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A PARADIGM SHIFT IN SCIENTIFIC ADVANCE: A MODEL FOR CHRISTIAN CONVERSION IN THE MODERN WORLD?

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Introduction

Since the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century an intellectual climate has developed in the Western world which is inimical to Christian belief. Anti-supernaturalism and historical relativism have so shaped the thinking of 'the modern world' that the claims of historic Christianity can scarcely be taken seriously. A plausibility structure has been developed in which, *e.g.*, the Christian claim that Jesus rose from the dead is manifestly inadmissible.[1] It may be acknowledged that the disciples had experiences which led them to the belief that Jesus had risen from the dead, and that such belief may remain inspiring today as a private religious conviction of those who choose to accept it. What cannot be accepted is the claim of historic Christianity that the resurrection provides the indispensable clue for a proper interpretation of the nature of the universe and the purpose of human life. In the public realm of commonly accepted scientific facts, on the basis of which all important collective decisions are taken, there can be no place for a risen Jesus Christ. When, through education, people are introduced to this modern view of the world they generally either set aside their religious beliefs as irrelevant, or retain a religious dimension but keep it strictly separate from the business of life in the 'real world'.

Neither position can do justice to the comprehensive claims of biblical Christianity. The New Testament calls for a conversion through which Christ becomes the controlling centre for all our thinking and the basic interpretative clue for our whole understanding of life. For modern Westerners this constitutes a revolution of the most radical order. This article is an attempt to consider how such a revolution may occur. The approach taken is to examine the character of the major

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1 See, *e.g.* P.L. Berger, *The Heretical Imperative: Contemporary Possibilities of Religious Affirmation* (London, 1980), pp. 1-30.

intellectual revolutions which have occurred in scientific history and to consider how these may suggest a pattern for the change of mind demanded by Christian conversion in the modern age. In particular, since Christian conversion is often regarded as a lapse into irrationality, we will attempt to locate the rational ground within modern conditions for such a change of mind. This is by no means intended to suggest that conversion is entirely and exclusively an intellectual matter. Other aspects of the human psyche have their legitimate place. However, it does seem particularly necessary today to demonstrate that Christian conversion does not require the surrender of intellectual integrity and that there is a firm rational basis for changing the mind of our contemporaries in the modern world.

Paradigm Shift in Scientific Revolutions

At the outset it has been freely admitted that a radical alteration in our whole perception of reality is required in the transition from a modern world-view to a Christian one. We may begin our study by noting that such revolutionary change is not unknown, or even unusual, in intellectual progress. In his *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Thomas S. Kuhn has argued persuasively that any decisive scientific advance is characterised not by the steady accumulation of knowledge, but rather by the sudden emergence of a completely new perception of reality. Scientists normally work within well-established paradigms – models from which spring particular coherent traditions of scientific research – so that normal science consists in 'extending the knowledge of those facts that the paradigm displays as particularly revealing, by increasing the extent of the match between those facts and the paradigm's predictions, and by further articulation of the paradigm itself'.[2] What normal science does not do is to challenge or overthrow the commonly accepted paradigm. However, such revolutionary development does occur at the truly momentous occasions in scientific advance when a paradigm shift takes place. The progression involved in this kind of reconstruction is described by T.F. Torrance:

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2 T. S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd ed. (Chicago, 1970), pp. 10, 24.

> Certainly the recognition of what is new requires as a base of operations a conceptual framework to help us distinguish it from what we already know, but what is new can be identified properly and grasped only as we are able to break free from an antecedent framework and if we are able to assimilate what we are able to grasp of it out of itself through a reconstruction of that framework. Such is the heuristic function to which a scientist hopes to put his formalisation, but a transformation of the formal framework on which we rely in scientific reasoning, an adaptation of it in the very act of applying it to something new, so that it will enable us to strengthen our grasp of it, is a feat of an educated and disciplined intelligence of considerable intuitive power: yet that is precisely what happens in the moments of great creative advance in science.[3]

We hope to show that this kind of paradigm shift offers a suggestive model for consideration of Christian conversion in its intellectual aspect.

From an exhaustive historical study of such scientific revolutions, Kuhn concludes that what occurs on such occasions is, first, the awareness of anomaly. So long as the commonly accepted paradigm is unchallenged, scientific observers experience only the anticipated and the usual, even under circumstances where anomaly will later be observed. However, when a researcher, who is often either very young or very new to the field, persistently draws attention to something wrong in the paradigm itself, then the revolution is underway. That awareness of anomaly opens a period in which conceptual categories are adjusted until the initially anomalous has become the anticipated. At this point the discovery has been completed.[4] Such a discovery, since it cannot be accommodated within the existing paradigm, leads to a crisis, and eventually to the construction and acceptance of a new paradigm.

This reorientation of science by paradigm change is described by Herbert Butterfield as 'handling the same bundle of data as before but placing them in a new system of relations to one another by giving them a different framework', or

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3 T.F. Torrance, *Transformation and Convergence in the Frame of Knowledge: Explorations in the Interrelations of Scientific and Theological Enterprise* (Belfast, 1984), p. 146.

4 Kuhn, *Scientific Revolutions*, p. 64.

more colloquially, as 'picking up the other end of the stick'.[5] Butterfield notes that 'change is brought about, not by new observations or additional evidence in the first instance, but by transpositions that were taking place inside the minds of the scientists themselves'.[6] The result of such paradigm shifts as, *e.g.* those associated with Copernicus or Newton or Einstein, is very far reaching: 'when paradigms change, the world itself changes with them'.[7] It is not a matter of gradual adjustment. Rather an entirely new perception of the world is quite suddenly put in place.

The kinship of scientific paradigm shift to the intellectual revolution of Christian conversion may be illustrated by noticing a personal involvement in one of the classic scientific revolutions: the development and acceptance of quantum theory in physics in the early twentieth century. In the months before Heisenberg's paper on matrix mechanics pointed the way to a new quantum theory, Wolfgang Pauli wrote to a friend: 'At the moment physics is again terribly confused. In any case it is too difficult for me, and I wish I had been a movie comedian or something of the sort and had never heard of physics.' Less than five months later the 'conversion' had occurred and we find Pauli writing: 'Heisenberg's type of mechanics has again given me hope and joy in life. To be sure it does not supply the solution to the riddle, but I believe it is again possible to march forward.'[8] This case illustrates how personal, and indeed how costly, is the engagement and commitment required of a scientist in the process of paradigm shift. The conversion experience is extremely demanding and the new paradigm is usually fiercely resisted when first advanced. Often it is only the next generation which is able to accept the new paradigm and work on the new basis.

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5 H. Butterfield, *The Origins of Modern Science 1300-1800* (London, 1949), pp. 1, 7.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 1.

7 Kuhn, *Scientific Revolutions*, p. 111.

8 R. Kronig, 'The Turning Point' in M. Fierz and V. F. Weisskopf (eds.), *Theoretical Physics in the Twentieth Century: A Memorial Volume to Wolfgang Pauli* (New York, 1960), pp. 22, 25-6, cited by Kuhn, *Scientific Revolutions*, pp. 83-4.

Christian Conversion as Paradigm Shift

The argument of this article is that it is a 'paradigm shift' of the sort described by Kuhn which occurs in the process of Christian conversion. No suspension of proper scientific procedure is involved. On the contrary, what is required is the application of the kind of intense scientific inquiry which is characteristic of the great discoveries in the history of knowledge. We begin with the anomaly, in this case the resurrection of Jesus, which does not fit the currently prevailing paradigm. Then, as our inquiry inexorably convinces us of the validity of the resurrection, our acceptance of the anomaly throws the current paradigm into crisis. The crisis is resolved only with the emergence of a wholly new paradigm in which the whole of reality is viewed in the light of the resurrection.

As a matter of history, it was a paradigm shift of this sort that occurred under the impact of the gospel in the early centuries of the Christian era. As Torrance has commented, the incarnation and resurrection of Jesus Christ 'forced themselves upon the minds of Christians from their own empirical and theoretical ground *in sharp antithesis* to what they had believed about God and *in genuine conflict* with the framework of secular thought or the world-view of their age'. The great constitutive events of the Christian faith 'forced themselves upon the mind of the Church against the grain of people's convictions, as ultimate events bearing their own intrinsic but shattering claims in the self-evidencing reality and transcendent rationality of God himself, and they took root within the Church only through a seismic restructuring of religious and intellectual belief'.[9] Torrance notes that the same kind of conversion occurred, *e.g.* in modern physics in the transition from Newtonian principles to those of relativity and quantum theory. An ultimate reality forces itself upon our attention and, since it cannot be fitted into the formal framework of hitherto acquired knowledge, presents us with a dilemma: *either* to reject what is disclosed as absurd *or* to commit ourselves to a radical restructuring of our whole conceptual system. As we become engaged with the intrinsic claims of the subject matter, these finally assume a compelling

9 T.F. Torrance, *Space, Time and Resurrection* (Edinburgh, 1976), p. 17.

quality which drives us to take the second alternative, no matter how costly or disturbing that may be.

In the case of the apostolic witness to the resurrection as an historical event in space and time, modern Westerners find that they cannot accommodate it within their existing conceptual framework. This may lead them to reject it but there is an alternative: to rise to the challenge of rethinking our whole understanding of reality in the light of the resurrection of Jesus. This involves a reconstruction of our understanding of God. All dualistic thinking about the relation between God and the world is overthrown, for since God himself has entered his creation he must be understood as a living God whose very being and life are accessible to human knowing and participating. It involves a reassessment of our understanding of Jesus. The resurrection marks him apart from all other leaders and teachers, vindicates his divine claims and demands of us our ultimate loyalty and obedience. It involves a re-evaluation of the material creation and of God's commitment to it. Space and time are not closed but open to God who by his dynamic action establishes their identity. It involves a revolution in our understanding of death. As C. S. Lewis graphically put it, 'He has met, fought and beaten the King of Death. Everything is different because he has done so. This is the beginning of the new creation. A new chapter in cosmic history has begun.'[10] In fact, as we unfold the intrinsic intelligibility of the event of the resurrection, our whole conception of reality is steadily reconstructed. The anomaly throws the existing paradigm into crisis and the result is a paradigm shift which produces a wholly new view of the world.

The Question of Rationality

The question remains, however, of the relation between the old paradigm and the new and how we may make the transition from one to the other. Is it a 'brainwashing' exercise in which we abandon all our previous knowledge and are indoctrinated into the new system? Or is there some rational continuity in the conversion process? To return to Kuhn, his thesis has been criticised on the grounds that it

10 C.S. Lewis, cited by M. Green, *The Empty Cross of Jesus* (London, 1984), p. 132.

posits a total discontinuity between the old paradigm and the new at a time of scientific revolution so that there is no point of contact or comparison between them.[11] This, it is said, suggests that there is a lack of rationality in the progress from one to the other – it is a 'leap in the dark', conditioned chiefly by social pressure. Interestingly, a similar criticism is often made of the intellectual aspect of Christian conversion. Lesslie Newbigin addressed himself to it in his recent consideration of Kuhn's thesis:

> While there is radical discontinuity in the sense that the new theory is not reached by any process of reasoning from the old, there is also a continuity in the sense that the old can be rationally understood from the point of view of the new. In Einstein's physics, Newtonian laws are still valid for large bodies in slow motion. Newtonian physics are still valid for mechanics. Thus to recognise a radical discontinuity between the old and the new is not to surrender to irrationality. Seen from one side there is only a chasm: seen from the other there is a bridge. By analogy... the new understanding of the converted person might make it possible... to find a place for the truth that was embodied in the former vision and yet at the same time offer a wider and more inclusive rationality than the old one could.[12]

Likewise Torrance emphasises that, while the Christian message demands a very radical reconstruction of our whole conceptuality, it does not involve any surrender to irrationality. Rather there is sufficient continuity for us to see at work 'the relation between the created rationalities and the transcendent rationality of God in which the latter is recognised not as an intrusion into the former but rather as their affirming and establishing on their true and ultimate ground'.[13]

Considerations of this order lead Newbigin to the important conclusion that, 'From within the plausibility structure that is shaped by the Bible, it is perfectly possible to acknowledge and cherish the insights of our culture. There is an asymmetry in this relationship, as between the paradigms of science, but not a total discontinuity. From one side the other looks quite

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11 See, *e.g.*, J. Polkinghorne, *One World: The Interaction of Science and Theology* (London, 1986), pp. 13-14.

12 L. Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (London, 1986), pp. 52-3.

13 T.F.Torrance, *Space, Time and Incarnation* (London, 1969), pp. 85-6.

irrational but from the other side there is a rationality that embraces both.'[14] This means that in the process of conversion there is no requirement for Christians to abandon the whole of their previous understanding. Rather it is taken up and embraced within a wider rationality so that they are still able to relate meaningfully to their previous interests, though their total frame of reference has been infinitely expanded. What we know with our modern mind is not abandoned but rather embraced and given a wider frame of reference in which its true bearing and proportion is brought to light.

This may readily be understood against the background of the emergence of a growing appreciation of the ontological stratification of the universe and the corresponding multi-levelled character of knowledge. The collapse, following the work of Einstein, of the idea of the universe as a closed mechanistic system has led to a deepening awareness of the infinite range or depth of objectivity and intelligibility in the universe and of the need for open systems and open structures of knowledge to comprehend it. No system can be complete or comprehensive on its own. In mathematics the incompleteness theorem of Kurt Godel demonstrated that no logical system can be complete without some reference outside the system to something beyond it. Applied beyond mathematics the Godelian theorems have had the effect of giving firm shape and justification to the multi-levelled structure of knowing.[15] The universe is conceived as comprising a sequence of rising levels, each higher one controlling the boundaries of the one below it and embodying the joint meaning of the particulars situated on the lower level. As we move through progressively higher levels of knowledge each one can embrace all that has been found on the lower levels yet at the same time transcend them.

It is as we move up this hierarchy of levels of reality, from the more tangible to the more intangible, that we penetrate to matters that are increasingly real and full of meaning. As Michael Polanyi illustrates the point, interpreting a grandfather clock or a Shakespeare sonnet in terms of physics and

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14 Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, p. 63.

15 See M. Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (London, 1958), pp. 190ff., 259ff.

chemistry may produce an analysis that is valid as far as it goes but which at the same time calls out for interpretation on a higher level.[16] In Christian conversion we begin to come to terms with these higher levels of reality. This does not involve abandoning or making a break with the structures of understanding developed at the lower levels. Rather these are incorporated and given their proper place and proportion within a truer grasp of reality in all its depth and range. Within this structure of knowledge there is a line of rational continuity which runs through and sustains our transition from one paradigm to another in the process of Christian conversion.

The Question of Circularity

The idea of executing a paradigm shift by rethinking our conceptuality on the basis of the incarnation/ resurrection has aroused objections on the grounds that it involves an essentially circular procedure, *i.e.* we interpret the incarnation/ resurrection within a framework of thought of which it itself is a constitutive determinant. Therefore we are not standing outside the object of our enquiry and examining it in the light of external criteria. Such an objection may carry weight where the object in question is patient of examination by cross-reference. However, it is not valid here since in the case of the incarnation/ resurrection we are dealing with *ultimate* realities for which, in the nature of the case, there is no higher or wider system of reference within which they may be proved. As Michael Polanyi points out: 'Any enquiry into our ultimate beliefs can be consistent only if it presupposes its own conclusions. It must be intentionally circular.'[17] There is no way of escaping a complete circularity of the conceptual system but this does not foreclose the possibility of rational analysis and assessment. As Torrance indicates: 'The system must be one which is internally consistent and which rests upon the grounds posited by its constitutive axioms, without any alien additions, so that the conclusions we reach are found to be anticipated in the basic presuppositions. Such a system, of course, even if entirely consistent within itself, could conceivably be false, and must therefore be open to

16 *Ibid.*, p. 382.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 299.

reasonable doubt: but that means that the system stands or falls with respect to its power as a whole to command our acceptance.'[18] If we are dealing with a paradigm shift then such a procedure is not unreasonable, given that the axioms of the new paradigm can, in the nature of the case, be examined not by reference to any higher or wider system but only in terms of their own intrinsic intelligibility and compelling reality. There is no vicious circle here.

In fact, all branches of scientific study depend on at least a provisional acceptance of the axioms of the system. In physics, for example, we have to presuppose that there is order in the universe if we are to have a science of physics at all. But we are unable to offer any proof at the outset that there is order in the universe. It is an axiom which must be assumed and, finally, our acceptance or rejection of that ultimate truth depends on the power of the system as a whole to command our acceptance. The paradigm shift of conversion to Christianity involves the provisional acceptance of certain key axioms of the Christian world view but there is nothing irrational or unscientific about venturing to test out these axioms by seeking an apprehension of the system as a whole.

The Question of Subjectivism

A further criticism of the demands of Christian conversion is the allegation that they involve an inescapable and insidious element of subjectivity, in that they speak of realities which can be accepted only by faith. This carries weight where the ideal of knowledge is one which envisages a series of objective facts existing in absolute distinction from the investigator. However, in the face of the progress of twentieth-century science, the ideal of pure objectivity has proved to be a mirage, and the inquiring, experimenting, theorising, *subject* has come to be seen as intrinsically necessary to the development of scientific understanding. It is in the interplay between the objective reality and the subjective investigator that the real substance of scientific advance is to be found.

The work of Michael Polanyi has been particularly influential in drawing attention to the role of intuition, conjecture and the creative power of the imagination in

18 Torrance, *Space, Time and Resurrection*, p. 15.

scientific advance. He has sought to undermine the rigid objectivism of the positivist approach through a demonstration of the crucial role in scientific work of the 'tacit dimension': the intuitive apprehension of a structure in reality which lies behind all our scientific investigation and guides the integrative activity by which we make sense of what we perceive. It is upon this informal and implicit 'personal coefficient' that even the most completely formalised logical operations ultimately depend for their meaning and truth. Torrance points out: 'This is why Polanyi calls for a rejection of the objectivist notion of truth: complete depersonalization leaves no room for the informal acts of commitment to ontological reality upon which the assertion of factual truth depends, or for the fact that such a commitment necessarily implies certain basic beliefs concerning the nature of reality with a claim to their universal validity, since it is only in the light of those beliefs that he interprets empirical facts and observations.'[19]

The importance of the role of the subject becomes clear if we look at the actual practice of science. At the frontiers of research, scientists have to make difficult decisions whether or not to commit themselves to a new line of inquiry. They have to decide which problems are worth investigating and which are not. They have to make value judgements in the light of a vision of scientific activity. Then they are sustained in their mental struggle by a passionate concern to solve the problem they have decided to investigate. The purpose and values of the knowing subject have a vital role to play in the disclosure of knowledge. In a word, it is by faith that we gain understanding.

This does not mean a retreat into a subjective conception of truth. Polanyi is very careful to guard against the danger of subjectivism and argues that his concept of the personal transcends the division between subjective and objective: 'In so far as the personal submits to requirements acknowledged by itself as independent of itself, it is not subjective; but in so far as it is an action guided by individual passions, it is not objective either.'[20] In fact, however, this is the way towards a proper objective grounding of knowledge: 'It is in tacit

19 Torrance, *Transformation and Convergence*, p. 200.

20 Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, p. 300.

knowing that we have to do with the ontological reference of knowledge, in virtue of which we establish empirical contact with reality in its intrinsic coherence and rationality, and therefore with that aspect of knowing in which its content is grounded evidentially and objectively, although informally, upon the structure of experience or reality.'[21]

There is an irreducible fiduciary component in all our knowing which is emphatically non-subjectivist, in that it arises strictly from the compelling claims of the basic reality to which the inquirer has been exposed. Polanyi suggests that Augustine's axiom *nisi credideritis, non intelligitis* ('unless you believe, you do not understand') is universally applicable: 'We must now recognise belief once more as the source of all knowledge. Tacit assent and intellectual passions, the sharing of an idiom and of a cultural heritage, affiliation to a like-minded community: such are the impulses which shape our vision of the nature of things on which we rely for our mastery of things. No intelligence, however critical or original, can operate outside such a fiduciary framework.'[22] This is not to surrender to mere subjectivism. In a competent fiduciary act the agent 'does not do as he pleases, but compels himself forcibly to act as he believes he must. He can do no more, and he would evade his calling by doing less.'[23] Interestingly, Polanyi invokes Luther's 'Here I stand. I can do no other' as the model for the position occupied by all scientific pioneers in their fiduciary commitment to the truth which has become disclosed to them.[24] Far from being alien, personal belief and commitment are fundamental to scientific progress. As Polanyi puts it, 'Originality in science is the gift of a lonely belief in a line of experiments or speculations which at the time no one else considered to be profitable. Good scientists spend all their time betting their lives, bit by bit, on one personal belief after another.'[25]

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21 Torrance, *Transformation and Convergence*, p. 158.

22 Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, p. 266. *Cf.* Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension* (London, 1967), pp. 13-14, 33.

23 Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, p. 315.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 308.

25 Polanyi, *Scientific Thought and Social Reality* (New York, 1974), p. 51, cited by Torrance, *Transformation and Convergence*, p. 195.

The crucial role of faith in the gaining of understanding is all the more pronounced in regard to knowledge of God, who is the ultimate ground and source of all intelligibility and truth. As we move up the stratified levels of reality within the universe, the role of the fiduciary component in the acquisition of knowledge becomes progressively more critical. Hence it is not surprising to find that at the highest level of knowledge, when we come to the transcendent reality of God himself, the exercise of faith is found to be particularly important. The 'personal coefficient' is central. It is only in the context of whole-life commitment that progress in true understanding is likely to occur.

The Christian theologians of the patristic era were aware of this when they insisted that proper understanding of God could not be gained without godliness (*eusebeia*), *i.e.* the embodiment of faith in a corresponding way of life and worship in the reverent service of God. The Reformers stressed one particular aspect of this – that in order to gain an accurate understanding of God, repentance (*metanoia*) is required, *i.e.* a commitment to changing one's mind and to changing one's life in accordance with the results of one's investigations. Here again, the demands of Christian conversion are little different in principle from those of scientific progress of any kind. The true scientist is not a totally detached and unmoved observer. Rather he is committed as a person to his work and ready to change his mind and change his life in the light of its results. Likewise in Christian conversion it is only as we get inside the way of life which corresponds to the divine revelation in Christ that we can attain the disposition of mind which is able to make progress in understanding it and to develop the appropriate modes of thought and speech which it requires. No advance in understanding may be attained without the exercise of personal faith and commitment. As in other fields, faith may be exercised in Christian conversion that is firmly grounded objectively and altogether removed from any mere subjectivism.

The Question of External Corroboration

Kuhn has pointed out the importance of external corroboration in the acceptance of a new theory.[26] In the case of Christian conversion, corroborating evidence is not lacking. The outstanding developments have been in modern physics, where the scientific revolutions of the twentieth century have produced a new understanding of the universe which is vastly more compatible with Christian belief. The idea of the universe as a closed continuum of cause and effect and the sharp contrast between 'real, mathematical time and space' and the 'apparent and relative time and space' of our ordinary experience, which have governed so much modern thinking and under which the Christian faith is practically unacceptable, have now been rendered obsolete. Einstein's relativity theory has demonstrated that neither space nor time can be regarded as absolute. The old deterministic system under which everything was rigidly understood in terms of cause and effect has proved inadequate to explain such established facts as the electro-magnetic field.

Meanwhile, quantum theory has shown that there is an unavoidable factor of uncertainty in all scientific calculations. The result has been the emergence of a much more open and dynamic view of the world in which aspects of reality are understood not by reference to any uniformity of causal patterns but in terms of their proper ontological intelligibility. In this way the fatal gap between empirical and theoretical concepts is transcended, and being is found to be essentially open, requiring open concepts and open structures of thought for its understanding. In this new intellectual climate Christian belief in creation, incarnation and resurrection has the opportunity to be presented in terms of its own intrinsic significance and without being squeezed into any alien framework of thought. This is a dramatic turn-around. As T.F. Torrance comments: 'Nothing like this has ever appeared before in the whole history of science, philosophy and culture, except in the theology of the pre-Augustinian Greek Fathers, who had to carry through the same kind of revolution in the basis of their culture as modern science is carrying out today. For the first time, then, in the history of thought, Christian theology finds itself in the throes of a new scientific

26 Kuhn, *Scientific Revolutions*, p. 155.

culture which is not antithetical to it, but which operates with a non-dualist outlook upon the universe which is not inconsistent with the Christian faith, even at the crucial points of creation and incarnation.'[27]

Modern science, far from undermining Christian faith as is often popularly supposed, in fact offers considerable 'corroborating evidence' to anyone involved in the process of Christian conversion. A further, and corresponding, area of corroboration lies in the extraordinary social and political changes of recent times. Polanyi and other philosophers of science argued from the 1950s that the open structures of the new science, and the open universe which they disclose, must lead to the collapse of totalitarian regimes and the spread of the open society. The events of the last few years in Eastern Europe have dramatically vindicated their judgement. The argument is that Marxism is a socio-political counterpart to a positivist and materialist notion of science, seeking to structure society in a way which corresponds to a closed, deterministic understanding of the universe. When transcendent realities and obligations are denied then the state invariably becomes the inheritor of all ultimate devotion. Recent developments in Eastern Europe have demonstrated the bankruptcy of such a system, and the rediscovery of spiritual values currently taking place in that part of the world acts as powerful corroborating evidence in the case of Christian conversion. None of this is intended to suggest that the intellectual transition from a 'modern' to a 'Christian' view of the world is self-evident or without serious obstacles. However, if external corroboration has a valuable role to play we should notice that it is not lacking either in the discoveries of modern science or on the stage of world history.

Conclusion

There can be no minimizing the radical nature of the mental revolution demanded in the modern world by the process of Christian conversion. However this in itself should not daunt us since 'paradigm shift' is common and indeed crucial in intellectual progress. In light of the multi-levelled character of knowledge we may embrace within our new Christ-centred

27 T.F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation* (London, 1975), p. 270.

view of reality all the rational knowledge which has been disclosed to us in modern life. The difference is that it is all given its proper place and proportion in a comprehensive perception of reality which does justice to the full range and depth of the universe. Such a reconstruction can take place only on the basis of an acceptance of the incarnation and resurrection but, in the case of such ultimate realities, a circular procedure is necessary and the new system stands or falls by its ability as a whole to command our acceptance. Faith is indispensable in the development of the new understanding but the commitment of the personal subject is recognised to be crucial in all spheres of knowledge. Moreover, there is striking external corroboration available to anyone making the transition to Christian faith. It is never going to be possible to become a Christian strictly through a process of logical deduction but there are firm rational grounds accessible to modern man which offer a basis for Christian belief. The model for a change of mind suggested by the great scientific revolutions may illuminate the nature of the mental revolution demanded in Christian conversion. It shows that there is, at the end of the twentieth century, a path to Christian belief which is intellectually coherent and convincing.[28]

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28 An earlier version of this paper (under the title 'Scientific Revolutions: A Model for Christian Conversion in the Modern World?') was presented as Faith and Knowledge Seminar No. 10, at Chancellor College, University of Malawi, on 31st January 1991. The author is grateful to all colleagues who attended the seminar and made stimulating and encouraging contributions.

THE INTERFACE BETWEEN THEOLOGY AND HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHY

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Introduction

Some years ago when working with itinerant families, I consulted material in the Brotherton Library, Leeds. While there I was introduced to a folklore handbook. It was a substantial volume. The unusual feature was that it consisted almost entirely of questions. Although not following that method, this paper makes no attempt to give a definitive or comprehensive account. Adopting instead an open-ended approach, I wish to suggest, at least implicitly, a range of questions that can be addressed without losing a sense of the dynamic nature of the biblical witness.

The *Macmillan Encyclopedia* (London, 1981) defines 'geography' as 'the study of the features of the earth's surface, together with their spacial distribution and inter-relationships, as the environment of man'. Following a brief historical survey it states, 'The discipline is now divided between the physical and social sciences. Physical geography includes geomorphology,... biogeography,... and climatology.... The main branches of human geography are historical geography,... economic geography, urban geography and political geography.' We are concerned here mainly with the category of 'human geography'. The entry quoted is written from a geographer's understanding. In it 'historical geography' is understood as, 'studying spacial change in an area over a period of time or reconstructing past landscapes'. However, in current studies from a biblical-geographic perspective 'historical geography' is concerned with the physical setting of events and the movement or resistance to movement of people in a space-time setting. It covers all social geographies where relevant.

'Theology' is often regarded in a very restricted way. Here the understanding is a very broad one, for it is not possible to be a Christian without being a theologian. Each one is influenced both consciously and unconsciously by a personal belief-system. Anyone who decries theology is by that very

act speaking theologically. We do not have a choice whether or not to think of life-issues theologically. Our choice is whether to be content with our present theological understanding or to be open to the possibility of improving it, with all that that entails for practice as well as belief.

Two Modern Approaches

One of the most helpful approaches to the Bible lies in the concept of 'salvation-history', or 'Heilsgeschichte', which sees historical events in the Bible as specific acts in which God saves his people. Such an understanding is a Christian interpretation of biblical events. It is a matter of faith, not proof, but it fits well with the biblical witness. Although geographical considerations have not escaped the notice of the exponents of this approach, it is history that takes centre stage. This has led Grogan to ask if there is not also a 'Heilsgeographie', a 'salvation geography' (G.W. Grogan 'Heilsgeographie: Geography as a Theological Concept', in *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology,* 6, 1988, p.81). Since events in human experience cannot take place in time without also taking place in space, the answer would appear to be 'Yes' – unless the geography does no more than locate.

Increasing attention is being given to another approach, which sees an understanding of the geography of Bible lands, and especially the Holy Land, as essential in biblical study. In this, geography is the handmaid of archaeology. It gives colour, holds our attention and, most importantly, removes some obscurities. In many studies the theological dimension is incidental and, while some give serious *ad hoc* theological consideration, there is very little evidence of concern for thoroughgoing theological and geographical integration. Anthropological, sociological, zoological and other insights may be very exciting but do little to sustain Christian faith and understanding!

The Bible is a collection of documents, each of which has a Middle Eastern provenance apart from Paul's prison epistles (unless, of course, these were written from Ephesus or Caesarea – and even if from Rome were written by one brought up in the Middle East) and possibly apart from Luke and Acts. Throughout, but most noticeably in the Old Testament books, despite their rich variety, theology and historical geography continually interact. At times this is very

obvious. At other times it is just below the surface. And the theology is not monolithic. It may be very developed or embryonic, and may be operative at different levels in the same passage concurrently.

I propose to develop my theme under three heads: 1. Geography and Salvation-History; 2. Geography and Biblical Literary Categories; and 3. Geography and Culture. But first an illustration might prove helpful. Acts contains theological statements related to an historical geographical setting. For example, 'The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all men life and breath and everything' (17:24-5), spoken in first-century Athens. Some statements are also theological interpretations. For example, 'This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. But God raised him up...' (2:23-4), addressed to first-century Jerusalem. A major theme in Acts is the ministry of the Holy Spirit. However, the book in its entirety is theology as well as history. In the selection of material and its balance, theological influences are present, and the history is not history in a secular twentieth-century sense, but salvation-history concerned with bringing the gospel from Jerusalem to Rome, the result of the continuing activity of the Lord (*cf.* 'began' in 1:1). Note that the way in which Luke executes his work is culturally conditioned. There is a striking similarity between Acts 1:1, 'In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt...', and Josephus' *Against Apion* 1:1, 'I suppose that, by my books of the Antiquities of the Jews, most excellent Epaphroditus, I have made it evident...', and 2:1, 'In the former book, most excellent Epaphroditus, I have demonstrated....'

1. Geography and Salvation-History

The central and over-arching theme that runs through the Bible is the kingship of God. The major focus in the exposition of that theme is God's covenantal relationship with his people. In Genesis, although covenant is probably implied in 1:27-8 and made explicit in 6:18 and 9:9, the major focus is on the covenant God established with Abraham in chapters 15 and 17. Some scholars argue that the closest parallels to this

covenant are the Hittite vassal treaties such as the treaty between Mursilis and Duppi-Tessub of Amurru (*Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, ed. J.B. Pritchard (Princeton, NJ, 1955), pp. 203-5. *Cf.* Alan Millard, *Treasures from Bible Times* (Tring, 1985), pp. 60-4). The Hittite empire came to an end c. 1200 BC and with it that type of treaty. Others believe that much later Assyrian parallels are important (G.E. Mendenhall and G.A. Herion, 'Covenant', in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 1 (New York, 1992) pp. 1188-9, and M. Weinfeld, 'berîth', in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1975), vol. 2, pp. 270-1). Millard, however, maintains, 'When other treaties become accessible to us, in Assyrian and Aramaic texts of the eighth century BC and later, the pattern has changed' (*op. cit.*, p. 64). Although further research is necessary for clarification, it is clear that this is one of a number of instances in Scripture where revelation is culturally relevant both historically and geographically. In the Abrahamic covenant we see both selectivity and adaptation. God cannot be reduced to the level of an earthly king, nor does he share his glory with any other. There is theology in these facts – not just antiquarian interest.

There are two major parts to the promises enshrined in the Abrahamic covenant. The first is the promise of numerous descendants. The other is the promise of a land which is to be the home, as subsequently becomes clear, of those descendants that constituted the children of Israel. There is no vagueness about where that land would be, although precise boundaries are not given. 'To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates, the land of the Kenites...' (Gen. 15:18-19). And not only so, but the promise is made for all time: 'I will give to you, and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God' (Gen. 17:8). The land is theologically significant. Other lands and the peoples who occupy them are also significant, but their significance is bound up with Israel and her land and depends on both as the promise is outworked. There was nothing automatic about it as defeats and exile were to show. The promise was conditional on obedience, yet the promise was not withdrawn. God's saving activity involving the land was recounted and

celebrated in prose and poetry, in thought and in liturgy, in personal reflection and in community.

Let us turn now from promise to law, for that too has a significant role to play. This is not the place to assess all the pertinent issues entailed in Israel's legislation but some points can be suitably raised. Any study which ignores the most significant law codes of neighbouring countries already discovered, and most notably that of the Babylonian king Hammurapi c. 1700 BC, would be impoverished. Although it is clear from the Bible that theology and legislation are integrally related, careful comparison with other codes enables us to reach a clearer understanding and brings into sharp focus the issues we have mentioned relating to covenant and treaty.

It should be noted that a very significant and distinctive feature of Israel's legislation is the repeated theme of purposive development (in contrast to a cyclical understanding), centred in the Lord's promise to give Israel a land. There are several significant passages in Exodus and even more in Leviticus, while in Deuteronomy it assumes major proportions: 'I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.... Honour your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land which the Lord your God gives you' (Exod. 20:2, 12); 'You shall therefore keep all my statutes and all my ordinances, and do them; that the land where I am bringing you to dwell may not vomit you out. And you shall not walk in the customs of the nation which I am casting out before you' (Lev. 20: 22-3); 'The Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror, with signs and wonders; and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey' (Deut. 26:8f.).

The land was a gift. Yet the gift was not an absolute one. The children of Israel could not do what they wanted with it. It was given to them in trust. The Lord remained the owner and retained the right to decide what was to happen to it – whether to grant a qualified ownership in whole or in part or even to take it from his own and give it to others. 'The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; for you are strangers and sojourners with me. And in all the country you possess, you shall grant a redemption of the land' (Lev.

25:23-4). The concern in Leviticus 25 was not only the merciful protection of the poor Israelite, but also to ensure that no part of the land was lost, not even to a fellow Israelite. This was also a concern for the daughters of Zelophehad in Numbers 36. For this reason the settlement of the tribes in Joshua 13-19 is also theologically significant, with lists of tribal boundaries, cities and villages. Taken in context this section 'is a partial account of Israel's taking possession of its divinely given territory, and of that territory's distribution to the tribes' (R.S. Hess, in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia,* vol. IV (Grand Rapids, MI, 1988), p. 912).

While obedience would result in blessing, disobedience would result in curse. Nowhere is this more clearly stated than in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 26-30. Obedience would ensure security and prosperity in the land. Disobedience would lead to exile even although that would not be the Lord's final word. Restoration would follow repentance. The Lord, however, would not be manipulated. He remained sovereign. In the Book of Judges we see Israel teetering on the brink and being rescued by the Lord when they cried to him. His deliverances were sovereign acts of grace, astonishing grace – not the reward for repentance which, except in chapter 10, seems to be conspicuous by its absence. And after many vicissitudes throughout the period of the monarchy – exile, first for Israel and then for Judah. This surely has a bearing on the eternal aspect of the gift of the land.

And the land itself – what a strange choice it seems at first glance! A land vulnerable in the power struggles of the great states of Egypt and Mesopotamia. A land vulnerable to attack from neighbouring nations and desert raiders. A land which for geological reasons was difficult to unify and control. A land where in places malarial swamp lay close to fertile ground. A land prone to drought and famine. Clearly more was at stake than obedience. It was in Monson's words 'God's testing ground of faith' (J.M. Monson, *The Land Between: A Regional Study Guide to the Land of the Bible* (Jerusalem, 1983), p. 14).

In eschatological passages in the Prophets the land has a central place. Yet when we turn to the New Testament it is absent, which is all the more surprising since in Judaism it becomes increasingly important! God's chosen race has a

unique place in the thinking of Paul, even although he was the Apostle to the Gentiles, as Romans 9-11 makes clear, but the land loses its special character. Like Israel's ritual, the land is obsolete with the Incarnation. It was in that land, outside the city wall of Jerusalem, that our Lord was crucified, but with the resurrection apparently all lands are 'clean'. 'The hour is coming when neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father' (John 3:21). 'Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth' (Matt. 5:5. To apply this beatitude to the Jews and their land would create more serious problems than it is intended to solve.) Luke tells of one who came to Jesus saying, 'Teacher, bid my brother divide the inheritance with me.' In an Old Testament context that would be a very important request. Things are different now. The request is quite trifling! The Lord replied: 'Man, who made me a judge or divider over you?' And this from the Messiah who was to put all things right! For Jesus, however, the important issue is one the man had not thought about: 'Take heed, and beware all covetousness; for a person's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions' (Luke 12: 13-21).

Christian Zionism does not sit easily with the New Testament witness. (In passing we note that some contemporary ultra-orthodox Jews in Israel regard the State as a sign of apostasy. Only the Messiah can legitimately establish a State of Israel.) The return of Jews to the land of their ancestors and the establishment of the State of Israel are unquestionably significant theologically, but they do not get their significance from fulfilled prophecy, although many parallels can be drawn. The significance is to be found elsewhere – in the providence of God. (Some would argue from passages such as Ezekiel 37 and Zechariah 12-14 that the present return of Jews to the land is prophesied. But the characteristics of the modern State are in some very important respects very different from those of the kingdom of the Messiah, closely associated with return to the land, and Zechariah on a literal understanding speaks only of a presence and not of a restoration from exile.)

It is in the providence of God that the State of Israel exists for Jewish people with their aspirations for security and prosperity. It is in the providence of God that there are Palestinians in that land who have not thrown in their lot with

the Jews (as some of their own have) but have their own aspirations for autonomy and self-determination. 'Are you not like the Ethiopians to me, O people of Israel?' says the Lord. 'Did I not bring up Israel from the land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Caphtor and the Syrians from Kir?' (Amos 9:7) - and that under the old covenant! It might be argued that it matters little whether an event is the result of prophecy or of providence. The distinction, however, is very important. If the return of the Jews is regarded as the fulfilment of prophecy it gives this and associated events a special legitimacy and a considerable degree of finality.

In the continuing struggle the Christian cannot encourage those whose aim is to undermine and destroy the State of Israel. Equally, the Christian cannot support unjust and oppressive treatment of the disadvantaged. Even under the old covenant Israel was told, 'When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. The stranger who sojourns with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God' (Lev. 19:33-4).

2. Geography and Biblical Literary Categories

We look now at the interaction of theology and historical geography on another level. In Old and New Testament we find both poetry and prose frequently integrated and at times unexpectedly juxtaposed.

The Psalms, the Wisdom literature and the prophets have many passages in poetry with geographical context. Particularly important are the references to Jerusalem, often referred to as Zion, a trigger designation that serves particularly well to bring out the theological importance of the city, the place where the Lord dwells, 'the city of the great King'. It was not only the centre of the national life of the united kingdom under David and Solomon and subsequently of the kingdom of Judah but also the site of the temple, one of the factors that made the kingship theologically significant. The king is God's vice-gerent, a concept closely related to that of the awaited Messiah.

We find, too, the celebration of the conquest and subsequent victories, both local and national, and the anticipation of return from exile. There are assertions that the Lord would vindicate his sovereignty in the subduing of

Israel's enemies, *e.g.* Moab, Edom, Philistia, Assyria and Egypt. But there is also censure for the 'chosen people', *e.g.* wholly in Amos 2:4-16 and partially in Judges 5:15-17. And there is expression of desolation: 'Is there no balm in Gilead?' (Jer. 8:22) and 'By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion' (Ps. 137:1).

Turning to prose we find a number of different types of literature including narratives, letters, apocalyptic writing and legal documents. Many contain geographical material. In the Apocalypse in the New Testament this is often symbolic, yet rich in theological significance. But Revelation also contains the letters to seven churches where allusions are made to concrete features which match the message or are a foil to set off the glories of the reigning Lord and reinforce the encouragement to Christians facing persecution. In a way this is a kind of practical theology. Our understanding of the New Testament letters is also greatly enriched by a knowledge of the religious, philosophical and socio-political characteristics of the localities to which they were sent.

Weiser notes, 'As contrasted with the narratives in poetry, a strong realistic impulse underlies the prose narrative. This impulse brings to the forefront the internal historical connections of what has happened' (*Introduction to the Old Testament* (London, 1961), p. 64). Care must be taken not to fall into the trap of the allegorists. Approaching these passages we should ask, 'Does the geography merely locate the event? Is is really significant or does it merely constitute part of the scenery?' In many cases it will simply earth the event – although even that will not be insignificant. Biblical faith is very much rooted in this world. However, it should not escape our notice that biblical writers tend to be very economic with description, and that should alert us to the possibility that some details may be very significant.

To the modern mind the capture of the strategically important city between Ebal and Gerizim where the covenant was to be renewed is much more important than the capture of Ai, probably no more than an outpost of Bethel at that time, which was only one of the steps on the way, yet the capture of Shechem is merely implied in Joshua while almost fifty verses are given to that of Ai. (Ai, always with the definite article, is not a name, but a description – 'the ruin'.) It might be argued that the writer had a disproportionate amount of

material at hand concerning Ai and virtually nothing about Shechem. It is much more likely, taking the passage in context, that very significant theological points are being made. It is the Lord who is sovereign and requires to be glorified in the absolute obedience of his people. It is he who withholds and grants victory. The victory he gives involves his people not only in moral obedience but also in careful military strategy and daring.

There are other ways in which geographical detail may be significant. Attitudes can unintentionally be passed down the generations in families, communities and nations and these attitudes come to be associated with regions and localities. 'Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites... "This people honours me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me..."' (Mark 7:6). 'As your fathers did, so do you' (Acts 7:51). Think of the contrasting tribal reputations of impetuous Benjamin, docile Asher, powerful Ephraim, nationally irrelevant Simeon. And yet the pattern can be broken. Jeremiah from Benjamin! Jesus from Nazareth!

In the Old Testament the universal rule of the Lord was proclaimed in contrast to the localization of the gods worshipped by Israel's neighbours (*e.g.* Deut. 12:2, 2 Kgs. 17:29-31; *cf.* 1 Kgs. 20:23, 2 Kgs. 5:17-19). 'Each national group had its own gods or principalities which had separate names and identities' (V.J. Sterk, 'Territorial Spirits and Evangelization in Hostile Environments' , in *Territorial Spirits*, ed. C.P. Wagner (Chichester, 1991), p. 152). If it were simply a question of the superstitious worship of lifeless idols such worship could simply be dismissed. However, idols and demons are linked in Deuteronomy 32:17, Psalm 106:36-8 and 1 Corinthians 10:20. Deuteronomy 32:8 in the Septuagint (supported against the Massoretic text by a fragment from Qumran) is particularly interesting, since 'sons of God', in a context in which worship does not feature, could include good spiritual beings (*cf.* J.A. Thompson, *Deuteronomy*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentary (London, 1974), p. 299). Daniel with its references to 'watchers' from heaven executing God's will on earth (4:13, 17; *cf.* 'principalities and powers' in Eph. 6:12, *etc.*) also speaks of spiritual beings which are associated with territories and peoples – 'the prince of Persia', 'the prince of

Greece', 'Michael, your prince' – and of heavenly conflict that affects the outcome of world events (Dan. 10). This is taken up in the New Testament at a number of points, most obviously in Ephesians 6 and Revelation, as well as in Judaism. There are no New Testament passages where spirits are associated with specific territories except Mark 5:10, where Legion 'begged him (Jesus) not to send them out of the country'. However, such an association could well be one of the factors underlying the uneven response to the gospel in Acts. In evangelism among hostile people a new openness will sometimes be found after the influencing powers are confronted in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, but this will not invariably happen. Our Lord did not pursue this line of action with Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum (*cf.* Matt. 11:20-4), nor presumably did his followers after Pentecost. Apparently with these towns it would not have been consonant with the will of God.

Following the spiritual histories of localities can be very revealing. Think of Hebron with such promise initially but losing its significance early in the monarchy. Follow Old Testament Shechem through to New Testament Sychar and beyond. Or think of Zebulun and Naphtali: 'The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light' (Matt. 4:15f). (Incidentally, an important by-product of this is the help it can give to the memory. When sections of Scripture are geographically located and illustrated with maps and photographs the impression left on the mind is much more vivid than that obtained by colour coding.)

Decision-making is frequently present in biblical narrative. The theologically very significant ark of the covenant features prominently in Joshua 3-8. Yet it does not directly account for the movements of the Israelites and their direction and timing in chapters 1-8. These depended on the belief that the Lord was communicating unequivocally in rational human speech. Without this the ark would have been reduced to a magic prop. In Genesis, God communicated with Abraham in a similar direct way. But when famine struck the land of Canaan shortly after Abraham arrived, there was no direct voice from heaven. He panicked, lost faith and went to Egypt (Gen.12). In Ruth, when famine hits Bethlehem, Elimelech takes his wife and family to Moab. There is no censure here, either stated or implied, of a possible lapse of faith. As the, to

us, strange ending shows – with its double climax on the name of David – the theme is how the Lord providentially incorporated a Moabitess into the direct line of David's ancestry. The famine was not a test of faith but a providential happening which led Elimelech to Moab. Later in Jerusalem, Hezekiah stood his ground by faith – a very practical faith since it was supplemented by the construction of the Siloam tunnel and the strengthening and extending of the fortifications – against the Assyrian army which besieged the city. But was it faith in the Lord that led Omri to move his capital from Tirzah to Samaria (1 Kgs. 16:24)? Certainly not, as the following verses make clear. Or think of Paul the great strategist who was yet open to the Holy Spirit. He changed his plans and the gospel spread powerfully into Europe (Acts 16). There are indications in the New Testament that others had taken the gospel to Europe earlier, but in the biblical narrative this occasion is particularly significant.

3. Geography and Culture

The more that is discovered about the cultures contemporaneous with the Bible within the Holy Land and neighbouring countries, the clearer it becomes that revelation is given expression in ways appropriate. Although culture is not hermetically sealed it is a geographical as well as theological concern. Genesis 1-11 comprises a variety of related material with extensive treatment given to creation and the Flood. What is the relationship with parallel material in the myths of other countries? We might conceive of a dependence of Scripture on extant myths, albeit with adaptation, and trace a movement of ideas and stories from one location to another. For example, we might conjecture a transmission of a creation myth in a general westerly direction from Mesopotamia to Canaan. However, the case is not that simple.

In the first place, as D.J. Wiseman states: 'No myth has yet been found which explicitly refers to the creation of the universe' ('Creation: III, Ancient Near Eastern Theories', in *New Bible Dictionary*, 2nd edit. (Leicester, 1982), p.247). The most relevant one is the Sumerian cosmogony known in its adapted Babylonian form – the *Enuma Elis*. However, no extant version pre-dates the first millennium, with antecedents going back most probably to the early second millennium. But

we now have the following lines from Ebla, near Aleppo in Northern Syria, from the third millennium, c. 2500-2300 BC:

> Lord of heaven and earth:
> the earth was not, you created it,
> the light of day was not, you created it,
> the morning light you had not made to exist.
> (G. Pettinato, *The Archives of Ebla* (New York, 1981), p. 244)

Contemporary with this is a reference to creation discovered in Egypt. Was the movement, then, from south to north and from west to east? More probably we have a theme of universal interest and with parallel developments. How are we to understand Genesis 1:1-2:4a in its cultural context? It is a statement of faith with a polemic edge. Explicitly it declares the uniqueness of God and his relation to creation – responsible for it, yet not part of it. Implicitly it rejects the polytheistic pantheon with its petty quarrels and absence of transcendence. Although subsequent passages in Genesis 1-11 differ in style and are not of the same intent, comparable theological dynamics are present there too. It is reasonable to account for similarities with extra-biblical material in at least three ways. Israel was living in the same physical universe as her neighbours and was experiencing the same phenomena, although the interpretation might differ. There were cultural experiences and understandings not inimical to Israel's faith which were common property. If cross-cultural communication is to take place there must be a certain amount of common ground in the vehicle of expression.

Parallels can be drawn between a number of brief passages, particularly in the Psalms, and the conflict between Baal and Yam (the sea) in Ugaritic literature. For example,

> Thou dost rule the raging of the sea;
> when its waves rise, thou stillest them.
> Thou didst crush Rahab like a carcass,
> thou didst scatter thy enemies with thy mighty arm (Ps. 89:9-10).

Even if 'Rahab' is Egypt (*cf.* Ps. 87:4; Isa. 30:7), the description is hardly one of sober prose!

> Was it not thou that didst cut Rahab in pieces,
> that didst pierce the dragon?
> Was it not thou that didst dry up the sea,
> the waters of the great deep? (Isa. 51:9-10).

Correspondence there certainly is with Canaanite mythology, yet we do well to be cautious. 'The *exact* relationship between Baal's fight against the Sea and Yahweh's conflict with the primeval waters is uncertain' (A.A. Anderson, *Psalms*, New Century Bible (London, 1972), vol. 2, p. 635). Polemicism seems muted, if in fact present, in the biblical passages containing these allusions. As the contexts show, the writers do not have a Canaanite mindset. The allusions seem to serve the purpose of graphically asserting the complete adequacy of the Lord in every circumstance and his unrivalled position. The writers were no more reverting to paganism than was Milton when he used classical allusions in his poetry. Similar caution must be exercised when comparing Canaanite, Egyptian and Mesopotamian Wisdom Literature with Proverbs, Song of Solomon and Ecclesiastes. A comparable New Testament passage is 2 Peter 1:3-4. Michael Green notes, 'These two verses abound in rare and daring words. Peter is very subtly using language uncommon in the New Testament but full of meaning in the pagan world, as we know from the Carian inscriptions' (*2 Peter and Jude*, Tyndale New Testament Commentary (London, 1968), pp. 64f.).

Examples of interaction are legion – which is not surprising since no part of the Bible was written in a cultural vacuum. Every verse has a historical geographical context, whether or not we can precisely determine date and location.

I wish to record my gratitude to the Presbytery of Glasgow for granting me three months' study leave in the Holy Land in 1991 and to the Institute of Holy Land Studies, where I received intellectual stimulus and encouragement in Christian fellowship. Without these two bodies this paper would not have been written.

THE REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF SCOTLAND AND THE DISRUPTION OF 1863. I. DISRUPTION AND RECOVERY

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The Reformed Presbyterian (RP) Church of Scotland is the lineal descendant of the Covenanting movement of the seventeenth century. The smallest and least well-known of the Presbyterian churches in the land of John Knox, she has maintained a separate organization, outside the established Church of Scotland, for over three centuries – longer than any other dissenting church in the kingdom. Tenacity – in terriers and churches alike – is often inversely proportional to size and this has certainly been reflected in the distinctive testimony of the continuing church of the Covenanters. It was succinctly summarized by the Revd S.M. Kennedy in his address to the Scottish RP Synod of 1932 – a comment all the more pointed because it was set in the context of the 1929 union of the two largest Scottish Presbyterian churches, the Church of Scotland and the United Free Church:

> But the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland has continued on its way, little moved by these changes in the ecclesiastical world around it. And while your church, like mine in Ireland, has had its difficulties and discouragements during the last thirty years, I have not the slightest fear that it will become absorbed in any of the other Churches in Scotland and lose its identity notwithstanding the talk of union among the smaller Scottish Presbyterian Churches.[1]

With only minor alterations, this might have been said at any Reformed Presbyterian Synod since the middle of the nineteenth century. She has continued on her way and remains unabsorbed by any larger church, a tiny remnant of the Covenanting cause. The purpose of this paper is to examine some of the reasons for this. In particular, we will note the interplay of, on the one hand, her distinctive testimony – the principles that demanded her separate existence – and, on the other hand, the pull toward union with other Reformed churches, the effect of the truths that cannot but draw together believers of 'like precious faith' (2 Pet. 1:1) in spite of their often very real differences. Our main focus

1 *Reformed Presbyterian Witness* 51 (1932), p. 135.

will be upon the 'Disruption'[2] of 1863 in the Scottish RP Church and its ripples down the years to the present. First, we must set the context by reviewing the beginnings of the Reformed Presbyterian Church.[3]

The Covenanters and their Church (1679-1863)

The movement that was later to become the Reformed Presbyterian Church emerged in the period immediately following the Rutherglen Testimony of May 29, 1679. Under the leadership of Richard Cameron and Donald Cargill, the more rigorous Covenanters affirmed afresh the binding nature of the National Covenant of 1638, and its twin doctrines of the *jus divinum* of a free, Presbyterian and Reformed Church and a nation, in covenant with God, acknowledging the kingly rule of Jesus Christ over the affairs of the state. Although ostensibly still embraced within the bosom of the broad Church of Scotland, these Cameronians began to assume a distinct identity as a result of the interplay of their own doctrinal emphases and the persecuting zeal of the Privy Council. They organized as the 'United Societies' on December 15, 1681. Their position was vividly proclaimed in a series of public declarations, most notably those at Sanquhar (June 22, 1680), Torwood (also 1680) and Lanark (January 12, 1682), and *The Apologetical Declaration* and *The Informatory Vindication* (both 1684).[4]

The United Societies thereafter held aloof from the Church of Scotland – a separation which continued even after the end of the persecutions and the return to relative normality at the Revolution Settlement of 1690. These Societies were non-ecclesiastical in structure. Their ministers, Messrs Shields,

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2 This is not to be confused with *the* Disruption – that of the Church of Scotland in 1843, in which over the issue of patronage and the spiritual freedom of the church some 450 ministers and elders walked out of the General Assembly to form the Free Church of Scotland.

3 For a somewhat fuller account, see my article 'Reformed Presbyterian Church' in the forthcoming *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology* (1993).

4 The texts of these and other foundational Covenanter documents can be found in *Testimony Bearing Exemplified* (New York, 1834), pp. 179-296. This compilation by Thomas Henderson of Kilmacolm was first published in Paisley in 1791.

Linning and Boyd, left them for the Established Church in 1690, and it was not until 1706, when the Revd John McMillan joined them from the Establishment, that they had regular gospel ordinances. McMillan was the only ordained minister of the Societies for some thirty-seven years.[5] Then, with the accession of a second minister, the Revd Thomas Nairn, the Reformed Presbytery was formed – at Braehead, near Carnwath, on August 1, 1743. Subsequent ordinations of new ministers allowed the organization of a Synod in 1811. During the period 1743-1863 the denomination appears to have remained stable in membership, perhaps growing slightly, with a constituency of more than 10,000 people. This was no little achievement, for there was a steady haemorrhage of emigrants to North Americas throughout the period and, in 1753, a serious secession known thereafter as 'the Breach'.[6] The 'Community', as it was called in John McMillan's day, was progressively transformed from one large congregation of scattered 'Fellowship Societies' into a highly organized Presbyterian denomination with local congregations and regional presbyteries. It was only after 1761 that the Community was divided into congregations and ministers assigned to them.[7]

Fifty years later, in 1811, there were eighteen charges and thirteen ministers in three Presbyteries,[8] while by mid-century there were forty-six charges in six Presbyteries, comprising a church of just over 6,900 communicant members, together with a proportional number of children and adherents.[9] This

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5 The Revd John McMillan (1669-1753) was ably assisted by John McNeill (1666-1732), who had been licensed to preach by the Church of Scotland in 1699, joined the Societies in 1708 and preached without ordination until his death.

6 Matthew Hutchison, *The Reformed Presbyterian Church in Scotland, 1680-1876* (Paisley, 1893), pp. 197-8. 'The Breach' gave rise to a body called 'The Reformed Presbytery of Edinburgh', which continued to exist until about 1817.

7 Hutchison, p. 215. At first, there was only one division, into Northern and Southern congregations, with the ministers divided between them. The ministers were 'the four Johns' –McMillan, Thorburn, Courtass and Finlay.

8 Hutchison, p. 255.

9 For the annals of the RP C. of S., see W.J. Couper: 'The Reformed Presbyterian Church in Scotland: its Congregations, Ministers and

was the high summer of the Covenanting cause. Her churches were growing and, for all that she was dwarfed by the Established, Free and United Presbyterian denominations, her testimony was highly visible in the Scottish scene. She rejoiced in a string of nationally known ministers and theologians – such as the Symingtons, Andrew and William, and William Goold, the editor of the works of John Owen. She was the church of John G. Paton, the heroic missionary to the New Hebrides. She had unchallenged claim to the legacy of the martyrs of the 'Killing Time' and continuity with the heritage of the Second Reformation and the Covenants, National and Solemn League. 'High summer' was, however, to become 'high noon' in the 'Disruption' of 1863.

The Disruption of 1863

Compared with the Disruption of the Established Church two decades earlier, the division of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in 1863 caused scarcely a ripple on the national scene. It was, however, a traumatic experience for the RP Synod. Stenographic records of Synod debates between 1859 and 1863 reveal a church in turmoil, as the conservative minority sought to overturn the majority decision of 1858 relaxing church discipline in the matter of exercising the electoral franchise.[10] These make sad, if absorbing, reading, as

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Students', in *Records of the Scottish Church History Society* 2 (1925).

10 Five annual stenographic records of the Synod's debate were published by 'The "Reformation" Association', an organization of conservative RPs dedicated to maintaining the testimony of 'political dissent' and the ban on voting and holding public office. These are: *Our Testimony Compromised* (Glasgow, 1859); *Principle v. Practice* (Glasgow, 1860); *Full Report of Discussions in the RP Synod, at Edinburgh, May, 1861...* (Glasgow, 1861); *Full Report of Discussion in the RP Synod in Glasgow May 1862* (Glasgow, 1862); and *Disruption of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland* (Glasgow, 1863). Supplementary publications included: *Review of Discussion in the RP Synod at Edinburgh, May 1861* (Glasgow 1861); *Review of Discussions in the RP Synod at Glasgow, May 1862; and of the Committee of Synod's Report, which was based on the legal opinions of Mr Sheriff Bell, Mr Sheriff Strathearn, Mr A. Murray Dunlop, Mr John Bright, and*

passions erupt on both sides and gather momentum to the point that division becomes not only inevitable but a kind of relief from otherwise incurable pain. The majority, determined for change, endures five years of debate and moves on, leaving the minority in isolated impotence, condemned to lose every vote and forced in the end to walk out and begin again to rebuild their shattered cause. The majority never looked back and in thirteen years were part of the Free Church. But for the minority, committed as they were to 200 years of practical political dissent, this was a catastrophe and the most important set-back to the Covenanting movement in all its long history. It was, however, also a re-birth of an unmodified Covenanting witness in the land of the Covenanters.

1. Two Controversial Issues

The RP Church had been agitated by two questions for several decades prior to 1863. These were the matter of the *electoral franchise*, already mentioned, and the pressure for *ecclesiastical union*. The former was, of course, the great obstacle to the latter, for the Covenanters' great practical 'distinctive' of the time was that they had banned the use of 'the vote' and made this a matter of discipline for their membership.[11] This practice rested upon the doctrine of the perpetual obligation of the Covenants, National (1638) and Solemn League (1643), and the correlative theory that to involve oneself in an act that might imply the approval of the nation that had broken these Covenants was to become guilty of complicity in that nation's error. Taking oaths of allegiance, serving in the military or in political office and voting for anyone who might take political office (and have to

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other six gentlemen (Glasgow, 1863); and *Disruption Portrait of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland* (Glasgow, 1863).

11 The non-voting position (with voting as a *censurable* offence) really came into play only with the extension of the franchise in the nineteenth century, most notably the Reform Act of 1832. Prior to that time, the focus of the distinctive principles of the RP Church had been more immediately upon the doctrinal ramifications of the Covenants as these were controverted between the different churches. After 1832, the option to vote became a reality for large numbers of the citizenry, to whom, formerly, it had been no more than a theory. The advance of political freedoms in Britain thus forced the issue upon the Covenanters in a fresh way.

swear to uphold the covenant-breaking British constitution) was therefore to be avoided as the sin of incorporation with an immoral government. Of all these, it was *abstention from voting* that was the visible, practical tip of the doctrinal iceberg – the whole covenanting corpus of doctrine – that separated the Covenanters from the rest of Scottish Presbyterianism. This in effect declared the latter to be in the grip of a religio-political palsy, namely, an unhallowed co-operation with an Erastian, covenant-breaking state. At the same time, however, this collided with the church's own doctrine of the unity of the visible church and her awareness that she shared a warm commitment to the Reformed faith with multitudes in the larger denominations of the realm. A tension therefore came to exist between the distinctive principles that separated her from other Reformed churches and the common principles which united her with others in a commitment to the doctrines of the Westminster Confession of Faith.

1.1 Church union. The movement toward church union first came to the fore with the issuance of a resolution in the Synod of 1821, warmly promoting the principle of seeking the union of the visible church.[12] This did not result in any practical moves toward union and, if anything, received somewhat of a check in 1838, with the publication of the new doctrinal part of the *Testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church*, approved by Synod in 1837.[13] This very crisply underscored the doctrinal differences separating the RP Church from other Presbyterian churches in Scotland. With respect to the Established Church, the Covenanters, while not opposed to the principle of the establishment of religion by the state, did reject the particular Erastian relationship then existing between the Established Church and the British government. She also

12 Hutchison, p. 263.

13 *The Testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Scotland* (Paisley, 1838). The Doctrinal Part was approved in 1837 and published in 1838. The Historical Part was approved in 1838 and published (in Glasgow) in 1839. These are usually bound together, according to the original plan of the Synod. This remains the doctrinal standard of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland in 1992, although it was last reprinted in the 1870s.

rejected the voluntaryism of the Secession and Relief Churches.[14]

Notwithstanding such trenchant indictments, the matter of union was taken up by the Synod of 1842 and sporadic negotiations were conducted thereafter with the Seceders, and, after 1863, with other non-established bodies.[15] This process was eventually to lead to the union of the post-1863 majority Synod with the Free Church in 1876.

1.2 The electoral franchise. The flash-point of controversy was the use of the franchise. Before 1832, this was not an issue, for few, if any, Reformed Presbyterians had the vote. After that date, many did have the vote and apparently exercised the privilege.[16] The following year, without sending it down on overture to sessions and presbyteries in accord with the law of the church, the Synod ruled that voting could only be construed as 'direct recognition of the [British] Constitution' and was therefore 'inconsistent with the enjoyment of the privileges of this church'[17] (*i.e.* membership). The Synod of 1833 marks the beginning of non-voting as the principal expression of bearing the testimony of political dissent. Indeed, that Synod effectively made non-voting a term of communion, although the actual disciplinary measures were left to the sessions, without specific guidance from Synod. The lack of uniformity as to the penalty tended to ensure further controversy, if only to clear up the inconsistent practice across the church. It seems certain that many in the succeeding years disregarded the ban on voting and were never subject to discipline.[18]

The Synod of 1858. For nearly a quarter of a century little was heard on the subject until, in 1857, petitions from congregations in Greenock and Airdrie re-opened the question, in the latter case specifically calling for measures to bring the practice of the church into conformity with the

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14 The RP Church was never the recipient of state funds, and so was 'voluntary' in *practice*, but she strongly affirmed the principle that the state was duty bound to recognise the kingship of Christ and give legal status and protection to the church.

15 Hutchison, p. 300 (*cf.* 338ff.).

16 Hutchison, p. 281.

17 Hutchison, p. 282.

18 Hutchison, p. 326.

position on voting as adopted in 1833.[19] In response, the Synod of 1858 ruled along traditional lines, affirming the position of the 1837 *Testimony* against voting, oaths to do with the Constitution and taking political office. But there was still the question over the decision of 1833, which appeared to call for church discipline in the case of any member who voted in parliamentary elections. Opponents of the application of discipline were not prepared to say that the *Testimony* was wrong in declaring it inconsistent for Reformed Presbyterians to 'commission others to do for them what it would be unwarrantable and immoral for them to do in their own persons'[20] (*i.e.*, vote for others to sit in Parliament), but wished to allow liberty of conscience on this point. They would teach it, but not make it a point of church discipline. So strong was this feeling in the Synod that the resolution to apply discipline (No. 4) was withdrawn – a tacit admission of defeat by the party that had proposed its adoption. Since the third resolution was to the effect that the church's practice be made conformable to the *Testimony*, it became clear that what was withdrawn in the fourth resolution (church discipline) could not be implied in the passage of the third.

The overall effect was to modify the enactment of 1833, which had clearly implied church censures for voting. This modification was masked by the apparent re-affirmation of the political dissent doctrine of the church and the absence of any explicitly stated change of practice. It did not, however, go unnoticed. Not a few regarded the action of 1858 as a defection from the covenanted testimony of Reformed Presbyterianism and, at that time, Dr John Cunningham, the RP missionary to the Jews in London, asserted that the removal of discipline in the matter of voting was the first step to surrendering 'the chief and distinguishing badge of adherence to the Covenanted cause, namely a practical protest against the British Constitution by refusing to vote and take the Oath of Allegiance'.[21] Subsequent events were to prove this analysis to be substantially correct.

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19 *Disruption Portrait of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland* (Glasgow, 1863), p.1.

20 *Testimony*, p. 222.

21 *Full Report of Discussions in the Reformed Presbyterian Synod in Glasgow, May 1862...* (Glasgow, 1862) p. 5.

The Synod of 1859. The following year, petitions from London and Penpont congregations called upon Synod to require the exercise of church discipline against any who exercised the franchise. After a day-long debate, which ended a half-hour after midnight, Synod rejected the petitions and affirmed the third resolution of 1858, which had called for consistency between the *Testimony* and the practice of the church, without specifying any disciplinary measures to be taken. This was, of course, a case of an unwillingness to censure anyone who actually voted, hiding behind an empty affirmation of a clear credal ban on voting.

It is clear from the debate that the leadership of the church had changed its mind on this point. William Symington, certainly the most widely-respected theologian that the RP Church ever produced, came out strongly against discipline for voting and served notice on the minority that there was no road back on the discipline question. He noted that 'The point upon which the whole diversity of opinion lies, is that of voting being identified with taking the oaths',[22] and asserted that the taking of the Oath of Allegiance by Members of Parliament was 'an accessory and accidental circumstance that does not reduplicate upon the individual'. He could not see shutting people out of the membership of the church who were 'not prepared to say "I will not vote, and I believe that voting is a sin in the sight of God"'. He therefore did not favour discipline and thought 'it would be a pity to split the Church on such a metaphysical question, as that of the identity of the voter with the person that takes the oath'.[23] Since Symington was a member of the committee that formulated the 1833 deliverance, this represented nothing less than a complete reversal of his earlier viewpoint and could not but have been a stunning blow to the petitioners.[24] The

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22 *Our Testimony Compromised: A Full Report of the Discussion in the Reformed Presbyterian Synod regarding the Use of the Electoral Franchise* (Glasgow, 1859), p. 20.

23 *Our Testimony Compromised*, p. 31.

24 *Ibid.*, p.19. Symington's and the Synod's 1833 position was that 'the exercise of the elective franchise, conferred by [the Reform Act of 1832], is a direct recognition of the Constitution, in virtue of the political identity subsisting between the representative and his constituents, and is therefore inconsistent with the enjoyment of the

subsequent vote buried forever, in the pre-Disruption RP Synod, any insistence that members not exercise the electoral franchise on pain of ecclesiastical discipline.

One immediate consequence was the secession of Dr John Cunningham, the RP missionary to the Jews in London, and the London congregation of the RP Church.[25] They were later to identify themselves with a remnant group of ultra-Covenanters in south-west Scotland, the 'Societies of the Old Dissenting Presbyterians of Wigtonshire,'[26] and the equally rigorous 'Reformed Presbytery' in North America (the 'Steelites'). They were to remain aloof even from the post-Disruption Minority after 1863.[27]

The Synod of 1862. Events moved rapidly to a climax. The 1860 Synod was largely absorbed by the case of David McCubbin, a member of William Symington's congregation in Great Hamilton Street, Glasgow (First RP), who had won election to the Glasgow Town Council and had taken the Oath of Allegiance as a Councillor. A complaint against the session for not exercising discipline in the case was, after a heated debate, dismissed with an encouragement that the session

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privileges of this Church'. In 1859, both were saying that the 'political identity' between representative and constituents was a 'metaphysical question' insufficient to warrant discipline (and splitting the church).

25 John Cunningham, *Our Testimony Kept; or the Position of Separation taken by the Reformed Presbyterian Congregation of London, in May 1859* (Glasgow, 1860), pp. 26-9. This largely reduplicates the text of *Our Testimony Compromised.*

26 *The London Scottish RP Magazine*, 1 January, 1866, p.1. The Wigtonshire 'Society' was the remnant of the followers of the Revd James Reid (1750-1837), who had withdrawn from the RP Church in 1825 on account of the removal from the Terms of Communion of the mention of the renovation of the Covenants at Auchensaugh in 1712.

27 *Ibid.*, p. 4. The 'Reformed Presbytery' was a conservative split from the Old Light RP Church of North America in 1840 under the leadership of David Steele (Steele, *Reminiscences. Historical and Biographical of a Ministry in the Reformed Presbyterian Church, during fifty-three years*, Philadelphia, 1883). At the time of writing, a remnant Steelite congregation still meets regularly for worship in the North Union RP Church, Brownsdale, Pennsylvania, still singing praise from the Scottish Psalter of 1650.

continue to 'proceed in the matter until they bring it to an issue', in the meantime expressing approval for their actions to that point.[28] This was ostensibly only discipline deferred, but subsequent events show that Symington and the majority in Synod had no intention of disciplining Mr McCubbin at all. The only 'issue' to which this matter came, was for it to drop entirely from sight in the decisive action of the Synod in 1862 removing all threat of discipline over the 'political dissent' doctrine of the Church.

In response to an 1861 overture from Dumfries Presbytery calling for a return to the former position as a solution to the prevailing ambiguity, a synodical committee reported to the 1862 Synod with the finding that there was no connection between 'the representative and the constituency as to implicate the latter in the Oath which the former must take on entering office'. The Synod also recommended abstention from voting (and thus from 'taking the oath in this sense') but declared that it had no authority in the Word of God to apply judicial censure.[29] Even more significant was the proffered basis for this decision, for the Synod explicitly repudiated her formerly held view that taking the Oath of Allegiance necessarily implied a '*complete* homologation of the evils of the British Constitution' [my emphasis]. Yes, the Constitution was defective, but, no, it was not as defective as had hitherto been thought. *Ergo*, voting was more a matter of judgement, than a definable sin. In this way, the 'distinctive' became a 'perspective', something for discussion perhaps, but not for discipline. This was what was then sent down in overture to

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28 *Principle v. Practice. Report of the Discussions in the Reformed Presbyterian Synod, on Questions relating to the 'Oath of Allegiance', and the use of 'The Elective Franchise'* (Glasgow, 1860), p. 28.

29 *Reformed Presbyterian Magazine*, May 1862, p. 230 (Minutes of Synod). The idea of 'complicity in error' is essential to the definition of the sin of 'incorporation with an immoral Constitution' and, consequently, to any practical programme of 'political dissent'. In denying a 'complicity in error' connection between voting and the Oath, the 1862 Scottish RP Synod not only pulled the rug from under the 1833 ban on voting, but seriously compromised the 'political dissent' doctrine itself. (See also *Full Report of Discussions in the Reformed Presbyterian Synod, in Glasgow, May 1862*, pp. 122-3.)

sessions and presbyteries, for a vote, which would then be ratified by the 1863 Synod. Only two ministers and five elders registered their dissent.[30]

2. The Synod Divides – May 7, 1863

When Synod met in the First RP Church, Great Hamilton Street, Glasgow on May 7, 1863, it was reported that all the presbyteries and a majority of the sessions had registered their support for the removal of discipline with respect to the exercise of the franchise.[31] A motion distilling the essence of the overture was made by the Synod Clerk, the Revd John Kay:

> Synod, therefore, in accordance with these reports enacts that, while recommending the members of the Church to abstain from the use of the franchise and from taking the Oath of Allegiance, discipline to the effect of suspension and expulsion from the privileges of the Church shall cease, and earnestly enjoin upon all under their charge to have respect to this decision, and to follow after the things which make for peace, and things whereby one may edify another.[32]

An amendment was then moved by John McDonald, an elder in the Third RP Church, Glasgow, to the effect,

> That the Synod, on mature deliberation, reject the overture sent down from the last meeting of Synod to sessions and presbyteries, and resolve to adhere to the principles of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, clearly set forth in her Testimony, and faithfully maintain the same in both doctrine and discipline.[33]

It was a forlorn hope, as the minority party well knew. The majority simply no longer believed in the rigorous political dissent doctrine of their forebears, as enshrined in the non-voting rule of 1833 and the 1837 *Testimony*. The revolutionary motion carried against the reactionary amendment by 46-11, with 7 abstentions. The central practical 'distinctive' of the Covenanting Church was thereby reduced, at a stroke, to a matter of opinion, even within her own

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30 *Full Report of Discussions in the Reformed PresbyteriaSynod, in Glasgow, May 1862*, p. 122.

31 This is to be compared with the irregular, if not indeed illegal introduction of the rule against voting in 1833. On that earlier occasion there was no overture and no ratification by the whole church, according to the church's own procedural law.

32 *Disruption of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland* (Glasgow, 1863), p. 6.

33 *Ibid.*, p. 14.

communion.[34] The Revd William Anderson,[35] Loanhead, then read a protest on behalf of himself and others, declaring their purpose to maintain the former position of the church and calling a meeting of a reconstituted RP Synod for the following day, May 8, 1863. After a short, but rather heated discussion, this protest was rejected, as was a similar document, delivered next day by the minority's legal representative.[36] After the dust had settled, so to speak, it became apparent that the majority had retained the allegiance of some 85% of the people. The RP Church had changed at the grass roots, in both pew and pulpit, and the remnant who were persuaded of the old claims of the Covenants and political dissent were faced with rebuilding the old church in a new and different world.

This was the moment that marked the beginning of the continued witness of the Minority Synod RP Church, a witness that has now survived by over a century the passage into history of the Majority Synod. The latter remained an independent body for thirteen years, until her union with the Free Church of Scotland in 1876. During that period, she effectively dismantled – as Dr John Cunningham had predicted – the residual Cameronian positions that would hinder the union. 'Covenanting' as a term of communion was dropped in 1872.[37] In 1876, the Majority Synod was simply absorbed into the massive structure of the Free Church – perhaps 10,000 souls among a third of a million! Five congregations declined to enter that union. Of these, Douglas Water, Rothesay, Stranraer and Whithorn later returned to the continuing RP Church, while Carnoustie rejoined the Original Secession Church, whence it had come some time before.[38] The Majority RP Synod remained in existence as a legal entity

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34 *Ibid.*, pp. 34-5.

35 William Anderson (1795-1866), was a native of Ballylaggan, Ireland. His entire ministry (1820-66) was in Loanhead, south of Edinburgh. It is a testimony to his steadfast devotion to the old Covenanting position that his congregation in Loanhead still adheres to the modern RP Church. Their building – built during Anderson's ministry – has the distinction of being the first church in Scotland to be built of concrete block.

36 *Disruption of the Reformed Presbyterian Church*, p. 37.

37 Hutchison, p. 357.

38 Hutchison, pp. 376ff.

until 1932 – a Synod *quoad civilia, i.e.*, a Synod for civil purposes, without ministry or people, provided for under the law of the land for the purpose of benefitting from certain properties and trusts. A slightly ironic end, perhaps, for a body which, through most of its long history, had vigorously dissented from involvement with a covenant-breaking state.[39]

Rebuilding Reformed Presbyterianism, 1863-1900

The principal task facing the minority was the re-establishment of some organizational integrity. The Synod was constituted on May 8, 1863 as a continuation of the original succession of Synods since 1811 and immediately adjourned to reconvene a month later. This meeting took place in Glasgow on June 2, 1863, and by the close of that day the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland was regularly organized, with eight congregations and two nominal presbyteries. The fact that from that day to this, with the exception of the synodical year 1870-71, these 'presbyteries' have had to meet together as 'the Joint Presbyteries of Edinburgh and Glasgow' is a poignant testimony to the struggle it has been for the last one-hundred-and-thirty years to maintain the order of a fully-fledged presbyterian denomination. Notwithstanding the difficulties and disappointments, progress was made, so that by 1876 the church had grown to twelve congregations, with seven ministers and just over 1,000 communicant members.

The period after 1876, then, was dominated by the effort to recover from the Disruption and once again see the growth of an uncompromised Covenanting witness. And indeed, throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century, the Reformed Presbyterian Church did show modest growth, and that in spite of continuing emigration of her people from the British Isles to North America and the Antipodes. Lack of ministerial manpower was also a serious problem. Mission stations in Darvel, Dundee and Lochgilphead withered on the vine for lack of gospel ordinances and some of the more distant centres seem to have survived without any settled ministry for many years at a time. The congregation in

39 *Reformed Presbyterian Witness* 52 (1933), p. 51. The winding up of the *quoad civilia* Synod in 1932 is marked by a bronze plaque on a wall of the University of Glasgow.

Thurso, in the far north, for example, had one visit from a minister in 1872 and just two visits in the following year. This suggests that the church's growth might have been much greater had there been more labourers to send forth into the harvest. Over the course of the rest of the century, the smaller, more remote congregations were closed: Rothesay (1881), Douglas Water (1885), Girvan (1886), Wick (1893), Lorn (1893),[40] and Whithorn (1899). Still, by the early 1990s, the city congregations were doing well, there were new congregations in Edinburgh and in north Glasgow. Some forty years after the Disruption, there were 1,125 communicants, ten congregations, and eight ministers. Total membership was higher than at any time since 1863.

Furthermore, the church was clearly confident about her Covenanting heritage and testimony throughout the nineteenth century, and well into the twentieth, for she sustained a vigorous polemic against the non-Covenanted British nation and churches. For the first decade or so, the focus of attack was the 'New Light' Synod, as the Majority came inevitably to be labelled. Exemplifying this testimony for 'Reformation principles' was a public meeting held in Glasgow on June 26, 1876, under Minority Synod auspices and on the occasion of the Majority Synod's decision to unite with the Free Church. No fewer than eight speakers addressed themselves to the following motions, all of which were – needless to say – 'unanimously carried' by the acclaim of a partisan audience!

> (1) That the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland is, historically and doctrinally, identified with the Church of the Second Reformation, and also with the position assumed by our fathers who, in 1688, protested against the Revolution Settlement in Church and State.
>
> (2) That the course adopted in 1863 by the majority... was an abandonment of the distinctive principles and position of the Reformed Presbyterian Church.
>
> (3) That we, representing the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland, regard it as our imperative duty... to continue to occupy the position, and to maintain and diffuse the principles of our Testimony,... being persuaded that these are Scriptural and shall ultimately triumph.[41]

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40 The Lorn congregation, situated on the island of Seil, Argyllshire, was the only Gaelic-speaking congregation in the Reformed Presbyterian Church, which, of course, was primarily found in the Covenanting areas of English-speaking central and south-west Scotland. The building still stands and is a restaurant.

41 *Reformed Presbyterian Witness* 6 (1876), pp. 493ff.

'Reformed Presbyterians are not pessimists', wrote James Kerr, pastor in Glasgow and one of their most prolific apologists, 'they are the sons of the morning; and those who die ere their desires for their covenanted land and the world are realized, die with their faces to the coming Sun.'[42] Written at the close of Queen Victoria's magnificent reign, this was the last sentence in a ringing call to the British Empire to embrace explicitly in her Constitution the supremacy of Jesus Christ. The tract, entitled *Political Dissent in Great Britain: a defence of the isolation of Reformed Presbyterians in the realm of politics*, catches the optimism and expectations common to Christians of the High Victorian era, but expresses them in terms of the distinctively Covenanter vision of an entire world renewed by God. Here is a postmillennial prospectus for the conversion of Britain and the nations before the coming of the great and terrible Day of the Lord.

After the New Lights had united with the Free Church, the polemics gave way, for a brief moment, to legal action. Since 1856, the united RP Church had shared in a fund called the Ferguson Bequest. This was denied to her after the Disruption, evidently as a result of 'an indirect effort (by the Majority Synod) ... in connection with the Ferguson Bequest Fund [Trustees]'.[43] After the Majority Synod united with the Free Church in 1876, the continuing minority RP Synod sued the Ferguson Bequest Trustees for reinstatement as qualified beneficiaries under the terms of the trust. The case went all the way to Scotland's highest court, the Court of Session, and

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42 James Kerr, DD, *Political Dissent in Great Britain* (Glasgow, 1901, 2nd ed.), p. 72. Kerr (1847-1905) received a DD from Geneva College, Beaver Falls, PA, the liberal arts college founded by the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America. For an account of Kerr's life, see Archibald Holmes, *Memorial Volume to the Rev. James Kerr* (Glasgow, 1906?).

43 James Barr, *The United Free Church of Scotland* (London, 1934), p. 194. The Ferguson Bequest was a sum of £300,000 left in 1856 for the support of the churches and schools of five denominations – four Presbyterian and one Congregational – in the west of Scotland. From 1863, the Bequest Trustees gave grants only to Majority Synod churches and indicated that they would give nothing to Minority Synod congregations until legally required to do so.

became a landmark in Scottish legal history.[44] The church eventually regained her former access to the Fund, a benefit which has been of indispensable value to the church and her ministers from that day to this.[45]

In the period before the First World War, a remarkably high proportion of Reformed Presbyterian ministers were published writers. James Kerr, as we have seen, was the apologist for Covenanting distinctive principles. Peter Carmichael,[46] James Dick,[47] Archibald Holmes,[48] Cameron

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44 A. Taylor Innes, *The Law of Creeds in Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1902), pp. 294-7. The interest of the Ferguson Bequest Case (Wallace v. Ferguson Bequest 1878, 6R, 486) is that it was the first legal case in Scotland in which the 'right of legislative or constitutional change... was deliberately brought forward'. The Minority Synod claimed exclusive right to the RP share of Mr Ferguson's money, on the ground that they were the true RP Church, constitutionally. The Majority (by 1878 united with the Free Church and only existing *quoad civilia,* partly for the very purpose of retaining an interest in the Ferguson Bequest for her formerly RP congregations, now in the Free Church) had of course felt it right to change their position and unite with the Free Church. The court found that their changed position could not disqualify them from benefitting from the Bequest, but also found that the Minority could hardly be denied the same benefits for *not* changing the position they had held all along. On Jan. 16, 1879, the Court of Session ordered the re-instatement of the continuing RP Church as a beneficiary of the Ferguson Bequest. For RP perspectives, see James Kerr, *Reformed Presbyterian Law Case. An exposure of the 'Defences' of the 'Civil' Synod* (Edinburgh, 1877) and John McDonald, *Pactum Illicitum. Lord Curriehill's Decision versus the Reformed Presbyterian Church* (Glasgow, 1878). A lively account of this case, supportive of the Minority, appeared in an editorial in the *Glasgow Herald* for April 18, 1878, published as a pamphlet: *Reformed Presbyterians in Scotland – Decision of Lord Curriehill – Court of Session – Edinburgh, Wednesday, April 17, 1878, showing their legal standing* (12pp.).

45 The Ferguson Bequest continues to give substantial grants to RP churches for building repairs and very generous stipend augmentations to RP pastors.

46 Peter Carmichael (1809-67), was one of the three ministers who led the minority in 1863 (the others were William Anderson and David Henderson). Before the Disruption, he published *The Superlative*

Mackay,[49] R. Thomson Martin, [50] John McDonald,[51] Henry Paton,[52] and John Paterson Struthers[53] all contributed, in quite different ways, to the presentation of the Reformed Presbyterian message to the wider Scottish public. Over a period of twenty-seven years, Struthers' magazine for young

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Worth and Dignity of the Faithful Martyrs (1857) and a Temperance tract, *An Earnest Appeal* (1860).

47 James Dick (1842-1916), later the Professor of Hebrew in the RP Divinity Hall, Belfast, was minister in Wishaw (1870-84). A native of Ulster, he wrote *The Headship of Christ* (1871), *Civil Rulers serving the Lord; or, the Scriptural Doctrine of National Religion* (1882) and *The Hymnary Discussions in the General Assembly... together with Letters on Hymns in Early Church History* (1899).

48 Archibald Holmes (c.1864-1932) spent most of his forty-five years in the ministry in his native Ireland, but he served in Paisley, 1900-03, and wrote the *Memorial Volume to the Revd James Kerr* (Glasgow, 1906?).

49 Cameron Mackay (1853-1937) was a Highlander of Free Church extraction, who ministered in Penpont between 1895-1905 and left over a doctrinal dispute. He published *The Dismissal of a Free Church Teacher* anonymously (he had been a schoolmaster in Halkirk, Caithness) and *Fifteen Bible Nuts opened and proved Sound* (1904).

50 Robert Thomson Martin (1832-67) took Wishaw RP Church into the Minority Synod. He edited *Sermons, Prayers and Pulpit Addresses by Alexander Henderson, 1638* (1855) and the *R.P.Witness* (1864-67). His 1865 sermon on *The Martyrs' Reward* was published posthumously in 1867.

51 John McDonald (1843-1933), pastor in Loanhead and Airdrie, wrote *Pactum Illicitum. Lord Curriehill's Decision versus the Reformed Presbyterian Church* (1878), *Jehovah Nissi: The Lord My Banner* (1882), *Romanism Analysed in the light of Reason, Scripture and History* (1894) and *Protestant Catechism* (1910, 10th ed.).

52 Henry Paton (1854-1942), minister in Edinburgh, 1903-10, edited *The Register of Rev. John McMillan* (1908).

53 John P. Struthers (1851-1915), minister in Greenock, editor (*Morning Watch*) and author of the posthumously published *Pilgrim Cheer: A Book of Devotional Readings* (1924); *Windows in Heaven* (1926); and *More Echoes from the Morning Watch* (1927). See also T. Cassells, *Men of the Knotted Heart* (1915) and A.L. Struthers, *Life and Letters of J.P. Struthers*.

people, *The Morning Watch*, reached into over 13,000 homes – some twenty-five times the number of RP households.

These were the halcyon days of the post-Disruption Covenanting church. The high point was probably around 1906. Changes were, however, already in the air. The prominent men were beginning to fade from the scene. Kerr had died in 1905, Struthers and McDonald were in the closing phases of their long ministries. Men were not coming forward for the ministry and the Scottish church was beginning to depend upon the RP Church of Ireland to provide ministers for her pulpits.[54] Membership was turning down. The long decline of the Scottish RP Church had begun.

to be continued.

54 Struthers died in 1915 and McDonald retired in 1920. No native Scot was settled in a Scottish RP congregation until A. Sinclair Horne was ordained in Loanhead in 1955. The Scottish Synod became, in effect, a presbytery of the Irish church. For an account of the ministerial make-up of the Scottish Synod, see James Robb, *Cameronian Fasti. Ministers and Missionaries of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland (1680-1929)* (Edinburgh, 1975). This was updated to 1980 by a series of mimeographed 'Corrigenda and Addenda'.

REVIEWS

The Message of Judges: The Bible Speaks Today

Michael Wilcock
IVP, Leicester, 1992; 175pp., £6.95; ISBN 0 85110 972 1

A traditional interpretation of the book of Judges has been to understand the narratives as describing a series of circles moving from Israel's apostasy, to their oppression by an enemy, to their repentance and appeal to God, to the divine commission of a judge who delivers them and provides peace for the land, and back to Israel's apostasy. Following in the footsteps of literary and other approaches, Wilcock suggests that the series of circles is better understood as a spiral which moves further and further away from the will of God. This tendency already occurs in chapter 1 where the ideal of destruction of a Canaanite king (vv. 6-7) is compromised by the end of the chapter, so that the man from Luz is spared (vv. 25-26). Othniel provides the example of an ideal judge. Shamgar and Ehud represented the unexpected ways in which God delivers his people. On the other hand, Wilcock observes that the wickedness of Israel does not change except that it gets worse. Wilcock rehabilitates Barak, from the picture of a weakling in need of Deborah's support as found in many commentaries, to one of a humble servant who recognises God's special gift in Deborah and who will not go forth without it. Gideon represents Israel. Like his nation, he begins in a very low estate but is chosen and used by God. The Abimelech episode demonstrates how God is at work behind the scenes to bring his judgement to effect, despite appearances to the contrary. For Wilcock, Jepthah did indeed kill his daughter, but he was faithful in that he kept his vow. By the time of Samson, sin in Israel has reached a point in which the people were compromising themselves by identifying with the Philistines. One of the most intriguing sections in the book is Wilcock's analysis of Israel's challenge to Samson and the way in which he is rejected or betrayed by them (pp. 142-3). But Samson's imitation of Christ's rejection and suffering is marred by his own faults. The terrible tales of the final chapters give evidence of the religious and moral depravity of the people. Although this is not a commentary and should not be used to deal with the profound translational and exegetical issues which are found in the book of Judges, it does serve well the series' purpose of providing spiritual insights for those who wish to benefit by a study of this book with so many difficulties. Of course, it is at the point of dealing with cruxes, such as Jepthah's sacrifice, that the keen reader will be most frustrated. Yet, if this leads one on to deeper study of the text, Wilcock's book may be judged a success.

Richard S. Hess, Glasgow Bible College

I Believe

George Carey

SPCK, London, 1991; 207pp., £7.99; ISBN 0 281 04532 1

This book was published shortly after Dr Carey became Archbishop of Canterbury. It is a collection of talks, lectures and addresses given to various groups over a period of years and was designed largely to let people catch a flavour of what the new Archbishop was like. In his preface Dr Carey says that he hopes people 'will see how difficult it is to put me in a theological box. I am unashamedly eclectic because I owe so much to all Christian traditions.'

There can be little doubt but that these aims were achieved. We do indeed catch a glimpse of what Carey is like. Some of the important themes of his ministry are presented with conviction and challenge. For example, there is a strong concern for mission and evangelism; there is the call for intellectual honesty and intellectual rigour in theological debate; and there is the call for dialogue and understanding between Christians.

Underlying all of this is a commitment to the great creeds and councils of the church and an orthodoxy which is prepared to take a stand against error and heresy, while yet being conscious of the need for love and compassion. There is also a desire to demonstrate the relevance of the Christian message, as for example in a lecture entitled 'Is God Green?' There are many challenges offered, perhaps particularly in parts four and five where traditional views of church and ministry are examined and thought-provoking alternatives considered.

The problem in assessing the volume is the disparity of length, style, language and content between the chapters. One moment he is lecturing to a university audience on some controversial subject and then we find him giving an advent address is a small parish church. It should be said, however, that the disparity is also part of the attraction. One never gets bored because one never knows what is coming next!

What is clear is that Dr Carey is correct: it is impossible to put him in a theological box. When he is lecturing to a Roman Catholic audience he seems the epitome of an Anglo-Catholic, but on the next page we might find Carey the evangelical or Carey the charismatic or whatever. What did become clear to this reviewer is that Carey cannot be called an 'evangelical' in the classic sense of that term, because of his view of Scripture. In the address 'Fundamentalism – Friend or Foe?' (a lecture given at York Minster while he was still Principal of Trinity College, Bristol) he makes a number of assertions and comments which are more reminiscent of James Barr than of his distinguished predecessor at Trinity, J.I. Packer!

In short, the book, like Carey himself, is a strange mixture which will perhaps satisfy no-one. For some that will be an advantage, but for this

reviewer it merely adds to the confusion surrounding what this man actually stands for.

A.T.B. McGowan, Glasgow

Profile of the Last Puritan: Jonathan Edwards, Self-Love, and the Dawn of the Beatific

David C. Brand

Scholars Press, Atlanta, GA, 1991; 165pp., n.p.; ISBN 55540 583 5

This is the published version of a Th.M thesis submitted by the author to Westminster Theological Seminary. It has all the advantages and disadvantages of such an enterprise, namely, it is a scholarly work with carefully detailed references and notes, and with many long quotations from primary sources, but it is less readable than those books which are not laden down with such scholarly apparatus.

Although the title speaks of the book as a 'profile' of Jonathan Edwards, it is not to be recommended for anyone who is not already familiar with Edwards. Much better to read this volume after having read one of the standard biographies – perhaps the best recent one being that by Iain Murray, although the author's favourite 'way in' to Edwards is via the two-volume work by Norman Fiering.

The strength of the book is the manner in which Edwards is presented in his early eighteenth century context, and the effort given to explaining his interaction with various theological and philosophical tides of thought. The basic thesis is that Edwards had an over-riding concern for the glory of God, and something of the 'vision' of that glory was what lay at the centre of his theology. In opposition to this, the philosophical thrust of the day was towards a man-centred rather than a God-centred view of love and benevolence.

Thus Edwards' position is contrasted with the empiricist and neoplatonist views which were current. Perhaps one of the most interesting aspects of the work is the way in which the writer disengages himself to some extent from Perry Miller's view of Edwards. In particular, he argues that although Edwards used some of the language and thought forms of Locke he was very far from accepting Locke's position as a philosophical basis for his theology, a view which Miller popularised in his biography of Edwards. The author goes on to demonstrate that it was covenant theology, with its great emphasis upon the glory and the sovereignty of God, which undergirded and gave structure to Edwards' thought.

In conclusion Brand demonstrates that those who adopted a man-centred view of benevolence, and the 'sentimentalist' moral philosophy which developed in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, ultimately abandoned Edwards' Calvinism either for Arminianism (and

eventually Unitarianism) or for a watered-down Calvinism such as can be seen in Timothy Dwight, Edwards' grandson.

The book is interesting and provides not only a fascinating glimpse into American theology and church history, but also a challenging and stimulating evaluation of the various ethical, moral and philosophical currents of Edwards' day, but it does not read well, because the author's style of writing is convoluted and unnecessarily complex. It is worth persevering, but hard work to do so.

A.T.B.McGowan, Glasgow

A Matter of Life and Death

John V. Taylor
SCM Press, London, 1986; 88pp., £3.50; ISBN 0334 00977 4

John V. Taylor is known from his earlier book, *The Go-Between God*, as a theologian of the Holy Spirit, and this subsequent volume confirms this general impression. Like many who engage with the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, he is also a man with a deep interest in Christian spirituality and life. The key theme of *A Matter of Life and Death* is Christian life, 'life in all its fulness', lived in the power of the Holy Spirit and grounded in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The five chapters which constitute the book are five addresses given at a mission in Oxford in 1986. The content is geared to the context: the addresses were and are intended as unashamed evangelistic meditations on the life to which Christ calls is. As such, they cover many of the classic themes of the evangelistic campaign: the human dilemma, the divine answer, its basis in the person and work of Christ, and the Christian fellowship. They do so, however, without once either beating the drums of evangelical rhetoric, or ossifying in theological jargon the many fresh insights offered.

There are many things of value in these pages, not the least Taylor's insistence that the work of the Spirit is not confined to the 'religious' sphere as it is traditionally and narrowly defined. If God is the one 'in whom we live, and move, and have our being', he seems to say, then we must understand ourselves as living always in relation to God, or perhaps better, as having the potential to discover ourselves and live most fully when we are open to the winds of the Holy Spirit and the person of Jesus Christ. Taylor's insistence, even in the context of a series of mission addresses, that this does not lead necessarily to a 'religious life' marks the most refreshing aspect of his work: just as Jesus was against religion that inhibits life and obscures the love of God, so we ought to be. Towards the end of the book, Taylor constructs a case for the church and for the necessity of Christian fellowship, but it is one which is honest enough to acknowledge the extent to which those who look for life

within the church are likely to be disappointed. It is this honesty, which is so often missing in religious writing, and perhaps especially in the evangelistic address, which I most appreciate in this book.

If the strength of *A Matter of Life and Death* is its non-technical and fresh grappling with the wellsprings of Christian life, its weakness is that in so doing it does not present anything like a theological system. I was at times left wondering, for example, whether Taylor's was a Spirit or a Logos Christology. Given the book's aims, it probably does not matter, but it is a theologian's lot to be troubled by such questions. Certainly Taylor leaves a great deal unsaid, but at the same time he writes beautifully and says more than most.

Gary Badcock, University of Aberdeen

Two Testaments, One Bible: A Study of the Theological Relationship between the Old and New Testaments

David L. Baker

Apollos, Leicester, 1991; 302pp., £14.95; ISBN 0 85111 422 9

First published by IVP in 1976 by photo-reproduction from the typescript of the author's 1975 University of Sheffield Ph.D thesis, Baker's excellent study now appears properly typeset and 'revised and enlarged'. It includes new chapters on 'Promise and Fulfilment' and 'Continuity and Discontinuity', and a new final section headed 'Implications for Theology and the Church'. The bibliography has been updated and reduced to be 'practical rather than comprehensive', and the number of scholars discussed has been reduced to be representative of each major approach rather than exhaustive, in order to provide 'an introduction to the problem of the theological relationship between the Testaments' for 'students and teachers, preachers and pastors'. It is a good example of a Ph.D thesis made digestible for a wider readership. Each chapter has a quite extensive and useful bibliography, while the general bibliography and author, subject and biblical references indexes appear at the end of the book.

In Part 1, the author sets out the biblical foundations of the problem and its treatment in the history of biblical interpretation. Under the slightly anachronistically-sounding heading, 'Old Testament view of the New Testament', the Old Testament's 'openness to the future' or 'relationship to future faith' is outlined – the development of Israel's future expectation, the prophetic eschatology, apocalyptic eschatology and the unresolved inner tensions of the Old Testament's expectations of the future. Baker then examines the New Testament view of the Old Testament, taking note of such matters as Jesus' use of the Old Testament and 'the substructure of Christian theology' represented in Old

Testament 'testimonies' and their contexts. In an enlightening survey in the remainder of Part 1, he traces the various ways in which the theological relationship between the Testaments has been viewed from the time of the Apostolic Fathers to the present day.

In Part 2, he discusses four modern solutions to the problem, *viz.*, the New Testament as the essential Bible (Rudolph Bultmann), the Old and New Testaments as equally Scripture (Wilhelm Vischer), the Old Testament as the essential Bible (Arnold A. van Ruler), and the Old and New Testaments as one salvation history (Gerhard von Rad). Bultmann is criticised among other things for the self-limiting nature of his existentialist approach to the Old Testament and his view of prophecy in terms of 'Miscarriage and Promise' which means the Old Testament history is essentially meaningless. Arnold van Ruler is criticised for setting up false antitheses between the Testaments, while von Rad's concept of 'salvation history' is deemed questionable in its view of the reality of the 'salvation' and the 'history'. Vischer alone survives the critique unscathed!

Part 3 consists of three chapters devoted respectively to the discussion of Typology, Promise and Fulfilment, and Continuity and Discontinuity, each a most helpful treatment of the theme in question.

In Part 4, the author sets out his own proposal towards a 'biblical', *i.e. whole Bible* solution. 'The two Testaments form one Bible, and to properly understand either one of the Testaments it is necessary to do so in relation to the other. Like Siamese twins, they are so closely linked together that separation is impossible without damage to both.' Christology, salvation history, typology, promise and fulfilment, continuity and discontinuity all point towards a 'biblical' understanding of the theological relationship between the Testaments, and this has significant implications for the authority of the Old Testament for Christians, for biblical interpretation and for a 'theology of the whole Bible'.

In his introduction, the author asks whether Christianity needs an Old Testament. 'Is the Old Testament to be thrown away as obsolete, or preserved as a relic from days of yore, or treasured as a classic and read by scholars, or used occasionally as a change from the New Testament, or kept in a box in case it should be needed some day? Or is the Old Testament an essential part of the Christian Bible, with continuing validity and authority alongside the New Testament?' David Baker's book will enable the reader to reach a well-considered and biblical answer to these questions.

Eryl Rowlands, Northumbria Bible College, Berwick upon Tweed

The Arab Christian: A History in the Middle East

Kenneth Cragg

Mowbray, London, 1992; 336pp., n.p.; ISBN 0 264 67257 7

A new book by Kenneth Cragg is of interest to readers concerned with Middle East affairs. This volume has the added attraction of Christological insights and Muslim-Christian dialogue. The author, a missionary bishop in the Holy Land, is a leading Arabist. As the sub-title indicates much of the work is historical, the sequence taking us from pre-Islamic days to the present: early Islam, Crusades, Ottomans and the Lebanese Civil War, along with theological issues as they bear on politics.

The book is a mine of information on matters episodic, cultural and lexical. Cragg opts for the grand style; 'the intricate complexity straining the possibilities of language' that he notes in the Chalcedonian debate is his also. Terms like ghettoize, arabicization are samples of his diction, serving his semantic ends. He tends to widen the denotation of the term Arab to include Semitic folk who adopted Arabic. Lebanon remained Arabic in speech centuries after Islam, as Hitti observes: 'the last phase of the (Muslim) conquest was that of language'. Simeon Stylites, described as Arab, was born in Cilicia. Nestorian missionaries also became Arabs; neither they nor the Copts or Maronites would accept the label.

Cragg points out that the lack of 'textual religion in Arabic' accounts for the ready response to the Quran. Elsewhere Metzger notes that renderings of the Arabic Old Testament (Babylon) and the New Testament (Cordoba) existed before 950 AD. Cragg's high view of the Quran surfaces repeatedly. He quotes the Quran far more often than the New Testament. He speaks dismissively of both Chalcedonian and Monophysite solutions to *theanthropos*, tainted as they are by 'Greekness'. His own Christology seems closer to Luther's *theologia crucis*. He does admit that Islam fails to reckon with the sin of the world; the cross is detested and prohibited.

Chapters 5 and 6 deal with European and Ottoman relations with Arabs. This gives Cragg the chance to do some Crusader-bashing; his references to the Crusades are twice as frequent as those to Islam's Holy War, carefully disguised as 'dynamism of a militant faith'. More encouragingly there are thumb-nail sketches of Raymond Lull and St Francis, whose eirenic spirit he lauds: 'Renouncing mutual slaughter and learning by calm engagement'. Engagement minus evangelism is safe enough; Lull heroically combined the two and died a martyr.

A helpful analysis of Arab nationalism follows. The Ummah concept (Nation of Islam) adapts to secularism and statehood. Christians were in the forefront of literary renaissance and ideological resurgence. Two

leaders in the movement, both Greek Orthodox, were condemned to death or exile, a fate shared by Muslim revolutionaries in Syria and Iraq.

In discussing Coptic disabilities the author employs the guarded language Egyptian Christians use when interviewed on TV on communal strife. Riots where Copts were victims are tucked away in the notes. This section makes compelling reading: Egyptian dynasties, religious congresses, French influence and British dominance. Butros Ghali the Coptic Prime Minister was assassinated in 1910, the name borne by his grandson, the U.N. Secretary General.

Two tales of woe take us to Lebanon and Palestine. Cragg offers a neat summary of Lebanese religious history. The 'Switzerland of the Middle East' is more realistically described by a journalist as 'Cinderella envied by her ugly sisters'. He lays most of the blame for the tensions on the Maronites; their distrust of pluralism is also a feature of British Evangelicals. Pierre Gemayel is Nazi-inspired, Franjieh corrupt and cruel. No mention is made later of the Jerusalem Mufti's Nazi sympathies. Cragg's compassion for the Palestinians is touching. Promises made by the British to both Jews and Arabs led to the tragic impasse of today. Suggesting New Testament solutions for Jewish-Muslim discord he quotes Ephesians 2:19, a text with a totally different aim.

Cragg deplores the use of proof texts by Zionists and their friends, but is this not a method adopted by Peter and Paul? There are chinks of light in the gloom: Fathers Bruno and Chacour, Jew and Arab but both Catholics, have initiated ventures of hope. If peace does come Christians will be the peacemakers.

Most engrossing and positive is the penultimate chapter: 'Poetry, Art and Liturgy' treated in the Christian-Arab context. The Lebanese contribution is not given its due; the outstanding literati of the first half of our century were mostly Lebanese. An excellent section on iconography and passages on liturgy are just as satisfying. Again Cragg expresses approval for Amos, overlooking Amos 9:14-15.

Cragg closes his investigation with a further question, 'A Future with Islam?' The future all unknown. A concise update on Arabic renderings of the Bible follows, with a disparagement of the quality of their Arabic in contrast with the glorious Quran. Nöldeke attributes the 'exquisite flexibility and vigour of the Arab language more to the age in which Muhammad lived.'

There is an all-round reproof of Muslims, Christians and Jews. A secular remedy may help heal the wounds. The perplexed and sceptical are more likely to respond (presumably to the gospel) than the assertive and clamorous. All in all a laudable achievement, an abundance of instructive notes and an eleven-page bibliography, as well as numerous extracts from Arabic literature, enhance the value of this timely book.

Richard W. Thomas, Glasgow

Unlocking the Bible

John Drane

Lion Publishing, Oxford, 1992; 48pp., £1.35; ISBN 07459 2210 4

Described as 'a way into the world's best-seller', this is a pocket-sized hard paperback, with coloured charts and illustrations. An introductory chapter speaks of the Bible's wide appeal, with an attractive illustration of an African women's Bible study group, but recognises the need of an introduction to a book which many find off-putting.

The Bible (*Biblia*) is a 'Library of Books'. Drane follows Hebrew Old Testament classification into Law, Former and Latter Prophets, and Writings. In four coloured bands, these are set out against a chronological diagram of key events. The New Testament is divided into Gospels, Acts, Epistles of Paul and Other Books, and similarly presented in a diagram. Later in the book an excellent map of Palestine calls attention to the main events in Jesus' life and ministry.

Chapters deal with 'The Message of the Bible'. It has various types of literature (two samples from the Good News Bible are Psalm 9 and Luke 4: 16-20) but a single message. Old Testament and New Testament tell the story of God's redeeming love, first through the Exodus and the history of Israel, then supremely through the person of Jesus, especially his cross and resurrection. Jesus is at the centre of the message 'the most remarkable person to have lived, (who) demands our serious attention'. The writer reinforces this point by telling how he personally came to know Jesus through the Bible, and of a woman he recently met who 'took the Bible at its face value... and in her own words, "became a totally new person".'

A chapter on 'Where to Begin' recommends the use of 'a good modern translation'. It suggests beginning with Luke, and then going on to other kinds of books – poetry, Paul, the Old Testament.

A final chapter on 'Making Sense of the Bible' uses a diagram of three coloured circles intersecting – Stories of Bible People, God's Story, Your Story: 'If we take courage and put our story alongside the Bible's story and God's story, the living God might just break into our lives. And that can give us a new understanding of all the stories.'

The vocabulary and layout of the book show that it is aimed at educated readers, probably college students. Its message is pre-evangelism, seeking to persuade those on the fringe of Christianity to read the Bible. While it is too slight-looking to be an attractive 'buy' to someone browsing in a Christian bookshop, it is a book that Christian students would find helpful to buy, and to lend or give to non-Christian friends; a well-advertised stock of copies would be a great help at a student mission bookstall.

I have a few minor criticisms. Following the Hebrew divisions of the Old Testament allows Dr Drane to make the point that the historical books are prophetically interpreted history, but seems to me to complicate matters. The reference to Jesus in Josephus is suspected by scholars to be a later Christian interpolation; Tacitus would have been better. To describe God as 'a good parent' seems an unnecessary concession to the feminists! To speak of the Holy Spirit simply as 'God's power' is insufficient. To say that 'then, as now, there were plenty of renegade believers who used the name of God to justify all kinds of barbarous and inhumane actions' is rather too simplistic a way to deal with the moral problems of the Old Testament.

This book is basically a starter, a persuasive, on the road to Jesus Christ. If it leads people to an open-minded study of the Bible, the effort and imagination that has gone into its making will be well worthwhile.

William G. Young, North Kessock, Inverness

Words to Trust

Campbell Gillon

T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1991; 212pp., £9.95; ISBN 0 567 29203 7

This volume consists of sermons preached by the author in the course of his ministry in Georgetown Presbyterian Church, Washington D.C. After serving a number of parishes in Glasgow, Campbell Gillon moved to the United States in 1980. His pulpit ministry is evidently appreciated, not least by people holding powerful positions in Washington who are numbered among his regular hearers.

Sermons generally find the journey from pulpit to page exceedingly difficult. Several of Gillon's congregation comment on the power and vitality of his delivery (and the beauty of his Scottish brogue), so that one suspects 'cold print' has robbed these discourses of their original fire. Nonetheless, the sermons of preachers who, like Gillon, seek to make every word count, seem to undergo a metamorphosis when published, emerging to a new and valuable literary existence. Certainly these chapters are eminently readable. They are also quotable. Take this for example, 'Certain forms of life require only the slime of the pool.... The badge of human dignity, the sign of greatness, is an outreach for satisfaction without which humanity cannot rest content.... Such expressions of need are inconceivable in an accidental bundle of atoms drifting to oblivion, which materialists tell us is the sum total of mankind.'

This quotation nicely highlights two outstanding features of these sermons; they are in touch with modern realities and they summon people to a life-changing commitment to Christ. Well-worn evangelical clichés are noticeable by their absence, yet the call to conversion is plain,

fresh and compelling. Prophetic courage is required to tell a well-heeled Washington congregation that God's will is not found 'by losing one's soul in the pursuit of power' and that 'We simply do not know who we are until we know to whom we belong.'

Campbell Gillon's sermons cannot be described as expository, nor do they operate at the intellectual level of a preacher like Helmut Thielicke, but *Words to Trust* is a fine example of pulpit ministry which is faithful, lively and of contemporary relevance. I commend this book to preachers who are struggling to make the vital connection between the Word and the world and to students who seek for a model of effective Christian communication.

David Smith, Northumbria Bible College, Berwick upon Tweed

Encyclopedia of the Reformed Faith

Edited by Donald K. McKim
Westminster/John Knox Press, Louisville, KY, St Andrew Press, Edinburgh, 1992; 448pp., $36.95; ISBN 0664 21882 2

From 'Accommodation' through to 'Zwingli', the Encyclopedia aims to provide a circle of knowledge indicating how events, persons and concepts have been particularly significant in the Reformed heritage. Its value lies in the way it makes accessible, in a clear and succinct way, the fruit of over two hundred international scholars' research. Many are the leading experts in their fields, the contributors' list reading like a Who's Who in the field of historical theology. The articles vary in length quite considerably, though most are relatively short, condensing a wide range of information into very helpful summaries. The editor believes the work can only be a supplement to larger studies, and yet the scope of coverage is surprising, as the articles do seem to cover an impressive breadth of themes. This applies particularly to the variety of persons covered, which proves most useful.

Encyclopedias and dictionaries can be difficult to review and evaluate by their very nature. But not so with this interesting and scholarly collection, which will surely become an indispensable tool for other scholars, ministers, students and any other interested parties. Its starting point is the conviction that history has meaning, and therefore the book's approach is not only to provide authoritative summaries but to identify present relevance in the contribution of the major characters and events dealt with. This makes this reference work much more than a book of historical facts and details; it should become a major contribution to understanding Reformed history and doctrine.

Clearly, there are omissions. Most attention has been purposely devoted to North America and Europe, persons and events falling outside of this limited remit receive little, if any, attention. Maybe this volume

will be the spark needed for the appearance of further volumes; if so, the book will have been doubly useful. The volume stands as a testimony, though, to the organisational ability of the editors in bringing together in cooperation such an array of qualified contributors. It is both relevant and thought-provoking, and should prove to be of value to a wide range of users. Many of the thematic articles act as useful bases for discussion and debate.

Unfortunately, in the article on 'William Carstares' editorial zeal has replaced the Scottish Toleration Act date of 1712 with the date of the English Act, 1689; one would hope that such editing has not occurred on a wide-scale.

Most articles are helpfully concluded with bibliographic references. There are also a number of works suggested as selected resources to supplement this volume.

Michael D. McMullen, University of Aberdeen

Between Faith and Criticism: Evangelicals, Scholarship and the Bible

Mark A. Noll

Apollos, Leicester, 1991; 271pp., £14.95; ISBN 0 85111 425 3

Mark A. Noll is Professor of Church History at Wheaton College in Illinois and is a leading authority on American church history during the colonial and early republican period. He has written extensively on the relationship between Christianity and culture in American society with his most recent major work being a study of the relationship between Princeton University and the early republic. He thus brings a solid historical perspective and an 'insider's' knowledge to any discussion on recent developments within American Evangelicalism.

Between Faith and Criticism was originally published in America as part of a 'Confessional Perspective Series' sponsored by the Society for Biblical Literature. Its sub-title, *Evangelicals, Scholarship and the Bible,* identifies the major theme of the book – the changing responses of Evangelicals (to whom he attempts to give a clear and recognizable definition) to critical biblical scholarship from the 1880s until the present day. The book begins with an attempt to give a working definition of 'Evangelicals' in an American context and a short but helpful discussion of the tensions which emerged for individuals who were both members (sometimes leaders) of evangelical communities and at the same time members of an academic community which was increasingly secular in its attitude towards the study of the Bible. Following this, the next five chapters give a chronological account of how individuals and institutions responded to the developments within biblical scholarship with the remaining four chapters covering a 'state of

the nation' assessment of where evangelical scholarship has got to and where it may be heading.

Three features commend this book; first, the style is readable and jargon-free with the footnotes banished to the end making it easier to read on trains or in traffic jams. Secondly, unusual in evangelical writings, it is supported with data from a series of surveys which Noll conducted listing both the institutional relationships which Evangelicals have developed and lists of theologians regarded as an influence on them at a personal level. (On this list a certain Jean Cauvin from Picardy was easily voted no. 1.) Thirdly, despite the obvious American focus of the book, much of the historical section is a comparison of developments in America and Britain. This is perhaps the book's greatest value as little has been written comparing Evangelicalism in its North American, British and European varieties. On a minor point, Noll seems to be one of the few American writers who can use 'British', 'Scottish' and 'English' in an accurate way appropriate to the context.

To whom would I recommend this book? Probably not to beginners; although readable the content is too specialized. Anyone interested in Evangelicalism or fundamentalism needs to begin with Marsden, Sandeen and White who cover the wider context and ask the real questions that should be addressed. This book is for specialists in American religious history or theology. The one group who would glean most from this book are dissatisfied biblical scholars who like Columbus are attracted by the gold, souls and sunshine to the new world.

John Bradley, Glasgow

An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews, with Preliminary Exercitations. Volume 1

John Owen

Reprinted, Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh and Carlisle, PA, 1991; xii + 548 pp., £10.95; ISBN 0 85151 612 2

Among the more distant peaks in the mountain range of great commentaries on Hebrews, that which bears the name of John Owen, under Cromwell Vice-Chancellor of Oxford University, is undoubtedly the highest between Calvin and Bleek. Owen might however not be flattered by the juxtaposition of his name with theirs: his theological pilgrimage led him away from Calvinism towards Independency or Congregationalism; and his thought world is in essential respects light-years away from the period of critical scholarship inaugurated for Hebrews by Bleek, and from which there is no return. Yet there is continuity as well as discontinuity in the tradition. Owen was a great enough scholar to distinguish between questions of canonicity and authorship, yet enough of a man of his time to affirm that, though Hebrews would remain canonical even if we did not know its author, that

author is certainly Paul. He affirms, against the young Manichee Augustine, Scripture's 'eloquence and propriety of speech', yet he is prevented by his commitment to Pauline authorship from fully recognizing the distinctive excellencies of Hebrews' style. Like Calvin, but unlike most modern commentators, Owen is concerned to apply the teaching of Hebrews to controversies of his own time; and indeed, although Socinianism in its seventeenth-century form may no longer be a live issue, the exposition and defence of Hebrews' presentation of the person and work of Christ remains as vital a task as ever.

The Banner of Truth Trust is therefore to be congratulated in making this commentary once more available. Its record for size must surely remain unbeaten. The present volume is the first of seven devoted to Owen's *maximum opus*, and vol. XVII of 23 in a reprint of Goold's edition of all of Owen's English works. The reprinting also of Goold's 'Subsidiary Notes' on Owen was no doubt dictated by practical considerations; yet discussion, for example, of Jesus' knowledge of Greek and of the destination of Hebrews, has probably advanced further since 1854 than in the two previous centuries.

This first volume consists entirely of 'Preliminary Exercitations': that is, questions of introduction, and two theological and historical excursuses: 'Concerning the Messiah' and 'Concerning the Institutions of the Jewish Church referred to in the Epistle'. At times the discussion wanders far from Hebrews: one of Owen's concerns is to rescue not only the Old Testament but even the Talmud from Jewish scholarship.

We therefore wait expectantly for the other, more directly exegetical, volumes in the series. But perhaps the Banner of Truth Trust would render at least equal service by also publishing a single volume including those parts of Owen's commentary which remain to challenge and instruct us. To quote one such sentence at random: 'What... we understand of the mind of God we faithfully adhere unto; and what we cannot comprehend, we humbly leave the knowledge and revelation of unto his divine majesty' (435).

Paul Ellingworth, University of Aberdeen

The Early Reformation in Europe

Edited by Andrew Pettegree
Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1992; £27.95, 250pp.; ISBN 0521 39454 6

This excellent collection of scholarly and readable essays, each a model of synthesis and compression of contemporary scholarship in its field, will prove a most useful aid for all students of the Reformation and their teachers. The essays set the various movements for religious reform firmly in the political and social contexts within which they developed and by which they were modified and diverted, and *vice versa*. They also

carry forward the story beyond the so-called 'heady' days of the movement into the period which scholarly opinion used to regard as 'the hardening of the arteries'. Indeed, these cautiously 'revisionist' studies demonstrate that so far from 'hardening', the 'blood stream' (to continue the metaphor) flowed through veins untapped by more traditional scholars.

Following a survey essay by the Editor, concentrating on Germany, but also setting the Reformation there in its European context, the remaining contributors deal with Bohemia, Moravia and Austria, Hungary, Switzerland, France, Scandinavia, The Netherlands, England, Italy and Spain, each reflecting the area of specialisation of its author. That within a book of a total of 250 pages each contributor has handled his subject with such thoroughness in respect to both depth and breadth, is evidence of the amount of scholarship distilled in these pages and of the craftsmanship of the respective authors. Compression inevitably there must have been, but nowhere is the flow of the narrative interrupted. The maps, in the chapters where they occur, are clear and helpful, as are the bibliographies provided at the end of each chapter.

I noticed one slip in dating: '1940s' for 1540s' (p. 63), and there is some confusion on some theological points – *e.g.* the statement that the Utraquists' 'maintained the Catholic sacraments and the Mass', and that 'they... understood the sacraments of baptism and communion in a spiritual sense' (p. 27): a bit of clarification would be helpful to non-theological students. But these are small matters in a book of such worth, and could easily be cleared up in the type of seminar for which the essays were originally designed. And how fortunate were the St Andrews undergraduates to be provided with such a feast of good things; as are students of other institutions who may now share these riches.

Obviously, these essays are designed to be used in conjunction with studies giving more detailed guidance on the theology of the Reformers and the administration of the church. But saying this in no way diminishes the value of this splendid collection of essays. Not the least significant reflection which emerges from reading these essays is that the day of the single author of books attempting to cover the European Reformation in its entirety is over. There is too much for one man to take on.

Robert Peters, Cambridge Religious Studies Centre

The Way the World Is: The Christian Perspective of a Scientist

John Polkinghorne

Revised edit., SPCK, London, 1992; 125pp., £4.99; ISBN 0 281 04597 6

John Polkinghorne is a distinguished theoretical physicist (FRS) who is now an ordained Anglican clergyman. His books are always worth

reading and this is no exception. As both a scientist and a Christian his quest is for truth. He believes he has found the ultimate origin of all things and ground of all rationality in the Word made flesh, so that Christianity gives a coherent insight into 'the way the world is'.

In the early part of the book he takes us quickly through the familiar territory of the scientist's 'standard model' of the universe, namely: Big Bang to the development of human life on this planet. ('Creationists' of course reject this model.) Polkinghorne is particularly impressed by (a) the rational structure and therefore intelligibility of nature, (b) the interplay between chance and necessity in the universe's development, and (c) the extraordinarily highly tuned make-up of the universe which was necessary for its development at every stage. All this he sees as pointing to 'design' and 'purpose'. In his exposition of these themes he gives the reader a simple insight into the world of quantum physics with its inherent indeterminism which challenges the materialistic assumptions of earlier science. He goes on to argue persuasively that such realities as our experiences of beauty and morality in principle cannot be reduced to physics and biology.

The chapters which follow briefly but helpfully consider: the reliability of the New Testament, the divinity of Jesus, the death of Jesus, the evidence for and significance of the bodily resurrection, the Trinity, the church and other religions. For those familiar with New Testament introductions as well as the writings of C. S. Lewis and others, there is (apart from his occasional use of an illustration from science) little that is new in these chapters. However he makes his points persuasively and for the audience he is targeting they are well worth making. Although he steers a middle course between the conservative evangelical and the sceptical liberal, the burden of his argument is gently to counter liberal scepticism. Even those familiar with the kind of points he makes would do well to read what he has to say.

Before his good index, he ends with a very useful glossary of both scientific and theological terms.

The book is addressed to honest enquirers, especially those who were his colleagues in science. As such its engaging style makes it a very useful evangelistic tool. I think, though, that he has perhaps been too kind to the sceptic. In the early section of the book, after giving very compelling reasons for belief in God, he goes on to tell us that he still respects the scepticism of his unbelieving colleagues. In the later sections of the book in spite of his good arguments for orthodox faith, he gives greater credence to some so-called New Testament scholarship than I think it deserves. I am not saying he should not have written in such a gentle style but I do think there is a place for a far more hard-hitting book challenging the irrational scepticism which does so much harm to the church and society.

Even with this minor quibble I very warmly recommend this book.

Howard G. Taylor, Glasgow

A Commentary on the Book of Genesis: Ancient Near Eastern Texts and Studies, Volume 6

Robert D. Sacks
Edwin Mellen Press, Lewiston, NY, 1992; 430pp., $79.95;
ISBN 0 88946 090 6

This volume provides a series of recollections on the book of Genesis which Professor Leo Strauss communicated to the author through numerous conversations. The volume provides a verse-by-verse translation of Genesis from the Hebrew with a commentary. The discussion presumes no knowledge of the Hebrew language but does focus on the text itself. Various views are presented with respect for contrary opinions. For example, the two possible translations of the initial clause in Genesis 1:1 are provided and their implications are discussed. The author does not decide in favour of one or the other. There is no bibliography and there are no indices.

Readers of *SBET* may find the following features to be of value: (1) the simple and clear style allows for a ready grasp and appreciation of the author's ideas; (2) the avoidance of a facile acceptance of much of traditional critical scholarship will appeal to the reader who wishes to focus on the present text of the Bible and to grasp its significance; (3) the digressions into a variety of Old Testament texts and stories may provide useful homiletic insights for the pastor wishing to enlarge the discussion of the biblical text; and (4) the perspective of Jewish and Rabbinic interpretation which, although not often explicit, pervades the commentary and may provide a welcome alternative viewpoint to balance one's own interpretation. Having said this, it is surprising that more space is not devoted to the sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis 22, a key in Jewish interpretation.

Of less value to readers may be: (1) the lack of interaction with modern historical and grammatical insights into these texts; (2) the absence of traditional Christian doctrinal understandings of the text (*e.g.* the lack of mention of original sin or the Fall when discussing Genesis 3); (3) the digressions into other Old Testament texts, which tend to give the book a 'stream of consciousness' flow not always helpful to the busy modern reader who wishes to get to the point; and (4) the hefty price of the book and the foreign publisher which make the book less accessible.

This would not be recommended as a first or second commentary on the book of Genesis. However, it might be of interest to the student who wishes to include it as part of the modern history of interpretation or to the pastor/teacher who seeks here an alternative interpretation of particular passages in the first book of the Bible.

Richard S. Hess, Glasgow Bible College

Persons, Divine and Human

Edited by Christoph Schwöbel and Colin E. Gunton
T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1991; 165pp., £16.95; ISBN 0 567 09584 3

This book is a collection of essays grouped loosely around the theme indicated in the title. According to the editorial introduction, the book takes its rise from the general revival of interest in Trinitarian doctrine in much recent theology, and from a concern to relate Trinitarian thought, and particularly the social doctrine of the Trinity, to the problem of what it is to be a redeemed human being. Of the seven essays which constitute the volume, however, only three – those of John Zizioulas, Colin Gunton and Christoph Schwöbel – can be said to be directly related to this theme; the other four – on Augustine, John Owen, Edward Irving and John Macmurray – are classed as 'historical and systematic studies', and will likely be of interest to specialists, but it is not clear how they are strictly relevant to the problem the book is meant to have in view.

The remaining essays, however, represent three significant attempts to address the question of human personal being in relation to the triune God. Professor Zizioulas, first of all, attempts to develop a constructive approach to this question through an historical and systematic analysis of the concept of the person. Zizioulas' claim is that the ontology of personhood, in which the idea of the 'someone' rather than the 'something' is prior, derives from biblical and patristic thought, and that the one possibility for a development of the theme of the ultimacy of persons in the contemporary context, paradoxically, is through a return to these biblical and patristic modes of thought. The Trinity is relationship; or, as Zizioulas has argued elsewhere, being is relational, and one must speak as a Christian theologian of an ontology of love rather than the ontology of substance of the classical tradition.

Professor Gunton's contribution attempts to make the case that to be created in the image of God is to be created as a person, constituted, as he says, in particularity and freedom and given space to be by others in community. Gunton, covering familiar ground, argues against both the Augustinian approach to the doctrine of the Trinity, and the Cartesian concept of the self as soul, and maintains that the Cappadocian vision of the Trinity which in certain respects survives in Coleridge's understanding of the Trinity provides a more adequate basis for an understanding of the nature of creaturely personhood. The Augustinian and Cartesian conceptions lead to a highly interiorized notion of the self; Gunton's is embodied, and relational in respect of both other persons and the natural world. The strength of this exposition is seen in particular in its holistic approach; the weakness is its superficial dismissal of Augustine in particular, for whom, after all, divine persons are pure relations (*De Trin.*, V).

The final essay in the volume, which takes the form of Schwöbel's twelve theses for a Christian anthropology, is in some ways the most interesting and powerful contained in the book, although the argument is largely undeveloped and the twelfth thesis is inexplicably left hanging. Here, Schwöbel contends that a Christian anthropology must be constructed from the doctrines of faith and justification, and that Christian anthropology is fundamentally about the new relationship with God which men and women have in Jesus Christ, the true human being. Schwöbel also begins here to sketch out the implications this would have for ecclesiology. His argument is that the Christian proclamation of the restoration of the divine-human relationship in Christ has profound implications for human relationships, most obviously in the Church. The renewal of relationship, however, extends also to involve our relation to the natural world, and will be rightly expressed in human culture.

This is a difficult book not intended for the casual reader, but rather for students and scholars with an interest in Trinitarian thought and its anthropological and social relevance. As such it is an interesting and at times illuminating book, but it would be too much to say that it is an important one. Much work remains to be done here; perhaps we can look to Schwöbel to develop his theses further in the future.

Gary Badcock, University of Aberdeen

Keywords of Faith, Running the Risk of Heresy!

James A. Simpson, Angus T. Stewart and Alan A.S. Reid
St Andrew Press, Edinburgh, 1992; 120pp., £4.95; ISBN 07152 0653 2

The purpose of this book is set out by James Simpson in the Introduction: 'Nowadays the great need is to translate "the language of Zion" into the vernacular... to reinterpret the Biblical themes in terms meaningful to our unchurched friends... not to say different things from our forbears, but to say things differently. I approached two friends, both able communicators, to help me write a book that might be of help.'

The three writers are facing their problem of communication in different situations. James Simpson has for sixteen years been minister in an important Highland parish, Dornoch Cathedral: 'One of the aims of my own ministry is to try and purge Christian belief of superstition and unworthy concepts of God: the idea that God is more concerned about what we do not do on Sundays than what we do the rest of the week, that God loves Protestants and white people more than Roman Catholics and black people, that God loves only "born again" Christians. These ideas are, I believe, incompatible with the truth of the Gospel.' Angus Stewart has ministered to a large suburban congregation on the outskirts of Glasgow for twenty-one years and has a broadly evangelical standpoint.

Alan Reid has been Chaplain to Aberdeen University since 1981 and is also a radio communicator whose 'Thought for the Day' has always a positive Christian content.

Each writer has expressed himself in his own way, and there has been some inevitable overlapping. Simpson on 'Eternal' and Stewart on 'Immortality' say basically the same thing, that eternal life is a quality of life that can begin here and now. Simpson stresses the ethical – 'Those whose lives reflect those qualities which characterised the life of Jesus – caring love, thankfulness, the forgiving spirit, humility – will quickly feel at home in heaven.' Stewart speaks of the personal relationship – 'It is when we acknowledge Jesus as Lord and begin to respond to his claims upon us, that we become members of his Kingdom and that we share this eternal life.'

The book has two parts: 'The ABC of Faith' consists of 26 word studies – nine by Simpson, eleven by Stewart and six by Reid; 'Twin Words' presents eight pairs of words – seven by Simpson and one by Stewart. Frequent reference is made in the word studies to contemporary usages, either to point out that this is *not* what the Bible means ('He thinks he's God Almighty!', 'I hope...'), or to lead in to the Biblical meaning ('bless you' at a sneeze; 'Dedicated' printer to a certain make of word processor; 'redeem' from a pawnbroker). Perhaps the most effective is 'conversion' from leaded to unleaded petrol. The spirit that drives man is 'environmentally unfriendly', and he needs to be converted to receive the Holy Spirit. 'What matters is which spirit provides the driving force – and this applies to our hearts, just as it applies to cars.' In the case of the Twin Words the question is more of ideas than words – Faith and Works, Predestination and Freewill, *etc.* There are many anecdotes from human life, and other illustrations, some suitable for children's addresses. Sodium by itself is dangerous; so is chlorine; but sodium chloride (salt) is beneficial. Truth without love and love without truth are both harmful, but love and truth together produce people who are the salt of the earth.

The entries are quite a mixed bunch – one or two seem to confuse by trying to say too much (Prayer, The Holy Spirit), while others are too much like three-headed sermons (e.g. Christian). Many are very helpful – I would single out Simpson on Almighty, Sin, Freedom and Responsibility, Judgement and Mercy; Stewart on Incarnation, Redemption, Resurrection; and Reid on Blessing, Hope, Wisdom. There are many quotable sentences:

> (A blessing) is a quite deliberate placing of a person or a group of people under the care of God and into the purpose of God for them.
>
> In the person of Jesus we find ourselves drawn beyond the limits of our minds.
>
> The greatest *judgement* is often to be treated better than we deserve; yet isn't that also *mercy*?

In spite of the provocative sub-title, I have found nothing blatantly heretical in the book, though there is a one-sidedness in some of the

entries that needs to be supplemented. For instance, there is no mention of the work of the Holy Spirit in sanctification; to describe the Bible as simply 'the record of the One who is himself... the Word of God' is not enough. Readers of this *Bulletin* will here and there find points of view expressed, in particular about the authority or historicity of Scripture, with which they would disagree.

Taken as a whole, the book is a worthwhile effort at communication, and will be specially useful as a resource to preachers of the gospel.

William G. Young, North Kessock, Inverness

The Gospel in the Modern World: A Tribute to John Stott

Edited by Martyn Eden and David F. Wells
IVP, Leicester, 1991; 279pp., £14.95; ISBN 0 85110 644 7

This collection is to honour John Stott on his seventieth birthday and fittingly focuses on the gospel of God and its place in the modern world, thereby guiding us to a central theme and concern in Stott's outstanding ministry over the years; a Christianity that is both biblical and contemporary. Stott, also, has been a creative and stimulating leader, and it might have been more in keeping with his work over the years if this collection had shown a bit more of an edge. Some of the essays have appeared elsewhere (*e.g.* Os Guinness' excellent address to the Lausanne II congress in Manila) and others are reworking of material (*e.g.* David Bebbington's essay on the effect of the Enlightenment on Evangelicalism), while others such as Martyn Eden's on Christianity and politics is a familiar covering of old ground with little new headway being made. Overall, however, we are given an interesting, wide-ranging collection. Stott's breadth of interest and concerns are reflected in the diverse themes of the essays and the stretch between the intellectual and academic interests (such as 'The "New Science" and the Gospel' by Ernest Lucas) and the practical (*e.g.* Packer on preaching). Michael Green, on evangelism, is appropriate for someone who always sought to make the faith clear and credible in a whole range of disciplines and who never lost sight of the responsibility to present a God who changed lives.

After a bright biographical introduction by Timothy Dudley-Smith, we have three chapters on 'the essential gospel' (but why is Bebbington's in this section?). There is a fine essay by Chris Wright on the authority of Scripture to show that the Old Testament by its witness to God's work of creation and in history gives authority for commitment to lasting values in our relativistic age. David Wells writes on how those who are reforming the faith, in such a way as to leave aside the work of Christ's atonement, are not reforming the faith but rewriting it as something that is different, not Christianity.

Part two, 'Understanding the modern world' has helpful outlines of modernity from Os Guinness, modern Britain by Elaine Storkey, the modern sciences and culture from Ernest Lucas, and Hindu-Christian dialogue from Saphir Athyal. All of these do more than describe the subject matter, they also point out the challenges to Christianity and how as Christians we should respond. The modern world needs to be understood and penetrated and each of these essays is a worthy attempt to do that. This section ends with Martyn Eden seeking to take us out of the old left wing versus right wing political fights. He is concerned that our faith seems to make little difference to our voting habits. He has, though, given himself too ambitious a task and we are left with more unanswered than dealt with.

The book's final part, 'Living the gospel' addresses spirituality (Tom Houston), preaching (Jim Packer), context and communication (Michael Nazir-Ali), evangelism (Michael Green), and ministry effectiveness (Michael Cassidy). Dr Houston's is a call for biblical and Trinitarian spirituality that combines knowing, feeling and doing, a replacing of the Victorian piety that has been an insubstantial and inadequate base and left many of us on the ropes in the antagonistic modern age. Michael Green's chapter is a look at the concern for and practice of evangelism at All Souls, Langham Place, a refreshing and appropriate piece of writing for this book. Michael Cassidy says that the pre-requisites for effective ministry are a clear conversion, good theological training, and a well disciplined personal life, the third of these being well described and dealt with. If these are applied to biblical evangelism and social concern, then effective strides will have been made to ministry effectiveness.

A list of Stott's books and notes on the contributors fills the last of the almost 280 pages. It is indeed a tribute to John Stott that such a broad and helpful collection should be gathered in his honour, and that they all cover themes that he himself has taught and practised.

Gordon Palmer, Glasgow

Earthkeeping in the Nineties: Stewardship of Creation

Edited by Loren Wilkinson

Eerdmans, Grand Rapids; xiv +391pp., n.p.; ISBN 0 8028 0534 5

This book is a revised and expanded edition of *Earthkeeping*, by the same authors, which was first published in 1980. That book was one of the first to address environmental and ecological concerns from the perspective of orthodox theological assumptions. The need for updating is occasioned by the availability of new data, demonstrable changes in the state of the planet, the greater awareness of environmental problems as central rather than peripheral concerns in the public arena, and also the development of Christian contributions to the debate. This theological

development has involved the discovery, recovery (and also considerable misinterpretation) of the 'meaning of the Christian gospel for all of creation'. It is intended for all thinking Christians, but will be most useful to ministers and Christian teachers at all levels. For use in informed preaching and teaching, however, its argument will need to be distilled if it is to be understood by most congregations and classes.

After a general introduction, the book is divided into four main sections, one of which is subdivided. The first deals with the 'State of the Planet', examining the land, animals, human population growth, and minerals and energy. The second considers 'The Earthkeepers', tracing first the historical development of human views of the world in which we live from the Greeks through to the contemporary environmental movement, which is seen as a search for a new religion; then there is a survey of 'Our Mind Today', dealing with 'models', economics, valuing creation, and the role of technology. The third deals with biblical issues, under the heading 'The Earth is the Lord's', and is concerned with dominion as stewardship, stewardship in itself, and resources and justice. The final section sets out some ideas concerning the appropriate practical response to these concerns – 'What Shall We Do?'. There are three appendices developing the practical response and some valuable annotated suggestions for further reading. There is also a list of Scripture references, and an index of names and subjects. The book also includes some pertinent cartoons on the subject from the *New Yorker* and *Christianity Today*.

The discussion of the scientific and historical material is fair in the context in which it is set. Professional scientists and historians of human thought will sometimes be tempted to say, 'Yes: but...'; that is inevitable in view of the ground the authors attempt to cover, and they are all professionals in the relevant fields of study.

The theological stance is biblically orthodox, and provides welcome relief from the 'creation spirituality' of Matthew Fox, transatlantic 'eco-feminism', and the pervasive intrusions of dangerous aspects of New Age thinking into 'green' theology. The method is essentially inductive, and we still await a deductive study which starts from the question, 'What does Scripture say?' Nevertheless the book is informed, readable, thoughtful, and generally practical. The cartoons are not only amusing, they also reinforce significant points in a way words alone might not.

This is an important book which challenges professing Christians, not least evangelicals, to address 'green' issues from a biblical standpoint.

Rowland Moss, University of Salford