number of Christians who stay in places like Ruchazie.

If society deteriorates and standards decline, till it becomes like a dark night or stinking fish, there is no

sense in blaming society, for that is what happens when fallen men and women are left to themselves, and human selfishness is left unchecked. The question to ask is 'Where is the church? Why are the salt and light of Jesus Christ not permeating and changing society?' (John Stott; *Issues Facing Christians Today*, Marshalls, Basingstoke, 1984, p.66).

Surely the lack of Christian presence has led to matters getting worse. It is dishonest of us to bemoan the lifestyle in areas like Ruchazie, to say it is too tough for us and merely to blame the residents or society or government. The salt goes elsewhere, the light moves on (and up in social terms!), and so it is to be expected that standards will collapse.

Where is the Church?

The question is not 'Will the church ever lose the poor urban areas?' but 'Will the church ever enter them?' Despite the rise in journals and para-church groups, despite the attention the large denominations have given recently, the church as a whole still keeps its distance. We have friends and relatives who have declined to come and visit in case their cars get damaged. This is very hurtful, especially when some add insult to injury by saying that they will pray for us. Many ask when we are leaving, because the implicit assumption is that this is not the sort of place you remain in for very long. Put simply, the church still wants to keep its distance. Of course reasons are given – 'I'm not the right kind of person' or 'There is the family to think of' – but these are often excuses.

Who is the 'right kind of person'? Each year for three years now we have had a youth volunteer worker with us, supplied through Careforce. Each has come from a very different background and straight out of university, is English and had no previous experience of areas like ours; yet each of them has been very well received and built good relationships with people here. One of them in fact is

still here, more than two years after his period as a voluntary worker is over! On the face of it, none of the three was 'the right kind of person', except that each of them was honest, listened, cared, tried to understand. That is the right kind of person.

It has generally puzzled me why the family issue is so quickly mentioned when it comes to inner-city mission, as compared to overseas mission. Overseas, education is often difficult or disrupted, there are dangers not usually encountered at home and violence is often commonplace. Why is it safe to take the kids there, but not to 'darkest Glasgow'? One of the great lacks in our parish is good examples of married life and parenthood. Generally, these are disaster areas and one of the key reasons for this is that there are no good role models. Young people have asked us 'Why should we get married when every marriage we know doesn't work?' – which is a very good question. What are we to say? 'There are plenty of good working examples in the west side of town'? How much better it would be to be able to name examples among those who are their neighbours. Good examples too of parenting is a desperate need. Much of the trouble with young people is due to the poor upbringing which is in part caused by lack of good examples of raising a family. Often parents do not interact with their children, do not play with them, do not ostensibly enjoy them, not because they have decided not to do any of that but because it has never occurred to them to do so, and this is partly because they have never seen anyone else do it! They are unaware of the value and benefits of doing so, and the children themselves will grow up, become parents and remain oblivious to all this. And no amount of work by social services, children's panels, schools and so on, will ever cover up for the lack of basic parental skills.

What about Leadership?

Leadership in the community is usually given by those who come in to work here from 9am till 5pm, Monday to

Friday, and who take their talents with them when they go home at night. This means that left behind are a number of 'helpers' but few who have had any experience of exercising power and control. A lack of expertise and confidence creates a paralysis of dependency. This affects all aspects of a community's life, the church included.

Those who are here all the time are, by and large, those who found school a bad experience and who did not really do well in terms of what is expected and demanded in traditional education. And yet it is traditional educational methods (lots of books, reading, conceptual thinking, *etc.*) that are used in church circles for teaching and training. We find it impossible to go to local bookshops and find suitable material for children's work, youth work, housegroups, *etc.* We have to work at producing our own nearly all the time which is very time-consuming. There is constant frustration at how hard people find it to grasp things and draw conclusions. So often we find ourselves going over the same ground again and again.

We might ask 'Where is the church?' in terms of how her abilities and talents are distributed. In areas like ours there are few with experience of chairing meetings, writing minutes (or having to write anything that someone else will look at!), working out plans, assessing priorities. In fact in communities like Ruchazie power and decision-making have been so systematically removed or undermined that in places where their re-introduction is attempted (such as the church), while it excites some, as often as not it threatens and scares others. This leaves us with difficulty in getting some jobs done, and with the particular tragedy that the only people able for things like looking after the buildings or minute-taking or whatever are the very ones that we need to see released from those jobs in order to be good elders, good visitors, good group leaders – which they would be were they allowed to get on with these things without having to do all the other jobs as well. Elsewhere in the city there are congregations with a number of people who can do the jobs required to

make things run smoothly and who are not needed to do so where they are, while we and others run at below the minimum.

Of course we do seek to work at building up people's confidence and gifts, and do make progress. However, often that progress comes to an end if the person or family moves out of Ruchazie, which is not unlikely. Not only do we lose them – and in a place like ours it is frustrating that the flow of talent is predominantly outwards – but we often find that as they move to a 'better area' to a church with more people and more able folks at work, the lack of confidence comes back, and they often do not make the transition into another church at all well. And so we end up with the frustrating situation that our badly missed key leadership personnel and other persons who were coming on, now find themselves without the same help and the same opportunity to develop as they once had.

Sympathy from a Distance

We spoke above about a gospel that needs to be in concrete and not abstract terms, about confronting the things that sin against people in places like Ruchazie, about the practical style of life here and about leadership. The need is for a greater Christian presence. More salt is required. For too long we have told people to change their ways, shouted from a safe distance, sent models and concepts from different culture that have in turn brought further oppression. For too long Christians in places like Ruchazie have been left to survive as best they could, and churches have been closed down because they could not keep things going in the way that the denomination demanded (even though these demands were built on expectations created in totally different contexts). For too long we have proclaimed ideas rather than realities. For too long we have failed to question whether it is right to accept that Christians will use their resources better (which is, after all, good stewardship), and so move out and away from poorer communities. For too long we have

assumed that others should remain in areas like Ruchazie and not given them any good example of our own willingness to serve in that kind of way. For too long we have assumed that teaching materials, resources for worship, styles of being should just be duplicated in poorer areas, and would in fact work well if only the people there could learn to be reliable, dependable, *etc.* For too long we have supposed that sympathy and some solemn prayer is the only support we can offer to people working in housing estate parishes. For too long we have been unconcerned at the disparity of church resources in our cities, and the crippling effect that this has on mission. For too long we have not even noticed the unevenness of resources, or have simply accepted it as the nature of things. For too long we have assumed that going the second mile is opening our chequebooks ('greater love has no man than this...').

We have a few people who, because of the call of God, have chosen to move in to Ruchazie. We have a few who, because of the call of God, have chosen to stay. They have been an enormous source of strength and encouragement. The tragedy is that this is still so exceptional. It is nice to have others' prayers and good to have their financial support. What we really need is some company – not the Church paying more full-time employees to work here, not gestures of support from a distance, but Christians who are prepared to be here to live here as part of the commission to go into all the world. When Jesus gave the commission, do we suppose he really meant 'Go where it is safe' or 'Go where there is a decent class of people'? Surely his own going to the forgotten, the despised, the outcasts rules out that interpretation, but though we would never say that that is what Jesus meant, that is how we take his words. And while the salt remains predominantly in the middle-class areas it is only to be expected that mission in the poorer urban areas will suffer. There is a big mission field in our cities. It is a tragedy that so few think it important enough to go there. I wonder

if Jesus thinks it is important? We would be delighted to have more join us, to respond to the call and challenge to be salt and light in places like Ruchazie. Come and live, come and serve. Needy areas? Yes, for salt and light. A difficult work? Yes, and all the more so, the more we neglect areas like this. Most of all we need some company.

REVIEW ARTICLE

WHAT IS THE OLD TESTAMENT SAYING FOR THE CHRISTIAN?

RICHARD HESS, GLASGOW BIBLE COLLEGE

God with Us: A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament

Christoph Barth

edited by Geoffrey W. Bromiley

Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1991; x+403pp., \$29.95; ISBN 0 8028 3680 1

This book fills a need which exists in English language studies of the Old Testament for the theological student. There are surveys which introduce the student to the Old Testament as a variety of literatures or books. There are histories (and sociological studies) which reconstruct Israel's life according to presuppositions, critical or otherwise, about the nature of the biblical literature and the extrabiblical evidence. There are also critical introductions which provide the student with a perspective on what scholars are saying about the Old Testament's origins and purposes.

Barth's book is none of these, nor is it an Old Testament theology in the traditional sense of the word. It does not set up some systematic theological categories and collect the relevant Old Testament data under each one. It does not try to reconstruct Israel's religious history using the latest critical methods. It does not incorporate existentialist or other philosophical world views and read the Old Testament from their perspective. Nor does it survey the work done in Old Testament theology. In fact, it is characterised by a lack of interaction with recent scholarship.

What then does Barth do? He has written a book which follows the contours of the canonical structure of the Protestant canon of the Old Testament in tracing God's

acts and revelation to his people. In so doing, he avoids choosing a few themes and tracing them through the Old Testament, as so many popular works have done. Indeed, the text which Eerdmans has published is a condensation of four volumes which Barth produced before his death (with a final section completed by his widow). It is an academic text, but one which provides the reader with a clear understanding of the progression of revelation in the Old Testament, rather than a discussion of a variety of theories about the matter.

Barth's perspective lies firmly within orthodox Lutheranism, with its emphasis upon the themes of the Word of God (appropriate for Karl Barth's son) and of God's absolute freedom and sovereignty in selecting and relating to Israel. As a result the work always remains close to the biblical text, incorporating a vast variety of biblical data without losing a perspective of moving through the Bible's record of God's dealings with Israel.

Given the unique significance of Barth's work, it seems of value to consider each chapter separately and systematically to progress through the book with attention to the highlights and with a few remarks on strengths and weaknesses. The introduction provides a defence of Barth's approach and his organization of the book.

Chapter 1, 'God Created Heaven and Earth', stresses that this is a derivative theme in the Old Testament. God's creation of Israel is primary, that of heaven and earth is secondary and dependent on the former. Thus creation by the Word of God is also to be seen as God's Word of love for his people. In creation, God is victorious over evil powers, pictured as the ocean, the desert, and the darkness. Although Barth's linkage of these with some sort of mythological forces of chaos must now be questioned (cf. D. T. Tsumura, *The Earth and the Waters in Genesis 1 and 2*, Sheffield, 1989), the parallel between this creation and the acts of God in the Exodus is clear. Israel saw God's 'perfect world' as in the process of being revealed. God's creation of heaven and earth imply that he

is above and sovereign over both. God's concern for humanity's creation reveals the importance of the person. This is true on the basis of God's revelation, rather than because of any good observable in humanity. Barth argues that the 'soul' is not immortal and supports this with references to the death of the soul. However, the flexibility and wide usage of *nephesh* (cf. H. W. Wolff, *Anthropology and the Old Testament*, London, 1974, pp.10-25) call into question any such conclusion without a more comprehensive investigation into life and death in the Old Testament. Barth defends an order to male and female in God's creation; one which gives leadership to males. However, he insists that woman is not a servant but a companion. The image of God signifies rule over all of creation. Like God, people create people; but only with God's help. Barth downplays original sin in favour of personal guilt. However, he finds God's saving purpose revealed in figures such as Abel, Enoch, Noah and Abram.

Chapter 2, 'God Chose the Fathers of Israel', provides a biblical perspective for the election of the patriarchs. These fallible individuals were not chosen because of their merit but because of God's free decision. Although real people, they were also representatives of God's people Israel. Aware that the patriarchs worshipped at what have been identified as earlier Canaanite cult centres and that they applied names to Israel's God which may well have had Canaanite origins, Barth argues that this was not due to any identification of Israel's God with Canaanite deities; but that it was permitted by God as an example of despoiling other deities of their names and sanctuaries. The ambiguity of some theophanies, for example the one in Genesis 18, is evidence that the emphasis of the author is upon the word itself rather than upon the form of revelation. At the centre of God's choice of the patriarchs are his promises in which, in complete contrast to vassal treaties, the overlord grants favours without requiring something in return from the vassal. The fulfilment of the promises provides orientation to the future.

Barth observes the theme of chapter 3, 'God Brought Israel out of Egypt', to be the most important one among those which he studies. All of God's other acts in the Old Testament are influenced by this. Israel's freedom is both from imposed slavery and from worship of other forces which those enslaving nations worship. God releases and accompanies his people, redeeming them according to his free will. Israel is released to serve God in an act of worship which already begins before leaving Egypt in the form of the Passover. God's gift of freedom to Israel provides a standard for the freedom of all peoples everywhere. Barth understands the name of Yahweh as unique and therefore one way in which God reveals himself as unique and as the God of the Exodus. The issues of the origins and etymology of the divine name continue to be debated (*cf. e.g. my 'References to the Divine Name Yahweh in Late Bronze Age Sources?', Ugarit Forschungen 23 (1991) forthcoming*). The plagues and the Passover form two stages of the victory which are remembered and repeated at other points in the Old Testament. Barth balances God's hardening of Pharaoh's heart with Pharaoh's self-hardening of his heart. He compares Pharaoh's stubbornness with the obduracy of Israel and of Moses. Ultimately, this is not completely satisfying since the issue of whether and how God could cause Israel to sin is not explicitly addressed. Also unaddressed are the implications for Moses' role if Aaron is his prophet. What does it mean for him to function in such an exalted office?

Although chapter 3 may be the key theme in Barth's introduction, chapter 4, 'God Led His People through the Wilderness', represents a significant study on an important, although often overlooked, theme. God's revelation to his people in the form of his saving deeds meant their preservation in this threatening world. Despite its complaints, Israel retained its faith as God's people. This complaining was a confession of the nation's inability to live up to its calling. Although there is a

distinctive emphasis in Exodus on mercy and in Numbers on judgement, the two themes occur throughout these accounts. God led the people by means of his presence in cloud, fire, pillar and ark. The tent of the presence arose after a crisis in which God's holiness could no longer be tolerated among the people who worshipped the golden calf. However, God was able to act freely to continue to meet his people through Moses. The tabernacle, on the other hand, demonstrates that everything which Israel needed for worship was already present in the wilderness. Barth stresses the sense of 'not yet' in the wilderness journey. It had an aim and a goal. Thus the generation that rejected God and died in the wilderness lost its aim. But the new generation carried the hope. Even in the land, the continuing pilgrimage of God's people was kept alive by the Rechabites, by the holy days, and by the Sabbath.

Chapter 5, 'God Revealed Himself at Sinai', studies an act which formed a key part of Israel's faith. Even so, the narration in the Pentateuch is brief and the event is not mentioned in Israel's credal confessions. Barth understands only one covenant between God and his people. This single covenant was progressively revealed throughout Israel's history. It included the revelation at Sinai. There God manifested his glory on the mountain and proclaimed his will in the law. He also motivated the people to a free assent by their participation in various acts. The law was revealed by God only to Moses and only at Sinai. The laws sanctified (religious, sabbath, purity), liberated (slave, oppressed), and united (festivals) Israel. Barth looks at the tabernacle sacrifices, the priesthood and the Levites from the perspectives of reconciliation and of God's freedom to choose.

At this point the reader has come almost halfway through the book. Thus Barth's primary focus on the Pentateuch and its revelation is clear. Such an emphasis is not uncommon in theologies. It provides the reader with a firm understanding of the institutions and covenants which

Barth sees as influencing the remainder of the Old Testament.

Despite a later comment which balances the perspective (*cf.* p. 235), Barth seems preoccupied in chapter 6, 'God Granted Israel the Land of Canaan', with arguing points to oppose Zionism. Because of this bias, some of his least satisfactory observations are found here. These include the view that the Bible does not clearly define Canaan's borders, and a stress upon the uncertainty of the land's continued possession or any right for Israel to continue to possess it. The latter point is especially important. It is accomplished through selective word studies which, even by themselves, do not disprove the idea of the land as a permanent possession. Barth also ignores the implications of these covenants and their blessings as given 'for all your generations'. This is not to argue that such matters have any relevance for the political existence of a secular state such as modern Israel. It is merely to note that such matters could be treated with a greater balance. Barth accepts that there was a conquest and goes on to make helpful observations on the morality of the extermination of the Canaanites. In addition to observing their spiritual danger to Israel, he argues that force was necessary since the Canaanites resisted Israel and that, as a whole, the Canaanites were permitted to live in an area conquered by Israel so long as they abandoned idolatry and immorality. Barth concludes the chapter (as the book of Joshua concludes) with a discussion on Israel's covenant renewal as a manifestation of the nation's worship and community.

In chapter 7, 'God Raised Up Kings in Israel', the reader learns that Israel had neither an absolute monarchy nor did it see kingship as absolutely good. David and Solomon represent all the kings in their successes and failures. God's Spirit chose and appointed Israel's kings. Human acts were secondary and complementary. Although Barth may be too positive regarding David, his roles as model king, as recipient of divine promises, and as sufferer are key aspects of the biblical account. God's election of some

kings and his rejection of others remains a divine mystery. The election itself is a matter of divine grace. Barth divides the prophecies of a coming just king into four groups: those strengthening the present king, those looking for the replacement of a bad ruler, those looking for the reestablishment of David's throne, and those looking for a new Saviour. Of this last group, the Servant Songs of Isaiah 40-55 receive note with their progressively greater emphasis on suffering.

Chapter 8 is 'God Chose Jerusalem'. The selection of Israel's ancient capital provides opportunity for Barth to explore many of the psalms of Zion and to emphasize once more God's sovereign freedom, this time in the choice and defence of the city as a joyous place of God's presence and liberating rule of justice. Barth uses this subject as a pretext to introduce Wisdom and Wisdom literature. The teaching is international in its borrowing and influence, but it is also individualistic, moral, modest, and self-controlled in its character. The prophets critique human wisdom, however. Later Wisdom emphasizes the Torah and the fear of the Lord. Job and Ecclesiastes address problems of righteous suffering and of the apparent meaninglessness of life. Nine pages on a major body of Old Testament literature such as Wisdom is insufficient to address its theological contribution to the whole book. The study of the temple and its institutions permits consideration of Ezekiel's visions of God's glory and of the future temple. Worship was characterized by movement toward the sanctuary, by specific offerings and occasions, and by expressions of suffering and need, of thanksgiving and of praise. The people's coming together for worship bears witness to all nations. The chapter concludes with consideration of biblical texts which describe the present Jerusalem as sinful and the new Jerusalem as glorious and filled with God's presence.

The opening part of chapter 9, 'God Sent His Prophets', provides a useful survey of biblical texts which address God's selection, commission and equipping of his

prophets. Barth divides his survey of the messages of the prophetic texts between those announcing the judgement which was coming and those proclaiming God's salvation, compassion and renewal after the disaster of the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem. A final section considers the apocalyptic message of Zechariah 9-14, Isaiah 24-27, 35 and Daniel. It announces God's control of world history to bring it to the end which he desires, and to usher in the promised kingdom. Like so much of the book, the value of this material is less in its observations, most of which have been made before. Rather it lies in the organisation and presentation of material in a way which makes sense in detail and generality of God's work and message in the Old Testament. The 'Conclusion' is two pages which project some of the prophetic themes into the New Testament.

In summary, this volume represents sober reflection upon the Old Testament as a text of divine revelation which describes God's saving activity with his people over a period of nearly two thousand years. Although the all-too-brief conclusion might lead the reader to think of this study as irrelevant to the Christian, just the opposite is true. We can applaud Barth for his refusal to compromise the message of the Old Testament by reshaping it either into the moulds of critical and alien methodologies or into the categories of systematic theology. However, we also should appreciate his refusal to allow the Old Testament to become a series of illustrations of New Testament truths. The Old Testament deserves to be read and studied on its own for here are 'the very words of God' (Romans 3:2). It embodies the principles of God at work with his people, of God saving his people, of his people responding to or rejecting his grace and of God's blessing or judgement. Theology is not the only means of studying the Old Testament, but it is foundational for the Christian. Barth's approach is not the only possible theology, but it is a way of making sense of the whole biblical text. Without a full and careful study of

the Old Testament all study of New Testament applications of prophecy, and indeed all theological exegesis, carries the danger of distortion according to the perceived interests of the interpreter. Christians today do not need another book which lists proof texts from the Old Testament. We need to study both testaments, each in their own integrity. Barth provides us with a way through the Old Testament which lets it speak for itself.

As pointed out at the beginning, this is not a work from which students of Old Testament history, criticism, or theological methodology will draw much value. Instead, it is for the student who wishes to have a guide through the Old Testament providing some detail and laying a strong foundation for informed and balanced exegesis and exposition of this key part of God's revelation. The student who reads this work will have a clear understanding of the Old Testament and its message. The emphases and applications of the work reflect the mature wisdom of a lifetime of ministry, much of which was spent in Indonesia. This reviewer suspects that, for active ministers, this work will be consulted more frequently than any of the other introductions, surveys, theologies, *etc.*, mentioned above. It clearly provides the reader with a message for the book or passage which has a biblical and theological context.

The Bible Tells Them So: The Discourse of Protestant Fundamentalism

Kathleen C. Boone

SCM Press, London, 1999; 137pp., £9.50; ISBN 0 334 00117 X

The recent spate in the growth of so-called 'fundamentalist' groups in Christianity and other religions has not surprisingly led to a number of critical and analytical works discussing the phenomenon. Kathleen Boone writes in a North American context, and her concern is largely with Fundamentalism as it is found in Protestantism in that continent. Her treatment is, as often in similar works, a mixture of true and false observation. She rightly recognises that the characteristic of Fundamentalism is its stress on the authority of Scripture literally interpreted. Her main argument is intended to show that in fact a particular interpretation of Scripture is developed especially by authority-figures: 'Fundamentalist pastoral theology fosters dictatorial leadership', which arms itself with the Bible as the infallible defence for its interpretations. Thus Fundamentalism presents a complex intermix between what Scripture commands and what the source of personal authority in the community may command – with the latter often disguised as the former. The text is not always taken literally: when the literal force is unacceptable (*e.g.* because it contradicts other scriptural teaching), then it is given a different interpretation.

The Fundamentalist answer to this type of criticism may be that a biblical passage has an objective meaning about which there can be no argument. The basis of Boone's counter-argument lies in the dismissal of the E.D. Hirsch type of interpretation, in which authority rests in the 'determinate meaning' of the text, in favour of the S. Fish type of interpretation which argues that authority lies in 'the collective determinations of the "interpretive community"'. But this means that the author's criticisms are in principle dependent on an unfinished controversy in literary criticism. The issue is a subtle one; and Hirsch's distinction between meaning and significance is more defensible than is allowed here. Nevertheless, it leaves open the question of how the significance of a text is to be determined for a community.

Boone repeats some of the standard criticisms of Fundamentalism – such as the oddity of predicating inerrancy only to the (invisible) autographs and of not having an infallible interpretation of these lost originals. Hence the Fundamentalists must have agreed strategies of interpretation – especially to deal with contradictions in the text. Here Boone argues that dispensationalism provides a way of dealing with such contradictions. But she misjudges the position somewhat, first because she is looking largely at the North American scene, and secondly because she equates premillennialism with dispensationalism.

Boone rightly attacks the kind of approach which says in effect 'any interpretation of the text will do so long as it preserves inerrancy' even if it is a strained interpretation. She also devotes attention to the role of works like the Scofield Bible which in effect determine the interpretation of Scripture within certain circles; here she is ignorant of the way in which scholarly dispensationalism, as represented, for example, by Dallas Seminary, has

become increasingly self-critical and less tied to such traditional formulations. Although she commendably tries not to look at TV evangelists, she cannot altogether ignore the downfall of some of them, but reflects that Fundamentalism remains unscathed, because in fact the Bible remains the authority in the movement and not those who depart from it.

The basic issues in the debate continue much the same as they were. It is the question of whether the Bible can rightly be accepted as an infallible authority in religion. What Boone has done is to call attention to the question of the relation of the Bible to other kinds of authority and to point out the very real danger that in some circles a particular set of traditions, upheld and developed by human leaders, may replace the authority of the Bible. Boone thinks that this is inevitable, given her understanding of literary criticism. A better assessment would be that it is an inherent temptation which should and can be overcome.

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Mission and Meaninglessness. The Good News in a World of Suffering and Disorder

Peter Cotterell

SPCK, London, 1990; 332pp., £12.95; ISBN 0 281 04449 X

Peter Cotterell's 'major contribution to Christian missiology' (as this book is introduced by the publisher) is a wide-ranging review of the Christian mission and of Christian missions. Part One is primarily concerned with the theological basis for the Christian mission. Entitled 'Religion, Religions, and the Apparent Meaninglessness of Life', it takes as its starting point the apparent meaninglessness of life expounded in Ecclesiastes which is identified with the Buddhist concept of *dukkha*. A 'religion' is 'any coherent philosophical system which attempts to answer the fundamental questions', or in effect, to provide life with meaning. 'The Christian World-View' is outlined in a brief chapter (or is it, less ambitiously, 'a Christian's world-view'?) and it is maintained that 'fundamental and irreducible contradictions' exist among the world's religions. This leads to 'The Problem of Particularity', namely the difficulty of maintaining a belief in the uniqueness of Christianity when confronted with religious pluralism. The inclusivism of Karl Rahner and Hans Küng, the pluralism of John Hick and the 'traditional evangelical view' are rejected. The last, represented by J. Oswald Sanders and Dick Dowsett, is that salvation depends on an overt knowledge of Christ and that 'a lost eternity' awaits those who have not heard. A fourth view is developed as an evangelical alternative: 'that although salvation is not supplied by the non-Christian religions, still salvation may be found by those who are within them, through the threefold programme of an inward *Logos* illumination, general revelation, and the saving work of Christ.'

Part Two, 'Mission as Response to the Apparent Meaninglessness of Life', continues the examination of the theological basis by considering 'The Mission Theology of Matthew', 'The Human Disorder' and the doctrine of the

church. The last leads to a chapter on the Church Growth movement and a factual look at the reality of the church, particularly in Europe. Part Three considers three alternative responses to meaninglessness. Islam ('an alternative monotheism') and Marxism ('a political alternative') are criticized for producing repressive societies. The perspective of Liberation Theology, 'an alternative Christian missiology', is rejected (particularly the justification of violence and the hermeneutical approach to the Scriptures which makes the Exodus the key), but it is recognized that it has been a corrective to the failure of traditional missions to combat poverty and oppression. Part Four is a one-chapter summary of the theme of Meaninglessness and Mission.

As an introduction to the issues raised by the Christian mission this book is a wide-ranging overview. Its failings are perhaps difficult to avoid in missiology, which according to one of its leading practitioners is a cross-disciplinary study, using the distinct methodologies of theology, anthropology and history. The dangers are of a lack of coherence and of superficiality. Major classical debates are dealt with summarily here (for example, predestination in pp. 139-141, where Barth is preferred to Calvin; the interpretation of Romans 6 and 7 in pp. 111-114). Perhaps this is unavoidable in a book of this kind, but the impression is left that the theology of missions lacks dogmatic grounding and coherence. The argument seems to jump from exegesis of passages of Scripture, or from hermeneutical issues, to practical observations. One consequence is that a somewhat fierce anabaptist ecclesiology is assumed and asserted without being established. Other assertions appear in passing, including criticism of the divinity faculties, 'notorious for their refusal or inability to up-date their syllabuses', the 'general irrelevance' of Anglican theological colleges, the need to change the creeds to include contemporary *ethical* issues, and, not least, the assertion that 'in Europe today the ministry probably constitutes the highest barrier to the believableness of the Church'.

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The Modern Theologians. An Introduction to Christian Theology in the Twentieth Century

David F. Ford (ed.)

Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1989; Vol. I: 342pp., £10.95, ISBN 0 631 15372 1; Vol. II: 330pp., £10.95, ISBN 0 631 16808 7

In this introduction to modern theology the editor has executed with great shrewdness and professionalism a simple but overdue conception. Although not unique, it is rare to entrust a survey of modern thought to an international team of specialists. David F. Ford has magnificently overcome the threat of inconsistency between contributions and given us what will surely be a standard work for a long time to come. His own long experience in teaching modern theology at Birmingham University shows through clearly in his lucid introductory summaries to each major section. Moreover he has miraculously managed not only to keep each contributor to the average length of around twenty or so pages (there are just one or two who take liberties) but also

maintained a consistent and most helpful format throughout for each chapter: Introduction, Survey, Content, Debate, Achievement and Agenda. The arrangement works splendidly, not only because of the fine editing but also because of the mastery of content and quality of work by the specialists. It would be unfair to pick out any particular contributor because of the sustained high standard but well-known names proliferate, such as Daniel Hardy, S.W. Sykes, Hugo Meynell, Aidan Nichols, Rowan Williams, George Lindbeck and many others.

The first volume covers key modern theologians grouped according to some sort of genre – a task not for the fainthearted since famous theologians are notoriously idiosyncratic. Ford does well here, though many would hesitate to put Bonhoeffer in the same group as T.F. Torrance! The volume is more dense in content than the second volume and, inevitably, selective. Robert W. Jenson surely deserves some sort of medal for squeezing Barth into around 25 pages whilst still being remarkably readable. In all, fourteen giants of the twentieth century receive attention.

The second volume launches into a survey of major theological movements. It is, on the whole, more accessible than the first volume whilst maintaining the same high standard of competence. As well as covering major trends in British and North American theology (which includes an interesting account of 'Postliberal theology' virtually unknown in this country), it handles Evangelical, Eastern Orthodox, Latin American, Black, Asian and Feminist theologies. It rounds off with both ecumenical theology and theology of religions. David Ford adds a helpful summary of the present situation in theology.

Both volumes include a glossary which should be helpful to the student reader and is all the more commendable for knowing how to distinguish between 'Fundamentalist' and 'Evangelical'. Each also includes an index combining subjects and names. Each chapter concludes with primary and secondary bibliographies. These closely relate to the chapter content which aims, I believe successfully, to 'prepare for, accompany and aid reflection on the study of texts'.

The only hesitation I would express over this excellent production concerns the density of content, especially in the first volume, and use of the work by undergraduate students. Even with the glossary to help, some will find some chapters relatively hard going. The serious students amongst them will, however, greatly benefit. But never mind the students; the *teachers* need books like these!

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The Spirit of Love: Theology of the Holy Spirit

Brian Gaybba

Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1987; 290pp., £12.95;

ISBN 0 225 66500 X

Dr Gaybba is Professor of Systematic Theology at the University of South Africa. As a Catholic theologian he serves as an adviser to the South African Catholic Bishops' Conference, and was formerly Secretary of the South African Anglican-Roman Catholic Theological Commission. The book appears in a series which offers post-Vatican II perspectives on the central issues of Christian theology. It is presented as a comprehensive treatment of the main beliefs concerning the Holy Spirit with two complementary sections: first, a historical perspective, tracing the development of the main ideas and movements associated with the Spirit from the Old Testament to the present day; secondly, a systematic development of a theology of the Spirit in relation to the Trinity, the church, the individual believer, and the world.

This book is geared for the student and theologian, with check questions provided at the end of each chapter, along with ideas for discussion and recommended further reading. It has three very thorough indices and a very comprehensive bibliography. Unlike many offerings from Protestant theologians, whether conservative or liberal, it takes into account works by authors from such different standpoints as Karl Rahner, Michael Green and Hendrikus Berkhof and presents alternative interpretations in a constructive and ecumenical spirit. Its catholicity commends it to the reader as few other recent works on pneumatology have been able to do. One can only be impressed by the depth and sensitivity of the treatment, especially if the reader has had little experience of modern Catholic theological writing.

The Spirit of Love succeeds in drawing on the rich resources of philosophy and theology throughout the centuries without giving the impression that the Holy Spirit is the exclusive concern of charismatic and Pentecostal theology. With a very sympathetic reflection on Luther and the Reformers, Gaybba faces up to the issues which divide Catholics from Reformed Christians in a way which encourages hope for future ecumenical dialogue. If the author is typical of more recent Catholic theologians, conservative evangelical scholarship will be forced to challenge traditional views and point to future co-operation which might have been unthinkable a few decades ago. Evangelicals will not agree with everything Gaybba says, but they will discover lines of thought which are uncommon in evangelical treatments of the subject.

For example, Gaybba refers to a Catholic emphasis on the gifts mentioned in Isaiah 11:2 (wisdom, understanding, counsel, knowledge, fortitude, piety, fear of the Lord) as qualities bestowed on the believer by the risen Christ in fulfilment of this Messianic prophecy. Because of this, some Catholic theologians have referred to the *charismata* in 1 Corinthians 12-14 as 'charisms', to avoid confusion. The former 'gifts' express the way in which the Spirit overcomes the effects of sin upon our minds and volition. 'They are gifts that have always been regarded as given to every believer at the moment of justification.' That is, they are intended for the benefit of the recipient,

primarily, for his or her sanctification, while also benefiting the community as a whole. Yet the 'charisms' more specifically concern service as practical expressions of the love of God in Christ whether in utterance, action, or understanding. Reformed scholars will be fascinated by Gaybba's exposition of Paul's concept of the Word of God in preaching, prophecy, wisdom and knowledge. He is unconvinced that a word of knowledge is a spontaneous insight into the mind or situation of one who is present in worship, and places such 'words' within the teaching ministry of the Word.

The Spirit of Love will be essential reading for any serious student of pneumatology for years to come. It is hoped that evangelical scholars will take time to appreciate its importance before embarking on similar projects, and give Brian Gaybba all due credit for this timely and convincing study.

Graham Houston
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I Believe in Church Growth

Eddie Gibbs

Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1990; 303pp., £8.99; ISBN 0 340 51732 8

Eddie Gibbs casts his net widely, and the result is a nearly comprehensive and very valuable study. Gibbs exposes the reader to a wide array of important works on church growth and related subjects through the notes (in the text) and bibliography. The volume truly is a wealth of material. Having been slimmed down and updated from previous editions, this version is especially tailored to the non-specialist. (I doubt, however, that many individuals who own an earlier edition would want to purchase this one – the revision is not that drastic.)

I Believe in Church Growth is an introduction. Its breadth would prevent those new to the field from supposing that church growth can be reduced to, say, a simple evangelistic method, but it also occasionally prohibits depth of analysis. Also, anyone who is well acquainted with the works of Donald McGavran or Peter Wagner (the gurus of church growth from Fuller Seminary's School of World Mission) will find portions of Gibbs's book strangely familiar. Gibbs does surpass other church growth specialists, however, by offering a discriminating application of church growth perspectives to the British scene. His interest in church growth in Britain, however, does not prevent him from calling attention to certain negative British (and European) church growth trends of recent years. He faces the problems head on. Gibbs commends Peter Wagner's popular definition: 'Church growth means all that is involved in bringing men and women who do not have a personal relationship to Jesus Christ into fellowship with him and into responsible church membership'. A central thrust of *I Believe in Church Growth* is an emphasis on that word 'responsible'. The mere lengthening of the electoral or membership role is of little concern to Gibbs.

A major divide follows chapter 2. Up to that point Gibbs is concerned to uncover the biblical and theological foundations for church growth. In the

much longer second section, the book turns to pragmatic concerns. Gibbs cautions, however, that theological and practical matters cannot be neatly separated, and that he hopes his is a 'sanctified pragmatism'. That hope is largely realised in the second section.

Some of the many pragmatic concerns of chapters 3–10 may be noted. It is not unspiritual to attempt to quantify growth; indeed, a pious aversion to record-keeping has sometimes concealed inactivity or ineffective ministry. The geographical parish map needs to be accompanied by a 'map' identifying different types of people. Small groups have great value for providing the intimacy and community many crave. Large groups enable Christians to celebrate their faith and experience a special kind of worship that cannot occur in small groups. Churches and their leaders need to remain open to change. Traditional theological education is impractical in certain respects.

A few of the book's many strengths may be noted: Gibbs deftly borrows from other disciplines (*e.g.* management, statistics) in a way that does not reduce missions to a business. Gibbs provides countless practical pointers from his pastoral experience (*e.g.* on the inner workings of church government). The biblical basis for church growth is stated clearly and forcefully, and not forgotten amidst subsequent pragmatic concerns. Divine action and human responsibility are properly intertwined. A discerning analysis of the homogeneous unit principle leads to twin conclusions: on the one hand, people find it easier to enter a Christian community if they do not have to cross social boundaries in so doing; on the other hand, in order to grow into maturity and reflect the variety of Christ's body, homogeneous churches must take steps to broaden their fellowship. Gibbs offers a healthy balance of stern criticism for failure in the church, and genuine hope for great prospects of growth by God's sovereign power.

As for weaknesses, the lack of Scripture and author indexes is detrimental (the detailed table of contents suffices as a subject index). More substantial shortcomings include a neglect of the problem of other religions (*e.g.* the challenge resurgent Islam poses to church growth in some quarters). The book's introductory nature also seems to restrict the measure of creative and strategic thinking for the future of church growth. A more specific objection is that Gibbs is overly critical of transfer growth, overlooking the valid reasons people often have for leaving one church to go to another. Lastly, Gibbs falls into the logical trap of making missions the church's top priority. Accordingly he fails to see that worship ultimately constitutes both the aim and the impetus of missions.

In the end, the strengths far outweigh the weaknesses of this informative, challenging and thought-provoking book. Eddie Gibbs's love for the church and longing for its healthy development is abundantly apparent. The book deserves a wholehearted recommendation.

Peter K. Nelson, Richfield, Minnesota

The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God

R.P.C. Hanson

T and T Clark, Edinburgh, 1988; 931pp., £34.95; ISBN 0 567 09485 5

Dedicated to fellow scholar Henri Crouzel, this book is a major contribution in the field of contemporary patristic studies, consisting in the most thorough treatment yet of fourth-century Christological and triadological debate, and (along with R.D. Williams' *Arius*) the first significant treatment of Arian theology in English for many years. Those familiar with Hanson's earlier contributions to the field (for example his book on Origen, *Allegory and Event*) will recognise here the same thoroughness and critical spirit; yet they may also find themselves disappointed with certain aspects of the book.

Despite the subtitle 'The Arian Controversy 318-381', Hanson opens the book by referring to this popular way of describing the theological agenda between these two dates as 'a serious misnomer'. From here on, the picture painted of Arius himself is one which seeks to disabuse us of the idea that the notorious priest from Alexandria was in any way a significant figure, either theologically or politically. He was simply, by accident of history, the occasion for certain powerful theological currents finally surfacing, and was drawn into a doctrinal whirlpool with which his name was subsequently associated, but which he himself in reality did little either to cause or to prolong, the latter role having been taken up by much more capable and predominant figures such as Eusebius of Nicomedia and Asterius. To describe these as 'supporters' or 'followers' of Arius, therefore, would be misleading if it were thought to imply some sense in which Arius broke new theological ground or founded a school which developed in his wake. The epithet 'Arian' is thus at best one worth keeping for the sake of convenience: otherwise it is 'scarcely justified to describe the movement of thought in the fourth century which culminated in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed'.

Hanson also considers the worth of the word 'controversy' in this particular context. That there was indeed controversy throughout the fourth century is undeniable: but was there a single controversy, the history of which can be neatly charted, and the ultimate resolution of which at Constantinople demonstrated? Hanson thinks not, rejecting this over-simple presentation of the matter for a much more complicated version in which numerous different controversies feature, and in which the lines of demarcation between the various sides become much more blurred. In part this is simply the inevitable result of the relatively microscopic detail in which Hanson's study is carried out. Yet his book goes further, calling into question any suggestion that, by stepping back from the historical trees to gain a perspective on the wood, a more simple or straightforward picture of the fourth century disputes can be obtained. The pattern, he insists, remains a highly complicated one, even in its broadest outlines.

It is here that the distinctive polemical thrust of this book is felt. The significance of the main title emerges as it becomes apparent that Hanson's concern is to challenge traditional accounts of the fourth century, presenting it not as a period of dispute between ancient orthodoxy and emergent heretical tendencies, but rather as a time of considerable doctrinal confusion, when it was not at all clear what orthodoxy *was* in relation to either Christ or

the doctrine of God. Thus, to cite Hanson himself, 'this is not the story of a *defence* of orthodoxy, but of a *search* for orthodoxy, a search conducted by the method of trial and error'. We are to think, then, in terms of a confused and confusing tangle of strands of development upon which dogmatic uniformity was ultimately imposed, rather than any clear conflict between the champions of 'the received tradition' and those troublesome heretics who insisted on rocking the boat with new-fangled ideas borrowed from pagan philosophy and elsewhere.

It is the relative novelty of this perspective which, Hanson insists, gives his work its true *raison d'être*. Certainly, it is refreshing to find so detailed a treatment in which the 'cowboys and indians' approach of so many previous commentators (including, it must be admitted, some of the Fathers themselves!) is shown to be both inadequate and unhelpful. Yet it is possible, in the passion to move beyond over-simplified accounts, to go too far, and it is for this that Hanson must be criticized. The metaphor of a search has an appropriateness in this context; but we must be clear about its proper object. This was not, as is sometimes implied in the book, a search for a Christological truth hitherto unknown or unrecognized. It was precisely a search for orthodoxy, that is to say, a search among various extant Christological alternatives for the one which best accorded with the apostolic witness to Christ. Thus, whilst Nicene theology as it eventually emerged was certainly not the simple rubber stamping of 'what all Christians everywhere have always believed' about Christ, it was, nonetheless, perfectly continuous with an important strand of interpretative tradition (albeit not the only important strand) reaching back into the third and second centuries. That it also broke considerable new ground in the process of reiterating, clarifying and rehonoring this tradition is hardly surprising: but the discontinuity ought not to be stressed at the expense of a considerable degree of continuity. If the picture is admittedly more complicated than some accounts have allowed, we must not allow the confusion to obscure this important fact.

There are other areas of Hanson's treatment which are deserving of the sort of careful criticism which lies beyond the scope of an ordinary book review. His treatment of the incarnational theology and soteriology of Athanasius is sadly deficient, and it is especially disappointing in a book of this size to find some of the more questionable prejudices of recent scholarship simply rehearsed without further comment, and then used as the basis for considerable parts of the argument which follows. Yet this remains a highly important book which will provide the next generation of scholarship with a valuable resource; just as long as the conclusions which it reaches do not become the unquestioned assumptions for all future ventures in the field.

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