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CONTENTS

70 Douglas A. Campbell: *The Rhetoric of Righteousness in Romans 3.21-26*, by Edward Adams

71 Marlene Cohen: *The Divided Self: Closing the Gap Between Belief and Behaviour*, by Brian S. Ringrose

72 Neil Elliott: *Liberating Paul. The Justice of God and the Politics of the Apostle*, by Edward Adams

73 B.A. Gerrish: *Grace and Gratitude: The Eucharistic Theology of John Calvin*, by David F. Wright

75 Rosino Gibellini (ed.): *Paths of African Theology*, by Roy Kearsley

76 Larry J. Kreitzer: *The New Testament in Fiction and Film: On Reversing the Hermeneutical Flow*, by Steve Nolan

77 Ernest Lucas: *Science and the New Age Challenge*, by Howard Taylor

78 Thomas Manton, edited by Alister McGrath and J.I. Packer: *James, by* The Review Editor

79 J.G. McConville: *Judgment and Promise: An Interpretation of the Book of Jeremiah*, by Edward D. Herbert

81 Charles Hodge, edited by Alister McGrath and J.I. Packer: *1 Corinthians* and *2 Corinthians*, by A.C. Boyd

82 Leon Morris: *Galatians: Paul's Charter of Christian Freedom*, by Alistair I. Wilson

84 John Puddefoot: *God and the Mind Machine*, by Howard Taylor

85 Brian Rosner (ed.): *Understanding Paul's Ethics. Twentieth-Century Approaches*, by Edward Adams

86 Kenneth Ross: *Gospel Ferment in Malawi: Theological Essays*, by Howard Taylor

88 John Stott: *Authentic Christianity*, by Charles M. Cameron

89 Ronald S. Wallace: *Calvin's Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament*, by D.F. Wright

89 Ben Witherington III: *Paul's Narrative Thought World. The Tapestry of Tragedy and Triumph*, by Edward Adams

90 John Wolffe (ed.): *Evangelical Faith and Public Zeal: Evangelicals and Society in Britain 1780-1980*, by Janet L. Watson

91 John V. Taylor: *A Matter of Life and Death*, by Gary Badcock

EDITORIAL: THE EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE 1846-1996

The 150th anniversary of the Evangelical Alliance deserves to be noted by Scottish Evangelicals in particular, for Scots such as Thomas Chalmers and Robert S. Candlish were among its most energetic initiators. The preparatory meeting held at Liverpool in 1845 assembled on the invitation of Scottish Evangelicals, and the fresh spiritual impulses released by the separation of the Free Church of Scotland enthused the creation of the Alliance in August 1846.

The fortunes of EA have waxed and waned over the decades, but in the last quarter of the twentieth century it has become a very considerable force in British, and especially English, Christianity. The Scottish arm of the Alliance, which received its own identity and organization in 1992, inevitably experiences the tensions involved in seeking to be distinctively Scottish while part of a much larger whole whose very raison d'être is unity and co-operation.

To mark the sesquicentennial, the Evangelical Alliance met in National Assembly at a watering-place on the south coast, out of which emerged 'The Bournemouth Declaration':

AN EVANGELICAL AGENDA

We, the National Assembly of Evangelicals, meeting in Bournemouth, November 11-13th 1996, rejoice in God's grace and patience, conscious of the privileges we enjoy. We have listened to God and each other and present this agenda as a reflection of our discussion together.

CHRIST, SCRIPTURE AND UNITY

We honour Jesus Christ alone as Saviour and Lord. His atoning death, bodily resurrection and personal return are central to Christian faith.

We resolve to proclaim to all the reality of new life through the Cross.

We confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God's Word incarnate; supreme authority is his. We recognise scripture as God's word written, the definitive, normative and sufficient revelation of God's truth.

We repent of our neglect of scripture and resolve to study, live and apply it relevantly in our world.

We recognise that unity is both God's gift and God's intention for his people. He has made us one in Christ; he wants us to express that invisible one-ness in visible ways. We believe that unity becomes visible primarily through our shared commitment to God's word, to each other and to his work.

We acknowledge our failure to maintain the unity of the Spirit.

Our one-ness in Christ requires us to work together with integrity:–

- to attempt to distinguish primary from secondary issues and to clarify the extent to which differing terminology can properly express the same truth;
- to affirm diversity and reach mutual understanding on secondary issues;
- to treat each other with love and grace and to live by the spirit of the 1846 Evangelical Alliance's 'Practical Resolutions'.

CHURCH AND MISSION

Missions begins with God, who calls us to share in reaching the world with his redeeming love. As Christ was sent by the Father, he now sends us in the power of the Holy Spirit. We recommit ourselves to this mission with renewed confidence in the one God revealed uniquely in Christ, and in the one gospel to be proclaimed to all people. We believe the Church is the community of faith which is called to be an authentic expression of the gospel and a sign of the Kingdom of God by:-

- developing missionary congregations of all ages, reaching across social, linguistic and geographical boundaries;
- planting radical and creative churches in unreached communities and people groups;
- releasing the vision, zeal and skills of younger leaders;
- recognising cultural diversity as part of our life and witness in the world;
- seeking to engage with the increasing pluralism of our world;
- rethinking the way we communicate and model gospel truth, love and reconciliation;
- receiving from and giving to the worldwide Christian family;
- preparing for future challenges and opportunities.

CHURCH AND SOCIETY

God created and sustains the world, and has given his human creatures stewardship over all he has made. We recognise that no area of life is outside God's sovereign rule. We take the incarnation and transforming work of Christ as our model for engagement. We affirm our commitment to releasing Christian people for involvement at all levels of society, informed by scripture and enabled by the Holy Spirit.

We believe it is important for the Church to be a listening people.

We acknowledge our common humanity, rooted in the image of God, and our shared responsibility to:-

- uphold and defend the sanctity of human life, and protect and promote all that contributes to human dignity and development;
- build and maintain peace and reconciliation between communities and peoples in conflict;

- pursue justice and compassion within our society and the wider world;
- promote teaching and training for responsible family living;
- oppose all forms of racism in Church and society;
- resist the tendency to marginalise others, and act to break down barriers of prejudice;
- promote a positive expression of sexuality, in singleness and marriage, freeing everyone to develop the rich variety of friendships God intended, as revealed in scripture.

CONCLUSION

Recognising our total dependence upon God, we commit ourselves to pray and work together to equip and mobilise Christians of all ages in pursuit of this agenda.

We repent of our past failures, and pray for reformation and renewal in the Church and for a spiritual awakening throughout these islands.

13 November 1996

Not a Doctrinal Basis

It is important not to view this Declaration as a doctrinal platform of the Evangelical Alliance. Its actual Basis of Faith comprises eight doctrinal articles (on God, Scripture, sin, work of Christ, justification, work of the Spirit, church, return of Christ), prefaced by an introduction which reads as follows:

> Evangelical Christians accept the revelation of the triune God given in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments and confess the historic faith of the Gospel therein set forth. They here assert doctrines which they regard as crucial to the understanding of the faith, and which should issue in mutual love, practical Christian service and evangelistic concern.

In general shape it is not unlike the Doctrinal Basis of the Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship (UCCF), which has been widely adopted by other evangelical bodies.

The Alliance's original Doctrinal Basis, approved at the London conference in August 1846, had nine articles, briefer, and incorporating one or two items unlikely to appear in a similar formulation at the present time, including 'the Immortality of the Soul'. 'The Right and Duty of Private Judgment in the Interpretation of the Holy Scriptures' was the second clause, after the first on the Scriptures themselves. It presumably reflected not so much opposition to the prescriptive magisterium of the Roman Church as the sensitivities demanded in cementing an alliance of diverse Evangelicals in the mid-nineteenth century. These are explicitly addressed in three paragraphs that follow the nine clauses but are still part of the Basis of Faith itself.

(i) It is, however, distinctly declared that this brief summary is not to be regarded, in any formal or ecclesiastical sense, as a creed or confession, nor the adoption of it as involving an assumption of the right authoritatively to define the limits of Christian brotherhood.

(ii) In this Alliance it is also distinctly declared that no compromise of the views of any member, or sanction of those of others on the points wherein they differ, is either required or expected; but that all are held free as before to maintain and advocate their religious convictions with due forbearance and brotherly love.

(iii) It is not contemplated that this Alliance should assume or aim at the character of a new ecclesiastical organisation, claiming and exercising the functions of a Christian Church. Its simple and comprehensive object, it is strongly felt, may be successfully promoted without interfering with, or disturbing the order of, any branch of the Christian Church to which its members may respectively belong.

Practical Resolutions

The extraordinary care devoted by the founders of the Evangelical Alliance to fostering Christian unity and harmony is also evident in the 'General Resolutions' adopted in 1846, which are referred to in the Bournemouth Declaration 150 years later as the 'Practical Resolutions'. It is to these that the Declaration itself should be compared, if to any statement from the Alliance's early days. Although they are lengthier than the 1996 Declaration, they bear reproduction here, not least because their substance derived from an important address by Thomas Chalmers and because they were read and emphasized at successive general conferences of the Alliance.

1. That the Members of this Alliance earnestly and affectionately recommend to each other in their own conduct, and particularly in their own use of the press, carefully to abstain from and put away all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil-speaking, with all malice; and, in all things in which they may yet differ from each other, to be kind, tender-hearted, forbearing one another in love, forgiving one another, even as God, for Christ's sake, hath forgiven them; in everything seeking to be followers of God, as dear children, and to walk in love, as Christ also hath loved them.

2. That, as the Christian Union which this Alliance desires to promote can only be obtained through the blessed energy of the Holy Spirit, it be recommended to the Members present, and absent brethren, to make this matter the subject of simultaneous weekly petition at the throne of grace, in their closets and families; and the forenoon of Monday is suggested as the time for that purpose. And that it be further recommended, that the week beginning with the first

Lord's day of January, in each year, be observed by the members and friends of the Alliance throughout the world, as a season for concert in prayer on behalf of the grand objects contemplated by the Alliance.

3. That, in seeking the correction of what the members of the Alliance believe to be wrong in others, they desire, in humble dependence on the grace of God, themselves to obey, and by their practice and influence to impress upon others, the command of Christ, to consider first the beam that is in their own eye: that they will, therefore, strive to promote, each in his own communion, a spirit of repentance and humiliation for its peculiar sins; and to exercise a double measure of forbearance in reproving, where reproof is needful, the faults of those Christian Brethren who belong to other bodies than their own.

4. That, when required by conscience to assert or defend any views or principles wherein they differ from Christian Brethren who agree with them in vital truths, the members of this Alliance will aim earnestly, by the help of the Holy Spirit, to avoid all rash and groundless insinuations, personal imputations, or irritating allusions, and to maintain the meekness and gentleness of Christ by speaking the truth only in love.

5. That, while they believe it highly desirable that Christians of different bodies, holding the Head, should own each other as Brethren by some such means as the Evangelical Alliance affords, the Members of the Alliance disclaim the thought, that those only who openly join this Society are sincere friends to the cause of Christian Union; that, on the contrary, they regard all those as its true friends who solemnly purpose in their hearts, and fulfil that purpose in their practice, to be more watchful in future against occasions of strife, more tender and charitable towards Christians from whom they differ, and more constant in prayer for the union of all the true disciples of Christ.

6. That the members of this Alliance would therefore invite, humbly and earnestly, all Ministers of the Gospel, all conductors of religious publications, and others who have influence in various bodies of Christians, to watch more than ever against sins of the heart, or the tongue, or the pen, towards Christians of other denominations; and to promote more zealously than hitherto a spirit of peace, unity, and godly love, among all true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ.

7. That, since all the disciples of Christ are commanded by the Holy Spirit to add to brotherly kindness, love, and are bound to pray that all who profess and call themselves Christians should be led into the way of truth; it is earnestly recommended to the Members of the Evangelical Alliance, to offer special prayer for all merely nominal Christians, as well as for Jews and Gentiles throughout the world.

8. That the Members of this Alliance, earnestly longing for the universal spread of Christ's kingdom, devoutly praise God for the grace whereby, in late years, Evangelical Christians have been moved to manifold efforts to make the Saviour known to both Jew and Gentile, and faithful men have been raised up to undertake the toil. They would offer to all Evangelical Missionaries their most fraternal congratulations and sympathy; would hail the flocks they have been honoured to gather, as welcome and beloved members of the household of God; and above all, would implore the Head of the Church to shield his servants, to edify his rising churches, and, by the outpouring of his Holy Spirit, to enlighten Israel with the knowledge of the true Messiah, and to bring the Heathen out of darkness into light. They would also record their confident hope, that their beloved Missionary Brethren will strive more and more to manifest, before the Israelite and other classes who know not the Redeemer, that union in their blessed Lord, the spirit of which, the Members of this Alliance would gratefully acknowledge, they have generally cherished.

Evangelical Unity and the Evangelical Alliance

It was Chalmers' concern that the new Alliance should not find itself a union without a job to do. What may surprise present-day Evangelicals is that the great task he identified for it was simply the promotion of Christian unity. There is much in these Practical Resolutions that the evangelical community today should take seriously to heart, if it is in earnest in still regarding evangelical unity as a goal worth pursuing. Unity features with Christ and Scripture in the first section of the Bournemouth Declaration, but even if allowance is made for its brevity, it falls far short of the studied application of the Practical Resolutions' commitment to this grand object of the Alliance.

Any fair comparison of official EA position-statements of 1846 and 1996 must recognize the enormous changes, amounting one feels at times almost to wholesale transformation, that have overtaken British culture and society during this century and a half. They are responsible for the Bournemouth Declaration's prominent concern for mission – although it never uses the word 'evangelism'. And if we may speak of the maturing of Evangelicalism, this in turn explains the Declaration's higher profile for Christian social responsibility compared with 1846.

Yet it is arguable that the Alliance, and the evangelical constituency as a whole, could do worse than revisit the Practical Resolutions espoused at the EA's foundation. Let the promotion of evangelical Christian unity be the great programme of the Alliance. Few who know the evangelical scene in the UK will doubt the urgency, and the difficulty, of this task. For these very reasons it must not take second place, or worse, to evangelistic or social schemes in the work of the Alliance itself.

Recovering a Doctrine of the Church

It may also be claimed that evangelical unity requires a stronger grasp of ecclesiology. Here a comparison of 1846 and 1996 is revealing. The original Doctrinal Basis contained no affirmation about the church, but only the following clause 9: 'The divine Institution of the Christian Ministry, and the obligation and perpetuity of the Ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper.' Today's Basis of Faith asserts the doctrine of

> The priesthood of all believers, who form the universal Church, the Body of which Christ is the Head, and which is committed by His command to the proclamation of the Gospel throughout the world.

A more biblical confession might combine the emphases of both, the ordered institutional local interest of the founding fathers and the universal functional christological note of the present Basis. It is a weakness of the modern clause that its 'universal Church' lacks anchorage in ordered congregations marked by designated ministries of Word and sacraments or ordinances. Perhaps these are taken as read, but perhaps not. For the flabbiness of evangelical ecclesiology has not lain so much at the level of theological stratospherics but in maintaining the unity of God's people in one congregation. British Christianity, very largely on its evangelical wings, has witnessed in recent decades an unparalleled free-for-all in do-it-yourself church-making. It may well be that a stronger allegiance to the fostering of Christian unity will call for a firmer discipline in this free market. Here lies a noble goal for an Evangelical Alliance that is conscious of its heritage, into the next millennium.

TESTING THE FOUNDATIONS OF THEONOMY AND RECONSTRUCTION

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Introduction

If God is sovereign how then should the Christian live, both as an individual and citizen, to apply this fact in the modern world? The Reformation revived belief in the biblical emphasis that God is supreme and sufficient in salvation; should not the way we organise and govern our society also reflect his sovereignty? Certainly, some evangelical Christians have at times stood against whatever was seen as contrary to God's moral law: Wilberforce against slavery, Shaftesbury opposing child labour, and Schaeffer against abortion, for example. In 1897 the notable theologian Abraham Kuyper, later to become prime minister of the Netherlands, pledged himself, 'that in spite of all worldly opposition, God's holy ordinances shall be established again in the home, in the school and in the State for the good of the people; to carve as it were into the conscience of the nation the ordinances of the Lord, to which Bible and Creation bear witness, until the nation pays homage again to God'.[1] So evangelical Christians have not been shy of arguing that all nations are subject to 'God's law'. What this might mean in practice has not always been clear, just as varying definitions have been given of the law of God. In recent years, however, the theonomy movement has developed apparently straightforward answers to the questions, 'what is God's law?', and 'how should that law be applied in contemporary societies?'.

The theonomists (sometimes termed Christian Reconstructionists) argue that we should obey *all* of the laws presented in the Bible, not simply the Ten Commandments but also including the whole of the Mosaic law in so far as this has not been fulfilled in Christ. We should also expect the state to enforce this observance on all, whether they are believers or not. Theonomists have been gaining in strength in the USA over several decades and there are now signs of interest in the UK. For example, the prominent American theonomist Greg Bahnsen visited England during 1993, and before this the journal *Calvinism Today* (more recently *Christianity and Society*) was already disseminating theonomic ideas. The time is therefore ripe to evaluate theonomy.

This task has been greatly eased by the publication of two books which neatly summarise the two sides of the argument. First there is

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A number of people have helped to shape the argument expressed in this article. I am particularly grateful to the members of the Christian Study Group at Queen's University, and also to the Revd David Brice, the Revd Harold Cunningham and Dr Ian Wilson for their comments on an earlier draft.

[1] A. Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids, 1898), p. iii.

G.L. Bahnsen's *Theonomy in Christian Ethics: Expanded Edition with Replies to Critics* (Presbyterian and Reformed, Phillipsburg, 1984: hereafter referred to as Bahnsen). Although Rushdoony[2] is more the pioneer of theonomy, Bahnsen, until his recent death, provided perhaps the principal 'serious' exposition of theonomic thought, together with an attempt to respond to the critics of this school. In contrast, the second book, edited by W.S. Barker and W.R. Godfrey, *Theonomy. A Reformed Critique* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1990; hereafter, Barker and Godfrey), represents a disguised compliment to the success of theonomy in gaining influence in the USA especially among the 'Reformed' churches. It presents a series of essays in which members of the staff of Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia respond to theonomy from the perspectives of hermeneutics, sociology, church history, and social and economic policy.[3]

Defining Theonomy: The Two Key Propositions

Before proceeding any further it is necessary to define theonomy. Although Bahnsen offers an extensive definition (his ten points, pp. xvi-xvii) this seems reducible to two key propositions: first, the 'continuing validity of the law in exhaustive detail', and, second, the obligation on modern governments to follow the government of Old Testament Israel in enforcing such obedience.[4]

In the first place, **Twentieth-century Christians are still obliged to obey the Mosaic law, because of '[the]...**

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2 R.J. Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, NJ, 1973), p.2.

3 Theonomists have not been slow to respond to this Reformed critique. For example, G. North in *Westminster's Confession: The Abandonment of Van Til's Legacy* (Tyler TX, 1991) regards the Westminster response as inadequately Reformed in its foundations (one sad legacy of the abandonment of Van Til's presuppositional apologetic), patchy and even sometimes downright dishonest.

4 An alternative and insightful approach to a definition is provided by A. Sandlin, 'The Creed of Christian Reconstruction', *Chalcedon Report* (August, 1995), p. 2, who defines the movement as Calvinist, theonomist, presuppositionalist, postmillennialist and dominionist. Alternatively, '"Theonomy" which simply means "God's law" indicates the belief that all of the non-ceremonial Old Testament civil code is meant to be obeyed by all nations. "Reconstructionism" betokens the conviction that American society and public policy are in a desperate state, salvageable only by a radical effort to bring the nation in line with norms of scripture'; D.L. Duncan, 'Moses' Law for Modern Government: the Intellectual and Sociological Origins of the Christian Reconstruction Movement', *Premise* II:5 (1995), pp. 4-16.

continuing validity of the law in exhaustive detail' (Bahnsen p. 39). In support of this contention the theonomists would advance what is probably their favourite text, Matthew 5:17-18, where Jesus said, 'I have not come to abolish [the law and the prophets] but to fulfil them... not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished' (NIV; used for all biblical quotations). For the theonomists this provides divine endorsement of the claim that the law of Moses still stands except where set aside by the New Testament.[5]

Secondly, **modern governments are obligated to enforce the law in detail just as that of Old Testament Israel was.** In this case, the theonomists have less direct textual evidence but claim that such a case can be reasonably deduced (Bahnsen, pp. 339-64). (They note how the Old and New Testaments claim God as the foundation of all political authorities and also the injunction to believers to work for the good of even heathen political entities; *cf.* Jer. 29:7). In Deuteronomy 4:6-8 God says, 'Observe them carefully [*i.e.* the laws delivered to Moses], for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people". What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the Lord our God is near us whenever we pray to him? And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?' In other words, Old Testament Israel, its laws and consequent systems of personal and social righteousness were set up by God to be a model for the other, pagan, nations. The theonomists see no reason why this should cease to be true during the Christian era. One notable consequence of the application of Mosaic law would be that a considerable list of crimes, and indeed certain immoral actions which would not now conventionally be considered as crimes in the legal sense, would become capital offences (Bahnsen, p. 445).

The Strong Points of Theonomy

1. *No platitudes or vague generalities*

Having defined theonomy we should perhaps begin by noting some of its attractive properties. Those who hope for the development of biblically based social ethics have reasons to give one cheer for theonomy. To begin with, whilst Christian comment on social, political or economic matters has sometimes been at best vague and, at worst, platitudinous

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[5] In Mark 7:19 Christ set aside the dietary laws, so Matthew 5: 17-18 cannot be a statement of the continuing validity of the law in exhaustive detail.

(Barker and Godfrey, p. 389),[6] the very detailed prescriptions of theonomy avoid being either. Bahnsen (p. 479) argues, 'The Law of God and its promotion also offers an answer to the current social-political irrelevance of the orthodox churches of Christ.' Indeed, Bahnsen accuses the non-theonomic mainstream churches in America of losing the ability to say anything meaningful as to how people should live in contemporary society. They 'analyse into a mist and mysticism' (Bahnsen, p. 15).[7]

2. *Application of the whole Bible*
Not only do theonomists attempt to lay down definite prescriptions for the social order but they try to base this on the whole Bible. This contrasts to those Evangelicals who give the impression that Leviticus and Deuteronomy are somehow less canonical than the rest of the Bible because, after all, they do not seem to have much to say to the modern Christian! The theonomists do find something in Leviticus and Deuteronomy and they display a due reverence for the law of God. Even though the law in itself cannot provide either justification or the empowerment for obedience, it remains, writes Bahnsen, a 'transcript of God's holiness and the standard for human righteousness' (Bahnsen, p. 146).

3. *Optimism of reconstruction*
Some at least would count it an attraction of theonomy that it is an activist and optimistic Christian movement. Its adherents really believe that they can turn the world upside down. Indeed, they aim to 'reconstruct' society along lines which conform to the universal lordship of Christ. 'If D.L. Moody thought the world was a sinking ship from which souls should be rescued, the Reconstructionists want to commandeer the ship, repair it and sail towards their own destination.'[8]

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[6] A situation sometimes blamed on the absence of a 'Christian mind' able to discern the distinctively Christian 'third way' in each situation (H. Blamires, *The Christian Mind* , London, 1963, p. 3 ; though see P. Miller, *Into the Arena,* Eastbourne, 1992, pp. 139-41, for a different view).

[7] Bahnsen's dismissal of the United Presbyterian Church of the USA Conference of 1967. See also, North, *op. cit.,* pp. 89-91, who gives a long list of interesting questions of applied Christianity which mainstream churches and their seminaries usually duck.

[8] Rodney Clapp, in *Christianity Today* (Feb 20, 1987), p. 19. Since Clapp came not to praise theonomy but to bury it, it is worth noting that from within the movement itself have come expansive claims of its activism and optimism. Indeed, these have been likened to some of the great ideologies. 'The most effective social movements of the twentieth century's masses - Marxism, Darwinian science, and

Historically, the Reformed churches have had a reasonable track record in stressing the creation mandate (*i.e.* the idea, based on Genesis 1: 28, that God has commanded human cultural development as part of the fulfilment of his creation purposes),[9] but perhaps they could now learn from the enthusiasm with which the theonomists seem to be tackling the reconstruction of society. They appear to be more Calvinist than Calvin himself in expressing a willingness to see not just the church but the whole of society reformed in line with the teaching of the Bible.[10]

4. *Crime and more punishment*

From what they see as their firm biblical foundations the theonomists have not been slow to sally forth to attack the influence of other philosophies and ideologies within the church and elsewhere. In some ways this has been beneficial. For example, they rightly stress that the criminal justice system should, amongst other things, provide punishment. This sets them against the humanistic view that punishment is a barbarous relic. This liberal downgrading of punishment may have occurred in part because of self-perceived guilt on behalf of the 'haves' that they have no right to punish criminals from amongst the 'have-nots', or because violence is sometimes seen as justified if committed for political motives, or because of the generally corrosive impact of relativism, social Darwinism and existentialism on belief in moral absolutes.[11] 'Thus there is a crescendo of the crime rates of all major cities of the world... and a continuing expression of group anarchy or terrorism.... In the face of all these situations... neither the

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militant Islam – have held variations of the three doctrines that are crucial for any comprehensive program of social change: providence, law and optimism'; G. North, 'Free Market Capitalism', in R.G. Clouse (ed.),*Wealth and Poverty: Four Christian Views of Economics* (Downers Grove, IL, 1984), pp. 27-65. North implies that theonomy is similarly equipped and therefore is the only school of Christian thought sufficiently well armoured in intellectual and spiritual terms to take on 'enemy' world views and win.

[9] Of particular strength has been the Amsterdam school of Dutch Calvinist thought, *e.g.* A. Kuyper's 1898 Stone Lectures, *Lectures on Calvinism, op. cit.*

[10] Miller, *op. cit.* , p. 7. In the vast body of Calvin's writings there are certain things which reconstructionists could point to as proto-theonomy. Calvin was at least a dominionist who regarded God as, '*legislateur et roy*' of the universe and he looked for a time when 'God is purely worshipped by all, and all the world is reformed', W. Bouwsma, *John Calvin* (Oxford, 1988), p. 192.

[11] See P. Johnson, *Modern Times* (London, 1992); on guilt, p. 41; on 'political violence', pp. 687-9; and on moral relativism, pp. 5-11.

government of the United States nor the Christian church of the said nation have done what is requisite in the way of supplying an antidote' (Bahnsen, p. 8).

The theonomists also argue (*e.g.* on the basis of Exodus 22: 1, which states the rate at which thieves of sheep or oxen must make reparation to their victims) that criminals must attempt to make restitution. The theonomists have not been alone in recognising the failure to provide for restitution as a major gap in most modern judicial systems.[12]

5. *Celebration of wealth-creation*

Business and economics represents another field in which theonomy provides what is at least in part a useful corrective to certain strong and sometimes damaging influences. The theonomists rightly celebrate wealth-creation as something mandated by God and also as the means through which levels of poverty have been most often reduced. In taking this position they run counter to a very strong tradition in the church which has either downgraded wealth-creation completely or at least accorded it much less favour than the redistribution of wealth.

Such a position may have derived from the Platonism of the early church Fathers, or even residual Manicheism in the case of Augustine, with the consequent tendency to view the affairs of this material world as necessarily evil.[13] Any bias against business may have been consolidated during the predominance of the church in medieval Christendom. Since the pre-1600 period was characterised by very slow economic growth and a sort of crude centrally planned economy, there may have been inculcated in church leaderships habits of thought which are now highly inappropriate in an era of dynamic market economies.[14] There is a danger that the current teaching programmes of evangelical churches restrict their message on wealth and economics solely to the New Testament strictures against a materialist philosophy of life. This means that many Christians do not realise how much the Bible (especially the Old Testament) praises creativity, and socially responsible and just technological change and economic activity. In fact, even churches which give a very high position to the Bible are prone to absorb the ideas of the outside culture. This means that they sometimes confuse what was once a generally accepted political consensus (*e.g.* in the UK for the Attlee welfare state of 1945-51, or in the USA for the Great Society of the Kennedy-Johnson 1960s)

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12 Jubilee Policy Group, 'Planning for Survival: A Family Policy for the Twenty First Century', *Insight,* 5 (1994).

13 G. Dawson, 'God's Creation, Wealth Creation and Idle Redistributors', in D. Anderson (ed.), *The Kindness that Kills* (London, 1984), pp. 13-20.

14 J. Atherton, *Christianity and the Market* (London, 1993).

with a distinctively Christian position.[15] A further manifestation of the bias against wealth-creation has been displayed by attitudes to the so-called 'Third World'. Perhaps the most vocally expressed view in recent decades has been the argument that the poverty of the less developed countries can be mainly or even entirely attributed to the wealth of the developed world.[16]

Against all these views, and especially the last, the theonomists have provided a useful corrective. They have noted that poverty has sometimes been a consequence of the behaviour of the poor individual or, indeed, the poor nation, and especially of sinful behaviour. One does not have to accept all of the premises of the theonomists' arguments to agree that they may have generated *some* valid conclusions with respect to issues such as crime and punishment and riches and poverty. However, have they really worked out from the Bible a watertight system of Christian ethics? There follow some of the reasons why they have not yet done so.

Flaws in Theonomy

1.*Deceptive simplicity of theonomic ethics*

Perhaps the major reason for the growth of theonomy has been its appearance of attractive simplicity. The answer to the question how should we live, and to the question of how society should be governed, is in both cases the application of all the Old Testament laws. Unfortunately, this simplicity breaks down on closer inspection. Even Bahnsen admits that not every Mosaic law can be directly applied in the context of modern society.

Take, for example, Deuteronomy 22:8, 'When you build a new house make a parapet around your roof so that you may not bring the guilt of bloodshed on your house if someone falls from the roof'. Since American homes typically do not have flat roofs, and the Middle Eastern custom of going up onto the roof is not usually followed, Bahnsen concedes there may be little point in direct enforcement of this injunction. However, he argues that owners of private swimming pools (perhaps more common amongst US theonomists than UK Evangelicals!) must put a barrier around the edge. The point is not that Bahnsen is wrong to argue this but that he has done what non-theonomists who take the Bible seriously have been trying to do for many years, *i.e.* disentangle which parts of the

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[15] D. Anderson (ed.), *The Kindness that Kills*, B. Griffiths, *The Creation of Wealth* (London, 1984), p. 9, and Atherton , *op. cit.*

[16] See the arguments of two American Evangelicals, R. Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* (London, 1978), and J. Wallis, *The Call to Conversion* (Tring, 1981). Their claims are in some ways similar to those advanced by exponents of liberation theology; *e.g.* U. Duchrow, *Global Economy: A Confessional Issue for the Churches* (Geneva, 1987).

Bible are culturally specific from those which have a timeless significance.[17] Bahnsen further admits that application of the Old Testament to our own circumstances is 'not an easy or simple task' (Barker and Godfrey, p. 122). 'This very willingness to discuss flexible application of the case law actually detracts from the popular appeal of theonomy, which lies in its (apparently) straightforward biblicism.'[18]

2. *Problems with the interpretative framework*

The application of theonomic principles is therefore not as straightforward as it would at first seem. Moreover, difficulties attach to Bahnsen's general approach that all Old Testament laws should be regarded as binding on us unless specifically abrogated in the New Testament. Would the theonomists seriously argue that the prohibitions of Deuteronomy 22:9 (do not mix crops) and 22:11 (do not wear blends of wool and linen) still apply to the Christian (Barker and Godfrey, p. 104)? (It is only fair to add that the symmetrical approach, that only those laws specifically endorsed in the New Testament still stand today, is equally problematic; most evangelical Christians would condemn cross-dressing but the New Testament provides no direct support for the prohibition expressed in Deuteronomy 22:5; Barker and Godfrey, p.110. Leviticus 18:23 presents a similar problem.) Bahnsen does admit that the Old Testament ceremonial laws do not apply to the Christian (Bahnsen, pp. 208-16). In this he is agreeing with the traditional Reformed approach to the identification of those laws which have abiding validity whereby ceremonial laws are seen as being fulfilled by the coming of Christ; obedience to such laws in Old Testament times is in the Reformed view seen as a paradigm, *i.e.* something from which the Christian can read across lessons but which does not necessarily apply directly. Bahnsen would therefore presumably argue that Deuteronomy 22:9 and 22:11 represent ceremonial provisions, *i.e.* the separation of God's people from contaminating influences, but the New Testament does not spell this out (though certain provisions, *e.g.* dietary ones, are clearly abrogated; *cf.* Mark 7:14-19, Acts 10:9-15).

The legitimacy or otherwise of the theonomic social programme is ultimately a hermeneutical question. Partly this is the issue of assumed continued validity which has just been discussed. Bahnsen, and other theonomists, tend to argue that any non-ceremonial law continues to be valid. The traditional Reformed approach, whereby the law was divided into three categories, ceremonial, civil and moral, with only the third

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[17] *Cf.* J. Stott's argument that we can overcome the hermeneutical problem of our cultural imprisonment plus the cultural conditioning of the biblical authors through cultural transposition; *The Contemporary Christian* (Leicester, 1993), pp. 186-206.

[18] Duncan, *op. cit.* , p. 8.

having continued application to Christians, cut no ice with Bahnsen who condemned the critics of theonomy for multiplying distinctions not enumerated in God's Word. However, it is notable that Bahnsen himself employed a twofold classification of the law, into 'moral' and 'ceremonial'. (The civil category, having been collapsed into the moral, therefore continues to hold.) Since the Bible itself does not contain a formal designation of these laws, though particular ceremonial laws are identified, Bahnsen, just as much as his more traditional Reformed critics, had been engaging in speculation as to the purpose for which God gave particular laws.

Whether the theonomists are right to follow a hermeneutic of assumed continued validity, in which civil laws are subsumed under the continued moral laws, depends critically on the nature and extent of the difference between the old and new covenants. In the old covenant the institutional form of God's kingdom on earth was the nation-state of Israel. Under the new covenant the institutional form is the church which is multi-national and multi-ethnic. Given this shift a good and necessary deduction would be the expiration of the Old Testament judicial laws. 'The civil law of Israel (as the application of God's eternal standards to a particular situation in the history of his kingdom) has now (in the progress of his redemptive economy) passed away with the demise of that state (in its unique role as earthly representative of the rule of God) and the advent of a superior institutional expression of God's rule.'[19]

3. *Exact blueprint for criminal justice?*

When the interpretative or hermeneutical foundation is weak one should not be surprised that some of the applications are flawed, and so it is with theonomy. Notwithstanding the earlier praise for some aspects of their teaching on criminality and economics, the reservations against their conclusions may be very strong. For example, is it legitimate to deduce that, because Old Testament Israel appears to have had no prisons (or at least Moses made no provision for them in his instructions prior to the conquest of Canaan), there should be no prisons in the modern USA (Barker and Godfrey, p. 44)? The theonomists infer that God's intention is that state authorities should eliminate the criminal class (either through personal reform in the case of minor offenders or through the execution of the more serious; one consequence of the application of the Mosaic law would be, of course, that the range of capital crimes becomes very large). Many people, including many Christians, would be horrified by these suggestions.

Such a reaction does not deter the theonomists, who dismiss such opposition as the exaltation of liberal secularist arguments over and above God's standards (Bahnsen, pp. xxiv-xxvii). The key criticism of

[19] Duncan, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

theonomic penology is not that it is distasteful but that there may be a misunderstanding of the way justice was applied in Old Testament Israel. There are grounds for holding that the authorities in fact had some discretion in applying the punishment for each crime. This would parallel the interpretation that the *ius talionis* ('an eye for an eye' *etc.*) established maximum permissible levels of retribution rather than prescribed obligatory responses (Barker and Godfrey, p.52). Certainly, we have two recorded cases where the state authorities did not immediately deal with what were apparently capital crimes, blasphemy (Lev. 24:10-16) and sabbath-breaking (Num. 15:32-6). Execution occurred only after a specific divine intervention, a 'word from the Lord'. The theonomists would presumably respond that the law was eventually applied. What they could not deny is that King David, who as a murderer and adulterer was twice over deserving of capital punishment, was reprieved. In other words, even in Old Testament Israel there appears to have been some discretion in the application of punishment. None of this is to deny that modern state governments still have a God-given responsibility to administer justice (Rom. 13: 1-4) and that Christians can call upon such governments to be 'tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime', to use Tony Blair's phrase, perhaps even to the point of the application of capital punishment against murderers. (The instruction that murderers should be executed is provided in Genesis 9:6 and therefore, because it predates the giving of the Mosaic law, could be seen as part of the creation order, which has a timeless and universal significance.) The Christian is not however necessarily obliged to start closing prisons!

4. *The wealth of nations*

The flaw in theonomic economic thinking is that it fails to appreciate the extent to which the poor, either locally or globally, cannot always help themselves. Chilton[20] argues that the Third World is under the judgement of God. It is certainly true that Deuteronomy 28 warns that national poverty can follow national unrighteousness. No doubt sinfulness is a primary cause of Third World problems but Chilton fails to distinguish between the sin of ordinary Africans, Indians and Latin Americans, the sin of their governments, and indeed the sin of western governments and companies. If it is implied that it is exclusively the sin of the Third World poor which is to blame, then theonomy could encourage a rather

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[20] *Productive Christians in an Age of Guilt Manipulators* (Tyler TX, 1981) a clear attempt to rebut Sider, *op. cit.* See also G. North, 'Editor's Introduction', in G. Grant, *In the Shadow of Plenty* (Fort Worth, Nashville, 1986), p. xiii. North in fact argues that longstanding poverty is always a sign of sin and the consequent curse delivered by God: G. North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Programme for Victory* (Tyler TX, 1981).

callous disengagement by rich Christians from concern for the conditions of the poor in the world.[21]

The rather simplistic monocausal theonomic explanation of global poverty may ultimately be as unhelpful as the similarly monocausal explanation, now apparently favoured in some mainstream evangelical churches and their development charities, which demonises the IMF, the World Bank, and western multinationals, and asserts (but does not prove) that developed world affluence causes underdeveloped world poverty.[22] In truth poverty and riches are sometimes the consequences of exploitation and structural sin but sometimes come about by variations in work effort, enterprise and efficiency in the use of resources. The Bible supports the possibility of both situations and therefore it is wrong to claim either explanation as the only permissible one for Christians to adopt. The question which interpretation of poverty is right in any given historical circumstance is therefore partly an empirical one, so that it would be helpful if Christians, both theonomic and non-theonomic, addressed themselves more carefully to the economic evidence before pronouncing on the causes of poverty.[23]

The theonomists not only argue that the poor of the Third World are largely responsible for their own fate but claim that the same is true for the poor of Chicago and New York, or indeed Glasgow and London. As a result they are reluctant to see either state welfare or private charity applied beyond the 'deserving poor'. In this respect one can see some

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[21] Given their general views about the nature of poverty and the appropriate sphere of government intervention in the economy it is not surprising that theonomists regard state-to-state international development aid as illegitimate. The theonomists would probably argue that they do have an adequate response to the plight of the Third World through a combination of mission activity (which would implant an ethos of the law-order of the Bible), private giving and free trade (W. Greene, 'Theocratic Norms in the Context of International Political Economy', *Paper Presented to the Southern Political Science Association* (Atlanta, Nov. 3-5, 1994).

[22] See Christian Aid, '*Who Runs the World?*', (July 1994). And for an evaluation of this point of view Atherton, *op. cit.*, p. 16, and H. McRae, 'A Bumpy Road from Bretton Woods', in *The Independent*, July 21, 1994.

[23] For examples of Christians who believe that the rich countries cause the poverty of the Third World see Sider, *op. cit.*, Wallis, *op. cit.*, and Duchrow, *op. cit.* B. Griffiths, *Morality and the Market Place* (London 1982), pp. 125-55, provides a vigorous rebuttal of their views. For opposing sides of the debate in secular terms see Oxfam, *Africa Make or Break* (Oxford, 1993), and World Bank, *From Stagnation to Recovery* (Washington DC, 1993).

similarity between theonomic social policy and the new right neo-conservatism which came into vogue in the 1980s.[24] However, it is worth noting that the theonomists have adopted a position on economic policy which would make even Mrs Thatcher and Mr Reagan, or Michael Portillo and Newt Gingrich or even Adam Smith and Milton Friedman, look socialist! For the theonomists the modern state should undertake no actions other than those directly prescribed in the Old Testament and New Testament and this leaves little scope, in their view, for anything beyond the provision of law and order and defence forces.

Once again, the theonomists appear to have no difficulty about being out on a limb. All their opponents, they argue, have fallen prey to humanistic, collectivist fallacies. Presumably they think that these fallacies have even infected American Republicans and British Conservatives, which explains why even right-wing governments have been unable to reduce the state's share in national income. The more fundamental issue than political isolation of the theonomists is whether they are right to use the Bible in the way they do, and more particularly whether modern governments should restrict their activities to only those things which have direct biblical precedents. Application of that principle would have halted Wilberforce's campaign to abolish slavery throughout the British Empire. In fact there may be some biblical support for moving beyond the minimum or *laissez faire* state; for example, in Joseph's anti-famine measures.[25] In addition to empirical criticism of their

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[24] For a Christian (though non-theonomic) representative of the new right see M. Novak, *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism* (London, 1988). One summary of theonomic economics notes the following elements: no state intervention in the market economy, no state provision of educational and health services, and no state monopoly in the issue of money (S.C. Perks, 'The Reconstructionist View of Economics', *Chalcedon Report* (1996), pp. 22-4). Perks also notes the striking similarities to the conservative school of neo-Austrian economics exemplified by Ludwig von Mises and Friedrich von Hayek.

[25] North. *op.cit.* (1991), pp. 274-5, has felt the need to tackle the example posed by Joseph's Egyptian administration. Joseph, he argues, cannot be used as a biblical justification for the activities of any modern central planner or bureaucrat because Joseph, uniquely, had the insight of a direct revelation from God and was righteously tyrannising over pagans. This was one case where the forecasts about the state of the macroeconomy did prove to be right! It is true that Joseph cannot provide an exact blueprint for modern governments but it is still significant that God would hardly have ordered Joseph to intervene in the economic management of society if this was *per se* sinful (Barker and Godfrey, p. 283).

argument that the poor are always responsible for their fate (the proportion of the USA poor who are able-bodied single males is quite low; Barker and Godfrey, p. 267), a more fundamental failing in the theonomists' position is that it may spring from an inadequate appreciation of the quality of God's grace (Barker and Godfrey, p. 274). His grace is, after all, the presentation of a priceless gift to the entirely undeserving. So perhaps individual Christians, and even the state social security system, should sometimes extend charity even to those who appear to have brought hardship upon themselves. (Acceptance of this principle is not to deny the inevitability of budget constraints at either personal or national level which limit the amount of help which can be given.)

5. *Calvin was no theonomist*

In spite of, or perhaps because of, the controversy which therefore attaches to aspects of applied theonomy, some theonomists, though not all,[26] have been anxious to establish an impressive pedigree for their school. Calvin, the Westminster Confession of Faith and the New England Puritans have all been hailed as proto-theonomists. It is true that sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Reformed thinkers appear to have taken a more robust position than their twentieth-century theological descendants on the possibility of using state power to enforce social righteousness (including the use of capital punishment against a wider range of crimes).[27] However, this similarity to theonomy is more superficial than substantial, given that the Reformers and Puritans arrived at their position using quite a different approach than the direct and exhaustive application of Old Testament law. For example, Calvin certainly started from God's moral law, which for him was summarised in the Ten Commandments, but then allowed natural law and circumstances to influence any detailed application to, say, Geneva in the 1550s (Barker and Godfrey, p. 302). For example, Calvin judged that the prohibition on interest-bearing loans in Deuteronomy 23 and Leviticus

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[26] Rushdoony, for example, was prepared to criticise what he viewed as incorrect biblical interpretation on the part of Calvin. On those occasions when Calvin was judged to have fallen under the influence of 'classical humanism', Rushdoony accused him of producing 'heretical nonsense' (*op. cit.*, p. 9). Some theonomists would warn against the leaven of natural law thinking in Calvin - see particularly North, *op. cit.* (1991) p. 240.

[27] 'Theonomy Again', *Free Church Monthly Record*, (December, 1992), p. 273, where Knox and Calvin are quoted as apparently favouring the stoning of adulterers. As to the execution of rebellious youths, Luther is recorded as writing 'would that we observed this law too'.

25 was primarily an anti-poverty measure designed to prevent the entrenchment of absolute poverty and debt slavery in what was a mainly agricultural society. Since he saw this intention of the law, though not its outward form, as having an abiding significance, he did not feel it should prevent interest on loans made to businesses (Barker and Godfrey, p. 307). Of course, Calvin may have made a misjudgement in his re-application of this law to modern industrial society. The Jubilee Centre[28] has argued that the development of a financial system based on interest-bearing debt has in many ways been socially harmful, but the important point in this context is that neither Calvin, nor for that matter the Jubilee Centre, is really theonomist.

Similarly, it is very doubtful that the Westminster Confession (1647) is a thorough-going theonomic charter. In fact it states that the various laws associated with the social and political order of Old Testament Israel expired with the end of that state (19:4). These laws should be applied in modern societies only to the extent that 'the general equity thereof' makes appropriate. This suggests a method very similar to that adopted by Calvin (or indeed Bahnsen when he considered the applicability of parapets). The Westminster divines were in fact working within a situation of extreme political flux. The Civil War was still in progress and within six years Parliament would execute the king and Britain would become a republic. Issues of church-state relations, antinomianism, liberty of conscience and threats of anarchy dominated debate. Given this background, if the Westminster divines had been theonomists, they would surely have made this crystal clear in their final document (Barker and Godfrey, p. 326). In fact, although they represented a range of views, with some probably willing to countenance specific theonomic applications though not the fundamental theonomic interpretation of the law, they were not theonomists. Even a rigorist like Rutherford did not wish the Mosaic penalties to be applied against sabbath-breakers (Barker and Godfrey, p. 341).

So it seems that Reformed theologians and politicians in 1640s England refused to take the opportunity of very unusual constitutional conditions to impose a theonomic state. It is perhaps even more notable that their Puritan counterparts in New England at about the same time did *not* introduce theonomy into the New World (Barker and Godfrey, pp. 351-84). John Cotton's *An Abstract of the Laws of New England* should not be regarded as representative of New England Puritanism and neither did his views gain official standing (Barker and Godfrey, p. 377). In any case, contrary to the claims of Bahnsen (pp. 549-69), Cotton may not have been an early theonomist (Barker and Godfrey, p. 339, and see also Bahnsen, pp. 556-7). Notwithstanding the fact that they could introduce

[28] M. Schluter and R. Clements, *Reactivating the Extended Family* (Cambridge, 1986).

laws starting from scratch and had deduced the idea that something comparable to God's national covenant with Old Testament Israel was still possible for a nation state in the Christian era, the New England Puritans do not seem to have been theonomists and the full range of Old Testament death penalties was not applied.

6. *The sociology of theonomy*

If theonomy does not come out of the stable of mainstream Reformed thought, where then does this dark horse come from? Barker and Godfrey suggest that in some ways theonomy is peculiarly rooted in the sociology of the late-twentieth-century USA (p. 246). The apparent simplicity of theonomic ethics, with the implication that social order and prosperity can be regained through obedience to those laws, may appear very attractive to middle Americans and US Evangelicals and fundamentalists (there is a lot of overlap between the sociological and religious categories) who have been disoriented by the loss of Protestant political and cultural ascendancy in the USA, the development of racial pluralism and the relative economic decline of America, which over two decades has squeezed middle-class and blue-collar living standards. In other words, theonomy appears an attractive exit for those who find that the American dream may have become a dead end. Of course, we should beware of falling into the trap of sociological reductionism. Ultimately theonomy should stand or fall according to the merits of its biblical interpretation. Nevertheless, some of the sociological insights have validity. After all, why did we have to wait until twentieth-century America for theonomy to appear? Why was it absent in other places and times where Reformed or evangelical Christianity was strong (seventeenth-century Scotland or the Netherlands, nineteenth-century England or even, dare one say it, twentieth-century Northern Ireland)?[29]

[29] The lack of any significant theonomy movement in Northern Ireland at present is in some ways surprising, given the presence of characteristics which might assist the development of such thinking: cultural openness to the South and Middle America of the USA, a strong Calvinist tradition, a preference amongst many Northern Ireland Protestants for very literalistic readings of the Bible, the history of use of state power to encourage particular religious adherences, weak development of socialist political parties, the Troubles after 1969 and hence the perceived need for a tough law and order policy, a receptiveness amongst many Protestants to ideas of a national covenant and 'a chosen people'. My guess is that some Northern Ireland Protestants (maybe part of the rural or fundamentalist section of Democratic Unionist Party support) are partial theonomists without realising it. Given all of this,

7. *Theonomist reluctance to accept that believers may have to suffer*

Underlying much of the theonomic approach may be a pretty thin view of suffering. In the theonomic scheme of things, the righteous will be healthy and wealthy but the wicked the reverse (this is how they read, for example, Psalm 37:25). Could it be that theonomists are making a similar mistake to that of an unbalanced charismaticism in assuming that believers are guaranteed a royal road to prosperity and healing? The theonomist may have adopted something akin to the 'Name it, claim it' philosophy of some charismatics and expanded it to the national level. In other words, theonomy is all about healing the USA and then the world. Obedience at the national level is expected to prompt such divine blessing that political and economic decline will be reversed. Bahnsen is explicit about this; obedience to theonomy brings the national blessings described in Deuteronomy 28 but disobedience will bring the curses described in the same chapter.[30] The weakness in this line of argument is the same as that underlying health-and-wealth theology. God may indeed choose to bless the obedient with physical strength and material riches (there is biblical precedent for this). Equally, and the Bible also provides instances of this (*e.g.* Job and Jeremiah), he may decide that the righteous remain less well off in human terms than their unrighteous counterparts. The same could also be true at the level of nations. The theonomists tend to have post-millennialist expectations of a future golden age coinciding with the implementation of their programme. In fact, the downside of the theonomist activism and optimism noted earlier is that it seems to spring in large part from a sometimes triumphalistic post-millennialism (Barker

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consideration of theonomy may be of particular relevance in Northern Ireland.

[30] Bahnsen, p. ix. Similarly North, *op. cit.* (1991), vigorously defends the thesis that God brings predictable positive and negative sanctions in new covenant history. To give North due credit, he has been able to point out that it was not always the case that amillennialism was as prevalent in mainstream Reformed thinking as has been the case since, say, the 1930s. Moreover, he could be right that amillennialism often degenerates into 'pessi-millennialism' and hence that postmillennialism is more likely to catch and hold the young or keen or activist. However, considerations of expediency or pragmatism do not clinch his case. North may be right that the graph line of Christendom's progress has been upwards since the resurrection and ascension, but, as a trained economic historian, he should be open to the possibility of cylical fluctuations around that trend. It is notable that North asserts that it is long-term poverty or prosperity which is the outcome of God's curse or blessing. Sometimes the deeds done by one generation are punished or rewarded only in the next (or even later).

and Godfrey, pp. 197-224). The danger of this outlook is that they disparage the present church. In contrast the New Testament presents the paradox that although the church in the interim between Christ's first and second comings is in fact suffering (1 Cor. 4:10-13, Phil. 3:10), it is also at the same time triumphant (Barker and Godfrey, p.216).

Conclusions

I have argued that theonomy, like the curate's egg, is good in parts. Even if the good is outweighed by a variety of flaws, there is still the possibility that the theonomy movement could bring net benefits to the rest of the church by forcing the wider evangelical and Reformed community to come to grips with what obedience to God's law means today.

At their most expansive the theonomists claim to have found the solution to all problems of identifying a biblically based personal and social ethic. They go so far as to argue that any alternative to the application of the Old Testament laws in exhaustive detail exalts human autonomy and hence sinfulness. In other words, it is either theonomy or autonomy; there is no other choice.[31] In practice, however, as I have argued, the theonomic claim of the 'continuing validity of the Mosaic law in exhaustive detail' is not very helpful, since theonomists, or at least the wiser amongst them, do not really mean what those words seem to mean. Bahnsen, for example, concedes that on occasions the laws cannot be applied directly to the modern world. Thought is required to provide the necessary cultural contextualisation. Once Bahnsen has admitted this, it must be wondered whether the gap in principle relative to the traditional Reformed approach to the Old Testament laws is all that large. After all, the Westminster Confession of Faith allowed for the application of Old Testament laws to the extent that their 'general equity' demanded. The old Reformed tripartite division of the law between the moral (of eternal validity), the ceremonial (abrogated because fulfilled in Christ) and the civil (applying specifically to Israel, though it may be possible to draw lessons for modern societies), may still be valid.[32]

The virtue of theonomy has been to remind us of the wealth of detailed

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[31] Bahnsen, p. 307. For theonomy to prevail would require an unmanageable crisis of the present world system, which theonomists believe likely, and a Christian revival on a heretofore unseen scale, which theonomists believe is inevitable (Greene, *op. cit.*).

[32] Though as Schluter and Clements, *op. cit.*, argue, it may be a mistake to assume that any given law can be allocated to just one category. Instead a single law could combine moral, ceremonial and civil aspects.

information provided in the Mosaic law. This is case law[33] whereas the Ten Commandments set out the general principles of God's moral law. In the case law we are confronted with God's priorities - the God who hates, amongst other things, blasphemy, sexual perversion and commercial dishonesty - and these serve as a valuable antidote against being conditioned by the standards of secular humanism and indeed the whole spirit of autonomy and antinomianism which the theonomists see as so prevalent in modern thought and practice (Bahnsen, pp. 279-314).

Theonomy also forces us all to think more about the role of the state as an enforcer of civil or social righteousness (distinguished from the personal righteousness which is a consequence of salvation). The theonomists accord a very heavy responsibility to government in enforcing an outward obedience to God's laws. The sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Reformers and Puritans also gave a wide role to the state in upholding morality.[34] In contrast twentieth-century Evangelicals have often been reluctant to ascribe such roles to government. This switch of position might be seen as justifiable adaptation to changed circumstances (*e.g.* the development of democracy). It might also be defended in principle, in terms of the victory of the philosophy of a 'free church in a free state' which was strongly represented within nineteenth-century Dutch and American Calvinism, which saw the state as a neutral holding the ring for plurality of Christian confessions and other faiths (for support of this view, see Barker and Godfrey, pp. 225-42).[35]

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[33] See how Paul uses, and yet also extends, the case law of Deut. 22:10 to support the principle provided in 2 Cor. 6:14.

[34] Westminster Confession of Faith 23:2-3, though these sections should be interpreted in the light of 19:4. In other words, the broad thrust of the Confession is not theonomic (Godfrey and Barker, pp. 326-7).

[35] The theonomy movement may have been of value as a challenge to the traditional post-1788 view which seems to have been prevalent in mainstream US Protestant churches, *i.e.* of the state as a neutral umpire holding the ring in a situation of religious pluralism. The theonomists have questioned whether such neutrality is sustainable in practice and even desirable in principle. However, this paper has not considered the church-state question and whether theonomists themselves blur the distinction between church and state. Although some theonomists have been anxious to deny this (*e.g.* Bahnsen, *No Other Standard* (Tyler TX, 1991), pp. 171-88), would theonomy in practice lead to the persecution of non-believers?

However, it must be wondered whether the theonomists might be right in arguing that even many evangelical Christians now lack either the moral courage or the intellectual means to argue for the more widespread application of God's standards to the wider society outside of the church.

THE MARROW AND THE DRY BONES OSSIFIED ORTHODOXY AND THE BATTLE FOR THE GOSPEL IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY SCOTTISH CALVINISM

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That the Marrow controversy 'is from beginning to end a most revealing commentary on Scottish Theology'[1] is not to be doubted. The issues it raised touch the very heart of the Reformed faith, to the extent that what was at stake was not the merit of one mere human publication, *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*, but the very nature of the gospel and the free grace of God itself. Not surprisingly, then, a wide variety of subsequent works in Scottish church history and theology reveal virtual unanimity in praise and esteem for the 'representers', or Marrowmen, and their stand against the General Assembly. All are agreed that a subtly legalistic doctrine of conditional grace pervaded much preaching in Scotland in the early eighteenth century. All are agreed that 'the precious truths of the gospel' were 'wounded by the condemnatory act'[2] of 1720 which was well worthy of its epithet, the 'Black Act'. But, in more recent contemporary debate at least, all have not agreed as to whether the root of such perfidious legalism was inherent in the federal Calvinism of the Westminster standards themselves. So, while the Assembly's decision is universally deplored, and Marrowmen such as Thomas Boston held up by all sides as among the 'brightest lights in the firmament of the Reformed Church in Scotland',[3] there has been some disagreement as to which side in the controversy had the better claim to the orthodoxy of the Westminster standards— in the letter as well as in spirit.

Divergent Interpretations

On the one hand, scholars of Barthian persuasion such as J.B. Torrance[4] and M.C. Bell[5] have applauded the Marrowmen as true theologians of

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1 J.B. Torrance, 'Covenant or Contract? A study in the Theological Background of Worship in Seventeenth-Century Scotland', *SJT* 23 (1970), p. 59.

2 Representers' answers to the Assembly Commission's questions, quoted in S.B. Ferguson, *The Grace of God in the Gospel: Some Lessons From the Marrow Controversy* (Aberdeen, 1981), p. 5.

3 J. Macleod, *Scottish Theology* (Edinburgh, 1974), p. 153.

4 'Covenant or Contract?'. See also 'The Covenant Concept in Scottish Theology and Politics and its Legacy', *SJT* 34 (1981) pp. 225-43;

grace, though still struggling to do justice to free grace within a framework of federal theology, because they failed to see clearly enough that the 'legalism against which they were protesting grew in no small measure out of federalism itself'.[6] Yet they view Boston and his colleagues as sensing enough of its dangers that in their hearts at least they were making a definite departure from the Calvinism of the Westminster Confession 'back to the theology of the Reformers and the older Scottish tradition'.[7] As such they were true prototypes of John McLeod Campbell who 'was to raise the same issues in a more thorough-going way a hundred years later, and be condemned on similar grounds'.[8] Thus, although on this view the General Assembly of 1720 was quite wrong *per se* in condemning *The Marrow,* they would have to concede that technically the Assembly was correct in detecting a departure from the prevailing orthodoxy of the Westminster Confession, and thus censuring the representers.

On the other hand, Donald Macleod[9] represents the view of the majority of Scottish Calvinist theologians in vigorously defending the confessional orthodoxy of the Marrowmen, claiming *The Marrow* as 'quintessential Federal Theology', and regarding it 'quite absurd to suggest that it represented a radical departure from historic Calvinism; and endlessly irritating to be told that it belongs to the school of McLeod

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'Strengths and Weaknesses of the Westminster Theology', in *The Westminster Confession in the Church Today,* ed. A.I.C. Heron (Edinburgh,1982); 'The Contribution of McLeod Campbell to Scottish Theology', *SJT* 26 (1973), pp. 295-311; 'The Incarnation and Limited Atonement', *EQ* 55 (1983), pp. 83-94.

5 *Calvin and Scottish Theology* (Edinburgh, 1995).

6 Torrance, 'Covenant or Contract?', p. 63.

7 *Ibid.*, p.60.

8 *Ibid.*

9 'Federal Theology—An Oppressive Legalism?', *Banner of Truth,* Feb. 1974, pp. 21-8; 'Faith as Assurance', *Free Church Monthly Record,* May 1988, pp. 99-101. See also Ferguson, *The Grace of God in the Gospel;* J. Philip, *The Westminster Confession of Faith: An Exposition* (Edinburgh, 1984). John Murray of Princeton and Westminster, one of the most influential of orthodox Reformed theologians of the twentieth century, can also be seen to expound Westminster theology in clear Marrow terms. See *Collected Writings of John Murray,* vols.1-2 (Edinburgh 1976).

Campbell rather than to the school of Westminster'.[10] It is somewhat ironic, then, that it is those very theologians most determined to defend Westminster orthodoxy today who must assert that the Assembly of 1720, though ostensibly having the same purpose in mind, nevertheless made a grave theological misjudgement not only in spirit, but also technically in the letter.

More Fundamental Issues

On a cursory glance at these conflicting views of the controversy, one might imagine that this is nothing more than both sides of a dogmatic debate seeking to claim the support of theological heroes from a somewhat romanticised past, and exhibiting the usual tendency to venerate those seen as martyrs to a theological cause. But the sharp divergence of opinion over the later case of McLeod Campbell betrays the real substantive differences in the claims of these two sides, and careful examination reveals that much more fundamental questions are at stake. If the Marrowmen were indeed truly in conflict with the Westminster Confession, then those within the Scottish church today who align themselves with the evangelical zeal of Boston and his friends in preaching unconditional grace to 'every man without exception'[11] must surely question whether they can give assent to the same Confession today.[12] If however the Marrowmen were right in their resolute claim to orthodoxy, it is of perhaps even more vital importance to ask why this

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[10] 'Faith as Assurance', p. 99.

[11] Evangelista's words, in answer to Neophytus's question as to whether such a one as he had 'any warrant to believe in Christ', are here taken from Preston's treatise of faith: 'Go, tell every man without exception, that here is good news for him; Christ is dead for him; and if he will take him, and accept of his righteousness, he shall save him.' *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*, edition with notes by Boston (London, 1837), pp. 106-7.

[12] Assuming that one seeks with any integrity to be true to the spirit of the liberty-of-opinion clause, the scope of which was of course strictly limited in intent when first introduced into the United Presbyterian Declaratory Act in 1879 and the Free Church one in 1892, rather than abuse it in such an open-ended way as to extend liberty of opinion to any doctrine one cares to choose.

same orthodoxy and indeed 'active zeal for the purity of doctrine'[13] in their opponents could yet issue in such a legalistic, condition-laden understanding of the offer of Christ to sinners that took the 'grace of God in the gospel and dis-graced it'[14] until it became no gospel at all.

That the answer to these questions must be sought more through careful historical enquiry than by dogmatic assertion would seem obvious, yet the surprising fact is that this period of the eighteenth-century Scottish church has been somewhat neglected as an area of scholarly historical study until recent decades, leaving many of the issues rather clouded in uncertainty, and hence the precise force of this 'revealing commentary on Scottish Theology' somewhat muted. Two recent works of this nature have however shed much light upon the subject. D.C. Lachman's survey[15] is a magisterial historical and theological study of the whole Marrow controversy from 1717 to 1723, dealing comprehensively with all the primary documentation for the first time, while A.T.B. McGowan's thesis[16] is concerned to expound systematically the theology of Thomas Boston, the leading theologian among the Marrow Brethren. We have room only to advance briefly some of their conclusions, but together these studies clear away many myths, and provide answers to some of the crucial questions.

Lachman's research leads him to conclude that despite what has often been averred, the entire ecclesiastical process was itself on the whole fair. Certainly, 'the various leading men had their usual influence' but 'there is no evidence of coercion or manipulation in the proceedings'[17] and the condemnation of *The Marrow* by the Assembly was 'indicative of a corresponding unanimity of opinion in the church at large'.[18] The primary consideration was definitely a doctrinal one, and the 'Assembly's Act must therefore be evaluated primarily on doctrinal grounds'.[19] This Lachman does in a thoroughgoing way, by wide-ranging comparison of the Marrow doctrines to the theology of the Westminster

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[13] J. Cunningham, *The Church History of Scotland*, vol. II (Edinburgh, 1882), p. 256.

[14] Ferguson, *The Grace of God in the Gospel,* p. 11.

[15] *The Marrow Controversy* (Edinburgh, 1988).

[16] 'The Federal Theology of Thomas Boston' (Aberdeen PhD thesis, 1990).

[17] Lachman, *Marrow Controversy*, p. 479.

[18] *Ibid.*, p. 477.

[19] *Ibid.*, p. 485.

standards and the writings of Reformed theologians from the early to late seventeenth-century.

On the crucial question of the 'warrant' or universal gospel-offer stressed in *The Marrow*,[20] which Hadow claimed must entail a doctrine of universal atonement, an examination of the context reveals plainly that there is no reference here to the extent of the atonement, and that 'Christ is dead for him' is merely a paraphrase of the gospel offer.[21] Support for this is found in such orthodox divines as John Owen and James Durham among many others, and it is made clear that *The Marrow* merely 'stresses *that which all teach*, a gospel offer to all' and 'though placing no emphasis on it, affirms a limited atonement'.[22] Rather, it was those who opposed *The Marrow* who misunderstood both the nature and foundation of the gospel offer.[23] By separating Christ from his benefits, Hadow and others had begun to 'fall into the categories of Arminianism'[24] and reduced the gospel to a message about the benefits of Christ's death. Boston and his friends, along with true Reformed orthodoxy, preached not mere benefits, but 'a *Saviour* who is full of grace and able to save to the uttermost all those who come to God by him'.[25] The consistent teaching of Reformed orthodoxy is therefore a particular redemption and a real, free offer to all; but framed in the context of an evangelistic encounter in *The Marrow* the emphasis is quite correctly on the free offer to sinners, while in the Westminster Confession there is special reference of the atonement to the elect.[26]

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[20] That Christ 'hath taken upon himself the sins of all men' (from Luther), 'hath made a deed of gift and grant unto them all' (from Culverwell) and 'is dead for [every man without exception]' (from Preston). *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*, pp.81, 106-7.

[21] Boston's notes are quite categorical: 'This is the good old way of discovering to sinners their warrant to believe in Christ; and it doth indeed bear the sufficiency of the sacrifice of Christ for all, and that Christ crucified is the ordinance of God for salvation unto all mankind, in the use-making of which only they can be saved; but *not an universal atonement or redemption*' (*The Marrow*, p. 106).

[22] Lachman, *Marrow Controversy*, p. 28 (italics mine).

[23] McGowan, 'Boston', p. 90-91.

[24] Ferguson, *The Grace of God in the Gospel,* p.10.

[25] *Ibid.*

[26] This is *not* to say that the Marrowmen somehow downplayed what was apparently a central tenet of their theology; it merely displays a

Covenant Unconditional and Conditional

Concerning the nature of the covenant of grace, Lachman cites numerous orthodox covenant theologians in support of the *Marrow* view of the covenant as wholly unconditional to men and women – faith not as a condition, but an instrument – and concludes that there are 'no grounds for regarding the *Marrow* as antinomian in this respect'[27] but rather that the opponents were tinged to a greater or lesser extent with the neonomianism of Richard Baxter and Daniel Williams. Reaction to antinomianism in the seventeenth-century led some later Puritans to teach the necessity of preparation prior to regeneration, and this had apparently become prevalent in Scotland, laying a precedent for opposition to the *Marrow* doctrine[28] which preached any sinner's freedom to come to Christ. But orthodox divines had always held that even 'if it were possible that a soul would come without a sense of sin, grace would embrace it; *sense of sin being no condition for the covenant*'.[29] Indeed Rutherford himself declared that 'none ever taught that Evangelicke Repentance is a prior preparation to conversion'.[30] McGowan points out that Hadow's defence of his position from the Westminster Confession here is guilty of disgraceful selectivity, omitting all reference to repentance as 'an evangelical grace ... not to be rested in as ... any cause of the pardon' for sin, and merely wresting out of context the words '[repentance] is of such necessity to all sinners, that none may expect pardon without it'.[31] Lachman offers a further great weight of

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careful biblical balance. 'While Reformed confessions may begin with statements on the doctrine of God and the divine decrees, that is not where preachers and teachers need to begin in addressing men about salvation. In the apostolic preaching to the lost, recorded in the book of Acts, nothing is said of the doctrine of election, while in the Epistles it is scarcely ever omitted.' I. Murray, *Spurgeon vs Hyper-Calvinism* (Edinburgh, 1995), p. 115.

27 Lachman, *Marrow Controversy*, p. 54.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 67.

29 J. Durham, *The Unsearchable Riches of Christ*, quoted in Lachman, p. 60 (italics mine). Durham is thought to have co-authored the *Sum of Saving Knowledge* with David Dickson.

30 *Christ Dying and Drawing Sinners to Himself* (London, 1647), in Lachman, *Marrow Controversy*, p. 62.

31 McGowan, 'Boston', p. 309 (quoting Westminster Confession 15:3).

evidence, and concludes that *The Marrow* is fully 'in accord with Reformed orthodoxy in making evangelical repentance a consequence of faith'.[32] A similar verdict is passed on the relationship of good works to salvation, where he finds Hadow in harmony with the neonomianism of Williams, stressing that '[God] who made faith necessary to justification, hath made obedience necessary to sanctification'.[33] The *Marrow* position of Christ as 'the way' and good works 'a believer's walking in the way'[34] is far more representative of Reformed orthodoxy than was the General Assembly.[35]

Assurance Contested

Lachman's treatment of the doctrine of assurance is perhaps the weakest point in his thesis. He assumes that there was a clear change in the understanding of this doctrine in the mid seventeenth-century,[36] the problem then being that *The Marrow* reflected the orthodoxy of its own day that assurance was of the essence of faith, whereas Hadow and the Assembly held the later view that it was not. Lachman states that 'The Westminster Confession cannot be asserted with confidence to support either point of view', because 'not commenting on the relation of assurance to saving faith, the Assembly meant to allow room for

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[32] Lachman, *Marrow Controversy*, pp. 66, 487.

[33] Daniel Williams, *Gospel Truth*, quoted in Lachman, p. 72.

[34] *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*, p. 186.

[35] Lachman, *Marrow Controversy*, pp. 73, 486-7.

[36] There is considerable debate among contemporary Calvin scholars over the alleged gulf between the understanding of assurance in Calvin and in later Calvinists. See R.T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (Oxford, 1979); M.C. Bell, *Calvin and Scottish Theology* (Edinburgh, 1985); H. Rolston III, *John Calvin versus the Westminster Confession* (Richmond, VA, 1972); opposing views in P. Helm, 'Calvin, English Calvinism and the Logic of Doctrinal Development', *SJT* 34 (1981), pp. 179-85, *Calvin and the Calvinists* (Edinburgh 1982), 'Calvin and the Covenant: Unity and Continuity', *EQ* 55 (1983), pp. 65-81; D. Macleod. 'Misunderstandings of Calvinism', *Banner of Truth*, Aug. 1966, pp. 9-13, 'Federal Theology—An Oppressive Legalism?', *Banner of Truth*, Feb. 1974, pp. 21-8, 'Faith as Assurance', *Free Church Monthly Record*, May 1988, pp. 99-101.

disagreement'.[37] But a reading of both the Confession and the Larger Catechism make it quite plain that for them assurance is not of the essence of saving faith,[38] and furthermore, if *The Marrow* did so reflect the orthodoxy of 1645, it is indeed strange that the Confession, which itself enshrined the orthodoxy of 1645, should appear markedly different.

Systematic examination of Boston's doctrine makes it clear that he was in complete harmony with the Confession's position that our salvation depends on our state and not our knowledge of it, so that one 'can go to heaven in a mist not knowing whether he is going'.[39] Yet it is also clear from his extensive notes on *The Marrow* in this context that he recognises a certain objective assurance, not the infallible subjective 'kind of assurance which the Westminster Confession expressly treats, but an assurance which is *in faith*...a fiducial *appropriating persuasion*,'[40] which *is* a constituent element in saving faith.[41] Boston quotes Rutherford as having made this distinction in earlier times,[42] and indeed Lachman[43] admits that the Reformers themselves 'did qualify their assertions by admitting that this assurance was capable of degrees'.[44] I am inclined to

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[37] Lachman, *Marrow Controversy*, p. 486.

[38] e.g. Answer to Q 81: 'Assurance of grace and salvation not being of the essence of saving faith...'.

[39] Thomas Boston, *Works*, vol.2, p.18, in McGowan, 'Boston', p. 324.

[40] *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*, pp. 95-106 (italics mine).

[41] This distinction is spelled out most clearly by Ebenezer Erskine, another of the Marrow Brethren, when he expounds the difference between the assurance of faith and the assurance of sense. 'The assurance of faith is a *direct*, but the assurance of sense is a *reflex* act of the soul. ... The object of the assurance of faith is a *Christ revealed, promised* and *offered* in the word; the object of the assurance of sense is a *Christ formed within us by the Holy Spirit*. The assurance of faith is the *cause*, that of sense is the *effect*' (*Works*, vol. 1, p. 270, in McGowan, 'Boston', p. 334). John Murray takes this distinction between such a primary or direct act and the secondary or reflex act as axiomatic, so that 'whatever we may call the respective acts the distinction is too obvious to need any elaborate defence' ('The Assurance of Faith', *Banner of Truth*, June 1972, p. 17).

[42] *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*, Notes on p. 215.

[43] Lachman, *Marrow Controversy*, p. 10.

[44] This is essentially in line with the conclusion of A.N.S. Lane in 'Calvin's Doctrine of Assurance', *Vox Evangelica 9* (1979), pp. 32-54.

agree with McGowan[45] that a more reasonable conclusion from the available evidence is that the Reformers also believed in both subjective and objective assurance, but without spelling out either in any great detail, and that gradually the distinction was made, with at times variously more weight given to each side. At any rate, as Beaton also concludes after extensive examination, it must be quite clear 'that the Marrowmen did not hold the view that the assurance *referred to by the Westminster Confession* is of the essence of faith'.[46]

Conclusions

We must conclude, then, that the General Assembly was unjustified not only in spirit but also in the letter in condemning *The Marrow*, which is in no way 'demonstrably in conflict with the Westminster Standards'.[47] Far from being in dispute with federal theology *per se*, Boston and his brethren were consistent federal Calvinists contending against legalistic and neonomian perversions of Westminster orthodoxy. Why then did the representers lose their case so comprehensively, when as Lachman points out, the Assembly's charges, if true, would have been valid against so much of Reformed orthodoxy?[48] Hog's inadequate defence of *The Marrow*;[49] the incredible theological ignorance among ministers—particularly of the writings of the early seventeenth-century divines; the general fear of the bête noire of antinomianism; and, perhaps most importantly, Hadow's misrepresentation of *The Marrow* creating a man of straw in the popular imagination which was then easily destroyed—

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[45] *'Boston'*, p. 346.

[46] D. Beaton,'The "Marrow of Modern Divinity" and the Marrow Controversy', *Records of the Scottish Church History Society* 1 (1926), p. 126 (italics mine).

[47] Lachman, *Marrow Controversy*, p. 491.

[48] *Ibid.*, p. 487.

[49] One wonders why Thomas Boston seems not to have played a greater role in pleading the Marrow case in the pamphlet battles, and in the Assembly debates themselves. Perhaps we get a clue in his own memoirs, when, great preacher as he was, he says of himself: 'I was addicted to silence, rather than to talking. I was no good spokesman, but very unready, even in common conversation; and in disputes, especially at a loss when engaged with persons of great assurance', quoted in A. Thomson, *Thomas Boston of Ettrick: His Life and Times* (Edinburgh, 1895), p. 252.

these all played a part. Moreover, the ablest literature defending *Marrow* theology appeared only subsequent to the controversy,[50] when the battle was lost. These factors are doubtless all important, as Lachman indicates; but despite all, one is still left with a sense of mystery — of something unexplained, stones left unturned, questions not fully asked or answered.

Yet perhaps the most important question is why such a controversy should arise in the first place – why such numbers of ministers of the gospel, though thoroughly Reformed in their confessional subscription, could 'in their hearts be so closed up to God's people, and to the lost of all nations', that they could oppose the gospel of free grace so vehemently? The answer cannot be historical, but must be spiritual. 'They did not preach free grace, they did not show free grace, because they did not *know* free grace.' 'They had hold of the wrappings of the system of grace, "the doctrine of grace". But they had not been mastered by the gift which lay within, in the heart of the Christ of God. They were Calvinists with the minds and hearts of natural men – as far as this truth was concerned.'[51] C.H. Spurgeon, who stood firmly in the Marrow tradition against Hyper-Calvinists in England a century later, has the heart of it when he affirms that though sound doctrine is essential, it is not enough. 'You may have sound doctrine and yet do nothing unless you have Christ in your spirit. ... When love dies, orthodox doctrine becomes a corpse, a powerless formalism. Adhesion to the truth sours into bigotry when the sweetness and light of love to Jesus depart .... Lose love, lose all.'[52] The lesson to be drawn from both these controversies is summed up in John Murray's conclusion: 'when Calvinism ceases to be evangelistic, when it becomes more concerned with theory than with the salvation of men and women, when acceptance of doctrines seems to become more important than acceptance of Christ, then it is a system going to seed and it will invariably lose its power'.[53] This was what was at the heart of the Marrow controversy, and this is what Boston and his brethren set their faces resolutely against. For those who are wont to be

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[50] Riccaltoun's *A Sober Enquiry* and *A Review of an Essay upon Gospel and Legal Preaching* in particular, along with Boston's 1726 edition of *The Marrow* with copious notes.

[51] Ferguson, *The Grace of God in the Gospel*, pp. 17-18.

[52] *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, vol. 27, p. 600; vol. 32, pp. 580-81, (quoted in I. Murray, *Spurgeon vs Hyper-Calvinism*, pp. 113-14).

[53] *Spurgeon vs Hyper-Calvinism*, p. 120.

proud of their Reformed orthodoxy, then the message is clear. God does not find

> unanointed orthodoxy less of an abomination than unanointed liberalism. God is the God of truth, and it is truth that he honours ... but truth, of itself, does not save. You do not change men simply by promulgating decrees, or by firing distant salvos at unbelief and ungodliness. It is truth anointed by the Spirit, preached by crucified men, watered by the tears of saints, and thrust into men's hearts to do its death-dealing, life giving work—*this is what God blesses, and this is what saves'*.[54]

It could have been spoken by Thomas Boston!

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[54] T. Swanston, *A Stranger in a Strange Land* (Fearn, 1991), pp. 56-7 (italics mine).

CALVIN, THEOLOGIAN OF THE HOLY SPIRIT: THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE WORD OF GOD

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Introduction

The title 'Theologian of the Holy Spirit' was not given to Calvin by his contemporaries but rather by modern scholars, in recognition of his importance as a theologian in this area of theology that is so much in the forefront today.

The title may confuse some people, as they might conclude that the main subject that Calvin wrote about and dedicated himself to was the Holy Spirit. Actually, although Calvin did write many things concerning the Holy Spirit, he never wrote a specific work on the subject, as did John Owen and Abraham Kuyper, whose books in this area are still fundamental for the present-day church.[1] Although he speaks frequently of the Person and work of the Holy Spirit in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, John Calvin did not reserve a chapter exclusively to this theme.[2] Some have criticized Calvin for not giving more direct attention to the Holy Spirit in his writings, specially in the *Institutes*. This criticism is unfair. There are plenty of reasons for this apparent lack of attention.

To begin with, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit was not the focus of major debate between Calvin and the Roman Catholic Church at the time, nor of his struggle with the Radical Reformers, the Anabaptists and the 'Enthusiasts', known as the 'left wing' of the Reformation.[3] Calvin spoke of the work of the Holy Spirit only when this subject concerned the critical issues undergoing debate, such as the doctrines of salvation, sanctification, the Scriptures, and the sacraments.

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1 John Owen, *The Holy Spirit: His Gifts and Power* (r.p., Grand Rapids, 1960); Abraham Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit* (ET r.p., Grand Rapids, 1946). Other authors could be cited, such as the English Puritan, Thomas Goodwin, and, more recently, Benjamin B. Warfield and George Smeaton.

2 Calvin writes on the deity of the Spirit in 1:13:14ff., and on his redemptive work (applying salvation) in Book 3, especially in chapters 1-2.

3 The term 'left' has been recently used by a few historians to refer to this group without any political connotation. See n. 14 below.

Secondly, Calvin held the New Testament view that the Holy Spirit generally acted behind the scenes, as an agent of the Trinity. Although his actions were clearly perceptible, those who should always receive the pre-eminence were the Father and the Son. This conviction is reflected in Calvin's works and in his approach to various theological themes. There is practically no theological subject in which Calvin does not refer to the work of the Holy Spirit. His pneumatology is developed within the other areas of systematic theology, such as theontology (study of the Being of God), soteriology and ecclesiology.

This same approach is found reflected in the Westminster Confession of Faith. It is true that its authors, the Puritans, did not write an exclusive chapter on the Person and work of the Spirit. Benjamin B. Warfield, renowned Reformed Presbyterian theologian of the beginning of this century, suggests that the reason lies in that they preferred to write *nine* chapters rather than only one. An attempt made by the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America to meet the alleged deficiency produced an extra chapter in the Confession of Faith which, according to Warfield, was nothing more than a short summary of the nine original chapters.[4]

Finally, one cannot demand an approach on the subject by Calvin (or by the authors of the Confession of Faith) specifically directed to the questions related to the rise of the Pentecostal movement, centuries after his death. Even so, Calvin is surprisingly current in what he has to say about the Spirit.

Why then the title 'Theologian of the Holy Spirit'? First of all, Calvin was the first clearly to systematize the biblical teaching on the Holy Spirit. This does not mean that no one before him had written on the subject. However, few people prior to or after Calvin were so clear, simple and biblical in their writings.[5] Warfield testifies to this:

> The doctrine of the work of the Holy Spirit is a gift from John Calvin to the Church of Christ.... In the broad departments of 'Common Grace', 'Regeneration', and 'the Witness of the Spirit' in the third book of his *Institutes*, Calvin was the first to develop the doctrine of the work of the Holy Spirit, and to give the whole doctrine of the

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[4] *Cf.* Warfield's introductory note in Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, p. xxvii.

[5] For a list of the most important works on the Holy Spirit written after Calvin in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, see Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, pp. ix-x.

Holy Spirit a systematic organization, making it an indispensable possession of the Church of God.[6]

Secondly, Calvin fully integrated the doctrine of the Holy Spirit with the other themes and areas of theology, such as regeneration, sanctification, the methods of grace, the knowledge of God, among others. Calvin's pneumatology, in the same way, included and permeated all the other departments of the theological encyclopaedia. His theology is an organic unit, where the Spirit appears appropriately as the sovereign Dynamizer.

Thirdly, Calvin rescued some aspects of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit which had been buried in the medieval theology of the Roman Catholic Church, such as the relationship between the Word and the Spirit. Our purpose in this essay is to analyze, in detail, Calvin's contribution to our knowledge of the work of the Holy Spirit or, in other words, the vital and organic relationship between the Spirit and the Word of God, the Scriptures.

Calvin's teachings profoundly influenced subsequent studies within Reformed circles. His emphasis on the sovereign work of the Spirit continues in the Reformed tradition among the English Puritans, particularly John Owen and Richard Sibbes, who gave us the most extensive and profound biblical theological studies about the Holy Spirit's ministry that exist in any language.

Calvin's Theological Context

Let us start by remembering that Calvin's theology was born and developed in the middle of an intense doctrinal conflict that marked the sixteenth-century Reformation. His doctrine of the Holy Spirit was shaped by his battle on two fronts. On one, he fought against the captivity of the Scriptures to the Roman Catholic Church, and on the other, against the abandonment of the Scriptures by the Radical Reformation.

1. The Roman Catholic Captivity of Scripture

Calvin and the Roman Catholic Church shared some convictions with respect to the doctrine of Scripture. To both, the Scriptures were the Word of God, inspired by the Holy Spirit, infallible and authoritative. This view was not being questioned by Calvin, nor by the other Reformers. The point under debate between Calvin and the Catholics was

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[6] Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, pp. xxxiii-xxxiv.

the papal teaching that the authority of the Scriptures depended on the witness of the Church. The Roman Church affirmed that the canon of Scripture, and its preservation, divine origin and authority should be accepted by the faithful as true because the Church said so. The authority of Scripture, in other words, depended on the witness of the Church. In addition, the Church had the correct interpretation of Scripture; the collection of these interpretations formed the ecclesiastical tradition, which possesses as much authority as the Scriptures themselves. Thus, lay Catholics were debarred from reading and interpreting Scripture. They depended on the interpretation given by the Church. In this manner, the Word and its interpretation were captive under ecclesiastical authority.

Calvin rose up against this state of things, which had prevailed during the Middle Ages. He considered this teaching an insult to the Holy Spirit, and an abuse of authority by the Roman Catholic Church. To him, the true church was founded upon the Scriptures, and not the other way around. The authority of the Scriptures did not depend on the witness of the church, in fact quite the contrary: the church possessed authority only while it was within biblical doctrine. Calvin here appealed to Ephesians 2:20, where Paul teaches that the church is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, which is the teaching of the Scriptures.[7] The Church simply *recognized* – it did not *establish or determine* – the inspiration and the authority of the books which made up the sacred canon.[8]

For Calvin, the main proof of scriptural authority and inspiration was that God himself spoke through them. Calvin called this the 'internal witness of the Spirit'.[9] To him, the natural human being could not be convinced of the divinity of the Scriptures by arguments presented by the church, logical and rational as they may appear (1 Cor. 2:14).[10] It was the Spirit who persuaded the Christian to believe that God was speaking through the Scriptures, leading his heart to accept them, and giving him

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7 *Institutes* 1:7:2, 4:2:1, 9. See also Calvin on Eph. 2:20, *Calvin's Commentaries... Galatians...*, tr. T.H.L. Parker (Edinburgh, 1965), pp. 154-6.

8 *Institutes* 1:7:1. See also chapters 7-9 of book 1, where Calvin develops the theme of scriptural authority.

9 *Institutes* 3:1:1, 1:7:5.

10 *Institutes* 1:8:13, 1:7:4. *Cf.* Ronald S. Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament* (Grand Rapids, 1957), pp. 101-2.

full assurance of this, generating faith in his heart. In his *Institutes* and commentaries Calvin points to a few texts with this effect, such as 1 John 5:6-7, 2 Timothy 1:14-15, 1 Corinthians 2:10-16.[11]

For John Calvin, what the Spirit had revealed in the Scriptures was sufficient and final. Mohammed, the pope and the 'Enthusiasts' were wrong when they claimed that the Spirit would be teaching new truths in the present. To Calvin, the Lord Jesus' words in John 14:25 made it clear that the Paraclete's ministry would consist not of revealing new truths which went beyond those already taught by the Lord Jesus and his apostles, but of illuminating the minds and hearts of believers, that they might understand and believe in the truths which were now registered in the Scriptures. He states: 'The spirit which introduces any invention foreign to the Gospel is a deceiver and not of Christ.'[12]

The effect of Calvin's teaching was liberating.[13] Through the emphasis on the internal witness of the Holy Spirit as the greatest evidence of the divinity and authority of Scripture, he liberated the Scriptures and their interpretation from the captivity imposed by the medieval church, and put them back where they truly belonged, in the hands of the Holy Spirit. In this sense, the evaluation of a few Catholics who led the Counter Reformation in the seventeenth century was correct, in that one of the major differences that existed between Rome and Geneva was found in their doctrines about the person and work of the Holy Spirit.

2. The Radical Reformers' Disdain for the Word

Calvin's other battle front was against the teachings of the Radical Reformation, known as the 'left wing' of the Reformation.[14] There were

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[11] *Institutes* 3:1:1, 3:2:33-4, 2:2:20, 1:7:5. See also *Calvin's Commentaries*: *First Epistle... to the Corinthians,* tr. J.W. Fraser (Edinburgh, 1960), pp. 58-64, on 1 Cor. 2:10-16; *The Gospel according to St John 11-21...*, tr. Parker (Edinburgh, 1961), pp. 302-3, on 1 Jn. 5:6-7; ... *Second Epistle to the Corinthians...*, tr. T.A. Smail (Edinburgh, 1964), pp. 302-3, on 2 Tim. 1:14-15.

[12] *Calvin's Commentaries*: *St John 11-21...*, tr. T.H.L. Parker (Edinburgh, 1961), 88.

[13] We should justly note that Calvin owes much of this perspective to the pioneer teachings of Martin Luther, who already had, before Calvin, cried out against this state of things.

[14] See note 3 above.

various groups within this sector of the Reformation movement. To begin with, there were the Anabaptists, the 'Fanatics', the 'Spiritualists' and the Antitrinitarians, who 'though different in their purposes and in their doctrines, had in common the desire to see a much more radical reformation than that propagated by Luther and Zwingli'.[15] The controversy between Calvin and the Anabaptists concentrated itself on issues such as infant baptism, predestination, church government, the relationship between church and state, and the interpretation of the Scriptures.[16]

Calvin concentrated some of his writings in the fight against the excesses of the 'Enthusiasts' or 'Fanatics' (as they were known) in the area of new contemporary revelations from the Spirit. He wrote a treatise in 1545 entitled *Contre la secte phantastique et furieuse des Libertines qui se nomment spirituelz (Against the Fantastic and Furious Sect of the Libertines who are called 'Spirituals')*.[17] Calvin frequently mentions this movement either directly or through implicit suggestions in his *Institutes* and commentaries.

The 'Enthusiasts' emphasized the didactic ministry of the Spirit, a point which had been rescued by the Reformers. However, they went beyond them, claiming to be taught directly by the Spirit through new revelations, received through an inner light. They affirmed that the Spirit could not be restricted to written words, for that would lessen his sovereignty. To test the spiritual manifestations would be to dishonour the Spirit. They reached the point of ridiculing those who clung to the Scriptures, for they considered them an inferior and temporary form of revelation, and criticized Calvin and the other Reformers for clinging to 'the letter that kills'.

The 'Enthusiasts', therefore, were a reaction against the slavery of the Scriptures to the church which had been supreme until the Reformation, but a reaction which went too far. Calvin naturally sympathized with the 'Enthusiasts' on various points. For both, the Scriptures, as the Word of

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[15] William Balke, *Calvin and the Anabaptist Radicals*, trans. W. Heynem (Grand Rapids, 1981), p. 2.

[16] For a more profound analysis of Calvin's debate with the Anabaptists consult Balke, *Calvin and the Anabaptist Radicals.*

[17] This work is found published in French in *Corpus Reformatorum*, in Calvin's *Opera* 7, cols 145-248. There is an English translation by B.W Farley, *John Calvin, Treatises Against the Anabaptists and Against the Libertines* (Grand Rapids, 1982).

God, were not captive to interpretation by the Roman Catholic Church, but should be freely examined by all. Calvin, however, seriously questioned the separation between the Spirit and the Word, and considered any tendency in this direction to be 'demented'.[18] He also doubted that these 'new revelations' were a work of the Holy Spirit, and even suspected that those who claimed to receive new revelations, which exceeded the Scriptures, were being guided by a Spirit other than God's. Calvin believed in the reality and action of lying spirits, and that Satan was constantly deluding people, trying to draw them away from truth, transfiguring himself into an 'angel of light' (2 Cor. 11:3, 14). To him, 'new revelations' were really the inventions of lying spirits and did not come from the Holy Spirit, fulfilling passages such as 1 Timothy 4:1-2.[19]

The Holy Spirit and the Word of God

Calvin did not limit himself to criticizing the errors of the 'Enthusiasts'. He presented, in a positive and constructive way, the biblical teaching on the divine direction for the church living after apostolic times. In Book 1 of his *Institutes*, where he writes on 'The Knowledge of God as Creator', Calvin gives the following title to chapter 9: 'Fanatics, abandoning Scripture and flying over to Revelation, cast down all the principles of godliness.' In this chapter, the Reformer deals with the teaching of the 'Fanatics', as they were known at the time, from the standpoint of the inseparable relationship between the Spirit and the Word.[20]

1. The Spirit Speaks through the Scriptures

Calvin's central point was that the Spirit speaks through the Scriptures. Not that the Spirit was restricted to the preaching of the Word and to the sacraments, but that he could not be dissociated from either of them. The Spirit has been given to the Church, not to bring new revelations, but to instruct us in the words of Christ and the prophets. According to Calvin, the Spirit seals our minds when we hear and receive the word of truth with faith, the gospel of salvation (Eph. 1:13). He limits himself to guiding Christians and illuminating their understanding of what he has heard and received from the Father and the Son, and not from himself (John 16:13). As the divine teachings are found in the Scriptures, the

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[18] *Institutes* 1:9:1.

[19] *Institutes* 1:9:2.

[20] For a deeper study, see W. Kreck, 'Wort und Geist bei Calvin,' in *Festschrift für Günther Dehn* (Neukirchen, 1957), pp. 168-73.

work of the Spirit consists in illuminating them, causing these teachings to be understood by the faithful.

Against the disdain for the Scriptures on the part of many 'Enthusiasts', Calvin cited the example of the apostle Paul, who, although caught up to the third heaven where he received extraordinary revelations (2 Cor. 12:2), still never held disdain for the Scriptures, as if they were an inferior form of revelation, but recognized them as being sufficient and effective, by the grace of the Spirit, for edifying the church in all things concerning the kingdom of God (2 Tim. 3:15-17; *cf.* 1 Tim. 4:13).[21]

2. The Spirit is Recognized by his Harmony with the Scriptures

Another important point stressed by Calvin in the *Institutes* was that the working of the Holy Spirit could be recognized by his harmony with the Scriptures, which had been inspired by the Spirit himself.[22] Calvin wishes to present a criterion by which the church could discern in a safe way, in the environment of religious experience, what really came from the Spirit of God, and what came from false spirits. For him, there was only one safe and infallible criterion: the Spirit speaking through the Scriptures. In this way, there would not be any diminution of the Holy Spirit's power and glory when it agreed with them, since he himself had inspired them. It would be to agree with himself, and what dishonour could there be in this? To test the manifestations which supposedly came from the Spirit, using the sieve of the Scriptures, was, in reality, pleasing to him, for he himself had determined that the church should so proceed with respect to spiritual manifestations.[23] For Calvin, there could be no contradiction between biblical teaching and the work of the Spirit in the post-apostolic times; and it is for that reason that he frequently refers to the Scriptures as the 'image of the Spirit'.[24]

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[21] *Institutes* 1:9:1; *cf.* Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament*, p. 130.

[22] *Institutes* 1:9:2.

[23] *Institutes* 1:9:2. Passages such as 1 Cor. 12:1-3, 14-29 and 1 John 4:1, among others, establish doctrinal criteria by which one may judge prophecies and prophets.

[24] *Institutes* 1:9:2-3.

3. The Spirit's Sovereignty

The last point to which I wish to refer is Calvin's insistence on the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit in this intimate relationship with the Word of God. For him, the Word is the instrument by which God gives the Spirit's illumination to believers.[25] Thus, Christ speaks today through the ministry of the gospel, when it faithfully exposes the Word. The Spirit makes the exposed Word effective in the hearts of those who hear it. At the same time, the Spirit-Word relationship is not magical or automatic. The Word is not like a talisman, which liberates its magical powers when called upon to do so, at the whims of its possessor. The efficacy of the Word, on the contrary, is totally dependent on the sovereignty of the Spirit.[26] For Calvin, Paul's statement that we are ministers of a new covenant, of the Spirit who quickens (2 Cor. 3:6), is not a guarantee that our preaching will always be accompanied by the quickening power of the Spirit. Pastors do not hold the power to dispense the Spirit's grace to anyone they wish or at any time they want to. The Spirit turns the preached Word into an effective Word through a sovereign act.[27]

In this manner, the eloquence, skill, knowledge and fervour of the preacher are in vain if the grace and power of the Spirit are not present. It happens this way because the honour should always be Christ's, and not the preacher's.

Calvin's Influence on the Westminster Confession of Faith

The Westminster Confession of Faith was drawn up in the seventeenth century, almost a hundred years after Calvin's death, by Puritan pastors and theologians, gathered with this end in mind by the English Parliament, at the Westminster Assembly. The goal of the scholars who gathered there during many years was one: to organize biblical doctrine in a systematic fashion, using the principles of interpretation inherited from the Reformation. Its authors were deeply influenced by John Calvin. This influence can be clearly detected in the Confession's teaching about the Holy Spirit, specially in the relationship between the Spirit and the Word.

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[25] *Institutes* 1:9:2-3.

[26] Calvin's *Commentaries: Epistle... to the Hebrews...*, tr. W.B. Johnston (Edinburgh, 1963), pp. 50-53, on Heb. 4:12.

[27] Calvin's *Commentaries: The Second Epistle... to the Corinthians*, tr. T.A. Smail (Edinburgh, 1964), p. 43.

Thus, in its chapter on the Scriptures, the Confession declares, in the best Calvinist terms, that the authority of the Scriptures does not depend on the witness of man or of the church, but of God (1.4); that our certainty in its infallible truth and divine authority comes from the witness of the Holy Spirit in our hearts (1.5); that the Scriptures may not be added to at any time, not even by revelations from the Spirit, or by human traditions (1.6). The Confession declares, with Calvin, that the intimate revelation of the Spirit of God is necessary for the saving understanding of the things revealed in the Word (1.6), and that, ultimately, the supreme Judge by which all religious controversies must be examined is the Holy Spirit speaking through the Scriptures (1.8).

Relevance of Calvin's Teaching Today

The influence of the Neo-pentecostal (or charismatic) movement, arising in the 1960s, has made itself felt in a deep way in the historical evangelical denominations. We cannot deal with the movement as a monolithic block – there are, within it, various strains and ramifications of thought, which make generalizations unfair. However, when it appears in all its liberty Neo-pentecostalism manifests a belief in new revelations through prophecies and tongues, visions and dreams, all attributed to the Holy Spirit, the 'wind' of the Spirit. There are pastors who presume to have control over the Holy Spirit, and to bestow him through the laying on of their hands, to cast him upon people by blowing upon them, *etc*. These super-pastors even determine when the Spirit will heal or act, for they schedule healing and liberation meetings in advance, things which not even the Lord Jesus and his apostles did.

Evangelical denominations (including the Presbyterian!) are shocked and greatly surprised by these teachings. Many of their local churches have adopted, in varying degrees, the practices and doctrines of Neo-pentecostalism. Can we receive help from Calvin's teachings at this time?

To begin with, Calvin's teaching about the internal testimony of the Spirit comes to remind the church that, in these difficult times, it must ask God for the Spirit's intimate illumination so that it may understand and apply the Scriptures to its life and mission. We run the risk of thinking that Calvin, in his fight against the 'Enthusiast' excesses, fell into extreme, cold scholasticism. Balke relates what really happened: 'Calvin, the theologian of the Holy Spirit, wanted to guard himself

against fanaticism without limiting the liberty of the Spirit.'[28] Like Calvin, we should guard ourselves from the excesses of the day, simultaneously submitting ourselves to the freedom of the Spirit as we seek his illumination. However, for that to happen, local churches, councils and organizations of the churches must repent and their lives must be cleansed. We need to turn back to God in prayer, begging for the Spirit's illumination, as directs the Pastoral Letter of the Presbyterian Church of Brazil about the Holy Spirit:

> At the same time as he directs the Church to guard itself from an interpretation of Scripture which comes from the mistaken hermeneutical principles of the Neo-pentecostal experience, the Church also warns against an intellectualized and dry interpretation of Scripture, which forgets the necessary illumination of the Spirit for their comprehension and that God promises to teach those who seek to walk in righteousness and holiness with him (Ps. 119:18, 33-4; Luke 24:44-5).[29]

Secondly, Calvin challenges us to examine all spiritual manifestations by the standard of the Word of God, as to their nature, purpose and method. This practice correctly presumes the biblical teaching that the Holy Spirit does not contradict himself. The Scriptures were inspired by him. Although the Spirit acts in different ways at different times, he never does so in contradiction of what he has revealed in the Word. We should be open to the fact that the Spirit has emphasized different aspects of the Word in different periods – though never going beyond it or against it.

Thirdly, Calvin's teaching alerts us against those who claim to have total control over the Spirit, who claim to give the baptism of the Spirit through the laying on of hands, who teach immature and careless Christians to speak in tongues. He alerts us to reject every teaching, movement, cult, and liturgy where the Word of God is not given the focus due to it. If the Spirit speaks through the Word, the Word must be the centre.

Many Presbyterians consider themselves Calvinists and Reformed, but how many actually realize the implications of the Reformed Calvinist

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[28] Balke, *Calvin and the Anabaptist Radicals*, p. 326.

[29] 'O Espírito Santo Hoje – Os Dons de Línguas e Profecia', in *Cartas Pastorais* (São Paulo: Casa Editora Presbiteriana, 1995). The document was drawn up by the Standing Commission of Doctrine of the Presbyterian Church of Brazil.

teaching about the work of the Spirit for the Neo-pentecostal practices that are accepted in many of our churches? Calvin was, in fact, a man of the Holy Spirit, who when guided by him became God's main instrument for the Reformation of the sixteenth century, a movement which really was one of the greatest spiritually that ever happened in the Christian church, after the apostolic period. We all want a spiritual revival of this same magnitude. Calvin, who lived and ministered in the middle of that tremendous manifestation of divine power, was not afraid to offend the Spirit, but asked in a meticulous and deep manner, about the truthfulness of the phenomena which always accompany the great spiritual movements of history. If on one hand we should not be afraid of what the Spirit might do, on the other hand we should fear the spurious works of the false spirits, as well as our own deceitful heart.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that the 'age of the Holy Spirit', as it is known amidst many Neo-pentecostal groups, began not in 1906, with the meeting on Azusa Street, Los Angeles, but on the day of Pentecost. There is abundant biblical evidence for this. In his sermon on the day of Pentecost, the apostle Peter declared that the Spirit's coming was inaugurating the last days (Acts 2:16-21). The other apostles taught, in like manner, that the last days, the dispensation prior to the final judgement day, had already come (1 Cor. 7:29; 1 John 2:18). I emphasize this point because some might argue that we are living today in the 'age of the Spirit', and that Calvin lived before this age. Those who believe in this way claim that today the Spirit is acting in a much more intense and even different way than he did at the time of the Reformation, and that consequently what Calvin experienced and taught is, in a way, out of date. However, the Scriptures teach us that the church has already been living in the last day, the dispensation of the Spirit, ever since the apostolic period. Calvin lived and taught in the plain Spirit-age, just as we live and struggle today. Calvin's teaching, since it is biblical, could serve us as a road-guide, indicating the narrow and balanced path between a life of godliness and a mind stayed in the doctrines of grace.

SURVEYING THE SAINTS: REFLECTIONS ON RECENT WRITINGS ON 'CELTIC CHRISTIANITY'

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In the Spring 1992 issue of this *Bulletin*, I called attention to the vogue for modern 'Celtic Christianity'.[1] Here I shall comment on changes that have become evident in the direction of the movement since I wrote my first papers on the subject in the early 1990s, and then I shall offer a survey of recent writings and interpretations of sources. In conclusion, I shall provide a brief overview of recent scholarly writing on Scottish saints.

Popular 'Celtic Christianity'

In essence, 'Celtic Christianity' is a popular quest for a form of early British and Irish Christianity which is free from the great sins and failures of medieval and modern Christianity in the West. 'Celtic Christianity' and the 'Celtic Church', as defined by the proponents of the new popular movement, are the antidotes to the religious angsts of our time. In contrast to the conventional structures of church and state, 'Celtic Christianity' and the 'Celtic Church' are perceived to be native, holistic growths; they represent a well of forgotten purity, whose waters flowed out copiously, and indeed (some would argue) continue to flow still, in small but potent supply, ever available to meet the pains of our time, to protect the environment, erode unnecessary ecclesiastical structures, and nourish such highly desirable developments as the ministry of women in the church. 'Celtic Christianity', in short, tends to scratch the many itches of our ecclesiastical bodies, public and personal.[2]

Given the profusion of our itches, it is hardly surprising that this interpretation of early Christianity in the British Isles crosses denominational, and even religious, boundaries. It is also growing in its popularity, as is witnessed by the endless stream of publications claiming to expound some dimension of the theme.

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1 Donald Meek, 'Modern Celtic Christianity: The Contemporary "Revival" and its Roots', *SBET* 10 (1992), pp. 6-31.

2 Donald E. Meek, 'Modern Celtic Christianity', in *Studia Imagologica: Amsterdam Studies on Cultural Identity* 8 (1996), pp. 143-57. This volume of *Studia* is entitled *Celticism*, and is edited by Terence Brown.

The popular brand of 'Celtic Christianity' is to be distinguished carefully from the properly academic study of the history of early Christianity in the British Isles in the period before 1100.

Patterns of Popular Publication

The popular books on 'Celtic Christianity' published in the 1980s can be divided into two broad groups: devotional literature, aimed at those who wish to use 'Celtic' models of prayer and reflection in public or private worship, as in the work of David Adam; and descriptive volumes, explaining the main themes of Celtic Christianity and stressing the differences between it and the present-day Christianity, as in the work of Ian Bradley and Esther de Waal.[3]

Since the late 1980s, 'Celtic Christianity' has developed an academic respectability, and has worked its way into the curricula of some colleges and universities. This is reflected in the anthologies of 'Celtic' texts which are being made available for the benefit of students. These anthologies are very wide in their sweep, containing material from the hagiographers of the Dark Ages to the modern poets of the twentieth century; see, for example, *Celtic Christian Spirituality*, edited by Oliver Davies and Fiona Bowie (SPCK, 1995, £15.99), which provides all its material in translation, and thus leaves the properly Celtic linguistic dimension out of consideration. The terms 'Celtic' and 'Christian' in such contexts seem to be capable of infinite expansion, almost to the point of meaninglessness.

It is probably fair to say that there has been a change of direction in the more popular publications too since the early 1990s. Several seem to lay particular emphasis on the saints. There are various reasons for this increase in the saintly profile. There is the very obvious booster-rocket provided by the Columba anniversary itself, which coincides with the Augustine anniversary, and has managed to pull other saints like Ninian into its orbit. Authors have been very busy meeting the challenges of anniversary-driven publishers' deadlines. Furthermore, the 1990s were designated 'The Decade of Evangelism', particularly by ecclesiastical bodies south of the border. The Anglican Church affirmed the importance of the Celts as role-models for evangelistic strategy in the British Isles, and the Celtic saints have been seen as the principal

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[3] Earlier works and patterns of publication are discussed in the two articles cited in notes 1 and 2.

exemplars of desirable, indeed essential, missionary outreach to post-Christian Britain.

The patterns of publication tend to confirm several of the trends which were first noted in my 1992 article. It is now apparent that Anglicans, in particular, have turned 'Celtic Christianity' into a growth industry. It is specially noticeable that the majority of writers have an Anglican background, and that several hold high office in the Anglican Church. Bishops are not infrequent contributors. One of the most recent volumes, *Recovering the Past: Celtic and Roman Mission* (Darton, Longman and Todd, 1996, £8.95), was written for the Decade of Evangelism by John Finney, Bishop of Pontefract and formerly Anglican officer for the Decade of Evangelism. Anglicans appear to be rather uncertain about their identity these days, and this may be why they are recovering the 'Celtic' past in a big way. It is a very proper and very dapper sort of past, but it tends to lean away from Rome and Canterbury, towards Lindisfarne and Iona.

There is some interest too from within Roman Catholicism; Cardinal Basil Hume is among the latest writers, with his recent book, *Footsteps of the Northern Saints* (Darton, Longman and Todd, 1996, £7.95), in which he affirms Lindisfarne as the cradle of Celtic Christianity. The Cardinal, however, is not concerned to present a brief for Celtic Christianity, and the saints whom he describes are predominantly Anglo-Saxon: Paulinus, Aidan, Hilda, Theodore of Tarsus, Benedict Biscop, Wilfrid and Cuthbert. Cardinal Hume's book is really quite different from the usual popular volumes on 'Celtic Christianity'. It is much better focused, since the Cardinal views the saints from his own position as an overseer, and draws lessons from their lives; it is also better balanced than most, since it takes a wider sweep, allowing the Canterbury mission into its purview.

Cardinal Hume's greater emphasis on the non-Celtic saints underlines a difference of perspective between the Catholic side of the movement, and the Anglican side, certainly in England. It is fascinating that Anglicans have so obviously forsaken their own home-grown, Anglo-Saxon saints, and have 'bought in' to the Celtic variety. Generally, writers are at pains to contrast the 'Roman' and 'Celtic' dimensions of mission, with the 'Celts' much in favour, and the 'Romans' portrayed as Latinised, hierarchical, imperialist, power-mad tyrants. The Celts, on the other hand, are indigenised, non-hierarchical, egalitarian, democratic evangelisers.

From a Scottish perspective, it is interesting that there are still so few Scots, and notably so few Presbyterians, who have taken up the popular cause of the 'Celts' and their saints, even in this period of increasing

national consciousness. This is particularly fascinating because Scots like the Free Kirker, the Revd Thomas McLauchlan, in the mid-nineteenth century were among the first to reconstruct the 'Celtic Church' to bolster the claims and credibility of Presbyterianism. Perhaps Scots are wise enough to understand that the sort of 'Celtic Church' which the 'Celtic Christianity' writers advocate as a means of bringing Anglicans and Presbyterians together is exactly the kind of church that they do *not* want.

Conquering the 'Fringes'

From their southern perspectives, most of our writers reach out to embrace the northern 'fringes' of the British Isles, often placing a great deal of emphasis on what might be termed the 'purity of the periphery'. Within an historiographical framework, if the movement deserves to be seen in that way, it is apparent that this is another, more populist, version of the Anglocentric history with which we poor Celts have been saddled across the centuries. It looks out from an imperial centre, conducts an ideological reconquest of the 'fringe' areas of the British Isles, and reconstructs their history in a rather self-indulgent way. Those of us who inhabit the fringes find this kind of writing a little patronising.

The writers are probably unaware that they are subscribing to an agenda of this kind; the view from Pontefract is hardly likely to be interrupted by major cultural mountains, and there is little evidence that the writers have conducted much research into the original documents. Most (though not all) are not concerned with the primary sources of information, and occasional slips of the pen tell their own story. Thus, John Finney writes on his second page:

> In A.D. 597 two symbolic events took place. The Celtic St Columba died at Lindisfarne and the Roman St Augustine came to Canterbury.

The Iona Community should take due note of this subtle bit of asset-stripping – or should we call it 'relic-snatching'? – and extract some form of compensation from Darton, Longman and Todd. This would allow it to buy a modern, electronic, state of the art, mort-safe. A kind of ultra-sophisticated version of the Monymusk Reliquary, which could sniff out snatchers within a ten-mile radius, would do the job nicely.

Rejecting Romanticism

Recent writers like John Finney are very much aware of, and address themselves to, the dangers of oversimplification and romanticism, but they are not able to confront the issues with complete charity. The 'Celtic' side invariably wins out in such books, most notably in Ray Simpson's volume, *Exploring Celtic Spirituality* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1995, £7.99), and it is seen as the better model for evangelism at the end

of the twentieth century. Simpson draws extensively on the lives of the saints for his material, but he is also heavily indebted to non-Celtic commentators. His work shows the standard hallmarks of this kind of volume, notably in its romantic idealism, which Finney tries to counteract.

It has to be said, nevertheless, that there is a growing awareness of the over-romanticised perspectives of earlier writers, and that some degree of sobering up is now evident. Properly scholarly books such as *Iona: The Earliest Poetry of a Celtic Monastery*, edited by Thomas Clancy and Gilbert Márkus (see below), are gradually having a salutary effect. The corrective power of excellent presentations of this kind can be seen within the academic wing of the 'Celtic Christianity' movement; it is most evident in Ian Bradley's book on *Columba: Pilgrim and Penitent* (Wild Goose Publications, 1996, £6.99) which offers a very lively and useful introduction to Columba, and includes some interesting passages of recantation with regard to the author's earlier perspectives on both the 'Celtic Church' and 'Celtic Christianity'.

Since the early 1990s also, the saints generally have gained a much higher profile. Indeed, there are books which consist of little homilies on the saints, designed to meet the needs of the modern day, notably Michael Mitton's *Restoring the Woven Cord: Strands of Celtic Christianity for the Church Today* (Darton, Longman and Todd, 1995, £7.95). In this book the saints' biographies are used to give guidance in particular concerns of life.

(Mis)representing the Saints

The modern, popular presentation of sanctity tends to focus on a number of set themes, determined more by the needs of contemporary society than by the sources. Here, I will select a few individual volumes, and discuss four of these themes. In so doing, I hope to give Columba more emphasis than I propose to give to the other saints.

Paganising the Saints

The relationship between 'pagan and Christian' is prominent within the reconstructed popular paradigms of sanctity. 'Celtic Christianity' often enthuses over the way in which the Celtic saints absorbed or internalised aspects of pagan, pre-Christian culture. This perspective is developed in John Marsden's volume, *Sea-road of the Saints* (Floris Books, 1995, £9.99). This little volume is scarcely to be compared with the more popular volumes that I have already alluded to; it sits between scholarly studies and popular pot-boilers. On the whole, it is reliable and trustworthy, and one of its strengths is Marsden's swift and effective

dismissal of the so-called 'Celtic Church', although (sadly) he comes under the spell of the equally elusive 'Irish Church'. The author's handling of place-names and other aspects of history is not always strong, but his structure and approach are refreshingly sane. However, one of his key themes is the relationship between early Irish saints and druids. In particular, he sees Columba as one who has taken over the role of the druid in Celtic society. Thus, Marsden argues, the intensity of Columba's visions in Hinba (Iona) is to be explained partly by the way in which the saint has taken on the role of the druid in early Ireland and Scotland:

> Much as the druid entered into a trance before proclaiming a pagan king, it is more than likely that Columba would have entered upon a regime of solitude, prayer and fasting to resolve a political crisis. Such extremes of ascetic practice ... induced the visionary experience of the holy man in the ancient Irish church and such visions were regularly recruited to underwrite the intervention of the saint in affairs of state (pp. 111-12).

The parallel between the druid and the saint on this occasion is something of a long shot, a contextual parallel rather than a claim for absorption or direct influence, but elsewhere in the volume Marsden sees the saints as indebted to the druids:

> So numerous are the druidic aspects of the ancient Irish church that it must have been through the druid that the Irish holy man inherited a spiritual consciousness with its roots deep in the Celtic, even the pre-Celtic, past (p. 31).

The problem here is that one is really talking about generalities, rather than specifics. The role of the druid in early Celtic societies is by no means homogeneous through time or place, and the type of druid which such writers envisage as the precursor or even the prototype of the Irish saint is generally very benign, quite different from the sort of druids who operated in Gaul in Julius Caesar's time. Furthermore, saints and holy men who probed the mysteries of heaven through ecstatic experiences are known from the accounts of the Desert Fathers, and owe little to druids. Saint Paul had visions of this kind too, and it is worth bearing in mind that, in Adomnán, Columba is very much a New Testament saint. Adomnán and Dallán Forgaill, who composed an elegy on Columba, and also links Columba with angels, are not, in my view, showing a man who is a successor to druids, but rather the real ascetic, up sides with the best of the visionaries of Christian, rather than pagan, tradition. Adomnán is anxious to demonstrate that Columba is able to renounce the world for longish periods, and that he can commune directly with the heavenly realms, in a way that parallels the transfiguration of Christ. This portrayal

of his sanctity is used to give Columba tremendous authority when selecting candidates for kingship, for example. Unlike Adomnán, modern writers, influenced by syncretistic tendencies, are anxious to present evidence for a compromise between paganism and Christianity, and druids are a handy means towards that end. It is, however, evident that writers are now rather less inclined to find parallels for the visions and miracles of the saints in the alleged paganism of the Celtic past, and are turning more effectively, and in my view more fairly, to the Bible.

Domesticating the Saints

It is evident that several modern writers on the 'Celtic' saints are keen to show that they are a very accessible breed, both homely and kind. Thus, Esther de Waal writes in her latest book, entitled *The Celtic Way of Prayer* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1996, £7.99):

> Celtic saints are approachable, close at hand, woven quite naturally into life, just as would be any other member of an extended family. It is this which sets them apart from the great saints of the Western Church, who were made saints by formal canonisation through the process of a centralised ecclesiastical machinery.

De Waal's portrayal of the saints is heavily influenced by the presentation of their role in Carmichael's *Carmina Gadelica*, and seems to me to give insufficient weight to the way in which the saints have been reconstructed across the centuries. The Columba who was known in the nineteenth-century Highlands was a far cry from the Columba of the so-called Dark Ages. Columba of the charms and incantations is usually a gentle figure (*Calum Cille caomh*, 'gentle Colum of the Cell'), more involved in the protection and enabling of human life and activity than in struggles to maintain and extend his authority and influence.

Protection and enabling of human activity were indeed features of the saints of the Dark Ages, and, as Ian Bradley duly notes, Adomnán's portrait of Columba has these attributes. However, it seems to me that the modern balance has tipped more markedly towards the gentle side of Columba's nature, and of that of the so-called Celtic saints more generally. Re-reading the *Life of Columba* recently in Richard Sharpe's excellent edition (see below), I was very struck, particularly when going through Columba's prophecies in Book I, by how very powerful and awesomely terrifying he could be. His capacity to foretell the death of miscreants is quite frightening, quite *un*approachable at times, and even those who are honourable and seek his help seem to die very soon after they have come into contact with the saint. This is not the sort of saint we usually see in modern writings on Celtic Christianity; the 'new Columba' is an ecumenist and a warm-hearted evangelist, going out among people,

rather than standing apart from them. The portrait of Columba in Adomnán is, in my view, a fairly complex one, with many dimensions and many nuances aimed at establishing the saint's authority in numerous different fields. Modern writing tends to have its own set of agendas too, and to pick and choose accordingly.

Saints and Animals

If there is one theme above others which is often explored by the new writers on the saints, it is that of the environment. Saints, including Columba, are generally portrayed as very environment-friendly, setting up the precursors of the animal sanctuaries of our time. The starting-point of this interpretation of Columba is in the famous incident, recorded by Adomnán (I.48), in which the saint shows great kindness to a crane (or heron, according to Sharpe). The line that is taken by popular writers is that the saint is here showing his concern for creation or for hospitality 'for all God's creatures' (see Simpson, p. 70). That may be true in a very general way, but it is not at all the point that Adomnán is making. According to Adomnán, the important thing about the crane, in Columba's estimation, is that it comes from the north of Ireland, from the very region of Columba's ancestors (*de nostrae paternitatis regione*). It is therefore worthy of great care and attention. Here Columba is affirming his Irish ancestral roots, and the crane acts as a specific link between the exile and his homeland. It is worth noting too that the motif of a bird which travels between different members of a kin, especially between an exiled member and the family in the homeland, is known elsewhere in Celtic literature. The very specific, kin-based nature of Columba's interest in the crane is overlooked consistently by the popular writers.

Mission and Peregrination

Another theme which is currently pursued in the popular books has a direct bearing on the exile of Columba, and on that of many other saints – namely *pergrinatio*. It too is currently being reinterpreted in the light of modern agendas. John Finney, at the end of his book *Recovering the Past: Celtic and Roman Mission*, writes:

> When a large group of people are not Christian, living in a society which has attitudes and an ethos which is not Christian, then the Celtic model of evangelism is more effective. Such evangelism needs to make room for the *peregrinati*; in modern terms these are the travelling evangelists and church-planters and the religious orders and places like Lee Abbey and Iona who are experimenting with small houses set in inner-city areas (p. 141).

One has to work one's way carefully through a statement like that because it includes so many different strands of interpretation, all of which seem to me to be stretching the concept of *peregrinatio* (and associated terms) well beyond the intentions and aims of the Celtic saints. When Columba left Ireland on his *peregrinatio*, was mission in the modern sense his first priority? Personally, I think not; the aim of the *peregrinatio* was to escape from the masses, to go into seclusion, in order to contemplate God and the things of God. That was the spirit of the Desert Fathers too, and of many other Celtic saints besides Columba. *Peregrinatio*, if interpreted in the 'Celtic' manner, could lead to a mass exodus of clergy from England to the remotest bounds of the globe, rather than to a major engagement with local society – and few participants would survive to write their memoirs.

It is certainly true that, in certain cases, saints evangelised parts of the lands in which they finally established their bases, but evangelism of the people was not, as I see it, their first priority, at least not in every case. Some were recluses, while others were more outward-going types. We must therefore draw distinctions between different holy men and their motives, between, for example, Columba of Iona and Aidan of Lindisfarne, and we must be very careful that we pay due attention to the different motives for their respective careers, to say nothing of the perspectives that writers like Adomnán and Bede brought to bear on their subjects. The people-friendly Aidan, so lovingly portrayed by Bede, seems to me to stand in sharp contrast to those other earlier British clerics who did not evangelise the Anglo-Saxons, and incurred Bede's disdain. Motives, methods and means all varied, right across the spectrum. The liberal misuse of the term 'Celtic' all too often disguises these differences.

It can be said that the 'Celtic' saints are very much at the forefront of evangelistic thinking these days. They are at the heart of 'Celtic Christianity'. They are seen to be relevant to the needs of the late twentieth century. But the question which scholars must ask is whether our Celtic saints, thus dressed in twentieth-century garb, are the real Celtic saints, and, if we respond with a resounding 'No!', we must then ask ourselves how we define 'the real Celtic saints'. Where can we find the real Columba?

Saints and Scholars

That question is not easily answered, because Columba and other saints have been reconstructed across the centuries. Adomnán's *Vita Columbae* is arguably a reconstruction of the saint in a manner which meets the needs of Adomnán and his church, but it does have the advantage that the

writer was some thirteen hundred years nearer to the actual person. We will be helped towards discovering the nature of the early saints, not by adding another layer of fabrication to the picture, but by consulting the work of scholars whose aim is to dig into the early sources rather than construct their own romantic archetypes.

Those who wish a reliable general account of the saints and their *peregrinationes* will enjoy Lisa M. Bitel's book, *Isle of the Saints: Monastic Settlement and Community in Early Ireland* (Cork University Press, 1993, £12.95). Unlike the devotees of 'Celtic Christianity', Bitel emphasises the harsh realities of being an exile for the sake of Christ: 'Although famous, the exiles were few; most monks stayed safely at home. Only saints and saintly monks survived voluntary exile. This was because only saints needed no shelter, food, or human companionship' (p. 222). She underlines the potentially destructive effect of such exile on monastic communities, since it 'contradicted ordinary monastic existence' (p. 228).

Columba has been well served by academic writers since the early 1990s, and here we may note that modern Scots (to their credit) are, on the whole, more inclined to saintly scholarship than to romantic reconstructionism. The fine edition of Adomnán's *Vita Columbae* by Allan Orr Anderson and Marjorie Ogilvie Anderson, first published in 1961, was revised by the latter and republished by Oxford University Press in 1991 (£45.00), in a compact form. This edition remains essential for any serious work on the saint. This was followed in 1995 by Richard Sharpe's translation of the *Vita* in the Penguin Classics series, under the title *Adomnán of Iona: Life of St Columba* (£8.99). Sharpe, an Oxford scholar, provides a very useful *vademecum* for those who may be daunted by the scale and price of the Andersons' edition. It contains substantial notes and an excellent historical and literary introduction, with a section on 'The modern legend of St Columba' which deals with the modern reconstruction of the saint and is very relevant to the theme of this article. The focus on the Latin *Life* of the saint has been complemented by the study of poetry associated with Columba and Iona, edited and set in context most accessibly by Thomas Owen Clancy and Gilbert Márkus in their volume, *Iona: The Earliest Poetry of a Celtic Monastery* (Edinburgh University Press, £12.95). While it cannot be proved that all the poems in the volume were composed at Iona, they are concerned with, or linked to, Columba, and provide a further dimension to our understanding of how he was perceived, not least within an Irish / Gaelic cultural context. The introduction to the volume and to individual poems sometimes draws proper and just attention to the contrast between

the theology of the poems and that popularly regarded as constituting 'Celtic Christianity'.

Over the last fifteen years or so, steady work has been done on the Scottish saints by Alan Macquarrie, who has written a large number of seminal articles in scholarly journals These have now been gathered together with some further unpublished writing in a single volume, *The Saints of Scotland: Essays in Scottish Church History AD 450-1093* (John Donald, 1997, £14.95). This well-paced and readable book is securely rooted in the primary sources, and currently forms the single most substantial general work relating to the Scottish saints, including Columba. Those who wish to struggle free from the spell of 'Celtic Christianity' will be safely guided by the firm tread of this diligent scholar.

Less weighty volumes, which are nevertheless distinct from those of popular 'Celtic Christianity', are also appearing, among them Donald Smith's well-illustrated publication, *Celtic Travellers: Scotland in the Age of the Saints* (HMSO, 1997, £3.99). This surveys the Scottish saints on a regional basis, and the reader can travel around, using the book to discover the saints and saints' cults within specific localities. The writer recognises the dangers of that word 'Celtic' – but it is nevertheless used in the title. In the context of 'travellers', while describing the saints, it may give an entirely new gloss to the significance of those ancient, but colourful, buses which occasionally participate in peregrinations and adorn remote Scottish lay-bys.

The profusion of publications from the pens of those who subscribe to the popular version of 'Celtic Christianity' are thus being balanced by a continuing concern with the properly scholarly analysis of surviving evidence. It is to be hoped that the latter will have a beneficial, corrective effect on the former. If 'Celtic Christianity' becomes less trendy, less pseudo-'Celtic', and more realistic in its assessments and perspectives as a result of the 1400th Anniversary of the death of Columba, the saint will not have lived – or died – in vain.

REVIEWS

Behold Your King! Meditations on the Death and Resurrection of Christ

Richard Holloway
SPCK, London, 1995; 120pp., £5.99; ISBN 0 281 04811 8

This is a series of profound and moving meditations on the death and resurrection of Christ by Richard Holloway, Bishop of Edinburgh. In his introduction, he says that to preach the cross is 'one of the most taxing and privileged responsibilities of the Christian minister'; he himself rarely accomplishes it without weeping. He explains how he feels that Jesus' death has become an ecclesiastical event taken over by the church, but that in fact Jesus belongs to the world, not the church. These meditations are designed therefore to help us think in a deep and meaningful way about the death and resurrection of Christ.

The book is divided into three parts. The first – The Actors – leads the reader into the thoughts and feelings of people who played a part in the events of Good Friday. Part Two focuses on the Seven Last Words of grace, comfort, compassion, fear, longing, triumph and ultimate freedom spoken by Christ on the Cross and leads us deep into the mind of Christ himself. In Part Three – The Aftershock – the reader is encouraged to contemplate the meaning of Christ's resurrection, to discern what it can tell us about the character of God and the way God would have us live as Christ's followers today.

Janet Watson, Glasgow Bible College

Christian Theology. An Introduction

Alister E. McGrath
Blackwell, Oxford, 1994; 510pp., £12.99; ISBN 0 631 16078 7

The teaching of Christian doctrine continues to exercise the ingenuity of academics and publishers alike. How do you give an accessible introduction to a subject that spans two millennia and engages with very kind of human culture and church life issue? Blackwells chose well in commissioning Alister McGrath in this latest, well-thought-out response to the challenge, The author demonstrates his now familiar gift of explaining theological issues in a style usually free of 'theologese'. Joined with a highly

competent grasp of the discipline, McGrath's work has done all that his publishers could reasonably ask. Thanks to him the publishers can on the whole justify their claim that the book avoids denominational bias, analyses every area and is suited for those training for ministry. For the greater part, they can also justify their claim that the three major sections, 'Landmark' (a historical account), 'Sources and Methods' and 'Christian Theology' (a traditional theme-based section), provide a sound pedagogical progression but that each chapter is a self-contained unit. The historical approach at the beginning will win the attention and sympathy of readers not yet clear on the importance of doctrine, and will ease them almost painlessly into the subject. Each chapter has a valuable closing section indicating key names, themes, words and phrases together with questions for revision and further study.

It is no criticism of the excellent writing of McGrath to say that the experiment is not a complete success. For the result is quite a long book, and the three-sections approach creates its own problems. For example, it proves impossible to avoid repetition. A typical example is found in the chapter on the patristic period when opting for a section on 'Key theologians' followed by one on 'Key Theological developments'. As it turns out the two simply cannot be disentangled. Equally, fragmentation can take place: the patristic treatment of Christology reappears in the thematic handling of Christology. A broad brush treatment of historical theology followed by a similar treatment of method and topics is doomed to this result. Of course, repetition is a sound principle of teaching, but how far should it be be allowed in a book? To give just another example of the problems arising, should Cyprian and the Cappadocian Fathers fail to appear under 'Key theologians' and only make their entry in the thematic handling of 'Church' and 'Trinity'?

This question of structure is the man flaw (if that is a fair word) of the book. Other criticisms are simply those of individual preference. I found it slightly disconcerting to find no substantial treatment of the Definition of Chalcedon, but relatively generous space given to Harnack's view of patristic dogma (important as that is). The overall impression is of the sinking of boreholes at interesting points rather than a broad turning over of all the patch. This can leave a student vulnerable but can be defended in teaching terms. The result proves not that Blackwells were misguided but that the subject has formidable breadth and complexity. This is a bold, pioneering and progressive approach which deserves to succeed, and only writers of McGrath's stature can make as fine a job of it as here. The readability and reliability alone of the work

should guarantee it a place in every theological library where it should remind all teachers of Christian doctrine that their first task is to convince the next generation that the subject is absorbing, mainly accessible, and certainly indispensable. The publisher and author have certainly given us a lesson in achieving that.

Roy Kearsley, Glasgow Bible College

An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion

B.R. Tilghman

Blackwell, Oxford, 1994; 235pp., n.p.; ISBN 0 631 18938 6

Several introductions to the philosophy of religion have been produced over the last few years. Tilghman varies the routine in at least two ways. First, he seeks to introduce students to philosophy as well as to the philosophy of religion. Secondly, he selects a few key themes rather than trying to cover all the main ones. Before doing so, he traces the origins of philosophy and religion in an historical survey designed to give us our bearings. And after doing so, he concludes that the attempt to give evidence for belief in God, or any associated religious convictions, is altogether mistaken. Religion is a way of life in what philosophers will identify as a generally Wittgensteinian sense.

The result is a sustained assault on attempts to demonstrate the rationality of religious beliefs, according to the common understanding of rationality which links it with demonstration. In successive chapters, Tilghman discusses: 'The existence of God', 'The Bible, Truth, and History', 'Religion and Science', and 'Religion and Ethics'. God's existence cannot be proved. The Bible is not a convincing record of God's activity in the world. Scientific enquiry gives no evidence for religion. Religion cannot explain morality, nor does it provide us with a logical answer to the problem of evil. The author carries out his programme in a way that is largely negative and destructive, although it has a putatively positive effect of properly locating the role of religion in life.

If every philosopher of religion wrote as attractively as does Tilghman, the discipline would be well served. He is well able to harness expertise in the nature of argument to a winning and lively way of discussing the problems of philosophy of religion. His design of tracing the origins of philosophy and religion in the opening chapter is a particularly welcome feature of the book. However, for two reasons, this book cannot be recommended as an introduction.

First, by his selection of arguments to knock down, Tilghman gives the impression that no alternative forms of the arguments work. A good example is the discussion of Aquinas' cosmological arguments for the existence of God. There is no reference to, still less discussion of, the sophisticated contemporary presentations of cosmological arguments by, for example, Richard Swinburne or William Lane Craig. Indeed, throughout the book, Tilghman hardly ever engages with the best defences of the positions he attacks or the leading protagonists in the field. Indeed, he makes clear at the beginning that he does not intend to pursue all the possibilities. Nevertheless, the unwary student will come away with the conviction that the positions Tilghman attacks are patently indefensible. This is the result of a largely tendentious and irresponsible exercise.

Secondly, the author's treatment of the Bible, very important in the book, illustrates a mixture of ignorance, prejudice and snide contempt. He does not understand the Genesis narratives, claiming that Adam saw God, and failing to note the universal purpose of the covenant with Abraham. His attempt to answer the question 'Is the Bible true?' concentrates on the inerrancy of Gleason Archer's *Encyclopaedia of Biblical Difficulties* and dismisses the historicity of the Gospels with such statements as: 'The authors of the gospels cannot be understood to be ... historians in the modern sense. They would not have understood what it was to interview surviving witnesses...' *etc.*, and that the reports of the resurrection are inconsistent. There is no sign of digging deep here to understand what is going on and every sign of not wishing to dig deep elsewhere either: see the remarks on 'of one substance' (p. 37) and the bibliographical suggestions for further reading in theological ethics (p. 196). Students will come away thinking that they can easily dismiss much in the Christian tradition with a cursory knowledge of the Scriptures and an elementary logical move or two.

That is not to deny that some points are well made or that some points could not be so elaborated that they could be well made. It is to say that what we have is not good enough. Other textbooks in philosophy of religion (*e.g.* those of Brian Davies and William Abraham), whatever their weaknesses, continue to serve their purpose far better.

Stephen Williams, Union Theological College, Belfast

Image and Likeness: Religious Visions in American Film Classics

Edited by John R. May

Paulist Press, New York, 1992; 200pp., £14.95; ISBN 0 8091 3286 9

The Lumiere brothers' Cinematographe flickered into life in a Paris hotel basement in December 1895. But if, since then, it has been meat for reviewers, gossips, historians, and theorists, most theologians have been vegetarian. John R. May has been important in what limited critical theological reflection there has been. May's interests in literature are strongly present in his writing on film, and he shares T.S. Eliot's conviction that literature and film should be judged by Christian faith. So it is from a position within the Judeo-Christian framework that he and his collaborators look for religious 'visions' in American film classics.

Essentially a collection of shorter or longer religious film reviews, the book works around the thesis that in 'each of these films is an image of the religious sensibility of an American filmmaker, and thus a likeness of the transcendent in his vision'. Given the directors discussed, the working definition of 'religious' is necessarily broad, and concerns the questions which are 'most fundamental'. Interestingly the contributors avoid films explicitly dealing in faith or theological language. Their focus on a representative selection of the all-time-greats as well as films of note means there is much to interest the 'movie buff'.

The writers attempt 'a dialogue about lasting values in American films'. What they achieve is largely an intriguing set of analogical readings, addressing issues of concern to religious people. This leaves the extent to which they engage genuine cultural values, as distinct from offering religious interpretations of cultural tropes, open to question.

Neil Hurley's '*On the Waterfront* : rebirth of a "Contenduh"' is perhaps the most interesting here. Reviewing the 1954 Elia Kazan film, Hurley discusses the operation of the film's central characters, Father Barry and Terry Malloy, as 'Christ-figures'. Similarly, Charles B. Ketcham's essay, '*One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* : a salvific drama of liberation', works with the central character, Randle P. McMurphy, as 'an analogue to the Jewish-Christian figure of the Suffering Servant'. While Harvold Hatt recognises that 'a film is not a theological treatise', his discussion of Hitchcock's *Notorious* makes connections with the secular analogues of the dynamics of contrition, confession, and satisfaction.

Concern with finding filmic analogues to religious themes

underwrites much of what Hurley first described as 'cinematic theology', and locates May's project both here and elsewhere. The weaknesses of this analogical approach lie, first, in its philosophical basis of liberal humanism and existentialism, which yields a certain predictability of focus on the human quest; and, secondly, in the general assumption of literary interpretive paradigms, reducing film to visual story. These weaknesses lead to shortsightedness about the already committed nature of analogy: it is necessary to believe first in order to see.

Steve Nolan, Manchester

Mozart. Traces of Transcendence

Hans Küng

SCM Press, London, 1993; 81pp. £6.95; ISBN 0 334 021790

In this unusual and attractive book Hans Küng once again writes with insight, wit and clarity about a subject outside his own. In an entertaining introduction he explains that he wishes to advocate a middle ground between Barth's eulogies on Mozart's religious significance and Wolfgang Hildesheimer's sceptical minimising of it. Küng's claim to have a special contribution is simple: he is a Catholic and he thinks that Mozart was one too in the best Küngian sense. Mozart had indeed become disenchanted with the Catholic hierarchy but confidently clung to the Catholic faith of his youth, allying it to the insights of the Enlightenment.

In the exposition of this thesis many gems surface, of which one of the best is the author's claim to know that Barth dreamt that he was to examine Mozart in theology 'well aware that in no circumstances would Mozart be allowed to fail'. Küng playfully puts this down to Barth's suppression of Mozart's Catholic identity. The comment is not incidental: Küng will argue that Mozart was in his own way a theologian of direct Catholic piety and that he understood a theology of the heart which poor Protestants, even Barth, could not know. In a perfectly courteous and tongue-in-cheek style Küng seeks to break Barth's monopoly over a son of the church.

In fact Küng achieves a more serious purpose. Using his impressive knowledge of Mozart he argues cogently that, when composing church music, especially a mass, Mozart brought deep religious sensitivity to the task. Although there is no such thing as sacred, or secular, the music carries 'traces of transcendence' (of the title) and of mystery. Stoutly Protestant readers will search in vain for Catholic theology to which they can take exception in the analysis of Mozart's handling of the liturgy of the mass.

Moreover, before Küng has finished, sceptics and Marxists are needing to take cover as he pits the deeply devout work of the composer against bankrupt radicalism.

A fascinating read for lovers of Mozart and friends (Bach and Haydn also get a favourable mention) and not short of the telling theological punch either.

Roy Kearsley, Glasgow Bible College

Listening to the God who Speaks

Klaus Bockmuehl

Helmers and Howard, Colorado Springs, 1990; 164pp., £6.50; ISBN 0 939443 18 X

Klaus Bockmuehl was, until his death in 1989, professor of theology and ethics at Regent College, Vancouver, Canada. In this book of 'reflections on God's guidance from Scripture and the lives of God's people', contemporary Christians are provided with access to some of the lesser-known gems of spiritual wisdom, from Augustine to Bernard of Clairvaux, to Francis of Assisi, as well as more familiar insights from the Reformation. All is rooted in exposition of the theme of divine guidance in Old and New Testaments, with the focus on listening as obedience.

Much has been written in recent years about the gift of prophecy in the NT and today (*e.g.*, W. Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy*, 1988; G. Houston, *Prophecy Now*, 1989; D. Pytches, *Prophecy in the Local Church*, 1993), all of which affirms the need to hear what God is saying to individuals and fellowships in the contemporary context, and to explore ways of evaluating such insights. In this book, Bockmuehl helps the reader to cultivate the skills of listening to God in the midst of a clamour of different voices which call for our attention in the modern world. He recognises the over-arching authority of Scripture as the supreme rule of faith and life, yet faces hard questions as to how that kind of direction may be assimilated in the real world. This is not a 'how to' book, and the author is critical of the activism which characterises much of Western middle-class Christianity. But he also warns against quietism and wants to encourage a spirituality which is both practical and relevant.

This book deserves to become one of the latter-day classics of Christian devotion, coming as it does as the last will and testament of an exponent of Christian spirituality who was concerned that the Christian faith should be lived out in moral as well as experiential terms. It provides a much-needed counter-balance to more shallow

treatments of a devotional nature which often lack the biblical and historical depths sounded in the relatively few pages of this work.

Graham Houston, Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh

The Word To Set You Free. Living Faith and Biblical Criticism

David Brown

SPCK, London, 1995; xiii + 193pp., £9.99; ISBN 0 281 04806 1

This volume is a series of short meditations (thirty-six in all) based on sermons preached by the author. The collection represents an attempt to bridge the gap between the critical study of the Bible and the preaching of the good news. Brown notes that ministers and pastors often feel perplexed how to relate the discoveries of biblical criticism, with which they had become acquainted in their training, to congregations of ordinary believers. Many times they are caught in an internal tension, thinking one thing in the study and presenting quite another from the pulpit. On becoming a clergyman, Brown determined that study and pulpit should be fully integrated in his ministry. These meditations are efforts to fulfil that aim. In each he endeavours to bring out the spiritual significance of biblical texts through a critical reading of them.

The meditations are grouped under three main headings. In Part One, The Revealer at Work, the author tries to 'make more palatable the notion of a fallible Bible' and 'help the reader to view this fact as part of the wonderful generosity and providential love of God'. Part Two, Gospel Anticipations, contains meditations on Old Testament texts, highlighting strategic points in the history of Israel. Part Three, Gospel Hidden Treasure, takes the reader through the life of Christ. The Conclusion, Spreading the Gospel, deals with Ascension and Pentecost. Brown has included a Scripture and a subject index.

The individual and collective value of these meditations will have to be judged by the reader. Most subscribers to *SBET* will be unhappy with the view of Scripture with which Brown operates (though the author says he is strongly committed to orthodox Christianity). The applications and reflections which he offers are, in my view, sometimes insightful but never profound. This book represents an interesting and useful exercise, but one whose results are, for this reviewer, disappointing.

Edward Adams, King's College, London

The Hidden Voice. Christian Women and Social Change

Edited by Lavinia Byrne

London, SPCK, 1995; 181pp., £12.99; ISBN 0 281048 436

This is the final volume in a trilogy written by Lavinia Byrne. It continues the theme of 'hiddenness' from her previous book *The Hidden Journey*. Here the material is divided into two categories which Lavinia Byrne labels as either 'integrated' or 'refused', and which she considers show a subtle rejection of women's contribution to the genre. She describes the 'integrated' literature as mainstream. As an example she argues that women wrote hymns which were incorporated into hymn books but that nothing was made of the fact that women had written them and that therefore they had a distinction all their own. Similarly, Byrne highlights the fact that the writings of women educators who realised the urgent need for women to be educated were simply assimilated into the tradition and ignored because what they were suggesting would disrupt the social order. However, where women preachers and social purity and suffrage campaigners were concerned Byrne shows that their work was simply refused. Nothing has been written about them. Thus, works tracing the lives and thoughts of, for instance, Edith Picton-Turberville, Dorothea Hosie, Josephine Butler, Frances Willard, Mary Townsend and Mary Sumner are rare or non-existent, despite their impact on the society of their day.

Lavinia Byrne is concerned to highlight the fact that the women whose primary sources she has reproduced and on which she is commenting, wanted to change women's aspirations and that their voices called for a change in women's service and status both inside and outside the church. She acknowledges the fact that nowadays this voice is both public and authoritative and that it was thanks to these women who were prepared to brave stigmatism and rejection that women's role is now acknowledged. This book contains a wealth of material which would be of great use to anybody tempted to research the subject further. I found it fascinating because of the glimpses of experiences hidden behind the lines, encouraging when one considers the recognition that has now been achieved for women both inside and outside the church, but at the same time sad that women still have a long way to go in this struggle.

Janet L. Watson, Glasgow Bible College

The Rhetoric of Righteousness in Romans 3.21-26

Douglas A. Campbell

JSNT Supplement Series 65; JSOT Press, Sheffield, 1992; 272pp., £35; ISBN 1 85075 294 X

In this revision of his doctoral thesis, Douglas Campbell offers a detailed and fascinating analysis of Romans 3:21-26, utilizing rhetorical theory and insights from linguistics. He contends that the doctrine of justification by faith in its traditional sense is not as strongly supported by this passage as is usually thought.

There are four main chapters and an Introduction and Conclusion (and four appendices). In Chapter One, Campbell reviews and critiques previous attempts to interpret the text and to resolve the various exegetical issues relating to it. In the second chapter, he subjects the passage to rhetorical analysis. Chapter Three analyses the key atonement words in Romans 3:24-25, *apolutrosis, hilasterion* and *haima*. Campbell argues that the basic notion conveyed by this cluster of terms is that of an atoning death (on the analogy of the ritual of the Day of Atonement): Christ's death is a sacrifice for sin, an act of substitution (but not necessarily penal substitution) effecting a deliverance from sin. Chapter Four examines the righteousness and justification terminology of the passage. The Conclusion draws the various strands of the argument together and proposes a new reading of the text. Campbell claims that Romans 3:21-26 'makes the essentially simple point that Christ, and above all his death, is the definitive eschatological revelation of the saving righteousness of God'.

The author accepts the subjective genitive interpretation of the phrase *pistis Iesou Christou* in Romans 3:22 (which is becoming increasingly popular), rather than the traditional objective genitive view. That is to say, he takes the phrase as a reference not to the believer's faith in Christ, but to Christ's own faithfulness in going to the cross. Campbell, though, takes the subjective view further than most of its advocates and argues, on rhetorical grounds, that in all three of its occurrences in Romans 3:21-26, *pistis* refers to the obedience of Christ.

The book is a highly technical and specialized one which makes no small demands of the reader (a knowledge of Greek is required to follow the argument) but is well worth the effort of grappling with. While I fail to be fully persuaded by Campbell's argument, this is clearly a landmark study of Romans 3:21-26 with which subsequent discussion of the passage and its theology must engage.

Edward Adams, King's College, London

The Divided Self: Closing the Gap Between Belief and Behaviour

Marlene Cohen

Marshall Pickering, London, 1996; 254pp., £8.99; ISBN 0 551 02963 3

This latest volume in a series of handbooks of pastoral care is intended as a self-pastoring resource for all those with pastoral responsibilities. The author, Marlene Cohen (who is also series editor for these handbooks), is well qualified to help us in the area of pastoral counselling, and draws on thirty years of pastoral experience in three continents. The book could be described as an expansion of the quotation that 'a pastor's activity in gaining self-understanding is more important for spiritual leadership than expertise of all kinds'. So Marlene Cohen addresses some of the gaps frequently left in theological training in a fresh and contemporary way, drawing on a wide range of case studies. The book is primarily intended for individual reading but also makes provision for group study. This leads to a slightly confusing double structure in the book, with fourteen sessions for group use being divided between five chapters. There is no index, but a lengthy bibliography and a guide for group study are included.

Marlene Cohen gives detailed attention to the pastor's own inner complexities, which play a significant part in any pastoral encounter. These may be known and recognised aspects of our make-up or unknown and internalised influences. So this book analyses and explores the unofficial belief system that co-exists with our publicly owned beliefs and affects our patterns of behaviour. This analysis of our inner belief network, or 'personal pudding' as the author engagingly labels it, provides the strongest component of the book. We would all benefit from reflection on why we behave as we do and this resource probes our lack of self-understanding in a number of areas and also exposes our often sketchy knowledge of why others behave as they do. The final chapter on integration and integrity suggests ways in which we might tackle our own dysfunction as pastors, and encourages us to do a defining work on ourselves. The author offers her own guidelines for good pastoring and suggests in note form a number of ways of exploring the process of integration.

Inevitably in a small volume there is a good deal that is given only cursory treatment. I would have liked a little more clarity in the discussion of the 'splits' and 'gaps' in our personalities and how we may 'close the gaps' in practice. There are some generalised references to preaching and teaching which cry out for more detailed treatment. In the biblical sections I would have liked

to see fewer references more fully explained, and I am not sure what the author means by 'teaching a theology conductive[*sic*] to combating personal dysfunction'.

Having said that, there is a great deal of fresh insight and analysis which will be helpful to all of us in pastoral situations. We need the challenge to 'put ourselves out to pasture' from time to time and to face the complexities of our own personalities. I warmly recommend this book as an aid to that process.

Brian S. Ringrose, Edinburgh

Liberating Paul. The Justice of God and the Politics of the Apostle

Neil Elliott

Orbis Books, Maryknoll, NY, 1994; xi + 308pp., $18.95; ISBN 0 88344 981 1

This book is part of a series entitled the 'Bible and Liberation Series' (edited by N.K. Gottwald and R.A. Horsley), the aim of which is to bring to light the social struggles behind the biblical texts and to explore ways in which a 'liberated Bible' may offer resources in 'the contemporary struggle for a more human world'. Neil Elliott, an established Pauline scholar, sets out to liberate Paul from the service of oppression and domination into which, according to Elliott, he has for centuries been pressed, and to reinstate him as the apostle of liberation.

Paul has usually been interpreted as a social and political conservative, a supporter of the status quo. His legacy has often been used to justify and maintain various forms of oppression, *e.g.* to legitimate slavery, to silence women. But this understanding of Paul and this use of his teaching, Elliott claims, are a misunderstanding and a misuse. The apostle was much more radical than has been traditionally assumed and his message is much more liberating and challenging than we have been led to believe. Elliott argues that our understanding of Paul has been skewed by the existence of pseudepigraphal writings in the Pauline corpus. Most of the problem texts, he contends, belong to letters and passages falsely attributed to the apostle (*e.g.* 1 Cor. 14:34-5; 1 Thess. 2:14-16; 1 Tim. 2:11-15). Though commonly viewed as heirs or interpreters of Paul, the writers of the pseudepigraphal works are as much saboteurs as they are disciples. The pseudo-Paulines represent a betrayal and suppression of Paul's legacy. Their presence in the canon continues to contaminate the way the genuine letters are read. Excised from this corrupting influence, a

rather different picture of Paul emerges: an apostle with a liberative vision and praxis.

The book falls into two parts. The first, Paul in the Service of Death, deals with the misinterpretation and misapplication of Paul and his canonical betrayal. The second, From Death to Life, examines Paul's theology and practice from a political perspective, focusing on his theology of the cross, his apocalyptic outlook and his evangelistic and pastoral work as an apostle.

This is a passionately written book, containing many important insights. I agree with aspects of Elliott's critique of the common understanding of Paul as a social conservative, but I am not convinced by the picture of Paul as a liberation theologian he strives to set in its place. Elliott's Paul may well be more politically correct than some other images of Paul in circulation, but is he any less a scholarly construct? This book will both stimulate and provoke, and it will undoubtedly generate much discussion.

Edward Adams, King's College, London

Grace and Gratitude: The Eucharistic Theology of John Calvin

B.A. Gerrish

T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1993; 210pp., £12.50; ISBN 0 567 29233 9

This suggestive and sympathetic study originated in the Cunningham Lectures delivered in New College, Edinburgh in 1990. Its starting-point is Charles Hodge's inability in the mid-nineteenth century to stomach Calvin's catholicizing doctrine of the Lord's supper as expounded by J.W. Nevin. In the circumstances of the Lectureship, it is surprising - or perhaps a signal act of *pietas* - that the author, who teaches historical theology in the University of Chicago, fails to mention William Cunningham's similarly low estimate of Calvin's doctrine of the supper: 'perhaps the greatest blot in the history of Calvin's labours as a public instructor'.

But only two of the book's six chapters are devoted to Calvin's theology of the eucharist, which is set in the context of a comprehensive interpretation of the Reformer's thought that focuses on the fatherly generosity of God as the fount of all good things and the response of gratitude as the sum of true piety. For Calvin, father, here often without an initial capital, is more a characterisation of God than a name. To it belong the images of the church as God's family, of the faithful as his sons and

daughters, of baptism (to which a whole chapter is devoted) as the symbol of adoption, and of Christ as the heir, for us, of all God's goodness. The outcome is a wonderfully attractive exposition of Calvin's theology, which will be an eye-opener to those reared on caricatures of the dogmatic fatalism of the Genevan despot.

Not that Gerrish avoids the offence of Calvin's predestinarianism. 'Free adoption is the citadel of Calvin's faith; double predestination is a defensive outwork' - which had the effect of damaging the whole edifice. I doubt whether this can remain a wholly satisfactory account - in respect of either the ancillary role of predestination (too much is made to rest on the mere sequence of the 1559 *Institutes*) or, on this interpretation, Calvin's failure to discern its disastrous implications for the heart of his teaching ('he risked making humans more benevolent than God'). Nevertheless this is a powerful corrective to many presentations of Calvin, grounded in a lifetime's study of the Reformer and the Reformed tradition. The case is built up with abundant quotations that display a rare sensitivity in translation, and in continuing comparison with Zwingli, Luther and Bullinger - but never Bucer, remarkably enough.

Gerrish discerns the distinctiveness of Calvin's view of the supper in what he calls symbolic instrumentalism: the reality that the signs point to does not merely simultaneously accompany the signs (symbolic parallelism) but is given (through the Spirit and received only by faith, to be sure) by and with the signs. What is this reality? Nothing less than the whole Christ, not merely his benefits, or his divinity separated from his humanity. More specifically, it is his body and blood, given once for all for us on the cross and, on the basis of that one sacrifice, given ever anew for our lifelong nourishment. In a concluding attempt to clarify what Calvin means by this true partaking of Christ's flesh (which is not an oral partaking), since Christ's risen and glorified body is in a single place in heaven, Gerrish argues that it is communion in its power or influence or efficacy through the radiance of the Spirit.

I would be surprised if the readership of this *Bulletin* were unanimously persuaded that Gerrish has drawn the sting of Hodge's and Cunningham's bewilderment. In the last resort Calvin's teaching retains an elusiveness not shared by the gross simplicities of Zwingli and of Luther. But this volume is a contribution of the first importance which no student of Calvin or the Reformed doctrine of the supper dare ignore.

David F. Wright, New College, University of Edinburgh

Paths of African Theology

Edited by Rosino Gibellini

Orbis Books, Maryknoll, 1994; 202pp., n.p.; ISBN 0 88344 974 9

'African theologians wonder ... and make some proposals.' According to the editor that sums up this collection of essays. He is in a position to write with such confidence because of the emergence over the last two decades of African theologians of considerable stature, a number of whom contribute here. The thread tying all the papers together is a concern for an 'African theology' or 'theology of adaptation', as opposed to the 'mission theology' of European ecclesiastical colonisation often spoken of today. However, the editor reassures us that the work and accomplishments of the missionaries are not here on trial. He is true to his word, even though he gives an uncomfortable but telling account of the alliance of mission and colonisation. He is able to put steel into the complaint with a quotation from Hans Küng lamenting the fact that the gospel that became Greek has never become African, Arab or Asian.

It is no coincidence that seven of the eleven contributors are Catholic theologians. Undoubtedly much of what is written is a reaction to the hierarchy. A. Ngindu Mushete believes that the time has gone for an immutable model of Christianity, whether that of Western theology or Eastern Orthodoxy. In an overview of African Christianity he charts the march of diversity even within Africa. John Mbiti, long established as a foremost African theologian, writes with customary sureness on issues of interest beyond Africa: oral tradition, time, community and nature. Justin Ukpong explores the question of inculturation and takes the controversial and unconvincing line that since the gospel was embedded in Jewish culture it must be equally carried out from within each culture today. The matter seems more complex than this. Jewish culture, to the Christian, is more charged with the history of revelation than any other (including Western modernity and post-modernity!). Equally, Ukpong's method, if taken at surface value, would produce a series of unconnected and non-communicating Christian cultures. Rather Christian theology feeds on interaction and mutual learning between inculturated theologies.

Charles Nyamiti, an acute observer of the tension between inculturation and liberation models for Africa, writes refreshingly yet again on theology and the African tradition. F. Kabasele Lumbala carries the battle into liturgy. Again one wonders if such an equal and opposite reaction to Western imposition really *is* the best route. Elochukwu Uzukwu visits the same territory but

succeeds in touching on issues of more global interest. Patrick Kalilombe writes thoughtfully and constructively on African spirituality, but is it not a bit far fetched to blame African totalitarianism on Western models of spirituality?

African women are now beginning to be heard in theology, after much feeling of exclusion. Foremost amongst them is Mercy Amba Oduyoye. There is ground-breaking stuff in it, much of it applicable to the global aspects of theology and gender, including the evocative comment which has other applications: 'we cannot ascribe the cross to one half of humanity and the resurrection to the other half'! To give the book balance, three articles around the theme of liberation by Jean-Marc Ela, Engelbert Mveng and Simon S. Maimela, each in their own way show that liberation is still an issue in post-apartheid Africa. Maimela's paper is a disturbing reflection on white racism ... and disturbed we should be. Anyone from the West who is interested in Africa, or who is working there, would find plenty to think about in this worthy adornment of the Orbis portfolio.

Roy Kearsley, Glasgow Bible College

The New Testament in Fiction and Film: On Reversing the Hermeneutical Flow

Larry J. Kreitzer
JSOT Press, Sheffield, 1993; 168pp., £10.50; ISBN 1 85075 364 4

The title of Kreitzer's book is full of post-structural promise, and perhaps because of this it both excites and disappoints. It excites in that Kreitzer is refreshingly prepared to appropriate insights from popular culture for the interpretation of biblical texts. In this way he works to re-democratise biblical interpretation. But not only so. Kreitzer contends that there can be a '[reversing] of the flow of influence within the hermeneutical process', in such a way as to allow us to re-examine 'NT passages or themes in the light of some of the enduring expressions of our own culture, namely great literary works and their film adaptation'.

Kreitzer explores his thesis in five essays, moving from literary text to film adaptation to biblical text and back again, making connections and trawling for insight. Sadly, this is where he disappoints. Typical of his results is his essay '*Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* : Re-reading the Pauline model of the duality of human nature'. After impressively detailed consideration of the dark side of human nature personified in Mr Hyde, and read by some as sexual immorality, Kreitzer concludes: 'Is it too much to suggest that the

words in Romans 7, although they almost certainly will not bear the interpretive weight of sexuality sometimes thrown upon them, nonetheless do so speak to us of moral struggles that characterised not only the apostle's life, but ours as well?'

One reason for such unremarkable insight is the method of analysis. Kreitzer suggests a reader-response approach to the texts, moving from 'facets of our cultural heritage, and then [applying] it to our understanding of the NT materials'. Instead, his careful investigation of sources and nuances of adaptation is a NT scholar's redaction-critical preoccupation with authorial intention. Indeed Kreitzer appears innocent of the literary or film theory which would significantly deepen both his analysis and his insight. Apart from Halliwell we look in vain for film critics, and literary theorists are equally hard to find.

Even so, Kreitzer is certainly on to something. His strength lies in his detailing the way that fiction and film inform the process of interpretation. He manages to demonstrate how, for example, Wyler's film *Ben Hur* interprets Wallace's novel. This parallel may 'provide a helpful doorway through which to enter the hermeneutical arena of NT studies'.

There is important work to be done on the relation of contemporary culture to contemporary faith generally, and to the shape of biblical interpretation in particular. However, such work requires a theoretical base capable of more incisive analysis than that allowed by biblical interpretation alone. Such a base must draw extensively on cultural analysis, informed by semiotics, psychoanalysis, gender studies, *etc.* This will then yield a place from which deeper reflection on both text and tradition can be attempted.

Steve Nolan, Manchester

Science and the New Age Challenge

Ernest Lucas

Apollos, Leicester, 1996; 190pp., £10.99; ISBN 0 85111 440 7

This is an excellent book, not just for those who are interested in the New Age movement, but for all who are looking to deepen their understanding of the biblical world-view in our modern age. It is a non-technical, profound, fair and very clear exposition of the main issues. My only criticism is that the title itself does not reflect the breadth of the author's treatment of various alternative ways of understanding the cosmos in an age of ever-advancing scientific understanding of what the universe is, and what our place in it might be.

The main thrust of the book is to show very convincingly how New Agers have misused the baffling discoveries of modern science to advance their own metaphysics. However, in successfully making his case, Ernest Lucas also introduces the reader to the inherent mysteries of relativity, quantum theory and the nature of life which, as science progresses, become more and more awe-inspiring as the old materialist, reductionist and mechanistic view of the universe breaks down.

From the position of a highly qualified scientist and biblical scholar, Ernest Lucas gives us very good surveys and criticisms of Eastern mysticism, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Sheldrake (morphic fields to explain the genesis and behaviour of living things), Lovelock (the Gaia hypothesis and mother earth), the modern ecology movement, and process theology.

He does not deny the mysterious interconnectedness of things across the bounds of space and time, but expounds it in the context of a Trinitarian God who, although transcendent, is also immanent in his creation which he loves and for which Christ came, died and rose again. That alone, the author believes, gives us a sound basis for scientific investigation of the universe and caring for our planet as we love and cherish that which its Creator and Redeemer loves and cherishes.

The notes, bibliography and index are good, full and helpful.

Howard Taylor, St. David's Knightswood, Church of Scotland, Glasgow

James

Thomas Manton, edited by Alister McGrath and J.I. Packer

Crossway Books, Nottingham, 1995; 365pp., n.p.; ISBN 1 85684 116 2

For those who are more accustomed to modern commentaries, reading Manton (1620-77) is like stepping into another world. Manton's 'sermons formed the basis of his published commentaries'. In this respect, the preacher is likely to come away from Manton with much profit, and not with the criticism so often voiced of twentieth-century commentaries – 'too academic'. It should be said that Manton preached longer sermons and a lot more of them on James than we would today. This means that consulting Manton on any particular passage will involve quite a bit of reading (*e.g.* 114 pages on Chapter 1).

Comparing this kind of commentary (even in this abridgement) with modern commentaries requires balance. We would be missing a great deal if, in our concern with being up to date, we were never

to read the older commentaries at all. If, on the other hand, we were to read nothing but the Puritans, we might have great difficulty in adapting to the fact that we are living in the late twentieth century and not the seventeenth.

Those who have become rather disillusioned with the lack of real, practical application in many modern commentaries will warm to the publishers' commendation: 'In the realm of practical exposition promoting godliness, the old is often better than the new.' J.I. Packer, author of so many introductions to books, describes this one as 'the Mount Everest among expositions of the letter, both ancient and modern'. Here he endorses the opinions of J.C. Ryle – Manton 'is easily the foremost among the divines of the Puritan school' – and C.H. Spurgeon – Manton's work is 'consistently excellent'. In Manton's *James* there are spiritual gems, waiting for those who are prepared to take the time and make the effort involved in digging deeply for them. With his vast knowledge of Scripture and his keen eye for spiritual truth in fairly obscure passages, he will bring out lessons rarely found in many other commentaries which tend to say not much more than the fairly obvious.

Charles M. Cameron, Burnside Presbyterian Church, Portstewart

Judgment and Promise: An Interpretation of the Book of Jeremiah

J.G. McConville

Apollos, Leicester; 1993; 208pp., n.p.; ISBN 0 851114 318

McConville categorises scholars into those who regard the book of Jeremiah as containing Deuteronomistic material or as resulting from Deuteronomistic editing, and those who ascribe much or all of the book to the activity of the prophet himself. He seeks to provide an alternative to the common assumption of dependence upon the Deuteronomistic History (DtH). Towards this end, he considers the two main criteria which scholars use to discern its Deuteronomistic character – style and theology. He rightly underlines the inadequacy of style as a criterion since stylistic similarities may be explained in a variety of ways. Regarding theology he accepts that Jeremiah and the DtH share a covenantal theology, but notes also a number of clear differences between theological concerns of the two works. In contrast to the Deuteronomistic dependence theory, McConville seeks to show that the canonical arrangement of the book is not haphazard, but can be understood as the result of a coherent authorial / redactional

purpose. He also seeks to show that Jeremiah is dependent upon Deuteronomy and upon a joint prophetic tradition, particularly Hosea but also including the Southern prophets (Micah, Amos and Isaiah), rather than upon DtH.

McConville identifies the theology of the new covenant as governing the organisation of all the material in a more or less thoroughgoing way. The book moves from prophecies of judgment through which the people's inability to respond is affirmed to the need for a redemptive act from Yahweh. The various component parts of the book are seen as contributing in a variety of ways to developing this theme of divine and human action. McConville argues that this governing concept not only harnesses the diverse material of the book, but also can be used to shed light on the complexity of the structure of the book itself, so that the diversity within the book does not necessarily point to diversity of authorship. McConville recognises the diversity as the result of the book being produced over a large time-span, but also argues for a unity that is the result of an intentional ordering / redacting of the material. He is, however, unconvinced that one can reconstruct the details of the process of development. Nevertheless, he sees the growth of the book as having occurred during the lifetime of the prophet, and quite possibly in the context of the prophet's own ministry.

McConville's work represents a stimulating examination of the theological themes and purposes of the book in its canonical form. In my opinion, he is generally successful in providing a viable alternative explanation for the diversity of material in Jeremiah, and for its theological coherence. Although his suggestion that one cannot reliably reconstruct the process by which it was brought to its current shape makes good sense, his choice not to demonstrate the viability of possible processes by which Jeremiah could have been substantially responsible for the final form of the book weakens his case. This book is recommended for its contribution to our understanding of both the theology and composition of Jeremiah.

Edward D. Herbert, Glasgow Bible College

1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians

Charles Hodge, edited by Alister McGrath and J.I. Packer

Crossway Books, Nottingham, 1995; 320 and 240pp., £9.99 and £8.99; ISBN 1 85684 124 3, 1 85684 125 1

The Crossway Classic Commentaries introduce themselves as original works by godly writers, tailored for the understanding of today's reader. The intention of the series is to make available to a new generation some of the most valuable Bible commentaries written over the last five hundred years. While seeking never to change any thoughts of the original authors, the editors' task has been to adapt the originals so as to achieve maximum understanding and usefulness among a wide range of modern readers – lay Christians, students and ministers. The adaptation depends to some extent on the level at which the originals were written and involves abridgement, simplification of style and the removal of foreign words and Latin and Greek quotations, although references to the significance of Greek words and phrases are retained. The Scripture version used is the NIV. However, where the NIV rendering does not harmonise with the original author's comment, that is dealt with. These various adaptations make for a very readable text matched by clear type and good layout. It will perhaps be interesting to give some examples of modifications in the volumes under review.

Comments in the original may be left out as unnecessary. Dealing with the second part of 1 Cor. 1:26 Hodge felt it necessary to comment on the fact that in the Greek there is no verb to go with 'wise', 'mighty', 'noble' and therefore to suggest verbs that could be supplied. In this Commentary based on the NIV which reads 'Not many of you were wise by human standards', *etc.* there is no need for this kind of comment.

The KJ and the NIV both translate 1 Cor. 1:27 'But God hath chosen (chose, NIV) the foolish things of the world' to be the 'foolish portion of mankind'. The Crossway edition reproduces the explanation verbatim but sees no need to include Hodge's original note about it being possible for the Greek neuter plural to refer to persons rather than things.

The first part of Hodge's comment on 2 Cor. 5:21 is complicated and unclear. It contains some questionable references to Greek grammar. The Crossway editors omit the first part of the comment and take up again with Hodge at the point where he says 'the thing asserted here that Christ was without sin... the indispensable condition of his being made sin for us'. The editors have not deprived us by their abridgement.

Unfamiliar or outmoded words or phrases are replaced. For example in 2 Cor. 5:17 Hodge's 'analogous' is changed to 'similar' and in the same verse 'has wrought' becomes 'has made'.

More surprising is the omission of Hodge's comment on the phrase 'The love of Christ' in 2 Cor. 5:14. Hodge has stated quite definitely that here the phrase means Christ's love for us, not our love for him. The editors may have other views but by this omission have failed to present Hodge's understanding.

Although Greek words have been eliminated, not all reference to the Greek text is abandoned. On the phrase in 2 Cor. 5:14 translated in the KJ 'if one died for all, then were all dead', Hodge on the basis of Greek grammar and syntax argued for 'all died', which is in fact reflected in the NIV. With reference to the Greek Hodge also argued for 'in the place of' as the proper understanding of 'for' in this phrase. In both instances the Crossway editors without using Greek words have faithfully presented Hodge's argument based on the Greek.

Since spiritual vision and authority based on an accurate handling of the biblical text are the qualities that the publishers looked for, it is not surprising that Hodge was chosen as the commentator on the Corinthian Epistles. Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones said that 'One always turns to Hodge's commentaries with great confidence, for in him there is a perfect blending of theology, scholarship and devotional spirit which are the prime requisites of a commentary.' But Hodge is not flawless. Exegetical weaknesses show from time to time: for example, in his treatment of 2 Cor. 5:1-11. In using him, as indeed all good commentaries of his era and earlier, we require, as Don Carson has pointed out, to make allowance for a considerable improvement in the grasp of Hellenistic Greek over the last hundred years. Such improvement Hodge himself would gladly have made use of had he been writing today.

A.C. Boyd, Free Church College, Edinburgh

Galatians: Paul's Charter of Christian Freedom

Leon Morris

IVP, Leicester, 1996; 191pp., £14.99; ISBN 0 85110 658 7

Paul's letter to the Galatians is a foundational document for contemporary theology. This new volume on Galatians by the seasoned and dependable Australian scholar, Leon Morris, is therefore to be warmly welcomed. Some, like the present reviewer,

may read the title and have their appetites whetted at the prospect of a monograph on this storm-centre of Pauline studies written by a scholar who is not convinced by the 'new perspective on Paul' of J.D.G. Dunn and others. Unfortunately, this is not what Morris offers us (perhaps next time!). In fact this volume, despite its title and appearance, is a standard verse-by-verse commentary on the letter, similar to the commentaries on Matthew and Romans which Morris has already written for IVP in the 'Pillar Series'.

Morris makes it plain that the commentary is written for the 'general reader' rather than the 'specialist'. There is, therefore, very little in the way of technical discussion or scholarly debate. Numerous footnotes refer to selected scholarly works, but these do not give more than a first taste of the issues at stake. Most of the secondary works cited are commentaries, but there are also a few references to more recent monographs and journal articles. This may make the commentary less suitable for students who are looking for detailed interaction with contemporary secondary literature, but it does mean that the commentary has an uncluttered feel, allowing the reader to hear the text speak.

Readers of this *Bulletin* who appreciate the significance of Galatians for understanding not only the first-century church but also the course of the Reformation will be pleased to see numerous quotations from Luther and Calvin, as well as from more recent commentators.

Those who are already familiar with Morris' writings will recognise his strengths of paying meticulous attention to the meaning of Greek words and of clearly presenting the thought of the apostle in straightforward English. These strengths are combined in the author's own translation of the biblical text. Though the result may not always be particularly elegant, it helps to illustrate the decisions Morris takes in the body of the commentary. Those who require a commentary for preaching or leading Bible studies will find Morris' comments very helpful, and it is perhaps fitting that the two warm commendations on the book's dust-jacket come from men who are known primarily as preachers and expositors.

The lack of indices is disappointing but, given that this book is not designed as a scholar's tool, this is understandable.

Alistair I. Wilson, Highland Theological Institute, Elgin

God and the Mind Machine

John Puddefoot
SPCK, London, 1996; 140pp., £7.99; ISBN 0 281 04973 4

John Puddefoot is Head of Mathematics and an Honorary Chaplain at Eton College. The subject of his book is one that is at the forefront of philosophical-scientific-theological debate and this reviewer expects the discussion to grow in significance for a long time to come – outliving the debate about the big-bang, evolution and origins. As well as theoretical questions, it raises many ethical and practical matters. It is thus very important that theologians should be familiar with the many very profound issues involved.

The sub-title of the book reads 'Computers, Artificial Intelligence and the Human Soul'. The central issue running through it is whether or not computers will ever be conscious as the high animals clearly are, and whether they will ever be self-aware – able to reflect on their own existence – as clearly human beings are. Each normal human being knows what it is from within himself to look out of himself to the outside world. For others to know me they must know something of what it feels like to me to relate to the world beyond me. Clearly we can know computers from the outside, examining how they work, but we cannot enter into the world of a computer to feel what a computer feels. Most of us would believe that a computer does not feel anything and never will be a conscious being. However there are those in the Artificial Intelligence community who believe that there is nothing in principle that would stop us one day from making self-aware computers or robots. If one takes a strictly materialist view of reality (there is nothing but atoms) then self-awareness must be the product of purely physical processes in the universe and so self-awareness must be amenable to manufacture by future generations of scientists. On this view the mind is simply another word for brain which is merely a very complex computer.

Puddefoot shows how much of this debate is confused by the 'sliding definition ploy' of some writers who use words such as 'intelligence', 'brain', 'machine' and 'mind' in different ways depending where they are in their discussion. He takes us through the many scientific, philosophical and theological issues that surround this subject, warning us that we must not be too dismissive of capabilities of computers of the future (*e.g.* to provide creative solutions to human problems, to give companionship to the lonely). However, he doubts that self-aware personhood can ever be manufactured by human beings. His

theological reflections on creation and incarnation are certainly interesting. For example, he believes that the incarnation was necessary for God to know human beings from the inside. He does not believe in a brain-mind dualism, but believes that mind emerges from the brain but cannot be reduced to the physical processes of the brain.

I wish John Puddefoot could have dealt more with what others have written on this subject. The very important works by Roger Penrose, Francis Crick and Keith Ward (taking very different views) are hardly mentioned. The style is a little disconcerting. One moves through the book from passages which are very closely argued to other parts which are written with a chatty manner of expression with semi-humorous asides (not always relevant to the case being made).

Nevertheless we must be grateful to the author for helpfully highlighting many of the issues that will be debated in the years to come. He has obviously thought deeply about his subject and so many of his own reflections are profound and a real challenge to both materialists and Christians who have not yet taken the issues seriously enough.

Howard Taylor, St. David's Knightswood, Church of Scotland, Glasgow

Understanding Paul's Ethics. Twentieth-Century Approaches

Edited by Brian Rosner

Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI / Paternoster, Carlisle, 1995; xiii + 377pp., £14.99; ISBN 0 8028 0749 6 / 0 85364 618 X

This is a collection of important twentieth-century essays on Paul's ethics, brought together by a scholar with a wide knowledge of and interest in the field. The selection includes classic contributions from Adolf von Harnack, Edwin Judge, Gerd Theissen, Rudolf Bultmann, Eduard Lohse, Wolfgang Schrage and Richard Longenecker.

The volume is divided into seven parts corresponding to seven questions which the editor regards as crucial to the study of Paul's moral teaching: the origin, context, social dimension, shape, logic, foundations and relevance of Pauline ethics. Each section has two essays, representing either opposing views or an early and a more recent contribution to the sub-topic. The editor's Introduction helpfully presents the essays and the issues they raise

or confront. In a Conclusion he applies his seven key questions to 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12 as a case study.

This book is to be recommended both as a valuable anthology of significant and representative essays in the subject-area and as a useful way in to the study of Paul's ethics.

Edward Adams, King's College, London

Gospel Ferment in Malawi: Theological Essays

Kenneth Ross

Mambo Press, Gweru, Zimbabwe / Verlag für Kultur und Wissenschaft, Bonn, 1995; 151pp., n.p.; ISBN 0 86922 615 0 / 3 926105 44 5

The title must not mislead the prospective buyer into thinking that this is a book only for those interested in Malawi. Only three or four of its eight essays are really about Malawi. The others, although they refer to Malawi and Africa, could each stand alone as interesting contributions to such subjects as the world-wide discussion about relationships between church, culture, state and politics, Eastern Orthodox ecclesiology, and the place of recreation (in the sense of play and fun) in the Christian life.

The first essay 'The Truth Shall Set You Free' is a good summary of the very pivotal and courageous role the Malawian churches played in the overthrow of Malawi's oppressive one-party state ruled by the dictator Hastings Kamuzu Banda. For those who, like this reviewer, lived through many years of Dr. Banda's rule and know personally a number of the key church figures involved it makes intriguing reading.

The three essays that follow are theological reflections on the relationship of the gospel to the wider world of politics, social reform *etc.* In these three essays we receive a good exposition of Calvin (the whole of life, private and public being embraced by creation and redemption), Bonhoeffer (the relationship of ultimate and penultimate in the kingdom of God), and Moltmann (theology of hope). Running through Kenneth Ross's explanations is his own view (shared by this reviewer) that there is a continuity and discontinuity between the coming kingdom of God and this world. That means that we cannot but be concerned about righteousness in the world of politics, whilst recognising that our final hope is not in the church's own achievements in this world.

He particularly believes that where the government or dictator claims 'omnipotence' the church has the duty to proclaim the Lordship of Christ. But here is the irony. A great deal of political comment from pulpits and church reports makes the implicit

assumption that governments do have something approaching omnipotence and so have the power to redistribute wealth, guarantee full employment *etc*. But is the exercise of such power possible without destruction of the economy? I would like to hear Ross on that.

He refers to the widely-held view that Christ sided with the poor against the rich. This reviewer believes that this is only partly true. It was Christ's show of friendship to certain rich people (*e.g.* the exploiter Zaccheus) that brought down upon him the wrath of the religiously self-righteous – the very people who became most responsible for his crucifixion. The danger of self-righteousness in all our varying theological / political pronouncements is something we need to think through.

The next essay is a fascinating analysis of the actual preaching that is given in Malawi's main churches and the attitudes of preachers and listeners to their faith. From this we move to a good overview of one of the early pioneers of Blantyre Mission, the Revd David Clement Scott. Here we meet a man whose whole missionary strategy revealed his deep respect for African peoples and their languages. Kenneth Ross contrasts this with the mentality prevalent in the white man's political conquest of Africa. These very different attitudes led to the long and painful differences between the missions and their churches on the one hand and the colonial authorities on the other.

The design of the famous church building that Clement Scott constructed in Blantyre leads Ross to write an essay on Eastern Orthodox ecclesiology in which each local church is not so much an outstation of the central church authority, but rather a representation of the whole church of God. He makes a number of interesting and helpful points in this essay, but I could not help wondering whether his view of Eastern Orthodoxy would be quite so rosy if he lived in a country where it is the dominant faith.

The final essay is a plea, on good theological grounds, for Christians from a pietistic / evangelical tradition to re-consider more positively their normally semi-negative attitudes to recreation and play in the Christian life. I certainly recommend this book. It is biblically and theologically well argued, full of good points, very relevant to the modern world and written out of a situation of life-and-death ferment in a country that has long and honourable associations with the church in Scotland.

Howard Taylor, St. David's Knightswood, Church of Scotland, Glasgow

Authentic Christianity

John Stott

Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester, 1995; 424pp., £9.99; ISBN 0 85111 155 6

This book contains selected passages from Stott's writings, chosen and introduced by Timothy Dudley-Smith. Reading this book makes one aware of the massive contribution John Stott has made to Christian thinking and living during the second half of the twentieth century. While the writings are largely from the 1960s to the present day, several pieces date back to the 1950s, the earliest being a sermon from 1951. The range is most impressive. Their quality is outstanding, largely justifying Michael Baughen's comment: 'John Stott has been the most influential and significant Christian leader of the late nineteen-hundreds.' Some may wish to qualify this verdict, to read 'one of the most influential....'

As well as rekindling memories of my early indebtedness to Stott, *Authentic Christianity* provoked a sense of gratitude to IVP for its continuing commitment to bringing work of such high quality to the student world, in particular. One notes how many Christians (no longer young!) owe so much to Stott's writing for a substantial part of their grounding in 'Authentic Christianity'. Through Stott's 'concern... to teach and expound a revealed faith, and to interpret authoritative and timeless Scripture for a contemporary world', many have come to affirm, with deep conviction, that 'Christianity is authentic only when it is truly biblical'.

Timothy Dudley-Smith tends to play down his own achievement in compiling this volume. It may be quite accurate to say 'that this book is neither a systematic theology nor even a full and balanced exposition of John Stott's thought and teaching'. There is no extended comment on Stott's work – just a four-and-a half page 'Foreword' from Dudley-Smith. I suspect that, while the compiler's 'sole criterion... has been to select the telling or instructive or (above all) *thought-provoking* quotation', this book will ensure that the work of John Stott (born 1921) will not be forgotten. It may also provide an extremely valuable 'source' for younger theologians to write the kind of 'systematic theology' or 'full and balanced exposition' which this book does not claim to be. A final point, touched on by the compiler, which I would wish to underline, concerns the fact that 'some of his most valued and lasting writing' is to be found in the series *The Bible Speaks Today*. Time and time again, the quotations which sent me to the 'List of Sources' were from this series. As well as its sixty-seven sub-headings, located under twelve more general headings,

Authentic Christianity contains an extensive index, which makes it a very useful reference book. Even allowing for the clarity of Stott's exposition, it is hardly likely that many readers will read this book from beginning to end. Nevertheless, it is to be hoped that this book will not become the kind of reference work that is dipped into so very occasionally that it is hardly worth having.

Charles M. Cameron, Burnside Presbyterian Church, Portstewart

Calvin's Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament

Ronald S. Wallace

Scottish Academic Press, Edinburgh, 1995; 253pp., £9.25; ISBN 0 7073 0747 3

This is a welcome and economically priced reprint of a book first published in 1953, which has become a standard resource for English-language readers wanting access to Calvin's teaching about the Word and the sacraments. Latin and French are very largely confined to footnotes. If it perforce takes no account of scholarly discussions over forty years, this is entirely in keeping with the original, which sought exclusively to expound Calvin without bothering with his other interpreters. No one, of course, expounds Calvin in a vacuum, but the Barth-inspired renewal of interest in the Reformer has left few overt traces in this comprehensive study.

D.F. Wright, New College, University of Edinburgh

Paul's Narrative Thought World. The Tapestry of Tragedy and Triumph

Ben Witherington, III

Westminster / John Knox Press, Louisville, KY, 1994; 352pp., $24.99; ISBN 0 664 25433 0

Ben Witherington is one of today's most prolific writers in the field of New Testament study. In this volume, he offers an account of Paul's theology. He approaches Paul's thought from the (highly fashionable) point of view of 'narrative' or 'story'. He argues that Paul's theology and ethics are shaped by four interrelated stories which together comprise one larger drama: 1) the story of a world gone wrong; 2) the story of Israel in that world; 3) the story of Christ which arises both out of the story of Israel and humanity and the story of God as creator and redeemer; 4) the story of Christians, including Paul, which arises out of all

these previous stories and is the first instalment of the story of the world set right again. Christ is the turning-point and climax of the whole drama.

Using this narrative framework to arrange his discussion, Witherington deals with most of the main topics usually treated in works on Pauline theology. The following subjects are discussed: the fall; Satan and the powers; the human condition; Abraham; the law; Israel; Christ as wisdom, Messiah, eschatological Adam; Paul and the Jesus tradition; cross and resurrection; the parousia; Paul's conversion; justification; new creation and union with Christ; the Holy Spirit; anthropology; ecclesiology; resurrection. Detailed exegesis is given of key passages.

The merit of this book is that it is an attempt to do justice to the whole of Paul's thought. For Witherington, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Hence the author does not fix on certain Pauline ideas, such as justification by faith or participation in Christ, and try to make these the controlling or dominant ones for Paul's theology. The coherence of Paul's thought, he claims, lies not in some theological centre or core but in the fundamental story out of which all his discourse arises.

As an analysis of Paul's theology, however, this book has its limitations. Witherington's treatment of the various topics is uneven, detailed at some places, superficial at others (the section on the law is highly unsatisfactory). The level of his engagement with the scholarly debates leaves much to be desired. There is also a lack of penetrating insight on most of the issues discussed.

This volume serves as a helpful presentation of Paul's theology from a conservative point of view, but (students be warned) it is not quite at the cutting edge of the scholarly discussion.

Edward Adams, King's College, London

Evangelical Faith and Public Zeal: Evangelicals and Society in Britain 1780-1980

Edited by John Wolffe

SPCK, London, 1995; 221pp., £10.90; ISBN 0 281047 820

In his introduction to this book John Wolffe says that events leading to its publication are 'the continuing history of the movements with which it is concerned'. Certainly the project as a whole effectively deals with and assesses evangelical concern and public action over the last two hundred years. The nine essays come from a distinguished range of international and inter-denominational contributors brought together by the Evangelical Alliance and are comprehensive in their coverage. The evangelical

contributions to nineteenth-century life in the areas of welfare, anti-slavery campaigns, politics and commercial, educational and colonial developments are well documented. Thus apart from dealing with leading figures such as Wilberforce and Shaftesbury the contributors trace the wide-ranging commitment to social issues throughout the evangelical movement.

The overall coverage of the book is illustrative rather than comprehensive. Thus whilst drawing material from all parts of Britain it fails to address the Scottish, Welsh and regional experiences. What does emerge however are the debilitating effects of internecine strife within Evangelicalism despite the threats from theological liberalism, and this is particularly emphasised in Kenneth Brown's essay. I was encouraged, however, to see that modern Evangelicals, unlike their nineteenth-century counterparts who so often ignored women's efforts, now acknowledge the contribution that women made to the movement as a whole. The changing role of women in the twentieth century has obviously influenced Evangelicals; hence the inclusion of Jocelyn Murray's lively account of the role of women within Evangelicalism in the nineteenth century.

Clive Calver in his Afterword is particularly optimistic about the role of evangelical social action in the twentieth century and points to a need to learn from the past in order to face the future, triumphantly enumerating recent evangelical initiatives from Tear Fund to Cause for Concern. Calver depicts Evangelicals in the latter years of the twentieth century wanting to recover the identity and emphasis of their predecessors. Certainly politicians seem to be jumping on this bandwagon but whether one could say that this applies wholesale to Evangelicals and whether they actually are a force to be reckoned with could perhaps be food for argument.

One minor correction: the Glasgow Bible Training Institute (now Glasgow Bible College) was the outcome of Moody and Sankey's campaigns in 1892, and not of the Keswick Convention.

Janet L. Watson, Glasgow Bible College

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 us. 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, New College, University of Edinburgh