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EDITORIAL[1]

The latter part of the twentieth century has seen a renaissance of interest in Trinitarian theology. Tom Torrance speaks of the doctrine of the Trinity as 'the distinctively Christian conception of God with which every Christian doctrine and every aspect of the Christian way of life are concerned... the nerve and centre of them all'.[2] Trinitarian theology is not an obscure piece of abstract speculation but is closely related to the spiritual pilgrimage of God's people and the life of the church in society.

When the early church were formulating their understanding of the Trinity they were seeking to articulate the understanding of God that they had experienced in their personal and corporate encounter with the story of salvation.[3] They knew the love of the Father, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the empowering presence of the Spirit. Elizabeth Johnston comments that, 'the New Testament is filled with narratives, confessional formulas, liturgical formulas, doxologies, short rules of faith, all in a threefold cadence'.[4]

David Cunningham argues that, 'our belief in the triune God shapes us in profound ways – affecting what we believe, what we say, how we think, and how we live'.[5] But what exactly does it mean to be Trinitarian and live out a life of discipleship that is shaped by this doctrine?

WORSHIP

The early church encountered God as Trinity in their worship. Christian worship assumed a Trinitarian character from the earliest stages. James Torrance speaks of worship of the church as essentially a participation in

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1 A version of this editorial was presented to the Baptist World Alliance, Doctrine and Inter-church Commission in Prince Edward Island, Canada, in July 2001.

2 Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being in Three Persons* (Edinburgh, 1986), p. 31.

3 See Paul Fiddes, *Participating in God* (London, 2001), p. 5

4 Elizabeth A. Johnson, 'Trinity: To Let the Symbol Sing Again', *Theology Today* 54 (1997), p. 303.

5 David C. Cunningham, *These Three are One: The Practice of Trinitarian Theology* (London, 1998), p. ix.

the worship of Jesus.[6] Christ, according to Hebrews, is the 'minister of the new sanctuary', the leader of our worship. As Calvin expressed it, 'Christ leads our songs, and is the chief composer of our hymns.'[7]

This means that worship is not something that we do – a task to be taking up as a duty but is rather our response to what God has done for us and in us – a participation in the praise of Christ through the power of the Spirit – offering worship and honour and glory to the Father. Worship enables us to enter into the life of God, to rest in his love and to express our adoration. Worship, both corporate and private, will be characterised by the joy reflected in the eternal relationships experienced by the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The God who rejoices over his people 'with gladness... with loud singing' (Zeph. 3:17) looks for such an expression of joy and gladness in the hearts of his people.

TRINITARIAN SPIRITUALITY

Philip Sheldrake makes the comment that 'the doctrine of the Trinity... is absolutely essential to the coherence and cogency of any Christian spirituality'.[8] Our theology of God will inevitably affect our spirituality. Theologians who have tended to stress the 'economic' Trinity tend to understand their spirituality as one of 'doing' whereas those who stress the 'immanent' Trinity conceive of spirituality more in terms of 'being'.

Jurgen Moltmann's small book *Theology and Joy*[9] seeks to reflect on the place of play in the Christian life, suggesting that in play and in games we may well be reflecting the activity of God as Creator. Moltmann criticises the 'modern achievement-centred society... [where] people have lost their capacity for leisure; they no longer know how to do nothing'.[10] If David Bebbington is correct in seeing 'activism' as one of the defining characteristics of Evangelicalism[11] then we need to expose the danger of the exhausting treadmill of hyperactivity, which is so characteristic of the life of the church. Martin Luther anticipated the life

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6 James B. Torrance, *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace* (Carlisle, 1996).

7 John Calvin, *Hebrews* (Edinburgh, 1963), p. 67.

8 Sheldrake, *Spirituality and Theology: Christian Living and the Doctrine of God* (London, 1998), p. xi.

9 Jurgen Moltmann, *Theology and Joy* (London, 1971).

10 Ibid., pp. 32, 34.

11 D. W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain* (London, 1989), pp. 10-12

to come as a time when people will 'have their fun, love and joy, and shall laugh with thee and thou with them, even according to the body'.[12]

ECCLESIOLOGY

The social model of the Trinity, espoused by theologians from a wide spread of theological traditions such as Moltmann, Torrance and Pinnock, clearly directs our thinking to a view of spirituality which is relational and grounded in our commitment to the life of the church. Evangelicals, strongly influenced by the Enlightenment, have tended to be individualistic and sometimes pietistic in their understanding of spirituality. We have normally portrayed the Christian life as a solitary spiritual quest for personal holiness and peace, whereas the New Testament would emphasise an expanded capacity for communal life, selfless love and identification with the needs of others.

Some years ago Peter Berger suggested that the concept of the 'autonomous individual' was the central characteristic of the modern Western world.[13] The modern hero of western society is the entrepreneur, the self-made individual because 'self-realisation and self-gratification have become the master principles of modern culture'.[14] The individual has become 'deified' in contemporary culture as we have forgotten that we were created in the image of a Trinitarian God who lives in a joyful relationship of love as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Sadly, because we have lost the concept of the essence of the church being that of community, we have very little to offer to a culture of impersonality and loneliness.

One of the very great challenges which postmodernity is posing society is precisely in the area of radical individualism. The challenge to the church of Jesus Christ is to be a community that will demonstrate the story of the Triune God in the midst of a world crying out for spiritual reality.[15] The character of God should shape the behaviour of all his children who long to indwell a community of mutuality, of co-operation, of forgiveness, of unity which experiences peace in the context of a

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[12] Martin Luther, *WA XXXVI.* 600; *XLV.* 356

[13] Peter L. Berger, 'Western Individuality: Liberation and Loneliness' *Partisan Review* 52 (1985), p. 324.

[14] Craig M. Gay, *The Way of the Modern World: Or why it's tempting to live as if God doesn't exist* (Paternoster Press, 1998), p. 192. Gay also quotes Niebuhr as adding self-glorification (p. 196).

[15] Andrew Walker, *Telling the Story: Gospel, Mission and Culture* (London, 1996) p. 200.

genuine diversity of unique individuals who find their fulfilment in living in the unity of the Spirit.

Although we must avoid the danger of reducing our understanding of the Trinity to a question of relevance, it is evident that the social model of the Trinity speaks powerfully to the needs of the church in the twenty-first century.

Sometimes the stress that Reformed evangelicals have placed on the attribute of sovereignty gives the impression of hierarchy, even within the persons of the Trinity. This inevitably means that the model of relationships within the life of the church also begins to imply hierarchy. Yet, Trinitarian theology would remind us that relationships are about inter-dependence and not domination of other people.

GENDER

Often, the above model of authority has led to patriarchialism within the church; a feature that damns us in the eyes of many within our modern social setting, and in some situations makes our faith irredeemable.[16] Post-Christendom, Post-Modernist secularism will no longer listen to a church which uses the language of the obedience of the Son to the Father to imply that women are no less equal in honour to men but they are subordinate and their function is to obey. There is something attractive about a stress upon a fellowship of equality among persons that is so unlike the inequalities in human society. This is the gospel of good news that breaks down barriers of class, gender, colour and ethnicity rather than builds them.

The Anabaptist vision of the church as a covenant community was one which stressed the priesthood of all believers where each was seen to be a 'priest' to his fellow sisters and brothers, ministering the grace of God; where all are called to interpret the Scriptures within the context of the community, each person contributing out of their own experience as they tried to apply the word to their everyday lives. It was a community where women as well as men[17] were committed to lives of costly discipleship, at times 'contravening common societal restrictions on their gender' in both the church and society of their times.[18] Goertz says that

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[16] See David F. Wright, 'What kind of Theology for the twenty-first century?', SBET 17 (1999), p. 104.

[17] See C. Arnold Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology: An Introduction* (Pandora Press, 1995), especially chapter 18 on 'Equality in the Community of Saints' (pp. 253ff.).

[18] Ibid., p. 269.

'the notion of the priesthood of all believers' was 'enacted with particular zeal.... [T]he laity, both men and women, began to take over priestly ministries, preaching, celebrating communion and baptising...[;] women engaged in corner preaching and evangelism.'[19]

MISSION

Mission is primarily and ultimately the work of God for the sake of the world, a ministry in which the church is privileged to participate. Mission has its origin in the mystery of God's love, in the community of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, overflowing in God's action in creating, saving and restoring the world: 'It is not the Church that has a mission of salvation to fulfil in the world; it is the mission of the Son and the Spirit through the Father that includes the Church.'[20] All acts of service, through the life of the church and in the world, are always a participation in God's mission of love to the world in Jesus Christ and the Spirit. All who are sent in Christ's name to various parts of the world share in the one ministry of Jesus Christ, sent by the Father in the power of the Spirit to fulfil God's mission to the world.

The mission of the church is to participate in the seeking love of the triune God who reaches out to a fallen world, who pours himself out in sacrificial, self-giving love to welcome the wanderer, never restricting the goodness of God or the wideness of his mercy for all who need him so desperately – physically, emotionally and spiritually. This means that mission does not flow from reliance upon ourselves, our own resources, but upon the work of the triune God – not to be taken up as a burden but as gift of joy and love because we have been loved by God and long that others share that love for themselves.

As Christian theologians, we are called, not only to define and defend the doctrine of the Trinity in the twenty-first century but to 'participate in God', to experience his love and to express the reality of his life within our individual and corporate discipleship.

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[19] Hans-Jurgen Goertz, *The Anabaptists* (Routledge, 1997), pp. 114-17.

[20] Jurgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* (London, 1977), p. 64.

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY: CANON AND PLAIN SENSE (FINLAYSON MEMORIAL LECTURE 2001)

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THE CONTEXT

Biblical Theology is a somewhat slippery creature, which at times basks in the sun and at other times retreats quietly, or even ignominiously, into the shade. If it seems at first glance to have a simplicity about it, this is deceptive, and it has a habit of changing its form when it re-emerges for another phase of its life. At present, Biblical Theology shows signs of reaching its prime, after a spell in the wilderness. The last active period of its life was associated with G. E. Wright's *The God Who Acts*,[1] and also with the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, edited by R. Kittel. This emergence of Biblical Theology was ended, by all accounts, by James Barr's critique of Kittel, especially in *The Semantics of Biblical Language*.[2] In its wake, Brevard Childs spoke of a 'crisis' in Biblical Theology, and developed what is variously known as canonical criticism and canonical theology.[3] In doing so he expressly intended to find a new way of doing theology for the church based on the two testaments. The spirit of it was close to that of Biblical Theology, and the story of the latter over the last three decades must unfold the former too.

In these last days, however, there have been sightings of Biblical Theology itself, abroad again in the theological landscape, a newly invigorated creature. A leading example is Francis Watson's *Text and Truth*,[4] in which he aims to re-establish the genre, beginning with a

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1 G. E. Wright, *The God Who Acts: Biblical Theology as Recital* (SBT, 8; London, 1952).

2 James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (London, 1961).

3 B. S. Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (Philadelphia, 1970). His idea that the canon provided the shape of Biblical Theology was developed in his commentary on Exodus (London, 1974), and his *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (London, 1979).

4 Francis Watson, *Text and Truth: Redefining Biblical Theology* (Edinburgh, 1997). This followed Watson's book on biblical interpretation, *Text,*

critique of Barr's attack on Kittel, which he regards as a *tour de force*. Not only so, but Barr himself has weighed in with a major volume entitled *The Concept of Biblical Theology*,[5] which turns out to be a defence of the idea (he prefers 'pan-Biblical Theology'), though he understands it in a way quite unlike Childs or Watson.

What, then, is Biblical Theology? At the simplest level, it is letting the Bible speak today. The story as I have introduced it has focused on the world of academic theology. However, the lines between that sphere and the life of the church are not hard and fast, and the issue at stake has been how the Bible might be used in church and world. The academic discussion is at the same time a churchly one. Indeed, Biblical Theology is in essence an activity of the church. The spirit of its recovery as a concept is precisely the conviction that the Bible belongs to the church, is its inheritance, and that the church may not be deprived of it by a hegemonic academicism that effectively frustrates its use. The church's interpretation of the Bible, for itself and for the world, is not only its right, but its obligation. In this sense Biblical Theology has important parallels with that other primary activity of biblical interpretation, preaching.

THE METHODS AND RESOURCES OF BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

If then we have established the right of Biblical Theology as an activity of the church, how does it proceed? A moment's reflection on the diversity of biblical interpretation not only in the church's history but all around us today shows that this is no easy question. It involves the general problem of how an ancient text might 'speak' in a completely different modern world, that is, a general hermeneutical question. But in particular it involves the question how to read these various texts, spread over two testaments, in relation to each other and so as to discern a message for ourselves. There are further questions of definition, such as how Biblical Theology relates to other theological disciplines, especially Systematic Theology.

Canonical Criticism and Theology

The title of this sub-section seems to hesitate between two designations. Both are used, however, to refer to the method of interpretation advocated

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Church and World: Biblical Interpretation in Theological Perspective (Edinburgh, 1994), which addressed problems of doing theology in relation to postmodern hermeneutics.

[5] James Barr, *The Concept of Biblical Theology: an Old Testament Perspective* (London, 1999).

by Childs, with good reason, because the approach not only aims to do theology, but also to revise the way in which 'critical' reading of the biblical texts is done.[6] Criticism of historical criticism is at the heart of the enterprise. This is not just a matter of leaving those (historical-critical) issues on one side while we get on with what really matters, nor of 'moving beyond' historical criticism, since in either case the implied recognition of that method will return to put spokes in interpretative wheels. So the critique is more pointed and severe. For Watson, historical criticism has failed because it has not led to contemporary actualization of the text. That is, it fails by its own standards, namely to provide the illumination of texts necessary to their accurate interpretation. This is partly because of the multiplicity of proposed solutions to problems posed by the method, so that the promise of *progress* in understanding is ultimately illusory.[7] Christopher Seitz argues too that the method delights in sophistication, so that proposed 'real' meanings, unearthed by historical and sociological study, run counter to what the texts seem to say on a plain reading.[8]

The consequence of this failure is that the canonical texts have a right to be heard as what they are, the Scriptures of the church. The point can be made in slightly different ways. The stress can be put on the right of the church to interpret the Bible as Scripture because that is how it has received it and is related to it (the tendency of Childs). Watson, finding a 'formalistic tendency' in Childs, wants to add that the canonical form of

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6 The term 'canonical criticism' itself is attributable to James Sanders. His publications on the topic began with *Torah and Canon* (Philadelphia, 1972), but note especially his *Canon and Community: a Guide to Canonical Criticism* (Philadelphia, 1984). Sanders' understanding of the project differs from Childs', being hermeneutical rather then theological. That is, he is concerned with the factors that lead to a community's acceptance of certain texts as authoritative. See P. D. Miller, 'The Canon in Contemporary American Discussion' in idem, *Israelite Religion and Biblical Theology* (ET Sheffield, 2000), pp. 611-14.

7 Francis Watson, *Text, Church and World* (Edinburgh, 1994) pp. 58-9, cf. p. 40.

8 Historical criticism is driven 'by the necessary requirement to uncover the novel, the different, the complex. That is, historical criticism is *obliged* by its own character to make sure no plain sense consensus, binding Old and New Testament witnesses, emerges, because to do so would be to admit that the plain sense had a certain priority...' (Christopher R. Seitz, 'Sexuality and Scripture's Plain Sense', in Seitz, *Word Without End* [Grand Rapids, 1998] p. 322).

the text is the most suitable for theological use, because of 'the theological judgment that the subject-matter or content of the biblical texts is inseparable from their form'.[9] Though this thought is indebted to Hans Frei, whose work is often read as a call for a 'literary approach', Watson insists that the point is strictly a theological one.[10]

I want to look now at the main contributions of Childs to the study of canonical theology. Childs' early contributions (*Exodus*, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*) were concerned with the interpretation of individual books in their final form, with a focus on the canonizing community, and the 'canonical redactor'. While conventional critical scholarship was reviewed as part of the full process of interpretation, it was secondary to the text in its final form. And in addition, the aspect of the text's post-history (Jewish and Christian) became prominent, in a move that has proved important and influential. These works, however, left open the larger questions of how individual books contributed to a theology based on the wider canon, and indeed how that wider canon might be defined. How did the canon of the Old Testament relate to the two-testament canon? How did the final form of any given biblical book relate to either? And what place did the even-handed methodology of *Exodus* really give to historical criticism? To some, the idea of canon as the key category for theology seemed too formal. And the emphasis on the final form of books led to his work being bracketed along with the literary type of final-form interpretation, or indeed structuralism.[11]

Childs went on to try to address these questions, especially in *Old Testament Theology in Canonical Context* (*OTTCC*) and *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (*BTONT*). He argues first that canon is inseparable from the theological reflection that brought it about, and indeed that Biblical Theology continues to consist in theological reflection on that canon, by a community that stands within the canonical tradition, yet is aware of its own time-conditioned status.[12] Canon means

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[9] Watson, *Text, Church and World*, p. 17.

[10] Watson, *Text, Church and World*, p. 21.

[11] John Barton, *Reading the Old Testament* (London, 1984), pp. 101-3. Childs responds in *Old Testament Theology in Canonical Context* (Philadelphia, 1985), p. 6.

[12] Childs, *OTTCC*, pp. 6-15; cf. *BTONT*, pp. 67-8. The idea of canon as the arena within which theology is done cf. *OTTCC*, p. 15 is tempered with the assertion of critical reflection on its content: 'the complete canon of the Christian church as the rule-of-faith sets for the community of faith the proper context in which we stand, but it also remains continually the object of critical theological scrutiny subordinate to its subject matter who is

that theological interpretation arises from the interaction of the parts of the canon. An example: 'regardless of the original historical and literary relationship between the Decalogue and the narrative sections of the Pentateuch, a theological interchange is possible within its new canonical context which affords a mutual aid for interpretation'.[13] The canonical quality of Childs' interpretation comes out in his address of individual topics, the Decalogue again being an example. For example, he notes how its narrative context in the Pentateuch (first of all) provides a reflection on adultery in the story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife. Moving out from the Pentateuch, he finds the same topic in the account of David, Bathsheba and Uriah, and other topics of the Decalogue in the Psalms, Prophets and Wisdom books.[14] The First Commandment is brought into connection with the narrative of Kings, and with doxology in the Psalms.

According to his method, therefore, all parts of the Old Testament become relevant to each other. This, of course, is a significant move. Historical criticism proceeded by segregating the parts of the Old Testament and stressing their distinctiveness. For Childs, in contrast, *everything* is 'witness'. For example, on the Second Commandment: 'In many ways, the story of the Golden Calf (Ex. 32) offers the most extended canonical witness regarding the use of images.'[15]

While *OTTCC* is an example of an apologia for Old Testament theology, Childs takes up the challenge of *Biblical Theology* in *BTONT*. Already in *OTTCC*, Biblical Theology and Old Testament theology were distinguished in this way: 'the task of biblical theology is to explore the relation between these two witnesses [Old Testament and New Testament], whereas the task of Old Testament theology is to reflect theologically on only the one portion of the Christian canon, but as Christian scripture'.[16]

To see how the main section of the argument operates[17] we take as an example the treatment of covenant, people of God, election. Following

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Jesus Christ' (cf. *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* [Minneapolis, 1993], pp. 67-8).

[13] Childs, *OTTCC*, p. 13.

[14] Ibid., pp 63-4.

[15] Ibid., p. 67.

[16] Ibid., p. 9.

[17] In the first part of the book he deals with the sections of the two parts of the canon one by one. Then, in the major part, he addresses a number of theological themes in relation to both. In the first part his points of reference are principally historical critical. E.g. the treatment of the judges period is hardly 'canonical' in any sense (149-51) – in spite of the following of a canonical order. There are enormous possibilities for

historical-critical reconstructions of covenant,[18] he turns to the way in which the testaments relate. This is not just a matter of noting contrasts between them. Rather a dialectical pattern emerges within both testaments (e.g. in the Old Testament, between Israel as 'a concrete, historical nation, as well as a trans-historical, even ideal, reality'). The New Testament's relation to the Old, however, is conceived as an 'appropriation' of it, or rather of certain strands of it. If there is continuity between the testaments, it is attributable to such appropriation, and furthermore, there is also discontinuity, that is, where the New Testament has declined to follow a particular Old Testament line (for example, 'the early church remained somewhat critical of the covenant theology of the Old Testament and developed only the one aspect of the new covenant in the Synoptic passion accounts, in Paul and in Hebrews'.[19] Again, the theme of land puts the New Testament in 'the sharpest discontinuity' with the Old Testament. This passage is then followed by a reflection on 'the continuing integrity of the Old Testament's testimony to the people of God in accordance with its own theological voice' (expressed as Israel's dependence on divine mercy; God's purpose through Israel to reconcile the world to himself; Israel's voice in the Psalter as 'the authentic response of the people by which the New Testament witness is also to be tested').[20] These illustrations appear to go to the heart of the dynamics of canonical biblical theology for Childs. The relationship between the testaments is conceived according to a particular pattern, in which the movement is clearly from Old Testament to New Testament, yet in which the manner in which the 'discrete' voices unite in a common witness is never quite articulated. The section's closing 'dogmatic reflections' identify the topics of church and synagogue, the shape of the modern church (assimilating indigenous forms), and the challenge of political involvement. But it is not clear how these are identified out of the foregoing.

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theological interpretation here (e.g. C. Wright), but not exploited. (Gottwald is cited in the bibliography, but not mentioned in the text. The bibliography is almost exclusively historical-critical.) There is no New Testament reflection. On Joshua, the canonical reflection is in the main indistinguishable from redaction criticism. The reflections from the rest of the Old Testament are sparse. The bibliography is once again historical-critical (pp. 143-8). In this section, the treatments are at an introductory level, and stamped strongly by traditional criticism (NB 'The Prophetic Traditions', pp. 167-80).

[18] Childs, BTONT, pp 413-21.

[19] Ibid., p. 443.

[20] Ibid., pp. 444-5

It may be that Childs has responded effectively to the charge of formalism, by establishing that canonical theology involves theological reflection on the interaction of the parts, all oriented towards the central subject-matter, Jesus Christ. However, certain questions remain. The place of historical criticism remains unclear (Barr thought Childs ambivalent on it; Watson has found a retreat towards it in *BTONT*, as a bulwark against the threat of de-historicized literary readings[21]). His insistence on 'the discrete witness of the two testaments' presents a difficulty, because it raises the question of the nature of the relationship between them, and how exactly interpretation gives due weight to each. Childs' heavy stress on methodological programme means that he has not left fully developed exegetical examples. In addition, the issue of interpretation in general (how ancient texts speak) is scarcely broached. All of these matters seem paramount in any exercise in Biblical Theology.

Canon and History

One recurring concern about the validity of a canonical method in Biblical Theology is whether it is too much a closed system, neither open to general means of acquiring knowledge, nor to the world outside the church. Childs' hesitations about abandoning historical criticism have already been noted, together with the ready association of his method with ahistorical approaches, which he deplores. These factors indicate the need somehow to take account in interpretation of the historical character of the texts that bear witness to the substance of what is believed, and of the substance itself. They are the same factors that have led, for example, to the reassertion of a 'history of religion' approach to the Old Testament in the work of R. Albertz.[22] Albertz is convinced that religious statements cannot be understood apart from the historical context in which they are made. This does not mean that Albertz is interested in mere description of what was true in the past. Barr, in a sympathetic treatment of the work, points out that its intention is to do interpretation precisely for the church, and in the belief that canonical tendencies 'ghettoize' interpretation.[23] In attempting to let the Old Testament speak, Albertz has chosen a very

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[21] Watson, *Text and Truth*, p. 213, referring to Childs, *BTONT*, pp. 722-3, where Childs expressly distances himself from narrative theology, and from his own former position in *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*.

[22] R. Albertz, *A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period* (2 vols) (London, 1994).

[23] Barr, *Concept*, pp. 118-23.

different method from canonical theology. While he resists the synthesizing of varying religious statements, which he sees as a process of abstraction, canonical theology demands synthesis. The issue, then, is perhaps more a matter of methodology than of intention. The recurrence of a history of religion approach is testimony to the demands of the historical nature of the material. A similar point might be made about Stendahl's distinction in interpretation between 'what it meant' and 'what it means'. Here too the concern is to understand texts adequately in their historical settings, yet to be able in the end to make contemporary theological 'translations'.

If the issue, then, is between a canonical approach to the biblical texts and one that stresses the primary need to understand them in their original setting, on what grounds might the former be preferred? For some, the historical approach is simply too enmeshed with historical criticism and its false pretension to deliver decisive interpretations. Watson, for example, regards Stendahl's definition as typifying the point of view of most practitioners of historical criticism.[24] He goes on to refute it, agreeing in this respect with Childs, that there can be no 'autonomous descriptive method'; 'The assertion that historical-critical practice undertakes the "description" of the biblical texts is dependent on a prior identification of those texts as historical artefacts – chance remnants of a previous stage of human history – whose meaning is wholly determined by their historical circumstances of origin.'[25] He is echoed, in this outright rejection of historical criticism, by C. Seitz, who argues that the spirit of historical criticism is to render obscure, rather then to allow texts to mean what they evidently say.[26]

Yet it would be misleading to suppose that biblical interpretation can be done without attention to the historical character of the texts. By this I do not mean simply that one must do the historical work first, then proceed to interpretation, a view apparently implied by Childs' re-profiling of historical criticism in *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*, and apparently espoused by W. Brueggemann.[27] It is rather

[24] Watson, *Text, Church and World*, p. 31.

[25] Ibid., p. 33.

[26] Christopher Seitz, *Word Without End* (Grand Rapids, 1998), p. 322.

[27] Brueggemann and three co-authors, in an introduction to the Old Testament, express their intention to go beyond historical criticism in order to interpret the Old Testament theologically, while building on its results and remaining engaged in its perspectives; Bruce C. Birch, Walter Brueggemann, Terence E. Fretheim and David L. Petersen, *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament* (Nashville, 1999), pp. 20-21.

that theological knowledge depends not only on what the Bible says, but also in some degree on historical knowledge. For example, when we ask what is meant by 'God' in the Old Testament, of course it is true that we know this by reading the Old Testament *story*. We get to know who God is by the story of the deliverance of Israel from Egyptian captivity (Christopher Seitz's essay on the meaning of the divine name as revealed to Moses is very insightful on this point[28]), and indeed in the prolegomena to this in the Genesis accounts of creation and of God's encounters with the patriarchs. That account, however, is completely entwined with factors that we know by means other than merely reading the Bible. In Genesis and Exodus, El who meets Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is found to be Yahweh, God of Israel.[29] Yahweh is introduced by reference to a deity about whom we have knowledge from history and archaeology. In other parts of the Old Testament, Yahweh is known in relation (now in contradistinction) to Baal (or the baalim), about whom, again, we have substantial extra-biblical knowledge. Even the central creedal affirmation of the Old Testament, 'Hear, Israel, the LORD your God, the LORD is one' (Deut. 6:4), turns out to be, not a simple 'monotheistic' declaration, but a statement about the nature of Yahweh, in contrast to other deities – who might be variously singular or plural, Baal or baalim.[30] In general, Old Testament exegesis has been hugely enriched by its awareness of the world in which its texts were written. The creation narratives are a further example, where the relation of God to the world and humanity is articulated in dialogue with other creation narratives in its religious environment.[31] These examples raise a host of subordinate questions for interpretation (not least why Yahweh could also be called El, but was kept sharply distinct from Baal). But they show at a minimum that the boundaries between the discourses of 'religion' and 'theology' are exceedingly elusive.

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[28] Christopher Seitz, 'The Call of Moses and the "Revelation" of the Divine Name: Source-Critical Logic and its Legacy', in *Word Without End*, pp. 229-47.

[29] See R. W. L. Moberly, *The Old Testament of the Old Testament* (Minneapolis, 1992), for an account, and Seitz's response to Moberly in 'The Call of Moses'.

[30] Cf. P. D. Miller, 'God and the Gods', in *Israelite Religion*, pp. 365-96, especially pp. 389-90; also R. W. L. Moberly, 'Toward an Interpretation of the Shema', in C. Seitz and K. Greene-McCreight, *Theological Exegesis: Essays in Honor of Brevard S. Childs* (Grand Rapids, 1999), pp. 124-44, who argues that 'one' may mean one uniquely loved.

[31] This has been well documented and interpreted by G. J. Wenham, *Genesis I* (Waco, Texas, 1987).

The inevitability of 'religion' in the study of Biblical Theology is one reason why Barr continues to insist that historical criticism belongs inextricably to the task of theological interpretation. His approval of historical criticism is deeply rooted in his understanding of theological method, for he thinks, not simply that it is a necessary preparation for theology, but that there is a kind of theological knowledge that comes by 'natural' means, that is, other than by 'revelation' as that is usually meant in theological discourse. His support for natural theology is a major component in his critique of Childs' position, indebted as it is to Barth. Thus when Barr notes the religious background to the story of El and Yahweh, and especially the theory that 'Yahweh may have inherited from El the idea that Yahweh is the real owner of the land', he goes on to infer that 'it must mean that there was something akin to "divine revelation" in the El religion'.[32]

Does this claim stand scrutiny? When Barr says that Yahweh 'inherited from El' this particular notion, he presumably means that worshippers of Yahweh saw that what El worshippers predicated of El could be predicated of their God too. But the question remains as to what constitutes valid theological knowledge. Does the notion of divine ownership of land constitute valid theological knowledge because it was found first in the religion of El, or because it was accepted by worshippers of Yahweh, and then by the Old Testament writers? The question is further complicated because the Old Testament writers expressly oppose other forms of religion in the ancient Near East. If Barr's criterion is applied in these cases, are we to assume that the religion of Baal is not revelatory, since the biblical writers do not accept it. Or do we extrapolate from the premise that the environing religions *were* revelatory, and look for revelation there too? The question has some contemporary urgency, with the revival of interest in the 'popular' religion of Israel, especially the worship of the goddess Asherah, and consequences for certain types of pluralistic readings of the Old Testament. (In relation to Baal, of course, one might say that Yahweh both rejects and borrows, the latter for example in bringing rain, though in this case with the consequence of invalidating Baal's claims to do the things now predicated of Yahweh. The issue here arises, however, at the points where Baalism is rejected.)

The point illustrates how far apart Barr and Childs are in their theological methods. Barr's openness to natural theology is in proportion to his readiness to critique theological positions within the canon. He can reject theological 'voices', whether extra-biblical or not, on the grounds of

[32] Barr, *Concept*, p. 137.

theological inappropriateness, which is learnt from the church's cumulative theological tradition. For Childs, in contrast, it is the voices of the biblical writers that have the final say. Barr's other main argument for natural theology – that the Bible itself uses it – does not resolve the tension between the two approaches, for the passages which may be cited in favour of the concept aim in fact to establish belief in the God proclaimed by the biblical writers (so Watson's criticism of Barr on this point).[33]

If Barr were right in his belief that theological knowledge can be derived from sources other than the Bible, that might strengthen the case for a religious-historical reading of the Old Testament, in which the various voices of the biblical writers could be measured against a host of other voices in the background. If one takes his contention out of the equation, however, we are still left with the interdependence of religion and theology. We have seen this at the level of exegesis of particular texts, and it is therefore clear why there is a complicated issue of methodology at the highest level of organization (that is, a canonical-theological approach or a religious-historical one).

Canonical Methodology

What is decisive for a canonical approach to Biblical Theology, in my view, is the problem of the Old Testament. This proposition may not seem immediately persuasive, since works of Biblical Theology have been conceived along 'historical' lines. The classic example is von Rad's *Old Testament Theology*,[34] which has proved more influential on interpretation than its main methodological rival, Eichrodt's *Theology of the Old Testament*.[35] Von Rad's work is in reality a work of Biblical Theology, because it traces the action of God in history from the Old Testament to the New. Though von Rad distinguishes his *Theology* from a history-of-religions approach, it has a certain affinity with the latter because of its method, based on historical-critical exegesis, of examining each corpus of the material in turn, in a historical sequence. The picture is built up by a series of accounts of Israel's distinct faith experiences of Yahweh. The methodology is composite, as has been well shown by M. Oeming, who identified four categories used by von Rad: promise-history, tradition-

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[33] Watson, *Text and Truth*, pp. 242-67. He addresses Barr's argument in *Biblical Faith and Natural Theology* (Oxford, 1993), and considers Acts 17, Romans 1 and Psalm 104.

[34] G. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* (2 vols) (Edinburgh, 1962, 1965).

[35] W. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament* (2 vols) (London, 1961, 1967).

history, salvation-history and language-history.[36] But the common denominator is history, and there is a forward development from Old Testament to New.

One of the problems with von Rad's analysis is the uneasy relationship between the history of Israel discovered by historical criticism and the understanding of it expressed by Israel's faith. The proposed apprehension of the meaning of history by faith puts in question the precise role of historical criticism in discovering theological truth. As Oeming expresses it, von Rad's method 'transcends' historical criticism, and in respect of the role of faith in interpretation, he goes on to identify and expound the closeness of von Rad to Gadamer's hermeneutic.[37]

The ambiguous relationship to historical criticism in von Rad is well expressed by C. Seitz. Von Rad uses typology as a means to bridge the gap between an event in the past (that is, Israel's historical expressions of faith) and Christian theological interpretation in the present. That is, the ongoing 'tradition' broadens the significance of older events into the typical. In Seitz's view, however, this is insufficient, because other typologies are thinkable than the New Testament 'fulfilment', and because the category of typology struggles to cope with the fact that the later writers of the Old Testament, captivated by the glory of the event, 'manifestly misdraw the historical picture'.[38]

The problem also emerges starkly in connection with the category of tradition-history. The premise in this case is that the Old Testament writers engage in a reception of and reflection on existing theological traditions. In doing so, they adapt it according to fresh insights arising from new revelatory events. By adopting this perspective von Rad is able to argue that the decisive event of salvation-history that occurs in Christ is neither absolutely new, nor an illegitimate move, since the recognition of this latest saving act of the God of Israel is simply the last in a line of re-

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[36] Oeming showed that von Rad used the related concepts of promise-history, tradition-history, salvation-history, and language-history in his account of the relationship between the testaments; M. Oeming, *Gesamtbiblische Theologien der Gegenwart* (Stuttgart, 1987, second edition), pp. 20-33. Cf. Barr's presentation and evaluation of Oeming's argument: *Concept*, pp. 497-512.

[37] Oeming, *Gesamtbiblische Theologien*, pp. 33, 34-58.

[38] Seitz, 'The Historical-critical Endeavor as Theology', in *Word Without End*, pp. 28-40, here pp. 34-6. The passage cited (Seitz, p. 35) is G. von Rad, 'Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament' in C. Westermann, ed., *Essays on Old Testament Hermeneutics* (Atlanta, 1963), pp. 17-39, here p. 34.

interpretations of tradition in the light of new revelatory events.[39] If this seems cogent on the surface, the small print should not be missed. In a sense the new insights achieved by the biblical writers are re-realizations of existing traditions, and thus imply a validation of the tradition. However, the manner in which the tradition is acted upon is 'charismatic' and 'eclectic', charismatic because it involves free reinterpretation, and eclectic because 'what is really old and obsolete is quietly passed over, and so rejected, by the prophets'.[40] The issue raised by this is not the status of historical criticism as such, but of the Old Testament as revelatory, since parts of it here seem to be in principle superseded.

This discussion of von Rad therefore leads on to the question of the relative status of the testaments in Biblical Theology. Watson, while appreciating von Rad's 'typological interpretation that sees the enfleshed Word as the goal of God's history with Israel', criticizes him for largely not practising it.[41] Perhaps because he ultimately cannot break out of the traditional division between the disciplines of Old and New Testament studies, he is almost exclusively concerned with Old Testament interpretation as such, and 'he emphasizes the *forward* movement of salvation-history [his italics] towards a final actualization, at the expense of the retrospective movement, starting from the final actualization in Jesus, that is essential to the practice of a Christian typological exegesis'.[42] If Christ is 'the Word that was with God in the beginning', this implies not merely that the forward movement of the Old Testament must be complemented by a retrospective movement from fulfilment back to anticipation, but actually preceded by it.[43] An open-ended forward reading, not grounded in the centrality of Christ as witnessed by the whole of Scripture, is bound to lead to relativism and pluralism. (The point finds an echo in Brueggemann's advocacy of pluralism in Old Testament interpretation, and his reluctance, accordingly, to allow Christology a privileged place in it.[44]) Watson's claim, then, is that von Rad's declared

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[39] Ibid., pp. 25-6.

[40] Ibid., p. 25, referring to von Rad's *Theology* (vol. 2, p. 345, German edition).

[41] Watson, *Text and Truth*, p. 205.

[42] Ibid., pp. 205-7.

[43] Ibid., p. 207.

[44] '[R]ecognition of the important role of the church in affirming and passing on the Hebrew canon does not justify interpretations of canonical literature that limit our ability to hear the canonical polyphony of voices in order to conform to patterns of acceptable church doctrine'; Brueggemann et al. in *Theological Introduction*, p. 26.

principles are indeed 'canonical', but that in practice he has simply failed to carry them through.

Watson articulates the relative status of the two testaments further in a passage that criticizes Childs' concern to maintain the independent status of the Old Testament, which, he finds, is bound to lead to 'a radical judaizing of Christianity'.[45] He affirms both that a Christian reading of the Old Testament (which understands it as preparing the way for Jesus) is bound to be distinct from a reading of it in abstraction from this *telos*, and that such a reading must even so have a real connection with 'what the Old Testament texts "originally" or "actually" meant'.[46] This balancing-act aims both to preserve the unity of the testaments in their witness to Christ and to avoid fantastic Christological interpretations. The crucial factor in maintaining the balance is that the Old Testament should be allowed to shape our understanding of the reality revealed by Christ: 'If the scope of the Christ-event is the whole of reality, then there is no danger that any of the breadth and depth of the experience reflected in the Old Testament will be lost.'[47] This seems to me to be entirely right. (I think it is preferable to a remark of Seitz's, in a review of Watson's book: 'The Old Testament has a horizon that is not exhausted in what we can say about Jesus.'[48] This is true only in a certain sense, that is, if Christology is not taken to embrace and express the purpose of the whole biblical revelation. The disagreement between Watson and Seitz at this point is over definitions of 'Christological' and 'Trinitarian'.)

In this connection, however, it is important to observe that Watson has argued, in the same volume, for a recovery of the 'literal sense' in interpretation, supported by speech-act theory. In that context he offers a persuasive reading of Psalm 42, in which he establishes a connection between its original communicative intention (or illocutionary force) and that which it has when used in modern contexts.[49] However, he then contrasts this continuing validity of Psalm 42 with Psalm 137, with its prayer for the destruction of Babylonian children, on the grounds that the latter contradicts 'the speech-act that lies at the centre of Christian scripture, the life, death and resurrection of Jesus as the enfleshment and

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[45] Ibid., 215.

[46] Ibid., pp. 216-17.

[47] Ibid., p. 217.

[48] Seitz, 'Christological Interpretation of Texts and Trinitarian Claims to Truth', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 52 (1999), pp. 208-26, here p. 226.

[49] Watson, *Text and Truth*, pp. 107-19.

the enactment of the divine word'.[50] Because of this word, Psalm 137, although part of Christian Scripture, 'is not permitted to enact its total communicative intention', and moreover should never be used in a Christian liturgical context.[51]

This is the issue: does the Old Testament, in its own communicative intentions, help us understand the full range of the meaning of the Christ-event? Or are parts of the Old Testament's witness ruled out on the basis of a Christology derived from a method that gives priority to New Testament texts? (Watson assembles a number of New Testament texts around the themes of forgiveness and loving enemies as constituting a refutation of Psalm 137:8-9.[52]) Another way of putting the question is in terms of a 'plain sense' of Scripture. Watson and Seitz both affirm the need for this (though Watson prefers the term 'literal sense'), but they apply the point differently, Seitz being critical of Watson's overruling of one part of Scripture by another.[53]

PLAIN SENSE, HOLY WAR, AND CANONICAL METHOD

Can the plain sense of Scripture be defended in the context of a canonical reading? The question is scarcely new, and it has extensive ramifications, including one of consistency between theory and practice. Seitz, in an essay on 'plain sense' in relation to the topic of sexuality, finds a unanimity in the two testaments on the topic of homosexual acts, and asks in consequence for a bolder stance on this in the contemporary atmosphere.[54] This example has the advantage, from a 'plain sense' point of view, that the Old and New Testaments speak with the same voice (although it may be objected that nevertheless the texts in question raise hermeneutical issues that are not easily sidelined). The idea of a 'plain sense', in my view, faces a more immediate test where the Testaments appear to disagree. Psalm 137, and behind it Joshua and the Holy War strand of the Old Testament, is such a case. Here is a test, sharper than most, of the capacity of Biblical Theology to sustain the witness of the Old Testament in its theological synthesizing. The centrality of it as a test-

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[50] Ibid., p. 121.

[51] Ibid.

[52] Ibid.

[53] On the history of interpretation of conflicting texts, see the interesting essay by Gary A. Anderson, 'Is Eve the Problem?', in Seitz and Greene-McCreight eds, *Theological Exegesis*, pp. 96-123.

[54] Seitz, 'Sexuality and Scripture's Plain Sense', *Word Without End*, pp. 319-39

case is evident not only from its prominence among difficulties felt by Bible readers generally, but also in the literature of Biblical Theology. For James Barr the issue is clear. Joshua's destruction of the Canaanites is 'genocide', his view of the matter already expressed by his choice of term. In his view, post-biblical theological reflection teaches us that the Bible is simply wrong on this. He sees it as a good example of his distinction between biblical and doctrinal theology. 'If there was a theology of the Old Testament [meaning operating within the Old Testament], this command and practice, strange and offensive as they may be to us, do much to shape the character of the entire text and must have a central position. As a matter of doctrinal theology, on the other hand, I think it has to be simply repudiated. As a matter of the past, some sense can be made of it; but as a matter of guidance for present belief and action, it cannot be accommodated.' The only way in which he thinks it *might* be accommodated is 'the rather absurd allegorical sense, where the Canaanites become the temptations and sins that beset us'.[55]

Childs, in contrast, who wants to integrate the Holy War strand into his canonical way of thinking, regards the command to Israel to destroy the Canaanites as a unique, unrepeatable event. Asking how the *ḥerem* command can be reconciled with the Old Testament's own critical stance towards violence, he responds to the objection that if killing is wrong today it must have been wrong then by saying: 'The difficulty with this approach to theology is that such a non-historical way of thinking is foreign to the Bible, which does not work with abstract ethical principles.'[56] He goes on: 'The effect of the canonical shaping of the conquest material is that the book of Joshua has been assigned a specific, but time-bound, role in God's economy. The conquest continued to be acknowledged throughout the Old Testament as an integral part of the divine purpose for Israel, but it was never to be repeated. It was theologically rendered inoperative by being consigned wholly to the past. Much like the lost Garden of Eden, it functioned canonically as a picture of a forfeited heritage.'[57] This response is interesting because of its appeal to history as a way of escaping the theological difficulty. While an avenue on to a theological response is intimated in the idea of a forfeited heritage, the conquest has nevertheless been 'theologically rendered inoperative'. If this conclusion does not seem far from Barr's more pointed disqualification it

[55] Barr, *Concept*, p. 492.
[56] Childs, *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context*, p. 77.
[57] Ibid.

may be argued that the consignment of Holy War to the past is here read out of the canon itself.

If the Book of Joshua is to participate in a canonical theology then it must be possible to say what its role is. Rather than begin with the question, 'Did God command Joshua to kill Canaanite children?', we can ask whether this part of the two-testament canon teaches something in particular that other parts do not, and how it does so in relation to Scripture's witness to Christ. (The reading that follows is in a sense a 'forward' reading; but it is prompted by a question about Christ.) The first step is to consider Joshua's position in relation to its immediate canonical environment. This is clear because at the narrative level it continues from the storyline in both Numbers and Deuteronomy, which bring the people of Israel on their journey from Egypt and through the wilderness to the brink of the promised land, all in the context of covenantal promise and obligation. Both narrative and theological factors locate Joshua at a junction in the story. Theological tradition defines Deuteronomy as the end of the Pentateuch, or 'Torah', in the primary sense of the term. Joshua is thus the first step in a new history that leads the people into its land. Joshua as beginning is recognized in the critical theory that places it at the head (after Deuteronomy itself) of the 'Deuteronomistic History'. Strong narrative threads, however, link Joshua to the preceding books, a factor recognized in the critical theory of the Hexateuch, which saw Joshua as an end-point, on the grounds that it realized the promise of land that had run through the Pentateuchal story since God's encounter with Abram in Genesis 12:1-3. In the light of the recent tendency to think of Genesis-Kings as the 'primary history' of the Old Testament (based on narrative continuity, and also congenial to a canonical approach), Joshua has a liminal function. While this term might be used more strictly of Deuteronomy, it is true of Joshua too because it marks the end of the wilderness period and non-possession, yet is itself only a prelude to possessing. It is not yet the story of Israel's life in the land.

When this liminal position of Joshua is understood its relations to its canonical environment can begin to be explored. Facing back towards the Pentateuch, Joshua is the story of a promise fulfilled: 'So Joshua took the whole land, according to all that the LORD had spoken to Moses' (Josh. 11:23). The prelude to this includes the exodus, with its Passover victory over the powers aligned against God, echoed in Joshua 5:10-12, the first Passover feast held in the new land. The conquest itself is a counterpart and continuation of the overcoming of the Egyptian forces that tried to prevent the escape from slavery in that land. The breaking of the power of the

Egyptian *king*[58] finds an echo in Joshua's defeat of a host of *kings* in Canaan (Josh. 12:7-24). This defeat of tyrannical kingship is in turn, as Fretheim has well shown, a reassertion of God's creative purpose in contention with the forces of chaos.[59] Therefore the establishment of Israel in Canaan belongs to the divine purpose to re-create that is signalled in the biblical story at least from the flood-narrative (Gen. 6:5-9:17). Joshua conceives of Israel as a people whose king is Yahweh and which is constituted by an act of deliverance from slavery into freedom, a people whose unity is expressed in its common worship of Yahweh (Josh. 18:1) while its possession of land and wealth is by divine gift and distribution. Yahweh's kingship, furthermore, is mediated, not by a human king (since neither Moses nor Joshua is succeeded by his own heir), but by Yahweh's Torah, as taught by Moses, deposited beside the ark of the covenant, and made Joshua's rule of life (Josh. 1:7-8). This vision is a partial realization of the kingdom and salvation of Yahweh in the earth. The connection between creation and covenant is forged by the covenant-renewal with which Joshua ends (Josh. 24), with its explicit allusion to the primeval history, Terah, Abram, and the polytheistic world in which the re-creative plan was conceived (Josh. 24:2-4), and its basis once again in the 'book of the torah of God' (Josh. 24:26). The conquest of Canaan belongs to this picture of a realization of the kingdom, because it affirms Yahweh's victory over contesting powers, the prelude to Yahweh's rule in this part of the created world.

The Book of Joshua faces forward to the continuing story of Israel in its land. That story is characterized ultimately by the loss of all that was gained under Joshua. (In fact it begins within Joshua, in a strain in the book that insinuates a measure of failure to conquer fully, an echo of the failure of faith that caused the first failure to take the land recorded in Deuteronomy 1. Texts include Josh. 13:1; 15:63.[60]) The worship of Yahweh is compromised by the worship of Baal. The kings of Canaan find spiritual successors in the kings of Israel and Judah. Even the reforming King Josiah is a kind of antitype to Joshua, who remains a minor potentate even as he commands the reform, based on his rediscovery of the 'book of the Torah' (2 Kgs 22:8). His covenant renewal cannot halt the slide of Judah into exile. The march of Yahweh on Canaan to establish his

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[58] The contest between the powers of Yahweh and of Pharaoh is well evoked by W. Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Philadelphia, 1978).

[59] T. E. Fretheim, *Exodus* (Louisville, 1991).

[60] The irony in the texture of Joshua is well elucidated by R. Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist* (New York, 1980).

kingdom there is reversed by his march on Judah, a Holy War turned against the chosen people (the theme is most forcefully brought out in Jeremiah, e.g. Jeremiah 21).

The canonical development of the themes of Holy War and conquest may be illustrated by movements that can be traced in the Books of Psalms and Isaiah. Psalm 2 is a classic expression of the so-called Zion-theology, celebrating Yahweh's victory over enemies and his rule together with the Davidic king on Mt Zion. As such, and with a number of other Zion-Psalms, it provides concepts for Davidic messianism. However, it is located within a work (the Book of Psalms[61]) that knows of the end of the historic Davidic dynasty, and that opens up its horizon to Yahweh's universal rule (Pss 93-99). A similar trend is found in Isaiah, which contains a dispute with Psalm 2, in Isaiah 2:2-4. Here the motifs of Zion are carefully reversed, so that nations come in peace to Jerusalem, and weapons of war become redundant. While the return from exile to Judah can be depicted in terms reminiscent of exodus and conquest (e.g. Isa. 52:7-10; 60:10-14), the larger horizon of Isaiah is eschatological (especially chs 60-66). The divine kingdom will know no bounds. However, the element of victory continues to be represented by the language of conquest, and the pictures of salvation are shot through with those of subjugation (Isa. 61:5-7).

New Testament reflections lead in part to the sayings of peace and forgiveness noted above. Conquest, Passover, covenant and law are all reinterpreted in connection with the life, sufferings and death of Jesus. The victory of God is won in the heavenly places.

Yet it is victory that involves the present world and the powers that hold sway in it. The coming of the kingdom is described in the language of violence at least twice in Jesus' sayings (Matt. 10:34; 11:12). The life and death of Jesus is played out always in the face of authority, both religious and secular. The roles played by Pilate, Herod and Caiaphas show that the gospel is opposed not only in heavenly places but also on earth. 'Give to Caesar what is Caesar's' invites a question and suggests a challenge. The kingdom of God implies a claim to rule where others also stake a claim. The story of the church in Acts continues to be one of contention, now featuring Felix, Festus and Agrippa, and as the story ends with Paul preaching in Rome, Caesar waits in the wings. The final appearance of Rome in the New Testament, in the guise of Babylon, is as the empire

[61] A 'canonical' approach to the Book of Psalms is now common in the study of that book. See for example J. Clinton McCann Jr (ed.), *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter* (JSOTS, 159; Sheffield, 1993).

judged by God in just the kind of Holy War language used in the Old Testament's prophetic Oracles against the Nations (Rev. 17:1-18:24; cf. Jer. 50-51).

The sketch offered here is cursory, of course, and open no doubt to objections on grounds of imbalance. However, it seems to me to be one canonical trajectory. It is not a simple line, for there is a confrontation between peace and war entwined within it. Even so, the line followed was suggested by the question whether the topic of Holy War could in any sense illuminate the person and work of Christ. I think it shows that the idea of conquest and Holy War continue to have a function in theological formulation. This cannot be in such a way as to promote the use of arms in the furtherance of the kingdom, since the church's part in its establishment is to preach it, and make disciples of all nations.

However, one further question needs to be asked. In the account just offered, the theological topics of creation and Torah have played a part. I have not structured the essay overtly in these terms. However, the topics are implied in the location of Joshua within the canonical story from creation to covenant and the organization of God's people under Torah in land. It remains to ask, in this consideration of the canonical function of Joshua, whether it continues to play a part in theological reflection on these topics.[62] One particular application of the conquest has been made by Oliver O'Donovan in his advocacy of a political theology. O'Donovan's basic premise is that the revelation of Yahweh's rule in Israel discloses the nature of all political authority.[63] The three essential components of the divine rule, moreover, are victory (salvation), judgement (Torah) and land (possession). By this means O'Donovan finds that 'divine providence in history' lies behind the authority held by any regime.[64] The eschatological horizon of Christian moral thinking, therefore (which he expounds in

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[62] For some theologians, who place a high premium on the contribution of the Old Testament to theology, the answer is a strong affirmative. K. Miskotte sees Torah as a sign of the life God gives in creation, and a guide in the midst of ongoing covenant life; the address of Torah means walking with God in *his* story with us; 'in the Torah we see the "law" passing over into "gospel" and the "gospel" passing over into "law"'; the cult finds its true meaning in 'the integration of the relationship between God and his people', not apart from 'the renewed passing beyond the cult to daily acts, *to the holy war*, to actual encounter with the earth'; *When the Gods are Silent* (London, 1967), pp. 230-32.

[63] O. O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 45.

[64] Ibid., pp. 45f.

Resurrection and Moral Order[65]), does not preclude the operation of the divine victory in the affairs of the present world.

The elaboration of this thesis cannot be rehearsed here. It is brought to bear at this point to show one possible way in which the topic of conquest may continue to function in theology. This assimilation is not simple, however. O'Donovan makes this clear in a passage in *Resurrection and Moral Order*. Distinguishing between 'historical ends' and 'moral ends', he says that events in history are given significance by their 'end', and in Christianity the end is disclosed in the resurrection of Christ. Historical authority differs from moral authority because it can 'draw together in one narrative, to serve one historical end, contradictory movements...'. Again, 'it can reconcile where moral authority can only judge'. He goes on: 'We must expect to find, then, within the world history which Christ shapes around himself, moral incompatibilities that are reconciled historically.' Joshua is the case in point. And the point is: 'When we read for example, of the conquest of Canaan and the terms of the ban, we will understand the Christological significance of these events only if we suspend the moral question which we immediately wish to put to them.'[66] The moral question remains. Indeed when the unbridled acts of war are compared with 'the form of creaturely order which is shown us by Christ in Gethsemane', they are revealed as 'a contradiction to the moral order'.[67] The wars on Canaan reveal something that must be known before the Incarnation with its 'vindication of the moral order'. The violence of Joshua is thus brought under the judgement of Christ. In the gospel there has been a vindication of the whole created order, far beyond what was anticipated in Joshua. Joshua's victory is assigned to contingencies of the past, along with other Old Testament institutions, while 'Christ turns these fragmentary utterances of God's voice, in warrior triumphs and legislative order, into a history which culminates in the divine manifestation and vindication of created order.'[68]

Presumably a similar case might be made in relation to Psalm 137. Its function in the Book of Psalms has some similarity to the Oracles against the Nations of the prophetic books, especially Jeremiah, where the Holy War, once turned against Judah, is finally turned yet again, back on the oppressor (Jer. 50-51). The movement in that book is an affirmation of Yahweh's ultimate commitment to his purpose to bring the kingdom

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[65] *Resurrection and Moral Order* (Leicester, 1994, second edition).

[66] O'Donovan, *Resurrection*, p. 157.

[67] Ibid., p. 158.

[68] Ibid., *Resurrection*, p. 159.

through Israel/Judah. If Psalm 137 is understood in a similar way, however, it leaves open the question as to the canonical view of the feelings expressed. Such feelings (again in Jeremiah) are elsewhere the subject of divine rebuke (Jer. 12:5-6; 15:19).

In his use of the Old Testament, O'Donovan shows a debt to von Rad. However, he does not make overt use of either tradition-history or typology as categories, and consequently does not directly face the difficulty felt by Seitz about von Rad's effective erasure of the old traditions. Further, while he shares the view (with Barr and Watson in their different ways) that the violent actions of Joshua come under the censure of Christ, he has not simply ruled them out of the canonical court. While Barr could think of no serious theological function for Joshua's wars, O'Donovan brings Joshua within his theological reflection on Christ, and in doing so, has read it as part of Christian theologizing, and used it to advance his thinking about the meaning of Christ.[69]

CONCLUSION

I have considered whether a canonical approach is the best way to do Biblical Theology. In doing so I have reviewed some criticism of this proposal, partly on the grounds that it inhibits theological freedom, and partly that it is incompatible with the historical character of the biblical texts and subject matter. I have tried to make a case for a canonical method, however, on the grounds that it is implied in the concept of Biblical Theology itself, whose central methodological problem is precisely that of the two-testament canon. The canonical approach, however, cannot entirely dispense with a historical dimension, because of the historical nature of the texts, and the impossibility of distinguishing ultimately between religion and theology. But it is essentially in inner-canonical relationships that Biblical Theology is constructed.

The question of canonical method has to do partly with strategies of reading. What is the proper 'direction' of canonical reading, that is, should the Christian read forward from Old Testament to the New? If so, does one try to read the Old Testament first as if without knowledge of the New, as might be implied by a commitment to the 'plain sense'? Or does one explicitly read 'backward to' the Old Testament from the New? To ask

[69] A further possible recourse is to lessen the difficulty of the Holy War by exegetical means, for example by seeing it as metaphorical for the need for absolute loyalty to Yahweh; Moberly, 'Shema', pp. 133-7. In that case it may be asked whether it has the force to establish the victory of Yahweh as one of the planks in the platform of his rule in the world.

these questions is to set up an impossible alternative. Inevitably Christians read the Old Testament in the light of the New, and towards the New; but equally a forward movement is structured into the Old Testament part of the canon, and to fail to observe this could only lead to a misreading (thus with Frei). Furthermore, the contours of an answer to any particular question in Biblical Theology are likely to vary according to the nature of the question.[70]

There are greater difficulties than this, however, and advocates of a canonical method actually proceed in quite different ways. While all agree that canonical theology must be governed by its central subject matter, namely Jesus Christ, this does not in itself solve the problem of the relationship between the testaments. If the canonical approach demands that all parts of the two testaments ought to be heard, it does not follow that they will, since in some accounts parts of the canon can trump other parts. (This was true in Childs' idea of discontinuity between the testaments, in which the New Testament did not accept the Old Testament's concept of covenant in its full range, as well as of Watson's belief that the original communicative intention of Psalm 137 was cancelled by the New Testament's themes of love and forgiveness.) The advocacy of a plain or literal sense is a valuable emphasis, but this way too lie no guarantees of unanimity, because the intention to hear texts according to their plain sense leaves the question how such texts relate to the 'centre' still to be negotiated. (The whole subject of hermeneutics in general is largely left aside in this paper, though of course it ought to be developed in relation to this point. Watson has made important contributions on it, and the topic is the subject of a major project led by Craig Bartholomew.[71])

Readings are affected in the end by factors that go beyond the acceptance of a canonical method. In a closing proposal I have tried to show how a difficult Old Testament topic, the conquest of Canaan, might be assimilated into Biblical Theology. The attempt showed, I think, that such an assimilation is possible, contrary to versions of Christian theology which prefer to filter it out as incompatible with the gospel of love and forgiveness. It also showed, however, how much more is involved in

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[70] Barr is surely right to hold that Biblical Theology may take many forms, and does not have to be co-extensive with volumes dedicated to the subject as such, citing Barth's *Romans*, Hoskyns on John, and von Rad's *Genesis* as examples that fulfil its ideals; *Concept*, p. 143.

[71] Watson, *Text, Church and World*, especially pp. 15-153. Craig Bartholomew, Colin Greene, Karl Möller eds, *Renewing Biblical Interpretation* (Carlisle, 2000), is the first of a projected eight-volume series.

Biblical Theology than exegesis, since the proposal depended on the significant hermeneutical step of supposing that the Old Testament story of God's dealings with Israel was relevant to our understanding of the nature of the kingdom of God as proclaimed and accomplished by Christ, and to our thinking about the sources of political authority in the world generally. Clearly these are disputable assumptions. However, disputes of this sort belong within, and are perhaps the substance of, Biblical Theology itself.

DEAD TO SIN AND ALIVE TO GOD[1]

MARTIN DAVIE, THEOLOGICAL SECRETARY TO THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND COUNCIL FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY

In the weeks before Easter 1779 an Undergraduate at King's College Cambridge called Charles Simeon was racked with a consciousness of his guilt before the judgement seat of God. In the words of his biographer:

> He spent hours trying to reconcile his sense of guilt with the mystery of the sacrifice of Christ as portrayed in the communion service of 1662. He had no evangelical training to throw light on the subject. There was no one he knew to whom he could turn. The skies seemed brazen overhead and when he looked down it was only to see his horrific reflection as a sinner beyond hope. In this frame of mind he suddenly came upon a phrase to the effect that 'the Jews knew what they did when they transferred their sin to the head of their offering.' Like a flash it came to him, 'I can transfer all my guilt to another! ... I will not bear [my sins] on my soul a moment longer'. Looking back in happy retrospect over the years, he recorded later, 'accordingly I sought to lay my sins upon the sacred head of Jesus; and on the Wednesday began to have hope of mercy; on the Thursday that hope increased; on the Friday and Saturday it became more strong; and on the Sunday morning, Easter Day, April 4th, I awoke early with these words upon my heart and lips, "Jesus Christ is risen today! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!" From that hour peace flowed in rich abundance into my soul, and at the Lord's table in our Chapel I had the sweetest access to God through my blessed Saviour.'[2]

One hundred and seventy-five years later another Cambridge Undergraduate, David Watson, was presented with exactly the same answer to his awareness of sin. In his autobiography *You are my God* he recalls a breakfast time conversation with John Collins, then curate at All Souls Langham Place in London, that was to lead to his conversion. As he records the matter, Collins raised the issue of his need for God's forgiveness, and this led into an explanation of how this forgiveness was made possible by the death of Christ:

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1 This lecture was given as the Tyndale Doctrine Lecture in 1999.

2 H. E. Hopkins, *Charles Simeon of Cambridge* (London, 1977), p. 28.

He explained that... our primary need of God consists in our need for forgiveness. In countless ways we have broken God's laws, we have gone our own way, we have done our own thing. That is why God is naturally unreal in the experience of us all, until something is done about it. Surprisingly, I did not need much convincing about this. I knew there were some things in my life of which I was ashamed. I would not like the whole of my life to be exposed. I could also see that, logically, this was a possible explanation for the sense of God's remoteness and unreality. If he did exist and I had turned my back on him, it followed that there would be a breakdown of communication.

'Yes,' I said after further discussion, 'I'm prepared to admit that I have sinned and so need forgiveness.'

John then described the next step as believing that Christ had died for my sins. 'Oh dear,' I thought to myself. 'Here are those religious clichés which don't mean a thing. Anyway, how can the death of Jesus all those years ago possibly have any relevance to me today?' John unexpectedly took a piece of toast and placed it on his upturned left hand.

'Let this hand represent you, and this toast represent your sin.' Looking at the semi-burnt piece of cold toast I thought it was a fair analogy. 'Now, let my right hand represent Jesus, who had no sin on him at all. There is a verse in the Bible which speaks about the cross like this: "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one of us to our own way; and the Lord (God in heaven) has laid on him (Jesus) the sin of us all."' (Isa.53: 6). As he said that, John transferred the toast from his left hand to his right hand. 'Now' he said, once again with that winsome smile, almost like a chess player saying checkmate, 'where is your sin?'

'I suppose my sin is on Jesus,' I replied, going along with his analogy. In my heart I was beginning to see it, even though my mind wanted something much more intellectually profound. Perhaps that was the meaning of the cross. Perhaps Jesus did somehow take upon himself the sin and guilt of us all so that we, sinners though we all are, could be free to know the love and forgiveness of God without any barrier at all.[3]

These accounts of the events leading up to the conversion of two of the most influential Evangelical leaders of their respective generations point us to the centrality of the idea of penal substitution for Evangelical Christianity. To be an Evangelical Christian has traditionally meant not only believing in Jesus Christ, but believing also that the burden of our

[3] D. Watson, *You are my God* (London, 1983), pp. 19-20

sin and consequent guilt was carried by him on the cross and by being so carried was done away with. There have been those within the Evangelical movement who have put forward a different understanding of the cross, but they have, on this subject at least, been outside the Evangelical mainstream.[4] J. I. Packer is thus entirely correct to declare in his 1974 Tyndale Lecture *What did the Cross Achieve?* that belief in penal substitution 'is a distinguishing mark of the worldwide evangelical fraternity'.[5]

Like most of Evangelical theology, belief in penal substitution was not something that was invented *de novo* by the first fathers of Evangelicalism in the eighteenth century. It was instead an interpretation of the meaning of the cross which had been a central element in the teaching of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Protestant orthodoxy, but which had been eclipsed from the end of the seventeenth century onwards by the rise of the dominance of moralism and rationalism within both the Anglican and Dissenting traditions.

The fact that penal substitution can be found in the teaching of the sixteenth-century Reformers is easy to demonstrate. Three examples will serve to illustrate the point.

Firstly, in a famous passage from his 1531 commentary on Galatians Luther declares:

> Hereby it appeareth that the doctrine of the Gospel (which of all other is most sweet and full of singular consolation) speaketh nothing of our works

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4 For example, in his book *The Problem of the Cross* (London, 1919) the Liberal Evangelical V. H. Storr rejects the traditional doctrine of Penal Substitution as something which is 'artificial, hard, external, and too often pictures God as scheming to overcome a difficulty in which he has been placed by human sin' (p. 75). He argues instead that the cross is simply a demonstration of God's holiness and love, showing 'what sin meant to God, and what it cost to forgive it' (p. 85). Likewise the distinguished Evangelical missiologist Max Warren in his book *Interpreting the Cross* (London, 1966) rejects the idea of the: 'pacifying of an angry God, as though sin and its punishment could be bought off by an innocent victim being substituted for the guilty. That is to make the atonement wholly external and fundamentally unreal' (p. 24). He prefers to say: 'What was wrought out for us men and for our salvation by the coming in the flesh of Jesus Christ and by his living and dying, was both a revelation of the human heart, "deceitful above all things and desperately wicked" (Jer. 17.9, AV), crucifying goodness, and also a revelation of the heart of God which utterly condemns evil but loves the evil doer even when he is doing evil' (p. 24).

5 J. I. Packer, *Celebrating the Saving Work of God* (Carlisle, 1998), p. 85.

> or of the works of the law, but of the unspeakable and inestimable mercy and love of God towards us unworthy and lost men: to wit, that our most merciful father, seeing us to be oppressed and overwhelmed with the curse of the law, and so to be holden under the same that we could never be delivered from it by our own power, sent his only Son onto the world and laid upon him the sins of all men, saying: Be thou Peter that denier; Paul that persecutor, blasphemer and cruel oppressor; David that adulterer; that sinner which did eat the apple in Paradise; that thief which hanged upon the cross; and briefly, be thou the person which hath committed the sins of all men; see therefore that thou pay and satisfy for them. Here now cometh the law and saith: I find him a sinner, and that such a one as hath taken upon him the sins of all men, and I see no sins else but in him; therefore let him die upon the cross. And so he setteth upon him and killeth him, by this means the whole world is purged and cleansed from all sins, and so delivered from death and all evils. Now sin and death being abolished in this one man, God would see nothing in the whole world, especially if it did believe, but a mere cleansing and righteousness.[6]

Secondly in Book II.xvi of the 1559 edition of the *Institutes* John Calvin writes that it was not by accident that Christ died as a criminal, but that the way he died points us to what was really taking place:

> ...when he is placed as a criminal at the bar, where witnesses are brought to give evidence against him, and the mouth of the judge condemns him to die, we see him sustaining the character of an offender and evil doer. Here we must attend to two points which hath both been foretold by the prophets, and tend admirably to comfort and confirm our faith. When we read that Christ was led away from the judgment-seat to execution, and was crucified between thieves, we have a fulfillment of the prophecy, which is quoted by the evangelist, 'He was numbered with the transgressors' (Is. liii.12; Mark xv.28). Why was it so? That he might bear the character of a sinner, not of a just or innocent person, inasmuch as he met death on account not of innocence, but of sin. On the other hand, when we read that he was acquitted by the same lips that condemned him (for Pilate was forced again and again to bear public testimony to his innocence), let us call to mind what is said by another prophet, 'I restored that which I took not away' (Ps. lxix.4). Thus we perceive Christ representing the character of a sinner and a criminal, while at the same time, his innocence shines forth, and it becomes manifest that he suffers for another's and not for his own crime. He therefore suffered under Pontius Pilate, being thus, by the formal sentence of the judge, ranked among criminals, and yet he is declared

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[6] M. Luther, *A Commentary on St Paul's Epistle to the Galatians* (Cambridge, 1978), p. 272.

> innocent by the same judge, when he affirms that he finds no cause of death in him. Our acquittal is in this – that the guilt which made us liable to punishment was transferred to the head of the Son of God (Is. liii.12). We must specially remember this substitution in order that we may not be all our lives in trepidation and anxiety, as if the just vengeance, which the Son of God transferred to himself, were still impending over us.[7]

Thirdly, in his *Catechism* of 1570 the Elizabethan Dean of St Paul's, Alexander Nowell, explains:

> That Christ suffered not only a common death in the sight of men, but also was touched with the horror of eternal death: he fought and wrestled as it were hand to hand, with the whole army of hell: before the judgment seat of God he put himself under the heavy judgment and grievous severity of God's punishment: he was driven into most hard distress: for us he suffered and went through horrible fears, and most bitter griefs of mind, to satisfy God's just judgment in all things, and to appease his wrath. For to sinners whose persons Christ did hear bear, not only the sorrows and pains of present death are due, but also of death to come and everlasting: so when he did take upon him and bear both the guiltiness and just judgment of mankind, which was undone, and already condemned, he was tormented with so great trouble and sorrow of mind that he cried out, 'My God, my God, why hast thou foresaken me?'[8]

Turning now to the seventeenth century, three further examples will demonstrate that the same line of thought was central to the thought of orthodox Protestant theologians in that century as well.

My first example is taken from the treatise *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* by the great Puritan theologian John Owen, first published in 1647. In this work he argues that we are under 'obligation' before God to pay the penalty our sins deserve and that:

> the death of Christ made satisfaction in the very thing that was required by the obligation. He took away the curse, by 'being made a curse,' Gal iii: 13. He delivered us from sin, being 'made sin,' (2 Cor. 5:21). He underwent death, that we might be delivered from death. All our debt was in the curse of the law, which he wholly underwent. Neither do we read of any relaxation of the punishment in the Scripture, but only a commutation of the person; which being done, 'God condemned sin in the flesh of his Son,' Romans

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7 J. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, II.xvi.5 (Grand Rapids, 1975), pp. 438-9

8 G. E. Corrie (ed.), *Nowell's Catechism* (Cambridge, 1853), p. 159.

> viii.3, Christ standing in our stead: and so reparation was made unto God, and satisfaction given for all the detriment that might accrue to him by the sin and rebellion of them for whom this satisfaction was made. His justice was violated, and he 'sets forth Christ to be a propitiation' for our sins, 'that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus,' Romans iii.25,26.[9]

My second example is taken from a series of lectures on the *Apostles' Creed* which were given by John Pearson, the future Bishop of Chester, under the Commonwealth, and which were published in 1659.

Commenting on the word 'dead' in the fourth article of the creed he writes:

> We all had sinned, and so offended the justice of God, and by an act of that justice the sentence of death passed upon us: it was necessary therefore that Christ our surety should die, to satisfy the justice of God both for that iniquity as the propitiation for our sins, and for that penalty, as he which was to bear our griefs. God was offended with us, and he must die who was to reconcile him to us. *For when we were enemies*, saith St. Paul, *we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son.* (Rom. 5:10)[10]

My third example is from the *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* by the Reformed theologian Francis Turretin, published between 1679 and 1685, a work which represents the final flowering of the Genevan Calvinist tradition at the end of the seventeenth century.

Responding to the argument of the Unitarian theologian Faustus Socinus that Christ's death on the cross was merely an example of patience and love he maintains that Isaiah 53, understood as a prophecy of Christ, rules this notion out:

> All things which indicate a true satisfaction occur here: the moving and meritorious cause (viz, our sins, not his own): he was wounded for our transgressions (vv.4-6); and the bearing of punishment because he hath borne our griefs (v.4); the imputation of our sins to Christ by God as a Judge – 'the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all' (v.6); the voluntary undertaking of Christ as our surety because he was afflicted and opened not his mouth (v.8); an expiation for sin and full payment of the debt; because he laid down his life for sin and was taken from prison and from judgment (vv.8-10). Now with what propriety could all this be said if Christ had laid

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[9] J. Owen, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* (London, 1959), p. 157.

[10] J. Pearson, *An Exposition of the Creed* (Oxford, 1870), p. 386.

> down his life merely to exhibit an example of patience and love and not to make satisfaction for sin?[11]

The six examples uniformly assert that the teaching of Scripture is that Christ satisfied the demands of God's justice by bearing the penalty for sin demanded by God's law in his own person on the cross.

If we now move from description to evaluation and ask what is the value of this way of looking at the cross, it seems to me that it has three great strengths.

- It attempts to take seriously the teaching of Scripture. We can see this clearly in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century examples we have looked at, all of which take their orientation not from a priori speculation about how God might have saved humankind from sin but from the teaching of the Bible concerning what God has done to save us from sin. The same is also true of modern expositions of the doctrine such as Packer's Tyndale lecture mentioned above or H. E. Guillebaud's *Why the Cross?*[12] or John Stott's *The Cross of Christ.*[13]

Methodologically this has to be the correct starting point since only God truly knows why he sent his Son to die for us and the primary and definitive place in which God speaks to us is through the pages of the Scriptures which his Spirit inspired (2 Tim. 3:16, 2 Pet. 1:21, John 15:26-27).

- It takes seriously the fact that what took place on the cross had to do with the satisfaction of God's justice.

Thomas Cranmer makes this point brilliantly in his 1547 Homily *Of the Salvation of Mankind* when he talks about:

> the great wisdom of God in this mystery of our redemption, who hath so tempered his justice and mercy together, that he would neither by his justice condemn us unto the everlasting captivity of the devil, remediless for ever without mercy, nor by his mercy deliver us clearly, without justice or the

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[11] F. Turretin *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* vol. 2 (Philadelphia, PA, 1994), p. 429.

[12] H. E. Guillebaud, *Why the Cross?*, 2nd ed. (London, 1946).

[13] J. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Leicester, 1986).

> payment of a just ransom: but with his endless mercy he joined his most upright and equal justice.[14]

Cranmer's insistence that God's justice as well as his love had to be satisfied by the death of Christ embodies an important aspect of biblical teaching. According to the biblical witness God is a righteous God, a God who does what is just and right, upholding the righteous, and punishing the wicked. Thus for example the Psalmist declares:

> The Lord judges the peoples; judge me, O Lord, according to my righteousness and according to the integrity that is in me. O let the evil of the wicked come to an end, but establish thou the righteous, thou who triest the minds and hearts, thou righteous God. My shield is with God who saves the upright in heart. God is a righteous judge, and a God who has indignation every day. (Ps. 7:8-11)

Similarly Psalm 119:137 exclaims: 'Righteous art thou, O Lord and right are thy judgements', Abraham asks rhetorically in Genesis 18:25 'Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?', and Zephaniah states concerning Jerusalem: 'The Lord within her is righteous, he does no wrong; every morning he shows forth his justice' (Zeph. 3:5).

It is this just and righteous God who has acted for us in Christ, and thus Paul declares that the good news of what he has done for us reveals the 'righteousness of God' (Rom. 1:17), and in a key passage later on in Romans he maintains that God's offering of Jesus on the Cross as an atoning sacrifice

> was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins; it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies him who has faith in Jesus. (Rom. 3:25-26)

As C. E. B. Cranfield comments, what Paul is saying here is that:

> God, because in his mercy he willed to forgive sinful men, and, being truly merciful, willed to forgive them righteously, that is, without in any way condoning their sin, purposed to direct against his own very self in the

[14] J. Leith, (ed.) *Creeds of the Churches*, rev. ed. (Oxford, 1973), pp. 240-41

> person of his Son the full weight of that righteous wrath that they deserved.[15]

It is this truth which the doctrine of Penal Substitution has consistently upheld.

- It does justice to those places in the Bible where Christ is said to have suffered in our place.

Examples of such verses would be:

Mark 10:45: 'For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.'

2 Corinthians 5:21: 'For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.'

Galatians 3:13: 'Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us – for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who hangs on a tree."'

1 Peter 2:24: 'He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.'

In each of these verses the clear teaching is that Christ did something for us in our place, and this is a truth which the doctrine of Penal Substitution has rightly emphasised. It should also be noted however that it is an unfair criticism of the doctrine to say that its emphasis on Christ acting on our behalf means that it separates Christ from us in a way that makes it difficult to see how what Christ has done can be credited to our account. As well as stressing that Christ acted on our behalf as our substitute those who have advocated this way of looking at the cross have also wanted to say that what Christ has done affects us because we are united to him.

Thus Luther writes in his tract *The Freedom of a Christian* published in 1520 that through faith the believer is united to Christ like a bride to her bridegroom:

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[15] C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Edinburgh, 1975), p. 217.

> ...Christ is full of grace, life and salvation. The soul is full of sins, death, and damnation. Now let faith come between them and sins, death, and damnation will be Christ's, while grace, life and salvation will be the soul's; for if Christ is a bridegroom, he must take upon himself the things which are his bride's and bestow upon her the things that are his. If he gives his body and very self, how shall he not give her all that is his? And if he takes the body of the bride, how shall he not take all that is hers?
>
> Here we have a most pleasing vision not only of communion but of a blessed struggle and victory and salvation and redemption. Christ is God and man in one person. He has neither sinned nor died, and is not condemned, and he cannot sin, die, or be condemned; his righteousness, life, and salvation are unconquerable, eternal, omnipotent. By the wedding ring of faith he shares in the sins, death, and pains of hell which are his bride's. As a matter of fact, he makes them his own and acts as if they were his own and as if he himself had sinned; he suffered died, and descended into hell that he might overcome them all. Now since it was such a one who did all this, and death and hell could not swallow him up. These were necessarily swallowed up by him in a mighty duel; for his righteousness is greater than all the sins of all men, his life stronger than death, his salvation more invincible than hell.[16]

In similar fashion, Packer notes that:

> Anticipating the rationalistic criticism that guilt is not transferable and the substitution described, if real, would be immoral, our model now invokes Paul's description of the Lord Jesus Christ as the second man and last Adam, who involved us in his sin-bearing as truly as Adam involved us in his sinning (1 Cor. 15:45ff, Rom. 5:12ff.).[17]

In other words, just as we are lost in sin because we are united to Adam, so we are saved from sin because we are united to Christ.

There is thus much to be said for the doctrine of Penal Substitution and one can see why it has been widely accepted in Protestant theology. However in its traditional formulation it is also vulnerable to four serious criticisms:

1. Its use of the term 'propitiation' to describe what Christ has done is misleading.

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[16] M. Luther, *Three Treatises* 2nd rev. ed. (Philadelphia, PA, 1970), pp. 286-7

[17] Packer, *Celebrating the Saving Work of God,* p. 110

2. It is trapped in a retributivist view of punishment which takes an insufficiently serious view of the way that God deals with sin.
3. It underplays the seriousness of God's response to sin.
4. It has a tendency to underplay the importance of the resurrection.

To take the first point first, we have already seen in the quotations from Owen and Pearson the use of the word 'propitiation' to describe the effect of God's offering himself on our behalf. The use of this term is taken from the AV translation of three New Testament passages, Romans. 3:25, 1 John 2:2 and 4:10. The basic idea being expressed by the use of this term is that the death of Christ appeases God's judicial wrath so he ceases to be angry with us, and the use of the term is still defended by Conservative Evangelical writers today. Thus John Stott declares:

> It is God himself who in holy wrath needs to be propitiated, God himself who undertook to do the propitiating, and God himself who in the person of his Son died for the propitiation of our sins. Thus God took his own loving initiative to appease his own righteous anger by bearing it in his own Son when he took our place and died for us.[18]

In spite of the careful qualifications of the idea of propitiation made by Stott, and in spite of the linguistic arguments in favour of propitiation put forward by Leon Morris in his *Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*,[19] on the grounds that in the LXX and contemporary Greek literature the nouns *hilasterion* and *hilasmos* used in the passages in question would have been understood to mean 'propitiation', the use of the term remains highly problematic.

This is because what must ultimately determine our translation of these nouns is not primarily the evidence of the LXX or contemporary Greek literature, but the sense that we can make of them in the context provided by the theology of the books in which they are found and of the New Testament as a whole. Seen in this context the severe comments by George Caird about the use of this term still seem justified:

> One term, however, notwithstanding its use in the AV, must be discarded from the start. There was not in 1611, nor is there today, any justification for the use of 'propitiation' in this connection. 'Propitiate' is a transitive verb which requires a personal object, and which entails a change of attitude in the person propitiated. But in the New Testament atonement in all its

[18] Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, p. 175.

[19] L. Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* (London,1955), chs 4-5.

> forms has its origin in the unchanging purpose and love of God. If we are true to New Testament evidence, we shall not frame any sentence about atonement or salvation with Jesus as its subject which could not equally have God as subject. The only exceptions, more apparent than real, are sentences which speak of Jesus' obedience to the will of the Father and understanding his purpose. The continued use of 'propitiation' in theological debate is more the waving of a partisan flag than an aid to understanding.[20]

The two key points that Caird makes here are that the concept of propitiation demands:

a) a personal object who is propitiated

b) a change of attitude in the person thus propitiated

In the New Testament neither of these elements is present.

As Stott himself admits, in the New Testament God is never said to be the object of propitiation: 'it is true that nowhere in the New Testament is God explicitly said to be propitiated'.[21] Furthermore God's attitude to us does not change. *We* are reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5:18-19). He is *not* reconciled to us. God's attitude to us before, during and after the atonement is his unchanging love as Romans. 5:8-10, and 1 John 4:8 make clear, and, as we shall see, it is precisely the opposition to us of this unchanging love that make atonement both possible and necessary.

P. T. Forsyth takes us to the heart of the issue in his book *The Cruciality of the Cross* when he declares that the cross of Christ came from God's grace it did not make God gracious:

> We can no longer speak of a strife of attributes in God the father, justice set against mercy, and judgment against grace, till an adjustment was effected by the Son. There can be no talk of any mollification of God, or any inducement whatever, offered by either man or some third party to procure grace. Procured grace is a contradiction in terms. The atonement did not procure grace, it flowed from grace. What was historically offered to God was also eternally offered by God, within the Godhead's unity. The redeemer was God's gift.[22]

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[20] G. B. Caird & L. D. Hurst, *New Testament Theology* (Oxford, 1994), p. 137.

[21] J. S. Stott, *The Letters of John* rev. ed. (Leicester, 1988), p. 87.

[22] P. T. Forsyth, *The Cruciality of the Cross* (London, 1909), pp. 40-41.

It might be argued that those like Stott who continue to uphold the use of propitiation would agree with what Forsyth says about the cross as the fruit rather than the cause of God's gracious attitude towards us. Stott, for example, declares 'Let us be clear that he did not change from wrath to love, or from enmity to grace, since his character is unchanging.'[23]

However, precisely in arguing this point they would be undermining the case for propitiation, because if God's attitude is one of unchanging love and grace then it does not need to be changed, and if it is not changed then there is no propitiation.

If we then ask what translation would be preferable to propitiation in Romans 3:25, 1 John 2:2 and 1 John 4:10 I would argue that the RSV is right to use the word *expiation* since this brings out the key truth that what takes place through the saving work of Christ is not a change in God's attitude, but a change in us by means of which our sins are done away with.

If we take Romans 3:25 first of all, it is clear that in Romans the death of Christ saves us from the wrath of God. We can see this in Romans 5:9: 'Since therefore, we are now justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.'

However as Judith Gundry-Wolf notes in her article 'Expiation, Propitiation, Mercy Seat' in the *Dictionary of Paul and his Letters*,

> that still does not mean that Christ's death propitiated God. For Paul the wrath of God is God's judgment (see Rom. 2:5, 3:5-6) which destroys all unholiness and sin. In the light of the threatening wrath of God, the need of sinners can be said to be not *the transformation of God's attitude towards them* but the transformation of their *sinful existence before God* through its destruction and new creation. This transformation of sinners is precisely the significance Paul sees in the death and resurrection of Christ.[24]

If we then go on to look at 1 John 4:10, it is again clear that the change takes place in us not God. 1 John 4:10 is completely explicit that it was *because* God loved us that he sent his Son to deal with our sins. The purpose of Christ's death as 1 John portrays it is not to persuade God to look favourably upon us but to deal with our sin. Thus 1 John 1:7 declares, 'the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin'. As Stott observes: 'this is the only explicit reference in the letter to the saving power of the death of Jesus Christ' and what it tells us is that:

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[23] Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, p. 174.

[24] G. F. Hawthorne, R. P. Martin, D. G. Reid (eds), *Dictionary of Paul and his Letters* (Leicester, 1993), p. 282, italics hers.

> God has made provision to purify us from whatever sin would otherwise mar our fellowship with him or each other. This provision is *the blood of Jesus, his Son*, that is to say, the virtue of his death for our sins.[25]

In a similar fashion, in 1 John 1:9 God's forgiveness of our sins is linked with the fact that he cleanses us from all unrighteousness. In the theology of 1 John, therefore, the purpose of the death of Christ is not to appease God, but to purify and cleanse us from that which blocks our relationship with him, and 1 John 2:2 and 4:10 must be interpreted in this light.

To move on to the next criticism, we need to note first of all that a retributivist view of punishment is one that sees the purpose of punishment as inflicting retribution on a person committing an offence. Thus a parking offence might be met with a parking ticket, burglary with imprisonment and murder with life imprisonment or death. On a retributivist view of punishment in each of these cases the offender would be getting the punishment he or she deserved. They would be getting their 'just desserts'. The traditional view of penal substitution has operated within this ethical framework. The offence we have committed is sin against a holy God and the just punishment for sin is the physical death of the body and the eternal death of the soul. This is what we deserved, but it is not inflicted upon us because on the cross God in Christ took the punishment for us.

For example, Turretin writes:

> If Christ did not suffer eternal death, but only a temporal death of three days, still no less did he pay what we owed as to infinity of punishment. If it was not infinite as to duration, still it was such equivalently, as to value on account of the infinite dignity of the person suffering. For it was the suffering not of a mere man, but of the true God, who purchased the church with his blood (Acts 20:28) so that what was deficient in finite time is supplied by the condition of the divine person (which added an infinite weight to a temporary passion). Yet we may not infer that as the person suffering was infinite, one drop of his blood was sufficient for our redemption. Although any suffering whatever might have infinite value by reason of the sufferer, still his death alone could possess infinite value objectively in respect of the Judge inflicting it. The dignity of the person can increase the dignity of the punishment endured, so that the more exalted the person is who suffers, so much the heavier is the suffering to be

[25] Stott, *The Letters of John*, p. 81.

> considered; yet it cannot satisfy that species of punishment denounced by the law. Death alone answers to and fulfils the demands of law and justice.[26]

Working along the same lines, Packer argues that the Cross shows us:

> that God's demands remain what they were, and that God's law of retribution, which our conscience declares to be right, has not ceased to operate in his world, nor ever will; but that in our case the law has operated already, so that all our sins, past present and even future, have been covered by Calvary.
>
> So our conscience is pacified by the knowledge that our sins have already been judged and punished, however strange the statement may sound, in the person and death of another. Bunyan's pilgrim before the cross loses his burden, and Toplady can assure himself that:
>
> If thou my pardon has secured,
> And freely in my room endured
> The whole of wrath divine,
> Payment God cannot twice demand,
> First from my bleeding surety's hand
> And then again from mine.[27]

There can be no denying the emotive appeal of this way of viewing the cross; however, the problem with it is that the retributive view of punishment (which does not have explicit biblical backing) is difficult to justify. It is open to the simple question 'What is the point of meeting an offence with a penalty?'. The classic answer to this question is that punishment restores the moral balance of the universe which has been disrupted by sin.

As St Augustine put it:

> If there were sins and no consequent misery, that order... is dishonoured by lack of equity... the penal state is imposed to bring [the universe] into order. Indeed it compels the dishonourable state [of the sinner] to become harmonised with the honour of the universe, so that the penalty of sin corrects the dishonour of sin.[28]

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[26] Turretin, *Institutes*, p. 436.

[27] Packer, *Celebrating the Saving Work of God*, p. 110.

[28] Augustine, *On Free Will*, 111: IX: 26.

Vernon White comments in his book *Atonement and Incarnation*:

> A working definition of the distinctive meaning of retribution therefore emerges. Retributive reaction to offence is good, and has meaning, in so far as it harmonises, corrects imbalance and restores order. It must occur not just to deter others, not just to underline the moral seriousness of the offence, not just to bring the offender to a proper and painful sense of shame, but because retributive suffering just *is* the proper balance to sin: it sets it in proper relief; it 'harmonises' it in terms of the overall standards, structures, and fabric of the moral universe. Things are set right by retributive suffering in the way in which a whole canvas is set right when its black spots are painted into the shadow of a sunlit landscape. Conceived in this way it therefore becomes a necessity, a categorical moral imperative: it has to happen, whether or not the offender is reformed by it, for his sin remains a moral blot on the landscape until the balancing suffering is introduced in this way.[29]

Linked with this idea of the restoration of the moral balance is the idea of the restoration of the status quo. The proper moral order of the universe, which has been disrupted by sin is restored when sin is met with appropriate punishment. This is at first sight a very attractive theory of punishment and one to which we instinctively respond. However, as White goes on to point out it is seriously flawed.

1. The status quo is never properly restored.
2. It is difficult to see how the suffering of an offender balances out the suffering caused by the original offence.
3. It doesn't work in the field of personal relationships since the infliction of punishment cannot by itself restore a broken relationship.

He maintains that we need to argue for a re-creative rather than a retributivist view of punishment. We need to seek to create a new kind of good rather than try to restore the balance of the past. In fact, White argues, the only justification for a retributivist view of punishment is that amongst human beings it prevents punishment going too far and thus protects their human rights. And as he says 'here we are bound to put down another theological marker relating quite specifically to atonement theory. For this last point betrays the fact that retributive logic actually demands a

[29] V. White, *Atonement and Incarnation* (Cambridge, 1991), p. 94.

less strenuous reaction to evil than recreative logic. It is satisfied with less.'[30]

This moves us on to the third criticism of the traditional doctrine of penal substitution, which is that it takes an insufficiently serious view of the way God deals with sin. The point of criticism here is that the doctrine suggests that God is not that concerned about sin as such, but only with punishment being inflicted upon sins committed. To put it simply, it suggests that God is happy as long as the *penalty* for sin is paid by someone. If we ask why the Atonement 'works' the view presented by theologians such as Turretin is simply that God is content because the infinite penalty demanded for sin, has been paid for by the infinite worth of the suffering of the Son of God.

As White explains, the problem with this approach is that paradoxically it does not take seriously enough the concern that the Bible and the Protestant tradition rightly has with God's justice and his wrath as God's total rejection of sin, and is less easy to combine with a stress on God's love than an alternative 're-creative' approach.

Looking at how what he has said about the retributivist theory relates specifically to the atonement, White notes that given the propitiatory, juridical and substitutionary language used to describe the atonement in the Bible and the Christian tradition:

> *prima facie* it certainly does seem that a prior retributivist logic fits naturally into these Biblical concerns and theological categories, to explicate the atonement and the basis of reconciliation: God's anger burns until the demands of justice, conceived as a balance of suffering for sin, are met; and either because we are unable to suffer sufficiently to balance the books, or because God's love intervenes, this distribution of penal suffering is placed entirely on Christ in our stead: his is the symbolic or equivalent reparation for what we do not or cannot pay back ourselves.
>
> Yet in fact precisely the contrary is true. If the retributivist logic is replaced by a recreative logic, these Biblical concerns surrounding the Christ event will fare better, not worse. A recreative logic actually does more justice, not less, to the wrath of God, because, as already indicated, it takes a more 'strenuous' reaction to deal with the redemption of a whole situation, compared to the limited notion of a mere retributive balance, or even mere destruction. Furthermore, as such, it finds wrath and justice wholly

[30] Ibid., p. 99.

> compatible with the aims of love, and does not have to trade them off against each other, as does the logic of retributive penal substitution.[31]

It is sometimes argued that biblical teaching concerning the condemnation of the damned at the last judgement supports the concept of retribution since it depicts God as inflicting upon them a purely retributive punishment in which there is no re-creative element at all. Moreover, since it is God himself who inflicts retribution it follows that retribution must be a moral good.

Two responses can be made to this argument.

Firstly, it is now widely accepted on the basis of biblical texts such as John 3:17-21 and Galatians 6:7-8 that the fate of the damned is not simply a punishment imposed upon them by God, but is a fate which they themselves have chosen.

Thus Kallistos Ware writes in *The Orthodox Way*:

> If anyone is in hell, it is not because God has imprisoned him there, but because that is where he himself has chosen to be. The lost in hell are self-condemned, self-enslaved; it has been rightly said that the doors of hell are locked *on the inside*.[32]

In a similar fashion Packer states in *Knowing God* that the pains of hell

> are not arbitrary inflictions; they represent, rather a conscious growing into the state in which one has chosen to be. The unbeliever has preferred to be by himself, without God, defying God, having God against him, and he shall have his preference.[33]

Eternal damnation is then not a matter of God inflicting retributive punishment upon people, it is a matter of his respecting the freedom he has given them, even if they exercise that freedom to reject him for ever.

Secondly, the fact that the fate of the damned has no re-creative element in it can be seen to reflect the fact that the final judgement is precisely the *final* judgement. It is the point beyond which there is no future for the damned except the dreadful fate which they have chosen. This is not because God has ceased to care for them, or would not re-create them if he could, but because they have reached a point where nothing more can be

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[31] Ibid., p. 102.

[32] K. Ware, *The Orthodox Way* (London, 1979). p. 181.

[33] J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (London, 1981), p. 170.

done for them – even by God. C. S. Lewis makes the point brilliantly in *The Problem of Pain*:

> In the long run the answer to all those who object to the doctrine of hell, is itself a question: 'What are you asking God to do?' To wipe out their past sins and, at all costs, to give them a fresh start, smoothing every difficulty and offering every miraculous help? But he has done so on Calvary. To forgive them? They will not be forgiven. To leave them alone? Alas, I am afraid that is what he does.[34]

However, the fact that at the end of time God simply gives over the damned to their fate does not mean that up to that point he has not sought their re-creation.

It might also be worth asking whether we can actually see the existence of hell itself as a moral good. If that which is good is that which is desired by God, and if what he desires is the salvation of all people (Rom. 11:32, 1 Tim. 2:4, 2 Pet. 3:9) then it could be argued that hell is precisely *not* what is desired by God and is therefore not good. The existence of the damned in hell would then be a form of existence which God has rejected for his creatures but which they in their perversity and pride insist on hanging on to.

The fourth and final criticism of the doctrine of Penal Substitution in its traditional form is that it does tend to downplay the importance of the resurrection.

John Stott for instance, argues that the purpose of the resurrection is to make known what took place on the Cross:

> Of course the resurrection was essential to confirm the efficacy of his death, as his incarnation had been to prepare for its possibility. But we must insist that Christ's work of sin bearing was finished on the cross, that the victory over the devil, sin, and death was won there, and that what the resurrection did was to vindicate that Jesus whom men had rejected, to declare with power that he is the Son of God, and publicly to confirm that his sin-bearing death had been effective for the forgiveness of sins.[35]

This way of understanding the relationship between the cross and resurrection has a long heritage in the Protestant tradition. Thus Calvin declares in his commentary on John's Gospel:

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[34] C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (Glasgow, 1977), p. 116.

[35] Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, p. 238.

> the whole accomplishment of our salvation, and all the separate parts of it, are contained in (Christ's) death.[36]

However, elsewhere Calvin himself teaches us better. Thus he writes in Book II of the *Institutes*:

> although in his death we have an effectual completion of salvation, because by it we are reconciled to God, satisfaction is given to his justice, the curse is removed, and the penalty paid; still it is not by his death, but by his resurrection, that we are said to be begotten again to a living hope (I Pet. 1:3); because, as he, by rising again, became victorious over death, so the victory of our faith consists only in his resurrection. The nature of it is better expressed in the words of Paul, 'Who [Christ] was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification (Rom. iv.25); as if he had said, By his death sin was taken away, by his resurrection righteousness was renewed and restored. For how could he by dying have freed us from death, if he had yielded to its power? How could he have attained the victory for us, if he had fallen in the fight?[37]

Having looked at the strengths and weaknesses of the traditional doctrine of Penal Substitution we are left with the question of what an understanding of the cross would look like, that conserved the strengths and avoided the weaknesses of the traditional position.

In the second half of this paper I shall attempt a sketch of what I think such a way of looking at the cross should look like.

I. THE PURPOSE OF GOD

To begin at the beginning, the first thing we need to understand is what God's long term intention for the universe is, because any atonement theory has to relate to what we think God is attempting to achieve in relation to his creation. Now God's intention in this area is not something about which we have to guess because St Paul has clearly informed us what this intention is in Ephesians 1:10 where he tells us about God's

> plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

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[36] Cited in P. Van Buren, *Christ in Our Place* (Edinburgh, 1957), p. 81.

[37] Calvin, op. cit., II.xvi.13

That is to say, God's ultimate purpose is to unite all things in heaven and on earth to himself in his Son Jesus Christ. As F. F. Bruce puts it in his commentary on *The Epistle to the Ephesians*:

> This is the grand purpose of God which embraces all lesser aspects of his purpose within itself – the establishment of a new order, a new creation, of which Christ shall be the acknowledged head.[38]

As the doctrine of the Trinity teaches us, this purpose which God has corresponds to God's own nature. God himself is three Persons who are united with each other in love and he desires to share that unity first of all with his church (John 17:20-23) and then ultimately, through Christ, with the whole of the creation. As Kallistos Ware puts it in his book *The Orthodox Way*,

> To love means to share, as the doctrine of the Trinity has so clearly shown us: God is not just one but one-in-three, because he is a communion of persons who share in love with one another. The circle of divine love, however, has not remained closed. God's love is, in the literal sense of the word, 'ecstatic' – a love that causes God to go out from himself and to create things other than himself. By voluntary choice God created the world in 'ecstatic' love, so that there might be besides himself other beings to participate in the life and the love that are his.[39]

God's purpose in creation is thus that of love. God wills that he should share with his creation that eternal relationship of love in which he himself exists. However we should not be misled by sentimental human ideas of love into thinking that because God's purpose is one of love this means that God will not insist on having things his way and will allow his purpose to be frustrated.

On the contrary, Paul tells us in the very next verse in Ephesians (Eph. 1:11) that God 'accomplishes all things according to the council of his will'. God's love is the ultimate 'tough love'. It is a love that will brook no obstacle in achieving the goal which it intends. And, indeed, as the nineteenth-century Scottish theologian George MacDonald maintains, it is in the very nature of love, properly understood, that it has this inexorable quality.

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[38] F. F. Bruce, *Epistle to the Ephesians* (London, 1961), pp. 32-3.

[39] Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, p. 56.

> Nothing is inexorable but love. Love which will yield to prayer is imperfect and poor. Nor is it then the love that yields, but its alloy...For love loves unto purity. Love has ever in view the absolute loveliness of that which it beholds. Where loveliness is incomplete, and love cannot love its fill of loving, it spends itself to make more lovely, that it may love more; it strives for perfection, even that itself may be perfected – not in itself, but in the object.... Therefore all that is not beautiful in the beloved, all that comes between and is not of love's kind, must be destroyed. And our God is a consuming fire.[40]

In this quotation MacDonald connects the nature of love to the fact that 'Our God is a consuming fire' and he is quite correct to make this connection. This is because according to the biblical witness the God who is love and the God whose judgement is as a consuming fire are one and the same. It is the same Lord described in Psalm 145:9:

> The Lord is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made

who is described in Isaiah 10:17:

> The light of Israel will become a fire, and his Holy One a flame; and it will burn and devour his thorns and briers in one day. The glory of his forest and his fruitful land the Lord will destroy, both soul and body, and it will be as when a sick man wastes away. The remnant of the trees of his forest will be so few that a child can write them down.

The God who meets us in such terrible judgement is the God whose compassion is over all that he has made because the purpose of his acts of judgement is to further his purposes of love by removing all that stands in their way.

If we think of the biblical story line, after Adam and Eve are expelled from the garden God makes a new start for humanity by calling Abraham and promising to make him a great nation and a source of universal blessing (Gen. 12:3). In order to keep this promise God enacts terrible judgement upon the Egyptians and the peoples of Canaan and, when she strays from her calling, upon Israel herself. Finally, when God fulfils his promise to Abraham by coming to his people in the person of his Son all but a small remnant of Israel refuse to believe and thus come under God's judgement – a judgement embodied in the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. However, as Paul argues in Romans 9-11, even this judgement

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[40] C.S.Lewis(ed.),*George MacDonald:AnAnthology*(London,1983),pp.1-2.

implements God's loving purposes in that it gives the Gentiles opportunity to believe which will in turn eventually lead Israel back to God. Furthermore the salvation of Jews and Gentiles alike is not the end of the story for the full redemption of humanity will usher in the redemption of all of God's creation (Rom. 8:18-21).

Seen in this perspective, then, the story of God's anger is good news. It is good news because it is the story of how God's loving purpose is at work in history judging and overcoming all opposition and achieving the good end which God has intended from the beginning.

In the words of C. S. Lewis:

> You asked for a loving God: you have one. The great spirit you so lightly invoked, the 'lord of terrible aspect', is present: not a senile benevolence that drowsily wishes you to be happy in your own way, not the cold philanthropy of the conscientious magistrate, not the care of a host who feels responsible for the comfort of his guests, but the consuming fire himself, the love that made the worlds, persistent as the artist's love for his work and despotic as a man's love for a dog, provident and venerable as a father's love for a child, jealous, inexorable, exacting as love between the sexes.[41]

Or as Karl Barth puts it:

> If God does not meet us in his jealous zeal and wrath – exactly as He meets Israel according to the witness of the Old Testament, exactly as He meets it later in the crucifixion of his own Son – then He does not meet us at all, and in spite of all our asservations about divine love, man is in actual fact left to himself. That man is not abandoned in this way, that God is really gracious to him, is shown in the fact that God confronts him in holiness. It is in this way that God is present with him, taking over and conducting the cause which sinful man is impotent to conduct himself. It is in this way that God reconciles man to himself. The fact that God does not permit Israel, the righteous or the Church to perish means that he cannot allow them to go their own way, unaccused, uncondemned and unpunished, when they are and behave as if they were people who do not participate in this salvation and protection.[42]

God's wrath and God's love are thus not to be seen as two aspects of God's character which exist side by side and have somehow to be reconciled.

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[41] C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (London, 1940), pp. 35.

[42] K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/I (Edinburgh, 1957), p. 366.

Rather, God's wrath is God's love in action overcoming all opposition to his loving purposes.

In my description of God's loving activity I have several times referred to God's acts of judgement as manifestations of his love. This points us to the fact that just as we must not separate God's anger from his love, in similar fashion we must not set God's mercy and God's justice side by side as if they were two separate attributes of God which need to be harmonised. As I noted earlier on in this paper, the justice of God is a major theme of the biblical witness to what God is like, but his justice is only understood rightly when it is seen as an expression of his mercy and hence of his love. In the words of the Anglican Evangelical theologian Tom Smail:

> The God who speaks in the Scriptures is both just and merciful in everything that he does; the two are entirely consistent because the God who exercises both of them is entirely consistent with himself and faithful to himself and his purposes in all his works and ways.
>
> That comes out clearly in the way the Old Testament prophets, and in particular Isaiah, speak of God's justice. He speaks for example of Jerusalem as the place 'once full of fair judgment, where saving justice used to dwell' (1:21). When he is looking forward to God's people returning from exile he says to the anxious, 'Be strong, fear not, your God is coming with judgement, coming with judgment to save you' (35:4), and in the second part of the book God identifies himself to the prophet, 'There is no God apart from me, a righteous God and a Saviour' (45:21) where the meaning clearly is not 'a righteous God and in spite of that a Saviour,' but rather 'a righteous God and therefore a Saviour.'
>
> Verses like that could be multiplied from the Psalms and other Old Testament writings. We should not forget either that in the Old Testament we have a book of Judges which tells the story not of legal officials holding courts and imposing sentences but of men and women God raised up precisely to save and deliver his people from the oppressing Philistines. All this serves to make the point that in God righteousness and salvation, justice and mercy, are not in conflict but are complementary descriptions of how consistently and faithfully he pursues his single purpose for his people and his world. In the God who revealed himself in word to the prophets and even more in the person and passion of Jesus Christ, mercy is at the heart of justice, and his justice is his faithful commitment to mercy.[43]

[43] T. Smail, *Windows on the Cross* (London, 1995), pp. 42-3.

It is in the perspective of the purpose and character of God as I have just described them that we have to understand what God is doing in the cross of Christ. The cross is the ultimate example of how the anger and justice of God are good news because in the cross God's love is at work as his merciful judgement overcomes our opposition to him. The cross is then definitely not the story of how God began to love us because our sins were atoned for and his justice satisfied by the death of Christ. Rather it is the story of how, because God loved us, He sent his Son to do away with all those things that make us hateful in his sight.

To quote St Augustine of Hippo:

> Our being reconciled by the death of Christ must not be understood as if the Son reconciled us, in order that the Father, then hating, might begin to love us, but that we were reconciled to him already, loving, though at enmity with us because of sin. To the truth of both propositions we have the attestation of the Apostle, 'God commendeth his love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us' (Rom. 5:8). Therefore he had this love for us even when, exercising enmity towards him, we were the workers of iniquity. Accordingly, in a manner wondrous and divine, he loved even when he hated us. For he hated us when we were such as he had not made us, and yet because our iniquity had not destroyed his work in every respect, he knew in regard to each one of us, to hate what we had made, and love what he had made.[44]

What we shall look at next is how the cross enacted God's love for us by doing away with what was hateful in his sight.

2. DYING AND RISING WITH CHRIST

In an article entitled 'Can one Man die for the People?', Tom Smail voices the critical questions that we have to answer if as Christians we want to say that Christ's death changed the human situation before God.

> What is it that this one man can do that is so critical and transforming, not just for his contemporaries but for countless numbers of people far removed from him in time and distance? What by dying can one man do that will make possible and actual a new and reconciled relationship to God for all people?[45]

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[44] Augustine of Hippo, *Tract in John*, 110.

[45] J. Goldingay (ed.), *Atonement Today* (London, 1995), p. 74.

To begin to answer these questions posed by Smail we first of all need to realise that the cross does not stand alone but is the first part of a twofold act of God for our salvation the first part of which is the resurrection. As Calvin reminded us, It is not the cross alone that saves, but the cross and the resurrection together. Paul makes this point clear in Romans 4:25 when he writes that Jesus was 'put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification'. In the words of Charles Cranfield:

> What was necessitated by our sins was, in the first place, Christ's atoning death, and yet, had his death not been followed by his resurrection, it would not have been God's mighty deed for our salvation.[46]

The question then becomes how it is that Christ's death and resurrection together constitute the mighty deed of God for our salvation. Here I think the correct answer is given to us by Karl Barth in his commentary on the *Heidelberg Catechism* in which he declares:

> In the death of Jesus Christ, God took man's place in order to suffer in his place the destruction of sinful man and, at the same time, to realise the existence of the new obedient man. The way is therefore open to restore the lost right of man, his right to live as the creature of God. The grace of God against which man sins triumphs in Jesus Christ.[47]

Barth makes two key points in this quotation.

The first of these is that in the death of Christ on the cross the destruction of sinful man was undertaken by God. That is to say, the death of Christ on the cross was not just the *punishment* but the *death* of our old sinful nature. This again is a point which is underlined by St Paul who declares that when Christ died on our behalf we died with him. Thus we read in Galatians 2:20, 'I have been crucified with Christ' and in 2 Corinthians 5:14, 'we are convinced that one died for all therefore all have died'.

As the great Scottish theologian James Denney observes in his Expositors Bible Commentary on 2 Corinthians:

> Is it logical to say, 'One died for the benefit of all: *hence* all died?' From that premise is not the only legitimate conclusion 'hence all remained alive'? Plainly if Paul's conclusion is to be drawn, the 'for' must reach

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[46] C. E. B. Cranfield, *Romans* vol. 1 (Edinburgh, 1975), p. 252.

[47] K. Barth, *Learning Jesus Christ Through the Heidelberg Catechism* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1964), pp. 72-3.

> much deeper than this mere suggestion of our advantage: if we all *died*, in that Christ died for us, there must be a sense in which that death of his is *ours*; He must be identified with us in it: there on the cross, while we stand and gaze at him, He is not simply a person doing us a service; He is a person doing us a service *by filling our place and dying our death.* It is out of this deeper relation that all services, benefits and advantages flow; and that deeper sense of 'for', to which Christ is at once the representative and substitute of man, is essential to do justice to the Apostle's thought.[48]

If we ask why it was that Christ had to die our death on the cross in order that we might be saved the answer is also given to us by Paul, this time in Romans 6:6-7:

> We know that our old self was crucified with him that the sinful body might be destroyed and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. For he who has died is freed from sin.

That is to say, our fallen nature was slain in the death of Christ in order that we might have liberation from the domination by sin which our old nature necessarily entails. Thinking of it in terms of our earlier discussion we can see how Christ's death thus brings together God's judgement and God's love. The cross is an act of God's judgement in that on the cross the death penalty is carried out on us as sinners. Our sinful existence has no right to exist before God and is therefore brought to an end. It is at the same time an act of love since the purpose of this judgement is to destroy our enslavement to sin in order that we might become free to be the people God intends us to be.

This is a point made forcefully by Martin Luther in his *Lectures on Romans* delivered between 1515 and 1516. Commenting on Romans 6:3, Luther notes that in Scripture there is alongside the temporal death of the body, a form of eternal death which is a 'very great evil' in which 'it is man that dies, while sin lives and remains for ever'. This is the eternal death suffered by the damned. However, there is also a form of eternal death that is a 'very great good'. This is the form of death that took place in Christ:

> It is the death of sin and the death of death, by which the soul is freed and separated from sin and the body from corruption, and the soul is united by grace and glory with the living God. This is death in the strict and proper sense of the word (for in every other death some mixture of life remains, but

[48] J. Denney, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (London, 1894), pp. 194-5.

> not in this one, in which there is nothing but life itself: eternal life). It is only this death that the conditions of death fit absolutely and perfectly; whatever dies in it, and in it alone, vanishes entirely into everlasting nothingness, and nothing ever returns from it (indeed it inflicts death also upon eternal death). Thus sin dies, and also the sinner when he is justified, for sin does not ever return, as the apostle says here: 'Christ dies no more,' etc. (Rom. 6:9). This is the principle theme of the Scripture. For God arranged to take away through Christ whatever the devil brought in through Adam. And the devil brought in sin and death. Therefore, God brought about the death of death and the sin of sin, the prison of prison and the captivity of captivity. As he says through Hosea: 'O death, I will be thy death; O hell, I will be thy bite.' (Hosea 13:14)[49]

It was this death – the death of death and the death of sin – that was undertaken on our behalf by Christ through his death on the cross thereby achieving the expiation of our sins referred to in Romans and 1 John. Our sins are no longer a barrier between us and God, because in Christ our sinful existence has been brought to an end. It is a closed chapter. That is why in Matthew's account of the death of Christ the curtain of the Temple is torn in two and the tombs of the saints are cracked open (Matt. 27:51-53). The sin and death which barred access to God and kept the saints in their graves have been done away with by the death of Christ.

However, there is more to the work of Christ than simply the termination of our existence as sinners. The work of God in Christ is not simply, or even primarily, a destructive work. It is primarily a work of re-creation. This brings us on to Barth's second point which is that the purpose of Christ's death is to 'realise the existence of the new obedient man'. In the words of Peter in 1 Peter 2:24: which we have quoted above: 'He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree that we might die to sin *and live to righteousness*'.

This purpose was not achieved through the cross alone because if all there was was the cross then the story of God's involvement with humankind would have reached its terminus point on Calvary. If we were to have a future our old existence as sinners had to be replaced with a new kind of existence.

This new kind of existence is what has been made possible for us by Christ's resurrection on the third day. The resurrection is an act of divine re-creation in which a new way of being human is opened up in which we are not only dead to sin but alive to God. That is why Paul declares in 2 Corinthians 5:17: 'If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has

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[49] M. Luther, *Lectures on Romans* (Philadelphia, 1961), pp. 179-80.

passed away, behold the new has come' and why he writes in Romans 6:10-11 'The death he died he died to sin once and for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you must also consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.' That is why Christ declares in John 11:25-26: 'I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die.'

If we consider the cross and resurrection together what we therefore have is, as I have indicated, a twofold divine operation in which to quote John Stott who here rightly unites the cross and resurrection:

> We have died and risen with him, so that our old life of sin, guilt and shame has been terminated and an entirely new life of holiness, forgiveness and freedom has begun.[50]

Or, as Calvin puts it:

> our old man is destroyed by the death of Christ, so that his resurrection may restore our righteousness, and make us new creatures. And since Christ has been given to us for life, why should we die with him, if not to rise to a better life? Christ, therefore, puts to death what is mortal in us in order that He may truly restore us to life.[51]

The last point we need to consider is how we enter into what Christ has done for us by his dying and rising. The answer to this question is that it is by faith expressed in baptism. That is to say, it is certainly true that according to the New Testament we enter into a right relationship with God through faith, as verses such as John 3:16 and Romans 3:26 make clear. However, it is also true that in the New Testament perspective acceptance of what Christ has done leads to baptism and it is in baptism that we appropriate for ourselves what Christ achieved for all humanity in his death and resurrection.

Thus Paul tells us in Romans 6:4:

> We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father we too might walk in newness of life.

and, similarly, in Colossians. 2:12:

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[50] J. Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, p. 278.

[51] J. Calvin, *Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians* (Edinburgh, 1961), pp. 122-3.

> ....and you were buried with him in baptism in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.

And if we ask how we are enabled to walk in newness of life, the answer is through the power of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit poured out by the crucified and risen Christ (John 19:30, Acts 2:32-33), the Spirit given to us at our baptism (Acts 2:38, 1 Cor. 12:13), who makes the new life wrought for us by Christ through his death and resurrection an ever increasing reality in our lives and enables us to relate to God the Father as his obedient daughters and sons (Rom. 8:1-17) thus fulfilling God's original intention that we should live in relationship to him, enjoying the same unity with him that Christ himself shared (John 17:20-23).

To put it another way, through the death and resurrection of Christ and the work of his Spirit within us, we are enabled to enter into that New Covenant between God and his people prophesied by Jeremiah (Jer. 31:31-34, 32:38-40) and referred to by Christ in his explanation of the meaning of the bread and wine at the Last Supper (Luke 22:19-20, 1 Cor. 11:23-25). As Smail explains, in Jeremiah's prophecy:

> The forgiveness that is promised is a renewal of Israel's relationship with its God, its return from the exile of sin into the kingdom in which people know how to love God and how to love each other.[52]

It is this renewal, which is so much more than simply God not punishing his people's sins, that has taken place through the work of Christ for us as we are set free from sin through the death of our old selves and given the power to live lives of love in the power of the Spirit. Furthermore, as I noted earlier, Paul makes clear in Romans 8:18-23 that what we experience now is only the beginning of a cosmic regeneration that will be fully completed at the end of time when: 'the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and achieve the glorious liberty of the children of God', and the divine intention set forth in Ephesians 1 will find fulfilment.

So, to return to where we began, how did the cross fulfil God's creative intention by doing away with what is hateful in God's sight? By bringing an end through Christ's death to our old existence dominated by sin so that through Christ's resurrection we might enter into a new future in which through faith and baptism we are dead to sin and alive to God in the power

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[52] T. Smail, *Once and For All* (London, 1998), pp. 36-7.

of the Spirit, a future which will find its completion in a renewed universe when the kingdom is manifested in its fullness at the end of time.

In the words of Karl Barth:

> What then, we ask is that in which we believe? We believe that Christ died in our place, and that therefore we died with him. We believe in our identity with the invisible new man who stands on the other side of the Cross. We believe in the eternal existence of ours which is grounded upon the knowledge of death, upon the resurrection, upon God.[53]

Understanding the atonement as achieved through the death and resurrection of Christ appropriated by us through faith and baptism also enables us to make full use of the other models of the Atonement that have been put forward alongside the penal substitution model.

The Christus Victor model taught by some of the early Fathers[54] and defended by Gustaf Aulen in his book *Christus Victor*[55] saw the death of Christ as a victory over the devil and all the powers of darkness. As has been recognised from the Middle Ages onwards the way this idea was presented by some of the early Fathers was seriously flawed either because they suggested that the Devil had legal rights over humankind or because they saw the work of Christ in terms of God's deception of the Devil.

Nevertheless we can see from texts such as John 12:31, Colossians 2:14-15, and 1 John 3:8 that victory over Satan and the powers of darkness is an important element of New Testament Teaching, and the approach to understanding the cross and resurrection which I have advocated allows us to see how this victory was achieved. As sinners we were held captive by the Devil in moral opposition to God, but since we are now new people in Christ this is no longer the case (Eph. 2:2-7). Furthermore, Satan, the accuser, can find nothing in us to accuse since we are dead to sin and hence dead to the law's condemnation (Rev. 12:10-11).

In his treatise *Cur Deus Homo* Anselm sought to replace the idea of a victory over Satan with a *Satisfaction* model which depicted God as being like a Medieval monarch whose honour as ruler has been called into question by the disobedience of his subjects. According to Anselm in this situation either God must punish us eternally for our disobedience or we must offer him 'satisfaction' or recompense for it. We cannot offer this satisfaction, but the infinite merit of Christ's voluntary obedience in his

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[53] K. Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Oxford, 1968), p. 202.

[54] See for example Gregory of Nyssa, *Catechetical Orations* 22-4 or Augustine of Hippo, *De Trinitate* 13:19.

[55] G. Aulen, *Christus Victor* (London, 1953).

life and supremely in his death offered to the Father on our behalf is sufficient to outweigh our disobedience, and so we are not condemned to eternal damnation.

In its original form Anselm's argument goes way beyond the teaching of the New Testament, but his central argument that God has a right to absolute obedience from us, and that the work of Christ must deal with our failure to provide was a fundamentally sound one. The view of the atonement I have been exploring can include this insight by stressing that our disobedience was replaced by the obedience of the Son of God in his living and dying (Rom. 5:18, Phil. 2:8, Heb. 5:8-9), and that his obedience opened up the way for us to be obedient to God in our turn in the way I have described.

The *Exemplarist* model associated with Peter Abelard[56] and Hastings Rashdall's influential book *The Idea of Atonement in Christian Theology*[57] saw the work of Christ as changing the human situation by providing the supreme example of how much God loved us thereby leading us to love God in return. The idea that Christ reveals how much God loves us is certainly one which has New Testament support (see for example John 3:16, Rom. 5:8, 1 John 3:16 & 4:8). Nevertheless, as numerous critics have pointed out, there are two big problems with a purely exemplarist approach. Firstly, it is difficult to see how Christ's death can be an example of love unless that death was for some loving purpose. Simply dying does not necessarily show love. Secondly, this approach rather naively assumes that human beings on their own are capable of responding to God's love once it has been revealed to them – an idea which underestimates the power of sin in fallen human beings.

The approach I am suggesting avoids these difficulties by seeing Christ's death as having a loving purpose – to liberate us from the sin that wrecks our relationship with God. It also argues that we are not left to respond to God on our own, but that it is the power of the Holy Spirit which makes a response of loving obedience possible.

3. ONE DIED FOR ALL?

As we have seen, in 2 Corinthians 5:14 Paul declares that Christ 'died for all'. The question we then have to ask is to whom the word 'all' refers. Does it refer to all human beings or simply to those who put their trust in Christ? Did Christ die for everyone or only for believers?

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[56] See his *Epitome of Christian Theology* and his *Commentary on Romans.*

[57] H. Rashdall, *The Idea of Atonement in Christian Theology* (London, 1920).

In the seventeenth century this issue of whether Christ died for all or only for some was an extremely divisive one. Indeed the division between those of a Calvinist persuasion who held that Christ died to save only the elect and the Arminians who held that Christ died to make salvation available for all was one of the factors that led to the outbreak of the English Civil War.

Today the issue of the scope of Christ's atoning work is unlikely to spark off civil war, but it still remains a contentious issue which generates strong feelings on both sides of the argument. We can see this if we consider the views of J. I. Packer and Michael Green.

Packer declares in ringing tones in his introductory essay to the Banner of Truth edition of John Owen's great Calvinist treatise *The Death of Death* that to understand Christ's death aright we have to believe that Christ died to save the elect alone:

> It cannot be over-emphasised that we have not seen the full meaning of the Cross until we have seen it as the divines of Dort display it – as the centre of the gospel, flanked on the one hand by total inability and unconditional election, and on the other by irresistible grace and final preservation. For the full meaning of the Cross only appears when the atonement is defined in terms of these four truths. Christ died to save a certain company of hopeless sinners upon whom God had set his free saving love. Christ's death ensured the calling and keeping – the present and final salvation – of all whose sins he bore. That is what Calvary meant and means. The Cross saved; the Cross saves. This is the heart of true Evangelical faith....[58]

Green, on the other hand, is equally emphatic in his book *The Empty Cross of Jesus* that the belief that Christ died for the elect alone is a gross distortion of the gospel message:

> Such a theory verges on the blasphemous, and it totally contradicts 1 John 2:2 where the writer assures us that 'he is the expiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world'. There is a glorious prodigality of grace in God. There is no parsimonious and precise equating of the work of Christ with those who will respond.[59]

Given the 'clear blue water' between these two positions this is clearly an issue on which a decision has to be made one way or another. In order for this decision to be an informed one we need to look carefully at why the

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[58] J. I. Packer in Owen, *Death of Death*, Introduction.

[59] M. Green, *The Empty Cross of Jesus* (London, 1984), p. 84.

advocates of each position think the way they do, and it is to this task we now turn.

The position advocated by Packer is known variously as the theory of 'limited atonement' (because it holds that Christ died to save only a limited number of people) or 'particular redemption' (because it holds that Christ died to redeem a particular set of people).

The classic statement of this position is that put forward by the Calvinist theologians at the Synod of Dort in 1619 (the 'divines of Dort' referred to by Packer). They declared:

> it was the will of God that Christ by the blood of the cross, whereby he confirmed the new covenant, should effectually redeem out of every people, tribe nation, and language, all those, and those only, who were from eternity chosen to salvation, and given to him by the Father....

If we ask why they argued this way , the answer is that there are two roots to their thought.

The first root is a number of New Testament passages which seem to indicate that the purpose of Christ's death was to save his people. Not just to make their salvation possible, but to really and effectively achieve their salvation. Examples of such passages would be:

Matthew 1:21: '...you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins'.

Ephesians 5:25-27: 'Husbands love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word that he might present her to himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.'

Titus 2:14: '...who gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds'.

The second root is the conviction that a belief that Christ died for all leads either to universalism or to a denial of the sovereignty of God. The argument goes that if we believe that Christ died for all we also have to believe in one of two unsatisfactory alternatives. Either:

a) Since God is sovereign if Christ died to save all humans then all must be saved. Or:

b) Since we know that not all will be saved, it follows that in an indefinitely large number of cases Christ's saving work has been rendered ineffective by human sin and therefore the purpose of God in the death of Christ is frustrated by the sin of Man. In Packer's words: 'the enthroned Lord is suddenly turned into a weak, futile figure tapping forlornly at the door of the human heart which he is powerless to open'.[60]

To avoid being impaled on the horns of this particular dilemma they therefore argue that Christ did not die to save all.

While seeing the logic of this position those on the other side of the argument would maintain that the demands of theological logic have to give way to the witness of the New Testament and that while the New Testament does indeed teach that Christ died to save his church it also teaches that he died for the whole world.

Advocates of this position would point to texts such as the following as showing the universal scope of Christ's redeeming work:

Colossians 1:19-20: 'For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.'

I Timothy 2:4-6: '[God]... desires all men to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all.'

1 John 2:2: '... he is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the world'.

Thus I. H. Marshall comments on 1 John 2:2:

> ...John adds that the efficacy of this sacrifice is not confined to the sins of his particular group of readers it reaches out to all mankind. The universal provision implies that all men have need of it. There is no way to fellowship with God except as our sins are forgiven by the virtue of the sacrifice of Jesus. At the same time John rules out the thought that the death

[60] Packer in *The Death of Death*, p. 20.

> of Jesus is of limited efficacy; the possibility of forgiveness is cosmic and universal.[61]

So, which side of the argument is right? Speaking personally, I can see the attraction of the Dort position. It is neat, tidy and leaves no lose ends. However, as Alister McGrath notes, 'its critics tend to regard it as compromising the New Testament's affirmation of the universality of God's love and redemption' and I think that these critics are correct. The overall weight of New Testament teaching pushes us to the classic Anglican affirmation made in the Communion service in the *Book of Common Prayer* that on the Cross Christ made 'a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction, *for the sins of the whole world*'.

In the great words of Charles Wesley:

> The world he suffered to redeem;
> For all He hath the atonement made;
> For those that will not come to Him
> The ransom of His life was paid.[62]

What does all this mean for us? On the one hand we still have to declare with the seventeenth Anglican article that we only enjoy the benefits of Christ's atoning work because in an act of particular grace God has chosen that we should do so and has enabled us to do so through the work of the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, when we are tempted to despair of our own salvation or that of other people we can look to the fact that Christ died and rose for us and for them and therefore in confidence claim the benefits of his work in faith, prayer and thanksgiving for them and for ourselves.

4. PENAL SUBSTITUTION?

In this paper I have suggested an alternative way of understanding the work of Christ to that put forward in the traditional doctrine of Penal Substitution. I would still want to affirm, however, without equivocation, that the work of Christ was both penal and substitutionary.

- It was *penal*, because on the cross Christ fulfilled Divine justice, by paying the necessary and inevitable penalty for sin which is death.

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[61] I. H. Marshall, *The Epistles of John* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1978), p. 119.

[62] C. Wesley 'Father whose everlasting love' quoted in Marshall, ibid., p. 119.

- It was *substitutionary* because what Christ did he did in our place as our substitute and representative.

However, as compared to the traditional doctrine we need a better understanding of both the penalty and the substitution. As we have seen, the purpose of the penalty was not simply to inflict retribution upon sinners in the person of their representative, it was instead to destroy for ever that sinful type of human existence which frustrated the loving purposes of God. The penalty inflicted by God's justice was also a penalty inflicted by God's mercy – a 'severe mercy', but a mercy nonetheless. As we have also seen, Christ is not simply our substitute and representative in his death, but also in his resurrection. Christ not only died for us, but he also lives for us so that we might live in him.

> *I have been crucified with Christ: it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me: and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Gal. 2:20)*

SCOTTISH CALVINISM: A DARK, REPRESSIVE FORCE?

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INTRODUCTION

'Scottish Calvinism has been a dark, repressive force.' The thesis is a common one; almost, indeed, an axiom. Few seem to realise, however, that the thesis cannot be true without its corollary: the Scots are a repressed people, lacking the confidence to express themselves and living in fear of their sixteenth-century Super Ego.

The corollary, in turn, immediately faces a paradox. Scotland has never been frightened to criticise Calvinism. This is particularly true of our national literature. John Knox has been the object of relentless opprobrium, the Covenanters have been pilloried as epitomes of bigotry and intolerance, Thomas Boston portrayed as a moron, the Seceders as kill-joys and Wee Frees as antinomian Thought Police. The phenomenon is unparalleled in the literature of any other part of the United Kingdom. There has been no comparable English assault on Anglicanism. Nor has there been a similar Irish critique of Catholicism. Scotland has been unique in the ferocity with which its literature has turned on its religion. The Kirk's brood may have been rebellious. They have certainly not been repressed.

DETRACTORS

The most influential detractor was, of course, Walter Scott, whose heroic, well-rounded Cavaliers and Jacobites contrast vividly with his narrow, bigoted Presbyterians and Covenanters. But Scott was not the first. Robert Burns had already set the agenda. In *Holy Willie's Prayer*, for example, he stereotypes and lampoons the 'typical' Calvinist elder, famed only for his polemical cant, tippling orthodoxy and blind hypocrisy. His God,

> Sends ane to heaven an' ten to hell
> A' for thy glory!
> And no for ony gude or ill
> they've done afore thee.

He himself, of course, will go to heaven, 'a chosen sample, To shew thy grace is great and ample'. But his heavenly destiny is totally divorced from any kind of saintly life-style. He is a compulsive fornicator; and he knows it. It is easy, however, to fit his weakness into God's over-all purpose of grace:

> Maybe thou lets this fleshly thorn
> Buffet thy servant e'en and morn
> Lest he owre proud and high shou'd turn
> That he's sae gifted:
> If sae, thy hand maun e'en be borne
> Until thou lift it.

On the other hand, the lesser weaknesses of his adversary, Gavin Hamilton, admit of no such gracious interpretation:

> Lord, mind Gawn Hamilton's deserts;
> He drinks, an' swears, an' plays at cartes
> ....
> Curse thou his basket and his store
> Kail an' potatoes.

There have been, and still are, such Calvinist elders, as there are drunken priests and gay bishops. The falsehood lies in the relentless insinuation that every one of the class is of the same type.

Burns followed the same tack in *The Holy Fair*, a satirical portrayal of the 'sacramental occasion' at Mauchline in Ayrshire. It was a sunny, summer morning and the whole environment glowed with vitality and beauty: 'The rising sun, owre Galston muirs, Wi' glorious light was glintin.' The hares were hirpling, the larks were singing and the whole creation was proclaiming it bliss to be alive. The carefree young, too, were in their element, 'Fu' gay' and 'in the fashion shining'.

But not the communicants! They were dressed in 'doleful black', 'Their visage wither'd, lang an' thin.' In church they would sit, 'Wi' screw'd-up, grace-proud faces', sighing and praying and thinking on their sins. The sermon had nothing but 'tidings of damnation'; and the expression on the face of Moodie, the minister, was such that if Hornie, the Devil himself, had chanced in upon the service,

> 'The vera sight o' Moodie's face
> To's ain het hame had sent him
> Wi' fright that day.'

The Burns-Scott tradition of anti-Calvinism reasserted itself with all its old virulence in the work of Orcadian poet, Edwin Muir (1887-1959), perhaps because he himself flirted with revivalist religion in his youth and experienced several evangelical 'conversions'. Even so, the persistent, almost obsessional bitterness of Muir, who never lived in any community which could be remotely called Calvinist, is hard to understand. In his *Autobiography*, there is a revealing insight into the background to his biography of Knox: 'As I read about him in the British Museum I came to dislike him more and more, and understood why every Scottish writer since the beginning of the eighteenth century had detested him: Hume, Boswell, Burns, Scott, Hogg, Stevenson; everyone except Carlyle, who like Knox, admired power.'[1]

Whatever the source of Muir's knowledge of Calvinism, it scarcely inspires confidence that he can describe as 'distasteful to Calvinists' the idea that man in his fallen state retained 'a little of that knowledge and power with the which he was endowed by God'.[2] That, surely, is a core Calvinist belief, following from the doctrine of Common Grace. Such niceties apart, however, Calvinism, according to Muir, 'turned Scotland into a Puritan country, to remain so until this day'.[3] It also gave it 120 years of civil turmoil and persecution, probably because while it was pitiless to its enemies it was wantonly severe on its followers.[4] It had no place, Muir concludes, for the merciful or the generous and 'could no more have produced a figure like Saint Francis than it could have produced one like Socrates. Judged by the best in humanity, its figures seem narrow, sick and almost pathological.'[5]

The same venom appears in the poets of the Gaelic Renaissance, who can at least claim to have seen Calvinism at close quarters in their own Hebridean childhoods. Donald MacAulay, for example, can appreciate the evocative cadences of Gaelic psalmody ('transporting us on a tide/as mysterious as Maol Duin's') and the extemporaneous eloquence of village elders at prayer ('my people's access to poetry'). But when it came to the sermon,

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1 Edwin Muir, *An Autobiography* (Edinburgh, 1993), p. 226.
2 Edwin Muir, *John Knox: Portrait of a Calvinist* (London, 1930), p. 98.
3 Ibid., p. 100.
4 Ibid., p. 106.
5 Ibid., p. 116.

the fires of hell are in fashion –
vicious, alien threats
that filled the house with confusion and terror.[6]

In *The Scarecrow*, Derek Thomson strikes a similar note. When the Calvinist scarecrow (the Evangelical clergy) came to the ceilidh-house, the words of the folktale froze on the seanachie's lips and the music of the singer lost its power:

But he did not leave us empty-handed:
he gave us a new song,
and tales from the Middle East
and fragments of the philosophy of Geneva
and he swept the fire from the centre of the floor
and set a searing bonfire in our breasts.[7]

In the work of the late Iain Crichton Smith the anti-Calvinist polemic became a self-conscious crusade. The best known of his novels, *Consider the Lilies*, is a widely used school text-book and it is safe to say that the law would not allow teachers to hold up to similar ridicule any other religious group in the country. The Introduction to the Canongate Classics edition of the novel is from the pen of Isobel Murray,[8] who argues that Smith's basic theme is the danger of accepting any ideology or system of beliefs. She continues: 'the ideology inevitably under attack here is certainly Scottish Calvinism. Crichton Smith has many times written about the effects that the rigidities of Scottish Calvinism have on the Scottish psyche, and his attacks are passionate and deeply felt, for his own childhood on the island of Lewis was spent very much under the shadow of the Free Church there: "I hate anyone trying to control my mind," he says.'[9] It is no accident that Smith makes his Good Samaritan figure an atheist, although he himself admits that there is no evidence that his historical proto-type was of any such religious persuasion. 'It is not Christianity that Crichton Smith is attacking here,' writes Murray; 'it is what he calls "the Calvinist ideology".'[10] By contrast to the atheist, the parish minister is a compound of vices: insincere, self-important,

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[6] From the poem, 'Gospel 1955' in Donald MacAulay, ed., *Nua-Bhardachd Ghaidhlig: Modern Scottish Gaelic Poems* (Edinburgh, 1995), pp. 192-3).

[7] *Nua-Bhardachd Ghaidhlig*, p. 164.

[8] Iain Crichton Smith, *Consider the Lilies* (Edinburgh, 1987), pp. vii-xii.

[9] Ibid., p. viii.

[10] Ibid., p. xi.

economical with the truth, self-serving and sycophantish. When the widow goes to him for help, all he can say is that the evictions are a divine judgement:

> 'Have you ever thought, Mrs Scott, that this is a visitation?' Still looking at her he clicked his fingers sharply, then continued with some anger: 'I mean that the people of this village, aye, the people of all the villages here, have deserved this. Have you ever thought that this came as a punishment for their sins?'[11]

DISCRIMINATION

Scottish literature, then, has clearly not lived in craven fear of Calvinism. It has attacked its alleged repressor most manfully; and it has done so not through marginal, second-rate figures but through its most representative writers.

But some discrimination is called for. The older writers do not present the unrelieved caricatures which mar the recent literature. Burns, for example, knew perfectly well that although the Kirk could produce its fair share of sanctimonious hypocrites, Holy Willie was by no means a typical Presbyterian. In *The Cotter's Saturday Night* he presents a very different picture:

> The chearfu' Supper done, wi' serious face,
> They, round the ingle, form a circle wide;
> The Sire turns o'er, with patriarchal grace
> The big ha' Bible, ance his Father's pride:
> His bonnet rev'rently is laid aside
> His lyart haffets wearing thin and bare;
> Those strains that once did sweet in Zion glide
> He wales a portion with judicious care;
> 'And let us worship God!' he says with solemn air.

Scott, too, knew that there was more to Calvinism than 'screw'd-up, grace-proud faces'.[12] One need only recall his famous description of Dr John Erskine's preaching in *Guy Mannering* (Chapter XXXVII).[13]

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[11] Ibid., p. 74.

[12] Scott himself was an elder of the Kirk and as such had subscribed, presumably sincerely, to 'the whole doctrine' of the Westminster Confession.

[13] Erskine (1721-1803) was Evangelical colleague to the celebrated Moderate,

> A lecture was delivered, fraught with new, striking and entertaining views of Scripture history – a sermon, in which the Calvinism of the Kirk of Scotland was ably supported, yet made the basis of a sound system of practical morals, which should neither shelter the sinner under the cloak of speculative faith or of peculiarity of opinion, nor leave him loose to the waves of unbelief and schism... and although the discourse could not be quoted as a correct specimen of pulpit eloquence, yet Mannering had seldom heard so much learning, metaphysical acuteness, and energy of argument, brought into the service of Christianity. 'Such,' he said, going out of the church, 'must have been the preachers to whose unfearing minds, and acute, though sometimes rudely exercised talents, we owe the Reformation.'

CONFESSIONS OF A JUSTIFIED SINNER

Similar discrimination is needed in assessing James Hogg's classic, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner.* The work, written in 1823-24, is often portrayed as an uncompromising indictment of seventeenth-century Scottish Calvinism. David Groves, for example, describes the central character, Robert Wringhim, as isolated and lonely 'through his adoption of the twisted elitism of doctrinaire Calvinism'[14] David Daiches sees the *Confessions* as, 'The most sustained attack on the antinomian aspects of some popular Scottish interpretations of Calvinism'.[15] He even takes advantage of the connection between Hogg ('the Ettrick Shepherd') and Thomas Boston (Minister of Ettrick from 1707 to 1732) to link the *Confessions* specifically with the antinomianism of Boston's preaching: 'Hogg must have heard about Boston if he had not also read him' and this, along with local stories about the prowess of the Devil 'provided the germ of the *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*'.[16]

Dr William Robertson (1721-1793), in Greyfriars Kirk, Edinburgh.

[14] Introduction to James Hogg, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (Edinburgh, 1991), p. ix.

[15] David Daiches, *God and the Poets* (Oxford, 1985), p. 146.

[16] Daiches, *God and the Poets*, p. 146. Daiches' knowledge of Boston was second-hand. He quotes from Henry G. Graham's *Social Life of Scotland in the Eighteenth Century* (2 vols, London, 1899) to the effect that according to Boston's *Fourfold State* the good works of religion performed by an unregenerate man were 'mere sham and dead forms of holiness' and the repentance of one who was not elect 'nothing but sin; for man, aye, even the new-born babe, is a lump of wrath, a child of hell'. Even allowing for selective quotation, Daiches might equally well have levelled the charge of

There is no doubt that Hogg portrays both Wringhim and his entire circle as vindictive, predestinarian antinomians. Amid the vilest crimes, Wringhim comforted himself with the belief that 'a justified person could do nothing wrong'. No act of his could mar the eternal counsel, or in the smallest degree alter one event which was decreed before the foundation of the world. His father was of the same kidney: 'to the just, all things are just and right'. Even the mother had drunk the heady brew: 'Ah, that is a sweet and comfortable saying, Mr Wringhim. How delightful to think that a justified person can do no wrong.'

But did Hogg intend his readers to accept the Wringhims as typical Scottish Calvinists? It would be absurd to argue that the portraits have no connection with reality. We have all met religionists who 'knew no other pleasure but what consisted in opposition'. Equally we could give a name to the malevolence that pretends, 'I had no aim in seeking you but your own good.' We may even have met the man (or woman) who prays only for the elect, distinguishes thirteen different kinds of faith and initiates a conversation by asking, 'What is *In*effectual Calling?'

On the other hand, it is difficult to trace within Scottish Presbyterianism anything like the antinomianism represented by Wringhim.[17] It is certainly absurd to lay the charge of antinomianism against Thomas Boston. The minister of Ettrick was admittedly no legalist and strenuously defended the doctrine of justification by grace in the very terms of Luther, but he was adamant that the law remained the rule of life for every Christian. No man could be regenerate and continue to live his old life, let alone a lawless one: 'In his relative capacity, he will be a new man. Grace makes men gracious in their several relations, and naturally leads them to the conscientious performance of relative duties. It does not only make good men and good women, but makes good subjects, good husbands, good wives, children, servants, and, in a word, good relatives in the church, commonwealth and family.'[18]

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antinomianism against his own Jewish scriptures, according to which 'all our righteousnesses are filthy rags' (Is. 64:6).

[17] It clearly existed in England and is well represented in the writings of Saltmarsh and Crisp. Scottish Calvinism – not least in its most supralapsarian and scholastic spokesman, Samuel Rutherford – deplored it. Rutherford's *Survey of the Spirituall Antichrist* (London, 1648) was specifically targeted at 'the secrets of Antinomianisme'.

[18] Thomas Boston, *Human Nature in its Fourfold State* (first published 1720. Re-issued Edinburgh, 1964), p. 223. Cf. the comment of Dr John Duncan: 'I would like to sit at Jonathan Edwards' feet, to learn what is true religion, and at Thomas Boston's, to learn how I am to get it.' On another occasion

Hogg knew Scottish Calvinism too well to identify it with predestinarian antinomianism and throughout his narrative he is at pains to distance himself from Wringhim and to contrast him with the authentic religion of the Reformation. To some extent this is done through 'the Editor', even though it might not always be safe to take this figure as exactly representing Hogg's own position (at the end Hogg disowns him). It is 'the Editor' who memorably describes Wringhim's mother: 'Hers were not the tenets of the great reformers, but theirs mightily overstrained and deformed. Theirs was an unguent hard to be swallowed; but hers was that unguent embittered and overheated until nature could not longer bear it.'[19] This is close to a statement of the theme of the book: if you really followed the tenets of the Wringhims, they would drive you mad (which, in Robert's case, they clearly did). It is also 'the Editor' who records the Laird of Dalcastle's exasperated assessment of Rev. Mr. Wringhim:

> You are, Sir, a presumptuous, self-conceited pedagogue, a stirrer up of strife and commotion in church, in state, in families, and communities. You are one, Sir, whose righteousness consists in splitting the doctrines of Calvin into thousands of undistinguishable films, and in setting up a system of justifying-grace against all breaches of all laws, moral, or divine. In short, Sir, you are a mildew, – a canker-worm in the bosom of the Reformed Church, generating a disease of which she will never be purged, but by the shedding of blood.[20]

But Hogg is not content to leave the damning of Wringhim to the Editor. He also makes him damn himself. At the very beginning of the *Memoirs*, for example, he portrays Wringhim indulging in a ridiculous disquisition on Ineffectual Calling and records his mother's adoring wonder at the child's theological precocity. '"What a wonderful boy he is!" said my

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he declared, 'Boston had great tenderness of conscience, but I think there was a legality and *pernicketiness:* I think that a great deal of what he called desertion was just low spirits. Yet there were two things in him: he was looking only to Christ for justifying righteousness, and he was seeking to walk before God unto all well-pleasing.' See David Brown, *The Late Rev. John Duncan, LL.D. in the Pulpit and at the Communion Table* (Edinburgh, 1874), p. 63. Boston's horror of Antinomianism is also made repeatedly clear in his Notes on *The Marrow of Modern Divinity* (Edinburgh, 1726).

[19] Hogg, *Confessions*, p. 2.

[20] Ibid., p. 12.

mother. "I'm feared he turn out to be a conceited gowk," said old Barnet, the minister's man.'[21]

Hogg also uses other more subtle devices to distinguish Wringhim's religion from that of the Presbyterian peasantry. Nothing was more characteristic of Scottish Calvinism than its stress on preaching. Wringhim has no patience with anything so evangelical. His commission is not to harangue sinners from the pulpit, but to cut sinners off with the sword. He roots this in the decree of predestination, but there is a fine irony in it. There is no point in preaching, if the decree has for ever rendered their conversion impracticable. He seems not to notice that there is as little point in trying to murder people if God has not decreed it. But the rationale he offers for his preferences shows that his religion has little in common with the Calvinism of Scotland: 'The more I pondered on those things, the more I saw of the folly and inconsistency of ministers, in spending their lives, striving and remonstrating with sinners, in order to induce them to do that which they had it not in their power to do.'[22]

There is a similar gulf between Wringhim and the piety of Scotland on the even more fundamental matter of prayer. Referring to his growing friendship with Gilmartin, Wringhim writes: 'After weeks, and I may say months of intimacy, I observed, somewhat to my amazement, that we had never once prayed together; and more than that, that he had constantly led my attentions away from that duty, causing me to neglect it wholly.' He resolved to ask Gilmartin to explain: 'He disapproved of prayer altogether, in the manner in which it was generally gone about, he said. Man made it merely a selfish concern, and was constantly employed asking, asking, for every thing. Whereas it became all God's creatures to be content with their lot, and only to kneel before him in order to thank him for such benefits as he saw meet to bestow. In short, he argued with such energy, that before we parted I acquiesced, as usual, in his position, and never mentioned prayer to him any more.'[23]

Three things, then, are clear. First, the religion represented by Robert Wringhim was never the religion of Scotland. Secondly, Hogg was perfectly aware that Wringhim's tenets and behaviour were not those of the Reformers or their successors. Instead, these tenets provide the moral structure of the novel. It is by the standards of Protestant Christianity that Wringhim is damned. Thirdly, while most of the attention has focused on Wringhim's abuse of the principles of Calvin, we should not forget that

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[21] Ibid., p. 80.
[22] Ibid., p. 100.
[23] Ibid., p. 104f.

what is really being abused (and Hogg focused on this in his title) is Luther's doctrine of justification. Nor should we forget that that doctrine, at least in Luther's own judgement, was simply a rediscovery of the gospel according to St Paul, who was himself acutely conscious that his doctrine was liable to antinomian abuse: 'What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?' (Rom. 6:1) It is not Luther's fault, or Calvin's, any more than St Paul's, if men draw infernal inferences from their gospel.

But if Hogg's theme was not the hellish implications of Calvinism, what was it? The answer to that may prove elusive, as it does in relation to all great art.[24] Even Hogg himself may not have been able to answer it. What is clear is that Wringhim was no mere 'implacable ideologist', but a psychotic, and the symptoms of his psychosis are brilliantly drawn. At one level, his delusions are harmless enough. For example, he regards his journal as an allegory comparable to *Pilgrim's Progress*. At another, they are fiendish. He feels himself commissioned to 'shed blood in the cause of the true faith' and once he had committed the first murder he was 'exceedingly bold and ardent'. Here is a seventeenth-century Yorkshire Ripper, hearing voices urging him to act as God's scourge. To an extent, of course, the voices are Gilmartin's, but it is hard to know whether Gilmartin is the Devil or whether he is half of Wringhim himself. We could say he is both, but then Hogg doesn't tell us: probably because Hogg doesn't know.

But if the symptoms of the psychosis are brilliantly drawn, its causes remain obscure. To an extent Wringhim himself is a victim, not least because his psychosis is not the whole reason why he pushes Pauline and Reformation tenets to demonic extremes. He was nurtured in these extremes, imbibing them literally with his mother's milk. But neither do these extremes explain his psychosis. Rev and Mrs Wringhim (to continue Hogg's style) both held the same tenets, pushed to the same extremes, yet neither feels compelled to shed blood 'in the cause of the true faith'. In any case, this last phrase is itself a delusion. Wringhim can murder for envy as well as for predestination: witness his slaying of his brother, George Colwan.

The roots and causes of psychosis remain a mystery even to modern psychiatry and Hogg's achievement was not to explain it, but to describe it and then to leave it burdening our brains for the rest of our lives.

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[24] There may be no answer beyond, 'Read the story!'

DETAILED CHARGES

So much for the broad sweep of anti-Calvinist polemic in Scottish literature. But what have been the detailed charges?

First, that Calvinists have been censorious kill-joys, majoring on the preaching of hell, burying self-esteem under mountains of guilt and making innocent pleasure a sin. In the poem, *Selfrighteousness*, for example, Donald Macaulay bemoans this aspect of Hebridean religion:

> They ask of me only
> to weep repentance for a sin
> that does not concern me
> and I shall get in return an alien
> freedom I don't understand.

(Part of the force of this is lost in translation. In Gaelic evangelicalism, the word *saorsa* or 'liberty' is a technical term for the sense of deliverance experienced by Christians at conversion: the kind of experience registered in Charles Wesley's words, 'My chains fell off, my heart was free'. Macaulay is making the very deliberate point that this 'liberty' is of little use if you've never felt yourself imprisoned in sin.)

In *Highland Woman* Sorley Maclean makes the same point in a seeringly etched outburst which is at once an angry appeal to Christ, a protest against the exploitation of women and an indictment of the joylessness of religion.

> This spring and last
> and every twenty springs from the beginning
> she has carried the cold seaweed
> for her children's food and the castle's reward.

When she sought pastoral support and spiritual comfort she found little:

> And thy gentle Church has spoken
> of the lost state of her miserable soul.

There have, of course, been such preachers: men whose philosophy has been that terror alone could drive humans into the kingdom of God and that the only way to instil it was by preaching sin, hell and damnation. But they have not been confined either to Scotland or to Calvinism. The most famous sermons on hell are those of the New England theologian, Jonathan Edwards and the English Methodist, John Wesley. By contrast, no one could accuse John Calvin of being a hell-fire preacher. His

voluminous published sermons make scant reference to it. The same is true of the published works of his Scottish disciples. Their guiding principle was the dictum of St Paul, 'We preach Christ crucified.' This is clearly reflected in the homiletical literature of Scotland. The seventeenth-century divines gave their strength to such sermons as appear in Robert Bruce's sermons on the Lord's Supper,[25] Rutherford's *Christ Dying and Drawing Sinners to Himself* and Durham's exposition of the Song of Solomon. The eighteenth century gave us John MacLaurin's *Glorying in the Cross of Christ* while the nineteenth gave us Thomas Chalmers' *Fury Not in God* and *The Expulsive Power of a New Affection.* In the Scottish Highlands, John MacDonald, revered as the Apostle of the North, transformed countless lives (and churches) with such discourses as *Wilt Thou Go With This Man?*

In fact, the hell-fire preachers of Scotland have left astonishingly little behind them, suggesting, surely, that the theme was the staple fare of only ill-equipped and ill-prepared third-rate men. The Bruces, Rutherfords, Dicksons, Durhams, Guthries, Erskines, Maclaurins, Bostons, Thomsons, Chalmers, Bonars and McCheynes had better things to say.

Closely linked to the idea of its obsession with hell is the belief that Calvinism spread a pervasive communal gloom, banning innocent pleasures and driving them underground.

It would certainly be hard to find a fun-loving Calvinist anywhere in Scottish literature. Instead we have miserable sods like Rev. Mr. Wringhim, Ephraim Caird and Old Mortality. On the other hand, it would be easy enough to invoke historical Calvinist figures who were the reverse of gloomy. William Guthrie of Fenwick, for example, was described by Wodrow as 'usually extremely cheerful and facetious in his conversation'.[26] He was also a keen sportsman, who used 'the innocent recreations and exercises which then prevailed: fishing, fowling, and playing upon the ice'.[27] This is all the more remarkable considering that Guthrie was not only a Covenanter, but one who in the disastrous divisions which followed the Engagement of 1649 sided with the extremists (the Protestors) against the more moderate Resolutioners. But Guthrie, sadly, has no equivalent in Scottish fiction.

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[25] Robert Bruce, *The Mystery of the Lord's Supper,* ed. Thomas F. Torrance (London, 1958).

[26] R. Wodrow, *Select Biographies,* ed. W. K. Tweedie, volume II (Edinburgh, 1847), p. 50.

[27] Wodrow anticipates Raeburn's famous painting, *Rev Robert Walker Skating on Duddingston Loch* (National Gallery of Scotland).

Yet there may be something in the portrayal of post-Revolution Calvinists as gloomy. They had a good deal to be gloomy about. Modern historians, anxious to press on to highlight Presbyterian intolerance, are loathe to linger over the savage persecution suffered by the Kirk between 1661 and 1688. We may not like Covenanters,[28] we may deplore the murder of Archbishop Sharp and we may dispute contemporary estimates of the numbers actually killed, but by any standards the slaughter of these years constituted a Presbyterian Holocaust. John Maitland, Duke of Lauderdale, was its Himmler; Claverhouse its Eichmann; the Dragoons its Gestapo; the Bass Rock its Auschwitz; and the rack, the screw and the death-ships its ovens and gas-chambers. Scottish Presbyterianism was decimated; its leaders imprisoned, hanged and butchered. Rutherford escaped the scaffold only by succumbing to fatal illness. The leading lay-men of the Covenant, the Marquis of Argyll and Johnston of Warriston, were both executed. So, too, were the leading ministers: James Guthrie, Hugh McKail, Donald Cargill and James Renwick. Richard Cameron, like Hulrich Zwingli, fell on the field of battle. Cameron was only thirty-two; McKail and Renwick a mere twenty-six. John Livingston, Michael Bruce and Robert McWard (first editor of Rutherford's *Letters*) were banished. Alexander Peden, Alexander Shields, John Blackadder, Thomas Hog, James Fraser (of Brea) and William Carstares (architect of the post-Revolution church) were all imprisoned.

Any judgement on the moroseness of the Covenanters must take account of the trauma which had overwhelmed them, just as modern Israeli intransigence must be seen against the background of Nazi terror. Even fanatical intolerance might be understandable in the light of the corporate horror which had engulfed them. The devout peasantry of Scotland were subjected to a reign of terror as fiendish as Ceauşescu's oppression of Romania.

One of the most moving descriptions is that of Daniel Defoe:

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[28] James Hogg did not share the prevailing literary attitude towards the Covenanters. Defending Kirkton's *Secret and True History of the Church of Scotland* from one of his 'objective' modern editors, C. K. Sharpe, Hogg wrote: 'Never before did the world see so clearly that the suffering party were men struggling against oppression with their treasure and their blood; that they burned with a desire for freedom, and were possessed of spirits of which their country have good reason to be proud; and that their persecutors were that slavish cringing set – that fawning sycophantic race, who could sacrifice the rights and liberties of their fellow subjects for... base worldly lucre.' (Quoted from David Groves' *Introduction* to Hogg's *Confessions*, p. xiv.)

> They suffered extremities that tongue cannot describe and which heart can hardly conceive of, from the dismal circumstances of hunger, nakedness and the severity of the climate – lying in damp caves, and in hollow clefts of the naked rocks, without shelter, covering, fire, or food: none durst harbour, entertain, relieve, or speak to them, upon pain of death. Many, for venturing to receive them, were forced to fly to them, and several put to death for no other offence; fathers were persecuted for supplying their children, and children for nourishing their parents; husbands for harbouring their wives, and wives for cherishing their own husbands. The ties and obligations of the laws of nature were no defence, but it was made death to perform natural duties; and many suffered death for acts of piety and charity in cases where human nature could not bear the thoughts of suffering it. To such an extreme was the rage of these persecutors carried.[29]

The psyche of post-Holocaust Israel is driven by one obsession: it must not happen again. Hence the state of Israel. Hence the meticulous security of El Al. Hence the massive Israeli defence budget. Hence the determination to secure the Golan Heights and to settle the West Bank. All reflect a nation whose every home was touched by the gas-chambers, whose every night is haunted by the tortured faces of lost parents and children and whose every breath brings reminders of treachery and betrayal.

The injustice perpetrated by Scott was suddenly to paint the Covenanters, sullen, bigoted and morose, on the virgin canvas of Romanticism; as if they were weeds generated inexplicably from the pristine landscapes of Scotland's south-west. They were not. They sprang from the rack, the boot, the bayonet, the hell-hole and the death-ship. If opposition sometimes corroded their appreciation of the culture of the courtier that is understandable. If it sometimes drove them mad, that, too, is understandable.

But did Scotland's Calvinists not ban innocent pleasures?

There is no straightforward answer to this question. For one thing, Calvinist preaching inevitably reflects the strain of asceticism which runs through all Christian traditions. This asceticism derives ultimately from Jesus himself, particularly his exhortations to self-denial. In accordance

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[29] Daniel Defoe, *Memoirs of the Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1844), p. 66. Defoe's account of 'The Church in her Suffering State' is unendurable. I found it impossible to read it. He himself was under no illusions as to the scale of what he was describing. The Persecution, in his view, was 'the most inhuman of all the Persecutions which we read of, either before or since the Primitive Age of the Church of God; and by it the sufferings of the Church of Scotland are distinguished from the sufferings of all that ever went before them.' (Ibid., p. 77.)

with this, the New Testament abounds with appeals to sobriety and self-control and it is unfair to detach from this background Calvinist exhortations to renounce the world, forsake pleasure and turn our backs on self-indulgence. All Christian traditions echo the same sentiments, challenging the natural human assumption that 'fun' is happiness, insisting that spiritual joys are more substantial than those of earth, and proclaiming that all life's prizes are ultimately 'vanity'. This explains how a temperamental non-Puritan like Thomas Chalmers could preach so eloquently on *The Expulsive Power of a New Affection*. It also explains the emergence within Highland Evangelicalism of a kind of lay-monasticism not far removed from the monkery it professed to deplore. The Catholic principle of a counsel of perfection found a curious Presbyterian parallel in the difference between the discipline imposed on communicants and the standards expected of mere adherents.

The Kirk's banning of innocent pleasures is one of the underlying themes of John Buchan's novel, *Witch Wood*. In a conversation between the hero, David Sempill, and one of his more reasonable fellow-clergymen, Mr Fordyce of Cauldshaw, the latter declares: 'I'm tempted to think that our ways and the Kirk's way is not God's way, for we're apt to treat the natural man as altogether corrupt, and put him under over-strict pains and penalties, whereas there's matter in him that might be shaped to the purposes of grace. If there's original sin, there's also original innocence.'[30] In Mr Fordyce's mind (and doubtless in Buchan's) this innocence is linked to Katrine Yester, the adolescent daughter of a family of incomers frowned on by the ungodly because of their ecclesiology (or lack of it). But like most of the flawless saints of fiction, Katrine is a flat, one-dimensional character. She exists in elegiac snapshots rather than in action: a wraith-like, idealised nymph for whom the Witch Wood is a paradise where she can caper and dance and sing at her pleasure. Fordyce comments: 'When I hear the lassie Katrine Yester singing about the door at Calidon, I have an assurance of God's goodness as ever I got in prayer. If you ban this innocent joy it will curdle and sour, and the end will be sin. If young life may not caper on a Spring morn to the glory of God, it will dance in the mirk wood to the Devil's piping.'[31]

That is undoubtedly true. Nature has a way of avenging itself on repression. But what exactly is Buchan saying? The Kirk had not banned

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[30] John Buchan, *Witch Wood* (Edinburgh, 1988), pp. 113f.

[31] Ibid., p. 114. See the later (p. 220) comment of Mark Riddell, the new tenant of Crossbasket: 'The Kirk has banned innocence and so made a calling of hypocrisy.'

Katrine Yester and the reason why the native children do not play in the Wood has little to do with Calvinism. They are terrified of it because of its occult associations. Nor can it be argued that the locals resort to the Wood because, unlike Katrine, their games have been banned. The black rituals of Beltane are not a reaction to the suppression of innocent joy. They are testimony, instead, that even in its hey-day the Calvinism of Scotland was only skin-deep. The Kirk, which may have thought it had the hegemony, in reality knew little of what was going on. Beneath the veneers of Sabbatarian orthodoxy old superstitions flourished. Beltane held sway long before the arrival of Calvinism; now that the Reformation tide had ebbed, it was claiming its public place again.

The Witch Wood was not the only symptom of the survival of paganism under the very nose of the Kirk. Many ancient superstitions remained integral to the lives of ordinary people. When Rev David Sempill went to pay a death-bed visit to Marion Simpson, wife of the shepherd of Glenshiel, he arrived too late. She was already dead. But something struck him at once: 'The shepherd of the Glenshiel might be an old exercised Christian, but there were things in that place that had no warrant from the Bible. A platter full of coarse salt lay at the foot of the bed, and at the top crossed twigs of ash.' The covens, black Mass and orgiastic dances of the Wood might be different in scale, but they were not different in principle. Reformed Scotland still had its ancient gods and thousands still worshipped at their high places.

This does nothing to extenuate the demonic hypocrisy of Ephraim Caird and his fellow elders. Nine months after Beltane the parish was littered with children born out-of-wedlock (or 'still-born'). 'Where,' fumed David Sempill, 'were the men who had betrayed these wretched girls? ... What was betokened by so many infants born dead?' The men, of course, were in his own Kirk Session: noted theologians and experts in church polity, who placed the girls on the penitence-stools and subjected them to public humiliation and social ruin, knowing all the while that the real guilt was their own.

It would be foolhardy to deny the grains of truth in Buchan's tableau. Scottish Calvinism undoubtedly had its Ephraim Cairds: stern elders, noted theologians, leaders in black arts and deflowerers of virgins. But was every elder an Ephraim Caird? Only in Scottish fiction.

INQUISITORIAL MORAL TYRANNY

A second specific complaint is that Scottish Calvinism exercised a harsh discipline, probing inquisitorially into private lives and subjecting

Scotland to four hundred years of repressive moral tyranny. The Kirk was Big Brother. For Edwin Muir the Calvinistic Thought Police originated with Knox's *Book of Discipline*, which 'substituted for the particular tyranny of the priest a universal and inescapable public tyranny'.[32] In Muir's view it was symbolic that 'the Book opened with a command to prosecute, and almost closed with a plea for the extension of capital punishment'.[33] Its most fundamental idea, after all, was the corruption of man's nature, 'and its policy had necessarily, therefore, to be a policy of espionage and repression. Its sole instrument for keeping or reclaiming its members was punishment.' The result was that for centuries Scotland fell under the tyranny of sadistic Kirk Sessions who execrated moderation, showed a stiff-necked blindness to the more liberating ideas which were beginning to move mankind and encouraged the self-opinionated and censorious at the expense of the sensitive and the charitable.

Quite what Kirk Sessions did to provoke Muir to such bitterness is something of a mystery. A childhood in Orkney hardly placed one under the scrutiny of Knox or Calvin. But whatever the Orkney elders did to the poet must have been quite awful, because Muir is unforgiving: this fearful institution, the Kirk Session, wielded a sordid and general tyranny. His only comfort was that 'the time-honoured Scottish tradition of fornication triumphantly survived all its terrors'.[34]

There is no doubt that by the standards of today Kirk Session discipline in the seventeenth century was harsh.[35] Sessions meted out penitences, fines, imprisonments and even corporal punishments. One obvious defence of the elders is that in the seventeenth century the functions of ecclesiastical and civil courts overlapped.[36] Indeed, in many parts of the

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[32] See the chapter on 'The Book of Discipline' in Muir's *John Knox* (London, 1929), pp. 215-29.

[33] Muir's portrayal of the Scottish Reformers as bloodthirsty tyrants is utterly misleading. In practice, the 'persecution' of Roman Catholics was limited to fines and banishment.

[34] Muir, *John Knox*, pp. 306f.

[35] The best study of the operations of Kirk Sessions remains that of G. D. Henderson, *The Scottish Ruling Elder* (London, 1935). This includes a sober, and sobering, account of Kirk Session discipline (pp. 100-145). As a counter to the impression that Sessions did nothing but inflict punishments, see A. Gordon, *Candie for the Foundling* (Edinburgh, 1992).

[36] Cf. Henderson, *The Scottish Ruling Elder*, p. 108: 'it has to be remembered that the Session was practically the police court of the day, dealing with classes of people who do not now come under Church influences, and working by legal procedure only'.

country there appear to have been no criminal courts as such and the whole burden of trying and sentencing felons fell on the Kirk Session, who seem to have been able even to call on the services of the public hangman if they thought a flogging was appropriate. As a result, many offences which today come under the jurisdiction of sheriff courts would in the seventeenth century have come before the Session: drunkenness and child-murder, for example, along with domestic violence, foul and abusive language, theft and breaches of the peace. In these instances, the church was not making the law. It was merely enforcing it. Unfortunately, this also meant that the church was enforcing the savage penal code of the time.

But this amounts to little more than a plea in mitigation, and even as such it carries little weight. Scotland's seventeenth-century theologians knew perfectly well that church government was distinct from civil government. Apart from all else, the Westminster Confession had stated it very plainly: 'The Lord Jesus, as king and head of his church, hath therein appointed a government in the hand of church officers, *distinct from the civil magistrate.*' (*The Westminster Confession,* XXX.I: italics mine.)[37] Unfortunately the Confession itself also sowed the seeds of future difficulty by laying down that it was the duty of the civil magistrate to suppress blasphemy and heresy (*The Westminster Confession*, XXIII.III). This opened the door to confusion in both directions: church courts meddling in civil matters as brazenly as civil courts meddled in spiritual. The outcome was horrific. Kirk Sessions imposed not only the discipline of the penitence-stool, but the totally non-spiritual punishments of the birch, the stocks and the jouggs; not to mention banishments, exiles and imprisonments and whatever else was the accepted penal code of the day.

It is astonishing that such a confusion of civil and ecclesiastical roles could arise within a Christian tradition which at the level of theory insisted so strongly on the distinction between church and state. The harshness of the penal code did not itself, however, owe much to Calvinism. In non-Presbyterian England, the treatment of offenders was even more savage. No fewer than seventy thousand people were executed in the 38-year reign of Henry VIII (1509-1547): an average of almost 1,800 a year. The Puritan Alexander Leighton (father of the future Archbishop) had his ear cut off, his nose slit and his cheek branded by order of the Court of Star Chamber;

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[37] The Scottish Reformers had consistently shown themselves opposed to the idea of the clergy exercising public judicial functions. The *Second Book of Discipline*, for example, laid down that, 'The criminal jurisdiction joined in the person of a pastor is a corruption.' See James Kirk (ed.), *The Second Book of Discipline* (Edinburgh, 1980), p. 224.

and as if that weren't enough he was flogged (39 lashes) and imprisoned. Seventeenth-century England (as well as continental Europe) burned witches in their hundreds and even as late as 1820 the English penal-code prescribed the death-penalty for no fewer than two hundred offences.

None of this exonerates men who ought to have taken their guidance from the New Testament rather than from the seventeenth-century advocates of 'Tough on crime!' But Knox and his successors should be judged in their historical context. After all, men were being flogged and birched in Scotland even in our own life-time. There is certainly no justification for insinuating that Scottish Kirk Sessions were guilty of treating offenders more cruelly than corresponding courts elsewhere in Europe. Indeed, the composition of Kirk Sessions in most Scottish burghs was such that the accused at least had a good chance of being judged by his peers: a stark contrast to the English system where the gentry sat on the Bench and the poor appeared in the dock.

It should also be borne in mind that disciplinary processes were no more lenient under episcopacy than they were under Presbyterianism. The savage punishments meted out to those who attended conventicles or absented themselves from services conducted by the curates have already been noticed. But quite apart from these special situations, Episcopalian rigour fully matched the Presbyterian. In 1661 (and again in 1672) Parliament passed Acts as strictly Sabbatarian as any from the days of the Presbyterian hegemony. In 1603 the Episcopalian Kirk session of Aberdeen appointed 'censurers and captors to listen for bad language and either fine offenders or give them 'a straik on the hand with a palmer'. In 1663, the same Session banished three Quakers from the town; and in 1686 it paid a man sixteen shillings for catching a man and woman in bed together.

Even the Celtic church, so often romanticised as a model of eclectic tolerance, had a penitential discipline we today would find insufferable. Its prescriptions, in the words of Dr Ian Bradley, are 'full of severe punishments for what often seem to our eyes trivial lapses and faults'.[38] The ninth-century document, *The Law of the Lord's Day in the Celtic Church*, gives a fascinating glimpse of the way this discipline operated in relation to the Sabbath, so often seen as the distinctive obsession of Calvinist Presbyterianism.[39] The list of forbidden actions is formidable: beginning a journey, selling, contracting, cropping hair, shaving, roasting,

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[38] Ian Bradley, *Columba: Pilgrim and Penitent* (Glasgow, 1996), p. 82.

[39] D. Maclean, ed., *The Law of the Lord's Day in the Celtic Church* (Edinburgh, 1926).

bathing, baking and churning; as well as aimless running, grinding corn, housework and splitting wood. The punishments were correspondingly severe: 'The fine for transgression is four three-year old heifers, together with forfeiture of equipment.' In addition, a workman who did unnecessary work at his own pleasure had to forfeit the remainder of his annual pay; while anyone who witnessed a breach of the law yet failed to exact the punishment was liable to 'the same fine as the person who violates the sanctity of the Lord's Day'.

The harshness of Calvinist discipline should be judged against these backgrounds. Even so, its rigours were often in clear breach of formal Calvinist guidelines. The Westminster Confession, for example, had plainly restricted the power of church officers to inflicting *ecclesiastical* censures: admonition, temporary suspension from the Lord's Supper and (in extreme situations) excommunication from the church (*Westminster Confession*, XXX.IV). Sadly, in the confusion which reigned in an era which Clifford Hill has described as 'The world turned upside-down'[40] these guidelines were forgotten. The lapse is both explicable and reprehensible.

From the early eighteenth century onwards, Scottish Presbyterian discipline was regulated by *The Form of Process*. This document, adopted by the General Assembly in 1707, clearly stipulated that nothing should be admitted as a ground of censure but what was explicitly forbidden by the Word of God. This immediately limited the jurisdiction of Kirk Sessions to a handful of well-defined offences: swearing, cursing, Sabbath-profanation, drunkenness, fornication and adultery. At the same time, *The Form of Process* laid down careful rules with regard to the taking of evidence. Defendants had to be properly cited, given a clear statement of the charge against them and furnished with a list of witnesses. It was also stipulated that the accused had to be present when the witnesses gave their testimony. In addition, there was a clear system of appeals: anyone who felt she was a victim of local injustice could appeal to the presbytery; and beyond that to the Synod and the General Assembly.

This is not to say that from the eighteenth century onwards Scottish Calvinism unfailingly limited its discipline to spiritual offences or that it always acted justly, charitably and pastorally. The Kirk continued to sanction the burning of witches (the last was burned in Dornoch in 1727). It also condoned the execution in 1697 of Thomas Aitkenhead, an eighteen-year old youth guilty of little more than adolescent atheism.[41] No defence

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[40] Clifford Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down* (London, 1975).

[41] The Scottish judicial system must bear its own share of the blame: 'serious flaws in the prosecution and judgement were ignored at the time, and the

is to be offered for such behaviour on the part of a state which professed to regulate its civic life by the teaching of Christ. The lesson may be that it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a government to enter the kingdom of God.

SUPPRESSION OF THE ARTS

The third criticism (and the most strident of all) has been that Scottish Calvinism suppressed and discouraged the arts. This note was fairly muted in pre-twentieth-century critiques. Since then it has become the stock-in-trade of the Scottish literati, particularly among the writers of the Gaelic Renaissance, all of whom regard the advent of Evangelicalism in the nineteenth century as fatal to Gaelic culture. Calvinism (so the mantra goes) has promoted intellect at the expense of imagination, stifled creativity, driven out the old tales, songs and traditions and replaced them with the alien philosophy of Geneva.[42]

The key-note for this particular discourse was struck by Alexander Carmichael in his highly influential work, *Carmina Gadelica*. Carmichael travelled widely in his quest for traditional hymns and incantations and at one point in the *Introduction* to his first volume he describes in great detail the hospitality extended to him at a home in the parish of Ness at the Butt of Lewis. He feasted on fried herrings, fresh turbot, new-laid eggs, home-made butter, barley bannocks, wheat scones, oat-cakes and excellent tea. But his gratitude, such as it was, did not deter him from slandering the culture of his hosts.

He recounts a conversation he had with the housewife. He had asked her, 'Have you no music, no singing, no dancing now at your marriages?' She replied 'with grief and surprise in her tone': 'It is long since we abandoned those foolish ways in Ness, and, indeed, throughout Lewis. In my young days there was hardly a house in Ness in which there was not

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court lacked the elementary humanity to appoint counsel for the prisoner'. See A. L. Drummond and J. Bulloch, *The Scottish Church 1688-1843* (Edinburgh, 1973). p. 14.

[42] The one, notable, exception to this chorus is the poet Sorely Maclean, who pronounced himself, 'very sceptical of the Scottish writers who seemed to attribute most of Scotland's ills to Calvinism. What did they know of Calvinism?' Maclean also spoke of Hogg's *Confessions of a Justified Sinner* as 'a travesty of the Calvinism of the Scottish Highlands, and I believe of the Lowlands too'. See Sorley Maclean, *Ris a' Bhruthaich: The Criticism and Prose Writings of Sorley Maclean*, ed. W. Gillies (Stornoway, 1985), p. 10.

one or two or three who could play the pipe, or the fiddle, or the trump. And I have heard it said that there were men, and women too, who could play things they called harps, and lyres, and bellow-pipes, but I do not know what those things were.' 'And why were those discontinued?' 'A blessed change came over the place and the people,' the woman replied in earnestness, 'and the good men and the good ministers did away with the songs and the stories, the music and the dancing, the sports and the games, that were perverting the minds and ruining the souls of the people, leading them to folly and stumbling.... They made the people break and burn their pipes and fiddles. If there was a foolish man here and there who demurred, the good ministers and the good elders themselves broke and burnt their instruments.'[43]

Edwin Muir had little interest in Gaelic culture.[44] He spoke for the elitist end of the spectrum; and he spoke, of course, with considerable animus. In his view, there was one simple reason for the poverty of Scottish poetry since the seventeenth century: 'the strict Calvinism of the Scots, which was adverse both to the production of poetry, and to poetry itself'.[45] In particular, the Reformers had absolutely prohibited dramatic poetry and this signalised the beginning of Scotland's decline as a civilised nation: 'The strict surveillance of Calvinism and the consequent failure of Scotland to achieve poetic drama may partly account for the fact that in her poetry since the sixteenth century she has failed to rise above the level of the simple lyric.' Even in the non-dramatic sphere, she has failed abysmally: the Scots 'have produced scarcely a single verse of good

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[43] Alexander Carmichael, *Carmina Gadelica*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh, 1928), pp. xxxv-xxxvi. In all probability the conversation is merely a literary device employed by Carmichael to express his own opinion. It is highly unlikely that any housewife in Ness prior to 1900 could have delivered such a brilliant oration in English. It would also be very difficult to translate the dialogue back into Gaelic. I was born in the parish of Ness some forty years after Carmichael's visit. By that time the dancing, the music and the songs had staged a miraculous recovery. There was still one hundred per-cent adherence to the church, but the herring and the turbot, sadly, had gone.

[44] According to Muir, Scotland's Celtic civilisation, if it ever existed, 'left behind it an astonishingly meagre record of its existence. A little poetry, a number of lovely songs, some beautiful pipe music, hardly any sculpture or architecture, no painting, no philosophy, no science, and no sign of that conceptual intelligence which welds together and creates great and complex communities and makes possible the major achievements of art and science.' See Muir's *Scottish Journey* (Edinburgh, 1979), p. 130.

[45] Muir, *Scott and Scotland* (London, 1936), p. 23.

religious or metaphysical poetry'. There has been no Scottish Donne or Beaudelaire. In short, the technical skill and the whole art of poetry 'fell into a bottomless gap after the Reformation and the events which immediately followed it'.[46]

Yet Muir is not quite sure that 'the desolating influence of a gloomy and intolerant fanaticism' can bear the full responsibility. There is another possible explanation: the demise of the Scots language. 'Scotland's loss of a native civilisation was bound up,' writes Muir, 'with its loss of a native language.'[47] More specifically, Scottish life was split in two. Scots remained as the language of sentiment; English became the language of thought. As a result, irresponsible feeling lay side by side with arid intellect. Alternatively, Scots and English co-existed in 'reciprocally destructive confrontation'.[48] According to Muir, Gregory Smith labelled this phenomenon 'the Caledonian Antisyzygy': an attempt, presumably, to express (unintelligibly) the idea of Scots and English being unequally yoked.

But even for the 'antisyzygy' Calvinism must be blamed. In pre-Reformation Scotland, judging by the poetry, there must have existed 'a high culture of the feelings as well as of the mind'. This concord was destroyed by the rigours of Calvinism, which drove a wedge between thought and feeling and destroyed the language in which they had been fused. Alternatively (Muir's argument is not coherent) Calvinism was prolific of dissensions and this was paralleled by the break-up of Scots into local dialects.[49]

The issue here is not whether Calvinism is to blame for the demise of Scots, but whether the tension between Scots and English was itself as fatal to Scottish literature as Muir assumes. He deplores our loss of a native civilisation and attributes it to our loss of a native language. Does this mean that America has no native civilisation? He suggests, too, that bilingualism creates artistic schizophrenia. How does he account, then, for the fact that one of our major Scottish novelists, Iain Crichton Smith, was a native Gaelic speaker? or for the corresponding fact that the great modern Gaelic poets (Sorley Maclean, Derick Thomson, Iain Crichton Smith, Donald MacAulay) were all educated in English? How does he account for the fact that Joseph Conrad's native language was Polish? or that the native language of the four evangelists (who wrote in Greek) was Aramaic?

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[46] Ibid., pp. 24, 25, 23, 48.
[47] Ibid., p. 72.
[48] Ibid., p. 61.
[49] Ibid., p. 73.

Scottish life is not riven by any one *antisyzygy*. It is riven by a host of them: Highlander and Lowlander, Gaelic and English, Catholic and Protestant, Irish and Scottish, native and immigrant, council housing schemes and private fiefdoms. These tensions may as easily stimulate great art as suppress it. And bilingualism, far from inducing intellectual schizophrenia, may instead afford to our perceptions an extra dimension, furnish our imaginations with a whole arsenal of contrasts and comparisons and bring to our modes of expression a new depth and precision.

Back, however, to Muir's central argument: Calvinism is to blame for Scotland's calamitous failure in the arts. Part of the problem is the standard by which we measure failure. Muir, and perhaps all of us, assume that Scotland ought to have produced world-ranking artists in every field. In some (particularly literature) we have: Burns and Scott have had an enduring international influence. In others we have not. There has been no Scottish Mozart, Beethoven or Bach (neither, of course, has there been an English, Mozart, Beethoven or Bach; or for that matter a French one). We have produced no Scottish Michelangelo, Rembrandt or Picasso. Nor have we produced any Scottish Shakespeare, Aeschylus or Racine.

But are our expectations in connection with the arts any more realistic than our dreams on the stage of world soccer? How many world-beaters, how many geniuses, how many giants, can a small nation produce? In almost every artistic sphere, post-Reformation Scotland has produced work which although short of genius has reached high standards of excellence. Muir lamented our failure to produce a single verse of good religious or metaphysical poetry. The work of the Gaelic poet, Dugald Buchanan, certainly fell into that category.[50] In fiction, Scotland has produced James Hogg, John Galt, R. L. Stevenson, Neil Gunn and Lewis Grassic Gibbon; in poetry (apart from Burns) McDiarmad, Maclean, McHaig and Muir himself; in *belles lettres*, Carlyle and John Brown; in painting, Allan Ramsay, Raeburn and McTaggart.

Two figures are worth lingering over. One is the artist David Wilkie, whose influence extended far beyond Scotland to England and the continent.[51] The remarkable thing is that Wilkie found the Calvinist

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[50] See D. Maclean, ed., *The Spiritual Songs of Dugald Buchanan* (Edinburgh, 1913). The poem, 'An Claigeann' ('The Skull') is a brilliant example of metaphysical poetry.

[51] Duncan Macmillan describes Wilkie as 'next to Hogarth, the British artist with the most far-reaching European influence'. (*Scottish Art 1460-1990*, Edinburgh, 1990), p. 165.

ambience of Victorian Scotland no impediment to his art. On the contrary, he warmly embraced it, sharing the evangelical vision of Thomas Chalmers and falling under the spell of Thomas McCrie's *Knox*. One result of this was Wilkie's concern to explore the issues of common life, not least the distresses of Scotland's humble poor. The most brilliant example is *Distraining for Rent,* painted in 1815 and now hanging in the National Gallery of Scotland. But Wilkie was also determined to explore religious issues and his sympathetic treatment of Scottish Presbyterianism is in marked contrast to its treatment at the hand of the poets.

Three of his most outstanding paintings cover the key moments in Presbyterian liturgy. The first, completed in 1832, is *The Preaching of John Knox before the Lords of the Congregation* (Tate Gallery). The second also features Knox: *John Knox Administering the Sacrament at Calder House* (1839, National Gallery of Scotland. This painting was never finished). The third, depicting family worship and enthusiastically proclaiming Presbyterianism's independence of both priests and holy places, is *The Cottar's Saturday Night* (1837, Glasgow Art Gallery). This is an evocative masterpiece, reminding us that *Holy Willie's Prayer* was not Burns' only word on Scottish Calvinism. Wilkie gives the scene his own twist by including in the dim background a fiddle hanging on the wall.

Parallel to Wilkie's is the case of Hugh Miller. For 16 years (1840-1856) Miller edited the *Witness*, producing almost single-handedly a twice-weekly evangelical newspaper whose circulation rivalled and sometimes even surpassed that of the *Scotsman.* Yet, for all the pressure, it is doubtful if any nineteenth-century exponent of *belles lettres* equalled Miller's editorials. To call them *belles lettres* scarcely does them justice. In *belles lettres*, form and style are everything. They are primarily for entertainment. Miller's style, with few lapses, was brilliant: clear, crisp and economical. But the style was servant to the substance as Miller drew on his immense erudition not only to entertain but to educate and to advocate. In church history, English literature, theology and geology Miller was a front-rank expert. Whether he was arguing the cause of the Non-intrusionists (without Miller there would have been no Disruption), explaining the history of the Old Red Sandstone, describing a fossil, advocating a national scheme of education, deploring the evils of the bothy system or discussing the difference between the poetry of intellect and the poetry of fancy, Miller's strength of intellect, mental stamina, felicity of expression, fertility of imagination and strength of argument are awesome.

The 13 volumes of Miller's published writings represent only a fraction of the literary output of these phrenetic years: years which culminated, tragically, in suicide. Carlyle, Hazlitt or De Quincey may each excel Miller

in some one department. None could match his combination of talents or rival the public impact of his achievement. He was a remarkable fusion of the scientific, the artistic and the forensic.

Miller's contemporaries knew his worth. John Brown (1810-82), author of 'Rab and his Friends', numbered him with Burns and Scott, Chalmers and Carlyle, as the foremost Scotsmen of their times and described him as 'self-taught and self-directed, argumentative and scientific, as few men of culture have ever been, and yet with more imagination than either logic or knowledge'.[52]

Yet today Miller's literary legacy is forgotten. This can hardly be attributed to his mediocrity. Nor can it (as in the case of Chalmers) be attributed to Victorian rotundity and prolixity. Even less can it be attributed to Miller's irrelevance to our contemporary world. It is hard to resist the conclusion that the neglect of Miller is due to the fact that his Christian assumptions are unpalatable and his Calvinism anathema. There is no place for him in Scottish literature's Hall of Fame.

THE PRIMACY OF ART

But Muir makes a second assumption: art, and particularly drama, is the single most important enterprise in the world. In this he consciously echoes Goethe, who declared that not only is poetic tragedy the greatest of all literary forms, but that the writing of it is the highest activity of which man is capable.[53] Closer to home, Wordsworth, in his Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, made similarly extravagant claims for poetry. The poet, he wrote, towers above the rest of mankind as a man 'endowed with more lively sensibility'; he is 'the rock of defence of human nature'; he is 'its upholder and preserver', who 'binds together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of human society'. Accordingly, his art is the most sublime and his craft the most indispensable of all human activities. 'Poetry,' writes Wordsworth, 'is the most philosophic of all writing'; it is 'the image of man and nature'; it is 'the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge'; it is 'the first and last of all knowledge... as immortal as the heart of man.'[54]

If Muir and his fellow anti-Calvinists are arguing that from such perspectives Scottish Calvinism never gave art its due, they are absolutely right. Calvinism could never have ascended (or descended) to such idolatry

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[52] John Brown, *Horae Subsecivae* (Edinburgh, 1882), p. 216.

[53] Goethe, quoted in Muir, *Scott and Scotland*, p. 78.

[54] Wordsworth and Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads*, ed. R. L. Brett and A. R. Jones (London, 1991), pp. 255, 257, 259.

of art. It could never have made art the measure of man or viewed the promotion of art as the driving passion of a civilised society. Even less could it have entertained a standpoint prepared to justify anything and everything in the name of art.[55] It certainly could not have regarded poetry as a god which demanded total commitment. Man's chief end is not the writing of poetry or the staging of drama. Man's chief end is to glorify God; his *summum bonum* is to enjoy him.

From this point of view, Scottish Calvinism has for too long been on the defensive. A more confident and robust Protestantism would have claimed for itself what Muir and Wordsworth claimed for poetry; and from there it would have gone on to indict Scotland's artistic establishment on a charge of undermining and suppressing religion. Poetry, not philosophy, has been the scourge of Scottish Christianity, reducing us to a nation where the gap between the opera-going elite and the drug-addicted poor is greater than at any point in our history.

In a fascinating essay on, 'The Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences' David Hume warned that, 'there is no subject in which we must proceed with more caution than in tracing the history of the arts and sciences, lest we assign causes which never existed, and reduce what is merely contingent to stable and universal principles'.[56] The protagonists of the view that the reasons for Scottish cultural atrophy can be reduced to one simple factor (gloomy Calvinist fanaticism) should heed Hume's warning. It is easy enough to assign one comprehensive reason (the Treaty of Versailles) for the rise of German Nazism. It is not so easy to explain in one sentence why Scotland produced no Shakespeare (or why England produced no Knox). The argument that the church is to blame assigns to her a power she never possessed.[57] It assumes, *contra* Hume, that the rise and fall of cultures is subject to some determinist nexus and that if the church had adopted a deliberate policy of promoting drama, then a Scottish Shakespeare would inevitably have appeared. It forgets that the Kirk never had the wealth of Medicis and Borgias prepared to patronise the arts. And it forgets that unlike medieval Catholicism and all its modern imitators Calvinism could not seek to realise its ideals through ornate and

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[55] Cf. Abraham Kuyper: 'unable to grasp the holier benefits of religion, the mysticism of the heart reacts in art intoxication'. *Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids, 1931), p. 143.

[56] David Hume, *Essays Moral, Political and Literary* (London, 1903), p. 114.

[57] Cf. the remark of W. Croft Dickinson: 'no sooner had the Reformers won the war than they lost the peace'. *Andrew Lang, John Knox and Scottish Presbyterianism* [The Andrew Lang Lecture, 1951], (Edinburgh, 1952), p. 13.

sumptuous structures of worship: 'By virtue of its principle Calvinism built no cathedrals, no palaces and no amphitheatres, and was unable to populate the vacant niches of these gigantic buildings with sculptured ornaments.'[58]

The truth is that Scotland's cultural development was influenced by a multitude of factors: the size of the population; the nature of the climate; the state of the economy; the rapacity of the aristocracy; the limitations in education; the loss of the Royal Court; the despotism of the monarchy, with its nemesis in civil war;[59] the demotion and virtual elimination of the native languages, both Scots and Gaelic; endemic Highland unrest prior to Culloden and virtual genocide afterwards.

Add to all these the utter unpredictability of genius. None can forecast where or when the next one will be born, yet such genius will not only achieve personal greatness, but will also stimulate cultural activity all around it. Genius inevitably has its 'circle'. Scotland has not had the honour of producing any towering literary, musical or artistic genius, but it has had the honour of producing the philosopher David Hume, the political economist Adam Smith and the physicist James Clerk-Maxwell, all of whom were responsible for paradigm-shifts in their own fields. And at the risk of provoking Muir's ghost to return in apoplectic fury we may even take pride in the long succession of Scots-born prophets, preachers and theologians whose spiritual influence is still felt all over the world.

Suppression of the arts was never part of the Calvinist agenda. Indeed, Calvin himself elaborated his doctrine of Common Grace precisely because he recognised both the reality and the value of the liberal arts. He rejoiced that hardly anyone is to be found who does not manifest some talent in art and readily acknowledged that this gift is bestowed indiscriminately on the pious and the impious. This, after all, is why we need a doctrine of *common* grace. But *gift* it is: a divine endowment rooted in the common grace of God.[60]

Calvin speaks more fully in his *Commentary on Genesis*. Take, for example, his remarks on Jabel, 'the father of all such as dwell in tents' (Gen. 4:20): 'the invention of arts, and of other things which serve to the common use and convenience of life, is a gift of God by no means to be

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[58] A. Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, p. 164.

[59] Cf. Hume, op. cit., p. 116: 'it is impossible for the arts and sciences to arise, at first, among any people, unless that people enjoy the blessing of a free government'.

[60] Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, edited by J. T. McNeill, translated by F. L. Battles (Philadelphia, 1960), II.ii.12-17.

despised, and a faculty worthy of commendation'. He notes that it was among the descendants of the accursed Cain that these arts first flourished, and comments, 'It is truly wonderful, that this race, which had most deeply fallen from integrity, should have excelled the rest of the posterity of Adam in rare endowments.' 'Let us then know,' he concludes, 'that the sons of Cain, though deprived of the Spirit of regeneration, were yet endued with gifts of no despicable kind; just as the experience of all ages teaches us how widely the rays of divine light have shone on unbelieving nations, for the benefit of the present life; and we see, at the present time, that the excellent gifts of the Spirit are diffused through the whole human race. Moreover, the liberal arts and sciences have descended to us from the heathen.'[61]

Such theoretical endorsement of the arts does not mean, however, that Calvinism has nothing to repent of. I limit myself to two points.

First, there has been no Calvinist aesthetic. An excessive spiritualism has inhibited us from clearly asserting the goodness of the material universe. Terrified of the sensual we have refused to face the deeper question of the sensuous. We have also failed to insist on the absolute value of beauty, even though it is clearly emphasised in the creation narrative itself. In Genesis 2:9, for example, we read that God planted in the Garden 'all kinds of trees'. Some were 'good for food'. But others were there simply because they were 'pleasant to the eye'. They had no other 'use' and their inclusion in the Garden is nothing short of a ringing endorsement of beauty. If something is 'pleasant to the eyes' it may need no further justification.

But what is beauty? That, too, is surely a matter for the theologian, though not, of course, for him exclusively. Does the very form of the Creation Narrative constitute an endorsement of art? Are the orderliness and rhetorical brilliance of Genesis 1 themselves pointers to the criteria of great art? And what are the theological/aesthetical implications of the refrain, 'God saw that it was good'? Does this mean (as I think it does) that the poet always has God looking over his shoulder, that in the last analysis *God* is the only judge of art and that great art is therefore only that upon which *God* can look and see that it is 'good' (or even 'very good')? And if so (if God is the Paramount Art Critic), what are his criteria? Can we know them, or must we remain for ever agnostic? Can art be 'good' irrespective

[61] Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses called Genesis* (Edinburgh, 1847), vol. 1, pp. 217f. Cf. Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, p. 155: 'art has the mystical task of reminding us in its productions of the beautiful that was lost and of anticipating its perfect coming lustre'.

of moral and theological considerations (even if, for example, it is racist, sexist or blasphemous)?

Secondly, theologians have failed to make appropriate use of the arts. The late Donald Mckinnon spoke once of the diminution devout men suffer when they 'show themselves unwilling to allow their insight into human beings to be enlarged in ways at once unexpected and unfamiliar through great literature'. He warned: 'if one's image of the creature is contracted, that contraction reacts inevitably upon one's image of the creator'.[62]

Dr. Mackinnon's specific complaint was that men speak and act as if, for adults, novels were only properly read for relaxation and were unsuitable reading for 'the serious hours of the morning'. 'Do we,' he wondered, 'reach for such works as *Anna Karenina, Middlemarch, Nostromo, The Wings of the Dove, The Rainbow* for relaxation? Or if we do treat them simply as light reading, have we not already resolved in advance that we will not learn from them or take them seriously? In such an attitude of mind there surely lies a most certain source of the most deadly spiritual philistinism.'[63]

More recently, Professor Stanley J. Grenz, speaking of 'the wider context of the theological conversation', has written: 'Because the life-giving Spirit is present wherever life flourishes, the Spirit's voice can conceivably resound through many media, including the media of human culture.... Consequently, in the conversation that constitutes theology, evangelical theologians should listen intently for the voice of the Spirit who is present in all life and therefore precedes us into the world, bubbling to the surface through the artifacts and symbols humans construct.'[64]

This is a serious challenge, even though we may have to tone down Grenz's suggestion that the Spirit is present in all life, at least to the extent of reminding ourselves that the demonic is also present in all life and that the proportions of the one to the other vary enormously from one place to the next.[65] The Spirit is certainly not present in *Last Tango in Paris* as he is present in *Coriolanus* and *The Heir of Redclyffe*. But the question is still an urgent one: is art revelatory? If the heavens declare the

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62 D. Mackinnon, *Borderlands of Theology and Other Essays* (London, 1968), pp. 50f.

63 Ibid., p. 51.

64 John G. Stackhouse, Jr, ed., *Evangelical Futures* (Grand Rapids, 2000), p. 128.

65 Cf. the more restrained comment of Calvin (on John 1:9): 'beams from this light are shed upon the whole race of men ... there is no man to whom some awareness of the eternal light does not penetrate.' (*The Gospel according to St John 1-10*, Carlisle, 1995, p. 15.)

glory of God, can art make those heavens even more eloquent? Can it make 'the made things' (*ta poiemata*, Rom. 1:20) even more revelatory? If conscience continuously bears witness to the categorical imperative, can art aid and abet it, probing and illuminating, as no prosaic theology can, the darkness of human depravity and the depths of human despair? And if man, alone among God's creatures, can say, 'O LORD, our Lord, how excellent is your name in all the earth!', is it possible that our human capacity for doxology finds its zenith in art: in Handel, perhaps, or in Bach?

Art must defer to theology as truth; but then theology must listen to art as exegesis. A poem, a painting or an aria may be worth a thousand words.

REVIEWS

Van Til's Apologetics: Readings & Analysis

Greg L. Bahnsen

Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing, Phillipsburg, 1998; 764pp., $39.99; ISBN 0 87552 098 7

Some would argue that in the history of apologetics there were basically three approaches: Classical, Evidential, and Fideism, until Cornelius Van Til (1895-1987) began developing his 'brand' of apologetics. In 1928, after spending one year in the pastorate, he was asked to lecture in the department of apologetics at Princeton Seminary. When J. Gresham Machen resigned his position in the New Testament Department at Princeton Seminary in 1929 to establish Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, Van Til also resigned his position to return to the pastorate. After rejecting nearly a hand full of appeals to accept the position of apologetics professor at Westminster Theological Seminary, Van Til finally accepted the position and began teaching in August of 1929, where he remained until he retired forty years later.

Van Til's first published piece came upon the completion of his masters degree. In that work, a review of Alfred North Whitehead's *Religion in the Making*, Van Til's presuppositional approach became public. Four key points of Van Til's approach emerged. They included '(a) locating his opponent's critical presuppositions, (b) criticizing the autonomous attitude that arises from a failure to honour the Creator-creature distinction, (c) exposing the internal and destructive philosophical tensions that attend autonomy, and then (d) setting forth the only viable alternative, biblical Christianity' (p. 10). In his 1929 review of two works of Bavink, another foundational aspect of Van Til sprang forth. 'He insisted that the propagation and defense of the faith required believers to abandon the impossible notion of a "neutral territory" of truth between believers and unbelievers' (p. 10). Richard Pratt's work entitled, *Every Thought Captive*, encapsulates Van Til's motto in doing apologetics.

Van Til was a prolific writer, and Bahnsen cites nearly one hundred syllabi, books, articles and reviews by him in this volume. Because he was primarily Dutch, Van Til's works were more or less understandable

depending on who his 'proof reader' was when each work was published. Thus, some works are more easily understood than others. Unfortunately, readers often tire prematurely when reading Van Til because of the awkwardness of his grammar and vocabulary, and thus miss the genius of his contribution to the field of apologetics. This is where Bahnsen's work is so invaluable in understanding Van Til's thought. In a matchless way, Bahnsen offers in this work what he sets out to do:

> This book is an organized digest of what Van Til taught throughout his various publications about the underlying approach to apologetics. After an introductory sketch of the basic themes that drive Van Til's apologetic and a survey of his life, the book lays out his conception of apologetics and offers a simple description and illustration of his presuppositional method. We then explore and explain in more detail the relevant epistemological and psychological issues that bear on Van Til's way of defending the faith, culminating in a discussion of the transcendental argumentation that he endorsed--set in contrast to the more traditional way of using theistic proofs and empirical evidences. A few of Van Til's opponents are examined before his outlook is summarized in the conclusion. (p. xxii)

Any serious student of apologetics must acquire this work and read it. This is Van Til at his best because it is Van Til presented in a most readable fashion.

Bruce R. Backensto,
Beaver Falls and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

To Glorify God: Essays On Modern Reformed Liturgy

Bryan D. Spinks and Iain R. Torrance (eds)
T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1999; 272pp., £24.95; ISBN 0 567 08606 2

To those for whom the term 'Reformed Liturgy' is not an oxymoron, this book will make an interesting companion. Like all collections of essays the quality is not uniform, but generally I found it to be high. In an age when there is a greater reliance upon centrally produced liturgical resources and the lectionaries they contain, it is good to have a volume like this offering a fairly thorough critique.

The liturgies in question are *Common Order* (CO), produced by the Church of Scotland's Panel on Worship, and the *Book of Common Worship* (BCW) from the Presbyterian Church of the USA. In the opinion of those essayists who offer comparative studies, the latter is usually preferred, if only marginally. All sections of the liturgies are

examined in their own right, and some themes are looked at across the whole, which makes for a good mix of studies. One interesting feature of the collection is that it does not simply seek to assess the liturgies themselves, but also how relevant they are within their broader cultural context.

Rather than try to cover every essay in this review I shall paint a general picture and pick out one or two of the essays that particularly appealed to me. The first few chapters relate the processes by which the books came about, and I particularly enjoyed Horace Allen's account as a participant in the production of the BCW, for two reasons. It was interesting to have an insight into the attitudes and decisions over the last fifty years or so leading to the production of BCW. He also neatly draws out the twin dangers of total prescription and total freedom in worship and suggests that the genius of Presbyterianism can be seen in the creative local use of such liturgies.

A couple of studies on broader issues appealed to me. First, in a telling essay, Will Storrar examines CO from a cultural perspective within postmodern Scotland and lays down the challenge that the Kirk will only be able to use CO as a missionary and edifying text when it ditches its lingering concept of Christendom and modern mentality. The second may be of less relevance to some of this journal's readers, but it was thought provoking on a wider hermeneutical front. I have become more conscious in recent times of a greater number of ministers relying on the lectionary as the basis of the theme for the Sunday sermon. Largely skipping the 'Why?' question, John Goldingay asks the 'Which?' question and proceeds to examine the one compiled by the Joint Liturgical Group that appeared in the *Book of Common Order* (1979) and the Revised Common Lectionary that appears in CO and BCW. Having examined the strengths and weaknesses of both it might seem tame to end up saying what is needed is a hybrid, but he makes many interesting points along the way. Crucially, should the Gospel lesson, following the life of Christ, control the choice of the other readings, or should these other Scriptures be heard in their own right?

A series follows on specific subjects across the range of liturgical rites reflecting on the way in which the two books portray God, Christ and the nature of the Church. Of these, it was Kathryn Greene-McCreight's essay on God that grabbed my attention because of her damning indictment of CO's bland, nice God while the God of BCW is more like the God of the Bible and the Reformed tradition. 'In short, the doctrine of God taught in and though the liturgies and prayers of the two books examined is not the same at all' (p. 113).

Of the essays on individual rites, the one I found most interesting in the present moral climate was Kenneth Stevenson's on the marriage service. I cannot say I agreed throughout, but he raises many issues both theological and pastoral.

Without question, the essay that stands out from the crowd is the final one by Donald Macleod. Not in the quality of its writing, for there are others better, but more in the acceptance, or lack, of the term 'Reformed Liturgy' and the tone of the criticism towards the present subjects. In laying out the inherent difficulties the compilers face producing such material in a Reformed context he makes some good points. But later in more biting criticism one feels that he is straining to keep his language within the bounds of scholarly exchange. I suspect that many readers of this journal, like myself, would be sympathetic to much of what he writes, but there were points at which I found myself disagreeing profoundly, such as with some of his comments on the Lord's supper.

When offered this book to review I almost declined because of the subject matter. I'm glad I didn't because my understanding was broadened and my critical appreciation of these liturgies was deepened. The rub is to use them wisely in leading the people in worship of God. I hope it will help me do that.

Jared Hay, Balerno Parish Church

The Doctrine of Creation. Essays in Dogmatics, History and Philosophy

Colin E. Gunton (ed.)

T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1997; 179pp., no price; ISBN 0 567 08588 0

King's College, London, continues to be a source of high quality, constructive theological discussion and this collection of essays is no exception. Six of the eight contributions come from current or former members of King's, and the collection is only enhanced by a further two papers from the distinguished names of Robert W. Jenson and Daniel W. Hardy.

The Introduction hopes that the collection will have offered an insight into the importance of the dogmatic content of the doctrine of creation and that it prompts opportunities for further thought and research. By this test it is a highly successful venture. The discussion is sometimes quite technical but always dedicated to constructive dialogue with the issues of the day. The standard is so consistent that it would be a crime to single any one paper out for praise or disappointment.

Robert Jenson finds the identification of the Son with the community of Christ the goal of creation and with his usual craft leaves a Trinitarian

stamp on the subject in a stimulating seminal treatment. Paul Helm pursues the subject of God's timelessness, a debate in which he has become a major figure in recent years. He effectively responds to those who find creation in a timeless zone incoherent but seems to be unusually adventurous in affirming not just a timeless God but a timeless creation ('There was no time when the universe was not' and 'The universe is beginningless, without a first event'), though this eternal creation is distinguished from the temporal *making* of what now is. He certainly succeeds in showing how a timeless God might know things in time. Perhaps more work is needed to show as convincingly how a timeless God *acts* in time. But he uses spirited argumentation all the same. The approach of Paul Helm finds support in Alan Torrance's thoughtful treatment of *creatio ex nihilo.* Here too the idea of creation should not be of the space-and-time world of objects but the 'totality of spatio-temporal identities together with their interconnective matrices from absolutely nothing'.

Colin Gunton writes fruitfully on Genesis, reminding us of the limits to literalness in the long hermeneutical tradition of the opening chapters. More important, he returns to the Christological roots of the doctrine of creation without tipping into Christomonism. His paper on causation is less straightforward but very useful for double-striking the line between 'emanation' and 'creation'.

Daniel Hardy tackles the relation of creation to eschatology. There are many nuggets though the language is the most technical of all the papers. Some may be led to wonder from the paper if the 'eschaton' really is the radical departure from nature and history that the New Testament seems to expect. But only a longer piece would make this clearer. Brian Horne helpfully locates human freedom in a doctrine of creation, arguing that we 'live out our lives in the tension between freedom and necessity; and human creativity can only be properly understood in this context'. Christoph Schwöbel writes on the relation of God to creation and community. The piece is profound in defining God's relationship to creation in terms of divine self-giving (not simply as architect, janitor and emperor). This last approach will commend itself to many women theologians writing today. Which prompts the question: why no contribution from women when 'creation' is a field attracting many such scholars at the present time?

Not everything carries the day, but the more successful elements contribute valuable nurture to a top-priority debate.

Roy Kearsley, South Wales Baptist College/Cardiff University

The Triune Creator. A Historical and Systematic Study

Colin E. Gunton
Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1998; 246pp., £14.95; ISBN 0 7486 0792 7

Colin Gunton's fame in academic theology is assured from his work in Trinitarian studies alone, though he has tackled a raft of tricky issues in addition. Here, much fruit from previous writing has been gathered up and skilfully worked into a comprehensive theological vision. Like so many of his other writings it is enriched by the results of extensive collaborative work at Kings College, London, reaching out to many traditions, including Eastern Orthodoxy, Moltmann and modern Pentecostal thought. The author also has the bottle to engage with other disciplines, negotiating terrain in such diverse fields as biblical studies, science, philosophy and ethics.

The book begins with a mouth-watering taster to an ambitious programme which carries Trinity and creation out to meet challenges from such rivals as evolutionary science, study of religions and secular anthropology. It is too big a task for one book, of course, especially given the uncompromisingly apologetic thrust. While not claiming to be the last word on the subject, this work significantly upends many cosy assumptions of theological revisionism and critiques of religion, though it is done graciously. Amongst other things, the author shows that the all-too popular rejection of a Christian doctrine of creation usually ends up transferring the language of creative agency to the world itself. 'Nature' or 'evolution' enjoy the dignity of being personalised and then placed in charge. Consequently, only two possible views of the universe face us. There is a divinity which created things or the creation simply made itself. I should have liked Gunton at this point to have explored one further possible startling implication. A re-wording, albeit crudely, of the options could then be: 'Creation/science or paganism – that's the choice.' That is, an atheist view of the cosmos can only tend to something like the divinising of nature. On this account, it would be 'scientism' not religion that is superstitious!

This possibility aside, the author does lay out many timely warnings about the link between a doctrine of creation and the foundations of science. He is even-handed with his slap-downs. He points up the dangers of scientific fideism, but also laments the harm that Christian apologists have done to themselves by being ensnared in the nets of Platonism and deism – the real theological enemies of authentic science.

But what does the Trinity have to do with all this? Well, the separate integrity of the creation is assured not by doubtful philosophies of evolutionary naturalism (distinct from merely scientific use of the evolutionary method) but by a creator committed to protecting and preserving the creation. The two 'creating hands' of God, the Spirit and the Son (as in Irenaeus) preserve the Father's intention. A common, too whimsical, notion of evolution must not be confused with the work of the Spirit held in Christian theology. In contrast, the Spirit ensures 'providence', enables creation's freedom and makes possible a journey to the intended future. And the incarnation of the Son marks God's commitment to creation in general and humanity in particular, providing a benchmark of full humanity in the image of God.

That's the main course. But it's a ten-course meal and the only proof of all the ingredients is in the eating. The full menu includes fresh treatments of God's relation to time, eschatology's relationship to ethics and the merits or otherwise of Pannenberg, Moltmann, Augustine, Origen (and many more). You might think the reviewer is exaggerating. Well, just order up for yourself. Eating is believing.

Roy Kearsley, South Wales Baptist College/Cardiff University

Christianity: A Short Introduction

Keith Ward

One World Publications, Oxford, 2000; 184pp., £8.99; ISBN 1-5168-229-5

This book, written by the Regius Professor of Divinity at Oxford University, is stimulating at two levels. First it introduces the Christian faith to the intelligent outsider. It deals with a range of key subjects that shape Christian belief and practice. The distinctive feature of this book is that each theme is dealt with from three angles. After a general introduction on a topic, and before a shorter conclusion, three perspectives are presented that the church has held at different times or in different places. This is done, not to confuse, but to show the range of insights Christians have brought to their faith. It also helps to explain the diversity found in the church today.

At a deeper and more important level it is an excellent introduction for Christians. I suspect many Christians tend to think about their faith in line with their tradition. They may be ignorant of other ways of thinking. They may even be suspicious of or hostile towards any other possibilities. Keith Ward makes it safe and exciting to begin that journey of exploration. His method is such that he avoids the pitfall of caricature.

Moreover he does not trail his own personal preferences too obviously. His very fair and objective presentation allows the reader the chance to see the value and reasonableness of other positions than his or her own.

Furthermore when the position the reader holds is dealt with accurately he has a confidence and interest to approach the subject through other lenses. One aspect that impressed me is that even when a position was clearly not that of the author, he always tried to find something good to justify it, before he moved on to other options. By so doing he displays a generosity of spirit that is sadly not often found in a faith whose mark is supposed to be love for one another.

It could be argued that, by laying three alternatives out side by side and choosing none of them, this book simply mirrors the modern obsession with unlimited choice that renders all choices valueless. This is not, however, a sell-out to the 'pick and mix' philosophy so beloved by our post-modern culture. It is a serious attempt to describe the diversity that exists in the church whilst showing the connections that underpin different points of view. The way in which the writer tops and tails each chapter provides a very helpful setting against which each perspective can be seen at its best.

As a book it reads well and held this reviewer's interest throughout. Language is well chosen. The book is tightly written but remains readable. It provides a good overview to the contemporary Christian landscape and stimulates creative thinking about the Christian tradition. The writer does not provide an exhaustive view of Christian doctrine but is not afraid to face up to some very difficult issues.

This could be for some a very liberating book and for many a worthwhile read.

Colin A. M. Sinclair, Palmerston Place Church of Scotland, Edinburgh

William Barclay – The Authorized Biography

Clive Rawlins

Fount, London, 1998; 312 pp., £8.99; ISBN 0 00 628097 8

This is a book which in turn informs, delights and infuriates. The Reverend Professor William Barclay – Willie Barclay to his public – was by all accounts a larger-than-life character, and one who, over twenty years after his death, is still recalled in the church. But, as the years pass, there are more and more who never heard the man, and whose lives and ministries are barely impacted by his work. So this reviewer, for one, is grateful for the opportunity to read of one who made such an impact on the churchgoing (and non-churchgoing) public of Scotland.

Clive Rawlins' biography is presented as 'The Authorized Biography', and as such, he assumes that his understanding of Barclay, as Barclay's authorised biographer (interpreter?) must be taken as correct. More than once we are told that other commentators on Barclay's work are mistaken or plain wrong in their understanding of the man and his work. If Rawlins is to be believed, only his is the proper understanding of Barclay.

'There's a job to be done.' Barclay's strengths come through – his willingness to 'be of service', his lack of 'side'. His kindness and generosity of both his means and his spirit. Yet in some ways his was a life of contradictions. He comes across as a shy, almost self-effacing man who, nevertheless, loved to be the centre of attraction. 'A life of discovery' was his approach to teaching, yet he remained curiously out of touch with a lot of contemporary scholarship on the important and illuminating link between First-Century Judaism and the Early Church.

This is a remarkably uncritical biography. On the one hand Rawlins presents Barclay as the archetypal Prophet of Goodwill – the voice of understanding and compassion crying in the wilderness of closed hard-heartedness. And, Willie Barclay's shortcomings – his penchant for alcohol and his workaholic monomania – are not ignored by the author. Yet they are not given much weight. Indeed, no attempt is made to 'measure the man'. Rather, Barclay is presented as one who sought to be 'all things to all men, that he might win some'. What comes through is the man's great-hearted humanity, but such is the spin that Rawlins puts on Barclay's foibles that one begins to wonder just how true to life it all was. His was a life of giving: 'a ministry, a service; one of consummate goodwill'.

Barclay is seen as one who made scholarship approachable and learning digestible. He is presented the Great Communicator, who sought to make his students' world 'larger, more luminous, kinder'. Above all, Barclay's aim was to make 'the plain, common man, the centre of his work'. As he wrote himself,

> I began to think that I might become a theological middleman, to take the results of scholarship, to take the things done in the classroom, to take the great books the scholars have written, and to restate them in ordinary non-technical language which ordinary people understand.

On reading this biography one is enabled to understand William Barclay, the man, better; and surely that is what biography should seek to do. William Barclay and/or his biographer, Clive Rawlins, may infuriate you but, for all that, this is a book worth reading.

Alan Macgregor, Banff Parish Church

On the Interpretation and Use of the Bible: with Reflections on Experience

Ronald S. Wallace
Scottish Academic Press, Edinburgh, 1999; 137 pp., £7.25; ISBN 0 7073 0775 9

What well-known authors say in their later years is often illuminating, frequently summing up much of their thought or showing the conclusions to which they have come through a life-time's reflection. This happened in a distinctly troubling fashion in 'Mind at the end of its Tether' by H. G. Wells. There is interest in reading the later works of Christians like John Wenham and Oliver Barclay. This book, based on lectures given in Singapore, comes into the same category.

Ronald Wallace has of course written many books, most of them helpful expositions of Bible books or studies of the thought of the Reformers. His latest, written in a popular style, deals with the unity of the testaments, with approaches to interpretation in the contexts both of worship and of critical study and with issues concerned with the application of the Word. There are also chapters on openness and surrender, on typology and allegory and on the integrity of the biblical witness, but he does not deal with post-modern approaches to interpretation. There are many references to his personal experience and these autobiographical sections often show why he holds the particular positions he does.

His indebtedness to the Reformers, especially Calvin, is evident in every chapter and the influence of Karl Barth's doctrine of the Word of God is strong. This latter feature means that many readers will not find themselves in agreement at certain points. Yet it should be said that in the concluding chapter he moves towards a stronger biblical conservatism, for here he places great emphasis on the factual reliability of the Elijah and Elisha stories, for instance, and that of the Gospel of John. Here he says, 'The Bible is too often hindered from making its full and enriching impact on the minds and lives of our lay people, because after many years they have been led to share the current doubts amongst pastors and scholars about the reliability of its witness.'

He stresses the importance of good reading of the Scriptures in church services. On typology he moves deftly between extremes, saying, 'It is a wise rule... that we must avoid the deliberate habit of seeking here and there in Scripture for type and anti-type. We have no need to add to the decisive types which bind the New Testament so closely and convincingly to the Old in reinforcing the one Salvation history.' He

approves of allegorising to some degree (for instance, in expounding the Song of Solomon) but warns against its excesses. He has helpful things to say about the way the story element and the doctrinal elements in Scripture relate and he shows how sensitive their fellowship with God had made the Bible writers to the sufferings of some of the people whose story they narrate.

Geoffrey Grogan, Glasgow

Retrieving The Tradition And Renewing Evangelicalism: A Primer for Suspicious Protestants

D. H. Williams

Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan / Cambridge, UK, 1999; ix+243pp., £9.99; ISBN 0 8028 4668 8

Professor Williams writes from the unusual perspective of a Baptist teaching within a Roman Catholic institution. He makes good use of both of these perspectives in his concern to recapture a central role for tradition (as expressed in the early church fathers) within evangelicalism and especially evangelicalism as expressed in the free / independent churches. The 'Suspicious Protestants' of the sub-title are largely Evangelicals in the free / independent tradition a group who have disconnected themselves 'from the rich heritage of the church in its formative years where the doctrines of Christ and the Holy Spirit were developed' (p. 1) and other essential foundations laid.

Williams attacks a series of misunderstandings about the role of Tradition in church history. Behind these misconceptions, however, is a more profound issue. Under-valuing Tradition risks the danger not only of repeating old heresies but also of undermining Christian identity and mission. In an attempt to be culturally relevant and to meet the contemporary longing for spiritual experience some evangelicals are losing connection with their moorings which Williams identifies as the road to cultism. For example, the growth of small groups within the church is double-edged in that while a group can foster strong bonds of community and deep personal experiences it 'can offer no certainty that Christian orthodox teaching will likewise be transmitted in its midst' (p. 209). The possible result is increased fragmentation of the church.

The misunderstandings Williams addresses in his central chapters relate to the generally bad press associated with the very concept of 'tradition' within some evangelical circles, suspicion towards the Patristic period and assumed negative attitudes of the Reformers to both 'tradition' and the Early Fathers. Tradition as a concept, he argues, is bound up in

the evangelical mind with the idea of extra-biblical activities and unbiblical practices whose rise can be traced to a supposed 'fall' of the church which occurred anywhere between the death of the last Apostle to the time of Constantine. He ably demonstrates the difficulties with this view defining tradition to be the passing and receiving of something living and showing how this took place within the context of the life of Jesus and the Apostles. Williams then draws on the great Church Councils and some key early church figures to show that neither imperial politics nor episcopal power can be used to account for and thus devalue the creeds and confessions of the late patristic era. They stand not as infallible documents but as 'faithful conductors of the Christian doctrine of God found in Scripture and the Tradition' (p. 172).

Much of his argument throughout centres on his understanding of 'sola scriptura'. Williams seeks to argue that the Magisterial Reformers not only drew on the work of the Early Fathers but understood 'sola scriptura' as operating within the context of the foundational Tradition of the church. So 'the hermeneutic of the church's "faith" guides the exposition and reception of Scripture' (p. 233). Williams therefore proposes a triadic structure of authority involving Scripture, Tradition and the church which seeks to recognise that they are not independent sources of tradition but operate together, presupposing one another. Within this he still gives Scripture a place of 'unique authority' (p. 215).

Williams has given us a stimulating and challenging book which rightly identifies some of the weaknesses of parts of Evangelicalism. William's criticisms cannot be levelled at all of Evangelicalism (e.g. see the dependence on the Church Fathers in IVP's Contours in Christian Theology series) but nonetheless there are deep concerns about the proliferation of groups and the tendency to demean what God has been doing in the past in favour of what he is doing now. The question that remains is how this situation can and should be addressed.

Andy Bathgate, Scripture Union Scotland

The People of the Great Faith: The Highland Church 1690–1900

Douglas Ansdell

Acair Limited, Stornoway, 1998; 234pp., ISBN 0 86152 198 6

My early exposure to Highland church history was sadly lacking. It was almost entirely confined to the oblique references made during a course on the history of Disruption and Union in the church in Scotland. Other than this, I might have spent my entire period of formal theological education

for the Church of Scotland ministry unaware of the unique, important, and fascinating story of the Highland Church.

It was, however, my great privilege some years later to be at Aberdeen University when Professor Donald Meek taught the first ever classes to Divinity students in Ecclesiastical Gaelic. We could well have used Ansdell's superb and necessary book as a main text.

Ansdell shows us both the distinctiveness of the church in the Highlands, and its relationship to external forces and agencies. He helps us through the most significant events and movements that are part of the history of the Highland Church; the establishment of presbyterianism, the rise of evangelicalism, the Church's role in social and political developments in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Clearances, Education, Revivals, Land League activities etc.), the Disruption, the role of the Free Church, the 1893 Secession and the Union of 1900.

Throughout, Ansdell is good at calling to question some of the presuppositions held by those both inside and outside of the Highland Church. Indeed, he raises the crucial question of perspective in Highland Church history. The book is also good at examining the influence of factors which have been more or less constant in the Highland Church, e.g. Gaelic, the supernatural, and the geographic challenge of mission in the Highlands.

Ansdell's main thesis is that significant movements on a national scale (presbyterianism, evangelicalism and the Disruption) reached the Highlands at times when the prevailing social, cultural and religious conditions did not have the capacity to resist. These movements were then assimilated, but given a particular Highland interpretation and application.

However, by the time the Free Church was moving to a more liberal stance in the latter part of the nineteenth century, the Highlands had been much strengthened by a church that had provided leadership, education, identity and a distinctive spirituality. Changes were then successfully resisted, but the cost of this resistance has been a broken and fragmented church in the Highlands.

This book provides a fascinating insight to the church in the Highlands. I was only occasionally frustrated by what had to be missed out, but the overview is clear and helpful. I would warmly recommend it to those outside the Highland Church, as a way of understanding its legacy today. I would strongly recommend it to those within the church in the Highlands, lest we read our own particular theological ideals into our past, and are tempted to believe in some golden age in the Highland Church. I would especially recommend this book to anyone who believes

that the Highland Church represents a monochrome and homogenous mass, 'gloomy, censorious and dictatorial'. The reality, as Ansdell clearly demonstrates, is far more complex, multi-faceted and interesting.

Iain Macritchie, Inverness Hospitals' Chaplain

Interpreting God and the Postmodern Self. On Meaning, Manipulation and Promise

Anthony C. Thistleton,
T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1996; 180pp., £12.95; ISBN 0 567 290302 5

Now, now, it is really no use saying that you just cannot bear to see another book with the word 'postmodern' in the title. They are just going to keep coming, so the best thing you can do is make sure you pick the gold from the dross – and for those serious about it, make sure you include this highly significant book by a distinguished evangelical author respected across the modern theological world. His aim is to grapple with the extensive twentieth-century critique of written texts and authorial purpose. He particularly crunches with those critical writers who claim that all texts and systems are instruments of manipulation and power, in other words disguised power bids. He challenges the claim that this is especially so in Christianity and tracks, in reply, a biblical view of service. He goes on to examine the claims that the self is an illusion and we are really no more than information and performance processors, hooked on to the expectations of those who most manipulate us. He rebuts the particular claim that Christianity is a prime nurturer of 'docility' on behalf of the power-brokers of selves.

The whole discussion is carried out with dignity and respect for opponents, frequently arguing from their own grounds rather than traditional ones. Part of the package is a theological biography of Don Cupitt, thorn in the flesh of conservative Christianity. Criticism that the author has aimed his critique at generalised targets have recently been effectively rebutted by him in a keynote theological conference paper at Edinburgh, but one wonders how the criticism could have been made in the first place. The detail, carefulness, patience and integrity of the discussion is a model of how texts need not be manipulative.

All the same, the clay feet of some key postmodern ideas come to view and get kicked away. The leading response, however, is a positive mapping out of constructive Christian thinking: especially a biblical understanding of the self and its destiny and the Trinitarian basis for 'love without strings', hope and reality. It has to be said that the main part of the book is an analysis and evaluation of critical philosophy,

hermeneutics and theology. It is not intended as fireside reading, and, true, is technical in places. Given the superficiality and subjectivism of most that passes for evangelical thought (as if Jonathan Edwards had set us no example here!) not enough leaders will invest time in grappling with Thistleton's quest. But those who do will have a deeper understanding of why Christian credibility is on the rack today and what the profound theological response of Christian faith should be.

Roy Kearsley, South Wales Baptist College/Cardiff University

Biblical Interpretation in the Era of the Reformation: Essays Presented to David C. Steinmetz in Honor of His Sixtieth Birthday

Richard A. Muller and John L. Thompson (eds)
Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1996; 351pp.; ISBN 0-8028-3819-7

It has long been the case that one of the neglected areas of Reformation studies was the interpretation of the Bible. Given the centrality of the Bible to the Reformation, encapsulated by the slogan, 'sola scriptura', this is a rather peculiar lacuna – or rather, was. The situation has been changing over the last ten years or so, and much of the highly significant work in this field has been done by students of David C. Steinmetz of Duke University, as well as by Steinmetz himself. In the work under review, we have set before us a rich selection of studies offered in tribute to Steinmetz on the occasion of his 60th birthday, and in these essays the reader is presented with a first-rate introduction to the history of biblical interpretation in the Reformation. Former students as well as colleagues of Steinmetz have contributed to this volume, which ranges from pre-Reformation developments to the later sixteenth century. In addition to the celebratory aspect of the book, the essays taken together are intended to set the achievements of the Reformation in the area of biblical interpretation within the wider context of pre-critical approaches to the Bible, noting not only the discontinuities with previous centuries, but also the common ground between the Reformers and their predecessors.

The book is divided into three parts. In Part One ('The Medieval and Renaissance Background'), three essays are devoted to the issue of the Reformation in relation to the era immediately preceding it. Especially important is the introductory essay by Richard Muller ('Biblical Interpretation in the Era of the Reformation: the View from the Middle Ages'), which sets the stage not only for this section, but for the entire volume. This essay is complemented by two specific studies: 'Johannes

Trithemius on the Fourfold Sense of Scripture: The *Tractatus de Inuestigatione Scripturae* (1486)' by Karlfried Froehlich; and 'Erasmus's Influence on Zwingli and Bullinger in the Exegesis of Matthew 11:28-30,' by John B. Payne.

Part Two ('Exegesis and Interpretation in the Early Reformation') takes the subject into the crucial early years of the Reformation, with essays by Kenneth Hagen ('*Omnis homo mendax*: Luther on Psalm 116'), Carl M. Leth ('Balthasar Hubmaier's "Catholic" Exegesis: Matthew 16:18-19 and the Power of the Keys'), Timothy J. Wengert ('Philip Melanchthon's 1522 Annotations on Romans and the Lutheran Origins of Rhetorical Criticism'), Irena Backus ('The Chronology of John 5-7: Martin Bucer's Commentary [1528-36] and the Exegetical Tradition'), and W. P. Stephens ('Zwingli on John 6:63: "Spiritus est qui vivifacat, caro nihil prodest"').

Part Three ('Continuity and Change in Mid-Sixteenth-Century Biblical Interpretation') carries the discussion of the central issues into the later period of the Reformation and on into the earlier stages of Protestant Orthodoxy. Here, we find essays by Susan E. Schreiner ('"The Spiritual Man Judges All Things": Calvin and Exegetical Debate about Certainty in the Reformation'), Craig S. Farmer ('Wolfgang Musculus's Commentary on John: Tradition and Innovation in the Story of the Woman Taken in Adultery'), Joel E. Kok ('Heinrich Bullinger's Exegetical Method: The Model for Calvin?'), John L. Thompson ('The Survival of Allegorical Argumentation in Peter Martyr Vermigli's Old Testament Exegesis'), Lyle D. Bierma ('Remembering the Sabbath Day: Ursinus's Exposition of Exodus 20:8-11'), John L. Farthing ('Holy Harlotry: Jerome Zanchi and the Exegetical History of Gomer [Hosea 1-3]'), and Robert Kolb ('The Doctrine of Christ in Nikolaus Selnecker's Interpretation of Psalms 8, 22, and 110').

The book concludes with Part Four ('Conclusion'), in which there is a final essay by Muller and Thompson ('The Significance of Precritical Exegesis: Retrospect and Prospect'). The authors seek to draw together the implications of the preceding essays and point out the value of pre-critical exegesis not only for the study of the Reformation era, but also for contemporary exegesis and theology. The volume concludes with 'A Chronological Bibliography of the Writings of David C. Steinmetz', drawn up by Mickey L. Mattox.

The range and richness of the essays are evident from the titles alone, and anyone interested in the subject would do well to add this work to their library. There is little to fault in this volume, which is a fine testimonial to the lifework of David Steinmetz in promoting this hitherto

much neglected field of study. One could wish that the editors had included as well a bibliography of the major works referred to in the text, which would have been a great help to those who wish to read further in the area of the history of interpretation. The lack of an index is also to be regretted. Yet in terms of readability, scholarship and accuracy, this work is first-rate, and cannot be commended highly enough.

N. Scott Amos, St Mary's College, University of St Andrews

Studies in Scottish Church History

A. C. Cheyne

T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1999; ix+325pp., n.p.; ISBN 0 567 08644 5.

Alec Cheyne, Emeritus Professor of Ecclesiastical History in New College, Edinburgh University, has put all students of Scottish Church history in his debt with this fine work. There are thirteen chapters, covering aspects of the entire period from the Scottish Reformation on into the late twentieth century. Among themes surveyed, we find the nature of Scottish Presbyterianism (doctrine, worship, government), the Revolution settlement, the Ten Years' Conflict and Disruption, changing attitudes to Scripture in the nineteenth century, and the history of the teaching of Church history at New College from the beginnings to the 1990s. Among the significant figures dealt with are Thomas Chalmers (clearly something of a hero for Prof. Cheyne), John Tulloch, John Caird, Henry Drummond, and the brothers John and Donald Baillie.

The chapters are written with an easy literary grace and a sure command of the source material, equally delightful. Even though one might from time to time question Prof. Cheyne's judgement on a particular matter, the book as a whole is highly informative, intellectually stimulating, and a pleasure to read. The occasional 'slip' does not normally make any material difference to the argument. For example, we are told on pp. 124-5 that 'the original leaders of Protestantism' did not think that the apocrypha had any place 'in the corpus of truly inspired literature'. The reality is far different. John Wyclif, the 'morning star of the Reformation', included the apocrypha in his English translation. Martin Luther kept them in his German Bible, denying their divine inspiration but characterising them generally as 'useful and good to read'. Zwingli's Swiss Bible also retained the apocrypha in this secondary sense. In Protestant England, the Geneva Bible (1560), Bishop's Bible (1568), and the King James Version of 1611 all included the apocrypha as a separate unit. These facts actually strengthen Prof. Cheyne's argument, which is to the effect that the

demand by many Scottish Protestants in the 1820s for the exclusion of the apocrypha from printed Bibles was an innovatory attitude.

Perhaps the most ground-breaking and illuminating essays in the books are Prof. Cheyne's two chapters on the Baillie brothers. I do not know of any other comparable analysis. In the absence of a full-scale biographical and theological opus on two of Scotland's (indeed, Britain's) most distinguished twentieth-century theologians, the student will now have to turn to Prof. Cheyne's account as his starting point: and he will not be disappointed.

This book should certainly be required reading for any serious study of Scottish Church history.

Nick Needham, Highland Theological College, Dingwall

A Passion for God's Reign

Jürgen Moltmann, Nicholas Wolterstorff, Ellen T. Charry
Eerdmans, Grand Rapids/Cambridge, 1998; xiii+112pp., ISBN 0-8082-4494-4

This brief, but typically thought provoking essay is another demonstration of Moltmann's passion for the coming of the Kingdom of God, the nerve centre of all his work. Here he addresses the issue of the role and status of theology. He is a man who sees humanity as a whole rather than divided into believers and non-believers, and the subject matter therefore belongs to the whole of humanity, not only Christians. Consequently Moltmann would wish to see theology on any platform where it may find a voice, in this case the public arena of the university.

He introduces the birth of the modern world by giving an enlightening summary of the origins of modernity, from the 'discovery' of America in 1492 to the modern advances of science and technology. All, from Columbus and Newton to Bacon and Kant, sought improvement, through the acquisition of knowledge, and the colonising and 'christianising' of alien nations and civilisations. The vision of the New World was the motivation for the modern European discoveries, with Messianic hope evidenced in the optimism of the Enlightenment.

The progress of modernity was not without cost, as demonstrated in the existence of contradictions between modernity and submodernity. The earth is being exploited, reflected by the crisis of meaning, brought about by apathy to the humiliation of the submodern third world. The future needs reinventing, seeing love of the giver of life bringing universal equality and liberation.

Social changes are briefly outlined, from Constantine's conversion and its significance, through The Reformation to the impact of immigration, which has resulted in apolitical multireligiosity. Religion has now moved from being a private matter to becoming merchandise.

Regarding the Kingdom of God and fellowship of the church with Israel, Moltmann, with his customary courage, which often verges on the controversial, urges the creative use of religious distinctions through the common denominators, and the taking from all religions that which promotes the Kingdom of God. The reader is compelled to engage with his thesis.

The essay presented by Nicholas Wolterstorff, entitled 'Public Theology or Christian Learning', disagrees with Moltmann, arguing that 'public' theology is endangered because of atheism and fundamentalism – the latter claiming that theology belongs to the church. His difficulty lies in the non-confessional attitude of theology in the public sphere, and he disagrees with assumption that Christian learning always takes the form of theology, also objecting to the terms 'laypersons' and 'theologians' and their differentiation.

The presentation by Ellen T. Charry, entitled 'The Crisis of Modernity and the Christian self', is a response to a different essay by Moltmann, discussing postmodern individualism. The article is only loosely connected to the one contained here, speaking more of the problems of modernity and secularisation, which are seen as the result of the crisis of the modern self. Her interpretation of Moltmann's view of the role of theology is that it is being wrongly laid at the door of the church.

Moltmann has used his knowledge of history and anthropology, but with the clear and consistent evidence of his own original thinking and persistent motive, passion for God and his Kingdom.

Wilma Shapiro, Glasgow

The Quest for Full Assurance; The Legacy of Calvin and His Successors

Joel R. Beeke

Banner of Truth, Edinburgh, 1999; 395pp., £6.95; ISBN 085151 7455

Questions regarding assurance of salvation have plagued believers for centuries and engaged the minds of some of the greatest thinkers of Christendom. Accordingly, this volume, a revision of Joel Beeke's Ph.D. dissertation, is a welcome contribution both for the seasoned student of historical theology and for the layperson who wishes to bring the fruits of thinkers from an earlier age to bear on their own life and struggles.

Beeke introduces his subject by briefly surveying the thought of the fathers and medievals as well as some of the magisterial reformers. Martin Luther, Philip Melanchthon, Huldrych Zwingli, and Heinrich Bullinger receive specific attention in a modest chapter, before the writings of John Calvin are taken up. Here Beeke looks primarily at the reformer's *Institutes*, and endeavours to make sense out of the apparent contradictions found in the chapter on faith (*Institutes* III.ii), after which he offers some analysis on the Calvin vs. Beza question. Following all of this, Beeke goes on to discuss several significant lines of thought which came out of the seventeenth century. William Perkins and William Teellinck are discussed as important points of contact between Reformation and Puritan theology. The theology of English Puritanism and the Westminster Confession are then examined, and analyses of John Owen and Alexander Comrie offered. A comparison between English Puritanism and the Dutch Second Reformation – amounting to an examination of Thomas Goodwin's theology – rounds off the volume.

The single question which, more than any other, undergirds this book has moved in and out of vogue since the seventeenth century: do the reformers, especially Calvin, find their thought faithfully expounded (if elaborated upon) by those in the post-reformation era? Beeke wishes to argue emphatically that they do. In this, he labours against many who have insisted that the relationship between the two is better characterized by discontinuity. Beeke ably engages this scholarship at most points in his book, with the more recent assertions of this view, by writers such as R. T. Kendall being especially targeted. Beeke's bibliography demonstrates how familiar he is with the terrain, and his thoughtful analysis of the issues cannot help but challenge even the staunchest opponent.

Yet this work is not without its shortcomings. The omission of Martin Bucer strikes a serious blow to Beeke's assessment of the Reformation. Nor is his treatment of the other reformers as substantial as one might wish. Moreover, this author cannot help but feel that the essay is peculiarly proportioned. It is as if Beeke wished to produce a standard treatment of the Calvin vs. the Calvinists question, but then decided to append other material to his examination. On top of this, the simplification of the dissertation does not go far enough to make it accessible to any but the serious layperson (and the inclusion of abbreviations such as 'it's' seems down right silly). Yet the tome unquestionably provides a treasure-trove of useful material for pastor and student alike, and is, on the whole, to be lauded.

Jon Balserak, Edinburgh

John Newton And The English Evangelical Tradition

Bruce Hindmarsh
Oxford Clarendon Press, 1996; 366pp.; ISBN 0-19-826379-1

This Oxford Theological Monograph contains the fruits of research of D. Bruce Hindmarsh, Professor of Church History at Briercrest Biblical Seminary, Saskatchewan, in an area which, the author claims, has been 'largely overlooked by historians interested in the eighteenth century'.

The remarkable story of John Newton, the slave trader who became a Vicar in the Church of England after his conversion, to which he testifies in his acclaimed hymn *Amazing Grace*, is familiar. But our knowledge of him is chiefly derived from popular biographies, some of them hackneyed, rather than from a thorough review of archival sources which the author of the monograph has pursued in order to reconstruct many important episodes in Newton's life story.

Although the work is roughly chronological, it is not strictly biographical. As an academic essay, it is full of detail surrounding Newton's immediate circumstances at any given juncture but it does not explore to any extent personal relationships established with those who became very close to him, such as William Cowper and Alexander Cluny. John Wesley fares a little better on account of his more intimate involvement in Newton's progress.

Hindmarsh's chief source in the early biographical material is Newton's autobiography, published in 1764, *The Authentic Narrative*. He describes how Newton's turbulent life led him to a point where he was able to pursue self-education and become a Free Thinker. However, he stumbled across St Thomas a Kempis' *Imitation of Christ*, and became troubled that the teaching of the New Testament might be true. He progressed towards a lively belief, and benefited from the public ministry of the Dissenters and also that of George Whitefield.

Working in Liverpool, he fraternised with Dissenters and Methodists in Lancashire and Yorkshire, consequently hindering his ordination in the established Church. Only after six attempts was he ordained and given the living of Olney and subsequently St Mary Woolnorth in the City of London.

As the biographical theme develops, Hindmarsh appropriately diverts his attention to excursions into literary criticism of Newton's letters, and into his hymnody, in which he was prolific, especially at Olney. Professor Hindmarsh pays particular attention to Newton's doctrinal stance and his spirituality. He developed an 'evangelical Calvinism', rooted in Bible study and prayer. His reasons for ordination in the Church

of England were not merely because of its social standing as his non-conformist friends suspected, but because of his inner conviction and realisation of the breadth of the influence of the gospel which the established church was able to exercise. This Newton expounds in his *Apologia*, published in 1784, fully aware that it would grievously upset some of those Dissenters. The monograph provides not only a fine piece of study of an academically neglected field but also a pastoral aid for many who, on account of their evangelical convictions, struggle with remaining as members of the established churches and other mixed denominations.

Peter Cook, Alston, Cumbria.

Rationality in Science, Religion and Everyday Life

Mikael Stenmark

University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, IN, 1995; xi+392pp., n.p.; ISBN 0 268 01651 8

'The debate on whether religious beliefs are rationally acceptable is over.' This is the concluding sentence of the book before us. At its beginning, an interesting question is posed. Is rationality always of the same order? The author seeks to broaden the scope of the rationality debate. There are different strands of rationality – theoretical, practical or axiological – having to do, respectively, with what we believe, do or value. What happens when we apply the same criteria to areas as diverse as science, religion and everyday life, his chosen areas of consideration? He expresses the fear that the current concept of rationality is so restrictive, indeed so reductionist, that whatever falls outside science becomes viewed as a-rational or irrational. He follows by arguing that the standards of scientific rationality ('the evidential principle, the proportionality principle, the rule principle and the principles of simplicity, scope and explanatory power') are inappropriate for assessing the rationality of religious belief.

There are, though, more recent insights from the ways of science that the author finds helpful. He directs us away from Popper's view of rational scientific change to the thinking of Kuhn, with his great paradigm shifts to which the usual rules do not seem to apply. He cites Lakatos: 'scientific change is a kind of religious change'. Stenmark points out that scientific rationality is characterised by informed judgements and by subjection to peer evaluation (or what I have heard Bondi modestly express as 'intersubjective verifiability'). He then tackles the question of commitment in religious belief. Is it against the spirit of

impartiality, which is the hallmark of scientific endeavour? He thinks not. For Popper, commitment is an outright crime, but 'social evidentialists reject this celebration of tentativity', comments the author tartly. Between commitment and tentativeness, even in science, a dialectic must remain.

Scientists, the author notes, do not reach the same standards of agreement in areas of life other than science. Religion, for example, deals with the existential and not with the simply technical. The questions asked in the realms of belief are not spectator-questions. As to whether something is rational or irrational, it is more useful to direct that question to the matter of believing rather than to beliefs themselves. As to what we ask or expect of believers, we should not flout the axiom of reasonable remand. Beliefs are to be considered innocent until found guilty. Predictability should not be required of religious beliefs any more than moral adequacy is required of scientific beliefs. The author compares some philosophical approaches. Formal evidentialists see us as having to abide by specific rules. Social evidentialists see us as making informed judgements exposed to peer evaluation. The author goes outwith the camp of evidentialism as a self-styled presumptionist, accepting belief as long as there is no good reason to do otherwise. The question eventually is not whether religious beliefs can be supported by sufficient evidence, but whether one should be a religious or a secular believer of some sort.

This is a book which has succeeded admirably in presenting a philosophical topic in a way that is interesting and mind-stretching for the non-philosopher. It demands from the reader a sustained intensity of attention which, if granted, will be amply rewarded. A shorter, Schaeffer-style version could prove immensely popular.

Alex McIntosh, Falkirk

God and Rationality

T. F. Torrance
T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1997; 216 pp., £14.95; ISBN 0 567 08582 1

This is a 1997 new edition of a book published first in 1968 and then in 1970.

Some writers and teachers speak down to those they are addressing. In contrast Tom Torrance pays most of us the compliment of assuming we are more educated than we really are.

Yet we should persevere with his writings for they are truly profound, speaking prophetically to church, theology, and society including the worlds of natural science and modern culture.

The book's title together with the titles of its chapters could give the impression that his theology is a dry scholasticism cut off from a warm-hearted knowledge and love of God. However nothing could be farther from the truth. One of the great burdens of the book is to show that there can be no knowledge of God and therefore no true theology unless we approach him with a humble earnest worshipping heart open to the deeply personal revelation of himself that he has made in the person of Jesus Christ. This indeed is the 'scientific' way to know God for it is the way appropriate to the Subject Matter of Theology— God himself. Fundamental to this way of doing theology is the conviction that the way of knowing God is the same as the way of salvation. So although many readers may be put off by what they might consider very technical terms from science and philosophy, the fundamental message of the book could be enthusiastically accepted by a less educated person who has recently opened his/her heart and discovered salvation in Christ in the pages of the Bible.

However to really get to grips with the text the reader needs to know what certain terms mean. Unfortunately it is only a relatively few people who have sufficient grasp of both: 1. The history of philosophy and also 2. Clerk Maxwell's Field Theories, Einstein and relativity, and Quantum Mechanics, to find the book anything other than a difficult read. Not that one should excuse laziness. These are important subjects indeed for anyone who is seriously engaged in the pursuit of knowledge. They, together with the message of this book, would help the honest searcher of truth – in any field of knowledge. For the message of this book challenges us to liberate our minds from preconceived logical structures which we might unconsciously impose upon the subject matter of our enquiry but which are inappropriate for the object of the enquiry and therefore are likely to distort the results of the quest.

There are many far from difficult books by such authors as John Polkinghorne (Christian minister and quantum physicist) and Paul Davies (non Christian theoretical physicist) who have a great gift for explaining the second group of awe-inspiring and mind-blowing subjects to the moderately intelligent enquirer. Little or no background in academic science is needed to understand them. Good introductions to philosophy are also not difficult to find. However a good addition to many of Tom Torrance's writings, when they are re-published, would be an extensive glossary. A glossary for *God and Rationality* should list the following names and terms: Mechanistic and Instrumentalist view of science, Quantum mechanics, Indeterminacy principle, Newtonian physics, Kantian metaphysics, Einstein and relativity, James Clerk Maxwell,

Field Theory, Michael Polanyi, Godel's Theorem, Aristotelianism, Receptacle or Container view of space, Relational view of space, Dualism, Static-ontic structures, Dynamic-noetic structures and many many more.

It is true that he does give some explanation to these names and terms but not enough for many for whom these are completely new.

In his preface Torrance tells us that the book is meant a as sequel to his *Theological Science* (for which he was awarded the prestigious Templeton Prize) and *Space Time and Incarnation*. The main chapters are divided into three main headings: 1. Theology Old and New; 2. Theology and Science; 3. Word and Spirit.

Under these headings we meet the following chapters: 'The Eclipse of God', 'Ecumenism and Science', 'The Word of God and the Response of Man', 'The Epistemological Relevance of the Spirit' and others too. Most of these individual chapters are papers that Torrance gave about thirty years ago and one at least refers to writers such as John Robinson and Paul Tillich that many of us have now forgotten. However this should not put us off, for the theological points have a continuing relevance to current debate and the pursuit of knowledge in all ages. Some of the 'prophecies' he made in these papers about the coming break up of Western society and civilisation are indeed coming true before our eyes.

The reader will find considerable overlap and some repetition but that is not a bad thing for Torrance's style is so concentrated and meaty that repetition helps drive the points home.

He tells us that there is only one way of knowing, whatever the object of enquiry. By that he does not mean that there is only one method of enquiry – very far from it. But what he does mean is that all methods of knowing must be appropriate to the subject of enquiry so that (say, against Aristotle and Kant) the enquirer must not approach the object of his study with a fixed logical system into which he seeks to fit the answers to his questions. Rather the subject matter itself will contain its own, at first, hidden logic or rationality, so that the scientist (be he a physicist or theologian) must seek to uncover a rationality that is inherent in the object of his quest. This is how all great advances of knowledge in the natural sciences take place. For example if we had simply studied the universe with a belief that space is the mere container of objects such as the stars and planets, we would never have resolved apparent contradictions that arise from our observation of the universe. We would never have grasped the nature of light. It took Einstein to discover a deeper logic in nature in which light, space, time, matter and energy are bound together in relationships – relationships which come

from the very being of their existence. That is to say they are relationships which are not dependent on independent external and eternal laws. Gravity, for example, is not, as Newtonian physics assumed, an independent external law which relates one object to another but rather belongs to the internal structure of what matter, energy, space and time actually are in themselves.

If this reviewer could be permitted to take a human example *(mutatis mutandis* of course), one might consider what binds two human beings together. It could be a rope, a contract or something else which is an external *third* thing holding them in relationship. Alternatively it could be friendship or a covenant of love *which are not external third things but things that flow out of what the human beings are in themselves and help define their very being.* Theologically speaking we are called to live by grace and faith (which belong to the very nature of what a Person/person is), not law (which is a temporary third thing added by God because of our transgressions). That is part of the inner rationality of theology that we so easily miss if we impose our legalistic ways of thinking upon the data of theological enquiry.

Imposing our own way of thinking upon our studies is his problem with much of what is called 'Biblical Scholarship' which tries to understand the Bible solely from the various ways we think it came to have been written – the phenomenon of the Bible. But this, again, is to separate the data of our enquiry from the fundamental nature of God's self-revelation, trying to understand the data by fitting it into our self-made mental constructs. He believes that this false *dualism* between reality and what we perceive – this phenomenalism – has bedevilled much of what is called Biblical Studies.

Indeed one of Torrance's pet hates is dualism in some of its many forms which itself becomes a kind of false rationality imposed upon its subject matter and thus incorrectly separates two qualities of reality into quite separate categories. This does not mean he is a Monist who believes 'All is One'. He could not possibly be accused of such a belief because one of the foundations of his theology is that God created the universe distinct from himself and out of nothing. Two of the other dualisms which he objects to are:

- space and matter (as if space were the mere container of the created order rather than an aspect of the creation which is redeemed in Christ)
- cause and meaning (as if one could separate off the natural sciences from the moral sciences)

He also does not like the 'mechanistic-vitalist' controversy about the nature of life. (Can life have a mere physical explanation or does it need something 'magical' added to it?) He prefers rather to speak of the bipolar and non-picturable nature of much of reality (so amazingly exposed at the fundamental levels of natural existence in quantum physics).

The dualism that he dislikes most is that of a Detached God and mechanistic universe. Rather in the pages of the Bible he believes we meet a God who, though He created the universe out of nothing, is – through His Word and Spirit – personally and deeply related to it. This is seen especially and uniquely in the Incarnation and Atonement in which he makes himself known to us by redeeming the world from evil. This act of revelation and redemption is made known, not apart from our physical world in some spiritual realm, but in our 'flesh'.

The appropriate way to respond to Word is by listening and answering. As we listen we find that the Word challenges us deeply so that we cannot do theology in a detached way but must allow ourselves to be challenged and changed in our inmost being. Even in the natural sciences the scientist must be open enough to the object he seeks to know to allow its hidden logic to engage with his mind so that he/she is able to grow in understanding. How much more must this be true in our knowledge of God.

Our problem, though, is that we cannot answer and respond to that Word from God because as sinners we are alienated from it. So, important for Torrance is the conviction that Christ is not only God's Word to us but also our human response to that Word. It is here that Torrance has got into trouble with some evangelicals who imagine he is saying that we don't need to repent and believe because Christ has done it all for us in our place. Of course this is not what he is saying. This is another place in which he assumes some of us know more than we do. Some of us need things from the Bible spelled out more explicitly in Torrance's writings. (Perhaps footnotes would be a good way to do this.) For the fact that Christ makes our response for us, taking our prayer to the heaven of heavens, is the major theme of the Epistle to the Hebrews. So when we fix our eyes upon Jesus the originator and completion of faith, we are set free from assurance-destroying worries so evident in both seventeenth-century Calvinism and seventeenth-century Arminianism. For whether we believe there is an irresistible causal relationship between the Holy Spirit and our faith or whether we think we need to co-operate with the Spirit, it is still *our* faith that becomes the subject that we are driven to consider. That is bound to lead to great doubts as to whether our experience of faith, prayer and worship are sufficient to please God. When

we are open to Christ we cease to examine neurotically our own personal experience of faith and prayer (wondering whether we have the signs of election or whether we have co-operated enough with God's grace). Rather we find that we are indeed born from above, do indeed believe in him and turn from our sins.

Since this way of salvation is the same as the way of knowing God, it is Tom Torrance's missionary endeavour to theologians to get us to think in Christ so that we do not cut off our theological or even the biblical statements from Christ himself. He uses as an example the statement: 'God is Love.' We see the meaning of that in Christ. However if we use it as an independent free standing statement from which we deduce other propositions apart from Christ then we will reach false conclusions. Language must not be cut off from that to which it refers. This is his quarrel with what he calls 'rationalist fundamentalists'. They are those who think they can treat biblical statements as independent from the ultimate Being to which they refer and apply *preconceived* rational structures to fit them into a dogmatic system. But this would be to commit the error that is referred to elsewhere in this review, namely to impose our own systems of logic on the subject matter of enquiry rather than letting it teach us its own inherent logic. Such systems of doctrine tend to be legalistic constructs of our own minds where we may seem to put grace (say) at the centre of the system but instead end up perhaps with a new legalistic system that does not really set people free in Christ.

The book has a full and helpful index of subjects and a good index of names.

Howard Taylor, Chaplain, Heriot Watt University, Edinburgh

Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth. Sacred Doctrine and the Knowledge of God

Eugene F. Rogers, Jnr
Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, IN, 1995; 248 pp., h/b $34.95, p/b $24;
ISBN 0 268 01889 8

Why should Christians with good traditional, evangelical Protestant credentials want to read a book mainly about Aquinas? Given the technical detail mastered here by Eugene Rogers, perhaps the answer for some is: not for any reason at all. In fact, however, the issues he raises are profoundly relevant for the church's witness.

Rogers seeks, very plausibly, to show that Aquinas was not the dichotomist that Protestant apologists assume him to be. He did not espouse an autonomous pursuit of the knowledge of God through natural

theology after all. In him philosophy did not triumph over scripturalism as often assumed. His theological discussions must be seen in the light of his commentaries (a piece of advice often applied also to Calvin). In particular we must revise our thinking to take account of the fact that Aquinas's arguments for the natural knowledge of God are rooted in Romans 1. He is therefore similar to the arch-enemy of natural theology, Karl Barth. The author argues a 'material convergence' in Aquinas and Barth based on a common master – Paul! Thomas too can talk about 'the ineffectiveness of natural knowledge of God under certain sinful conditions and how it serves to prove the necessity and sufficiency of grace, conditions that go unmentioned in the... article on the Five Ways...'.

If Rogers is right, the alleged divergence of theology and philosophy, Scripture and apologetics by which Catholic medieval writers are vilified by Protestant analysts of western thought, may not be so strongly laid at the door of Aquinas. So how successfully does the author do this? It really depends on many issues, some difficult to falsify or validate- for instance, that it is enough for Aquinas to announce his biblical or Christological assumptions without making further reference to them throughout hundreds of pages which follow. Or the claim that Thomas espouses Aristotelian first principles only in the sense that sacred doctrine is an Aristotelian *scientia* which takes all things captive for Christ. Certainly, we are looking at a forcible and riveting case in Rogers' handling of Aquinas on Romans 1:17-25, and some fascinating insights follow. For example: Thomas preserves rational powers in the fallen human being, not to exalt human reason but *to locate the fall in the will.* Rogers also succeeds in showing that Thomas, in his Romans commentary, sees human reasons as mere 'not yet', serviceable, preambles to faith which may be taken up into faith itself. For Aquinas, claims to be such preambles require the most intense validation from Scripture. Put this way, Thomas comes close to modern ideas of 'pre-evangelism'.

Serious theologians and students of the history of Christian thought can only learn much from this careful, balanced and highly skilled study from a master of the craft. For Barthian and Calvinist sympathisers alike, Rogers may not have done quite enough to dispel suspicions that Aquinas over-valued human reason. But he has certainly flung a rope that, at worst, almost spans the chasm between Catholic and reformed ways of thinking and, at best, finally draws the two together. Definitely a book that is not a waste of time, though not for the indolent.

Roy Kearsley, South Wales Baptist College/Cardiff University

Exposition of the Epistle to the Romans

Robert Haldane

Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1996; 729pp., £14.95; ISBN 0 85151 708 0

This is the fifth Banner reprint in forty years from the ninth edition (1874) of Haldane's 1830s work. (Fifty years ago A. L. Drummond considered that 'the modern reader would not be attracted by his style'.) The thrice-weekly Bible studies for almost thirty young men given in his own rooms in Geneva during his evangelistic visit of 1816-17, from which this exposition grew, were instrumental in converting several rationalistic theological students to a divine Christ, reviving Calvinism on the European Continent and bringing strong opposition to their author.

Commending the first reprint D. M. Lloyd-Jones expressed the view that 'while Hodge excels in accurate scholarship there is greater warmth of spirit and more practical application in Haldane'. The commentary reflects his concern that all reasonings be brought to Scripture and that doctrine be translated into experience and life. (When Merle d'Aubigné, one of Haldane's hearers, said, 'Now I see the doctrine of sin in the Bible', his response was, 'But do you see it in your own heart?'.) This detailed exposition of the book which taught Haldane the sovereignty of God, the corruption of humanity and the perfection of the righteousness provided by God, has not been made redundant by subsequent more scholarly works and will be appreciated by those who want careful exegesis, exposition which contributes to 'an exact and comprehensive knowledge of the distinguishing doctrines of grace', and application which promotes thought, action and worship.

Hugh M. Cartwright, Free Presbyterian Church, Edinburgh

The Christmas Stories in Faith and Preaching

John Proctor

Grove Books Ltd, Cambridge 1998; 24pp., £2.25; ISBN 185174 382 0

The Christmas stories, like everything else in the Gospels, are a piece of woven cloth. The warp is the life of Jesus, the weft is the meaning of these events. The booklet has main chapters on Matthew, Mark, Mary, John, and Jesus in relation to Christmas; and then shorter passages on theologians and preachers and what they do with Christmas. The author well holds event and theology together, and affirms the reality of the virgin birth.

Can Balaam's Ass Speak Today?

Walter Moberly
Grove Books Ltd, Cambridge 1998; 24pp., £2.25; ISBN 185174 390 1

No. 10 in the Grove Biblical Series. Walter Moberly outlines a hermeneutical basis for approaching the Old Testament, and considers the story of Balaam's Ass as a case study, well chosen because it appears to illustrate all the features of the Old Testament that irritate people today. Balaam, like Israel, is presented as one who knew God and was lured away from his calling. The booklet illustrates the aim of the author, that good commentary should leave us with the text itself better understood, and better able to be appropriated.

Jock Stein, Cumbernauld

The Theological Wordbook: The 200 Most Important Theological Terms and Their Relevance for Today

Don Campbell, Wendell Johnston, John Walvoord, John Witmer (eds)
Word Publishing, Nashville; 437 pp., $29.99; ISBN 0-8499-1381-0

This useful survey is clearly written and avoids unexplained technical terms. The words are well-chosen and plenty of biblical examples of the words and the ideas they express are given. Each entry concludes with a one-sentence devotional comment. The dispensationalist outlook of the authors influences some of the entries.

Geoffrey Grogan, Glasgow

BOOK REVIEWS