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SCOTTISH BULLETIN OF EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY

The scope of the *Bulletin* is broadly defined as theology, especially Scottish and Reformed, whether biblical, systematic-dogmatic, historical or practical, and Scottish church history. Articles submitted for publication should be sent to the Editor, books for review to Rutherford House (see below).

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EDITORIAL

As the new editor of *SBET*, I am very grateful to all those who ensured that this issue appeared.

I want to thank my predecessor, Kenneth Roxburgh, for the fine work of his tenure, and for passing on the paper from David Fergusson, much appreciated at the 2002 SETS Conference. David Searle provided me with the article by John Webster, an address David enjoyed at a conference he attended during a sabbatical leave. I commissioned the piece by Iain D. Campbell, having heard a tape of the excellent address he gave on this theme at a weekend study conference in his own congregation. And then David Wright rode to the rescue with a fourth article, based on a paper given recently in Hong Kong. To all the writers, reviewers and editorial staff, I want to express my sincere thanks.

Looking to the future, I trust the *Bulletin* will continue to be of interest to a wide range of theological readers. Ministers tell me they do not want a journal that is directed to a specialist, academic audience. They want it to be scholarly without being elitist. As one said, 'Expand my thinking, but feed my preaching.' On the other hand, research students and lecturers have asked me to narrow the focus towards the academy, and to provide a forum for students to publish chapters of their theses and for lecturers to submit material suitable for research assessment exercises. My inclination is to the former, to continue the broad approach as before, but I await the guidance of the new editorial board when it is formed.

Perhaps I should introduce myself by coming clean on some of my own views, formed initially through studies at Aberdeen University, the Free Church of Scotland College in Edinburgh and Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, none of which will want to be held responsible. That has been followed by twenty years of ministry in Scotland, exercised in three different settings. So, in fairly general terms, what do I look for as I read the various theologians in their complementary disciplines? (Please indulge me, just this once; future editorials will be around a hundred words.)

Let me make five basic points, in a theological wish-list. Some are obviously prerequisites, others will be seen as preferences, and I trust none is a mere prejudice.

Personal

The first requirement for any Christian theology worthy of the name is that it be *personal*.

I mean by that, first, a personal commitment *to Christ*. Our theologians must be Christians, who speak what they know. The perfect objectivity of the detached observer is a modernist myth. Christ must take precedence over this chimera. In every other area of life you can be an expert and a fan. My wife does not doubt Alan Titchmarsh's horticultural expertise because he adores plants. So why doubt the worshipper? I have seen rolling of eyes and shaking of heads from theological academics when a scholar asked to begin his seminar with prayer. The irony was that the early theologian on whom he and they were experts could not have understood theology apart from prayer!

Second, this means a personal commitment *to Church*. The theologian is not a freelance, but is called to fellowship in the community of faith and to full participation in the life of the people of God. Those who theologise from within the church are more likely to theologise for the good of the church. Ideally theologians should be preachers, to try to ensure that their theology is preachable. I recall a visiting professor being asked by a frustrated class, 'How on earth do we preach this?' His reply was, 'That's your problem. I haven't been behind a pulpit in years.' We need to recover the tradition of the preacher-theologian, surely one of the glories of our Scottish heritage.

And third, it means a personal commitment *to vocation*. We ought to have the highest regard for theologians who see their work as a calling, and who do it all as to the Lord. It must sometimes be difficult to maintain this vision, especially in the under-resourced and over-stretched modern university, but theology really is a shoes-from-off-your-feet vocation. This sense of vocation will also ensure that devotion to Christ does not diminish commitment to scholarship, but precisely the opposite. The Christian theologian is always conscious of an ultimate Research Assessment Exercise, the quality assurance of the Day (1 Cor. 3:13). So reverence ensures rigour.

Canonical

The second great requirement for Christian theology is that it be *canonical*. My concerns can be expressed most simply in terms of three dimensions.

First, there is *depth*. Some scholars will give their lives to the exegesis of Scripture, devoting themselves to the most meticulous, in-depth examination of the biblical text, with the wealth of tools and methods available. We need these men and women before anyone else, because

everything depends on properly understanding the canonical Scriptures. The task never ends, because Scripture is inexhaustibly rich, and because 'perfect translation' is an oxymoron. As a preacher, my own favourite form of theological scholarship is the detailed commentary. Through such exegeses the Spirit dazzles us with new insights, and the familiar is constantly made fresh.

Then, there is *breadth*. When we speak about putting a passage in its biblical context, we need to bear in mind that the big context is that of the whole canon. There is unity throughout the diversity, there is one narrative behind the individual narratives, there is one theology embracing the theologies. So we need the scholars who will do the biblical theology, within each testament and then across both testaments, always exploring the bigger picture. If you ignore the story-line of Scripture then, theologically, you have lost the plot. All Christian theology should be canonical, founded on exegetical depth and biblical-theological breadth.

And, further, there is *height*. Scripture is the mountain range which must be allowed to dominate our theology. We speak of towering figures in theology and we acknowledge our incalculable debt to them, but Scripture must be allowed to tower over them all, to dwarf them. We sometimes even use the language of canon to describe key theological figures and texts, but we must privilege the one breathed canon over every other. The greatest theologian is only a subordinate standard, and he is only that as long as he is faithfully representing the supreme one. The words of the fathers must be judged by the Word of the Father.

Evangelical

The third requirement is that our theology be *evangelical*. My plea here is that true theology should always have the evangel at its heart, and that the gospel should inspire our reading, our reflecting and our going, each of the three intimately connected with the others.

In the first place, we should work with *an evangel-led hermeneutic* in our reading of Scripture. If Christian faith sees gospel-grace-in-Christ as the theme of the whole Bible, then the gospel should lead and shape our reading of the whole Bible. Here is reformed reading. If the Reformation was about the rediscovery of the evangel, then reading with gospel eyes is being faithful to our truest distinctive. Some will say this is a shallow and superficial reading, just staying with the basics, but that is to misunderstand completely. There can be nothing more profound than the trinitarian and covenantal gospel. Let's be evangelical readers, who hear the same gospelling God throughout Scripture.

Then, also, we should work at *an evangelical theology*. I mean by that a theology that allows the evangel, the good news, to be pervasive, to fill out the content and shape the contours of the whole system. Systematic theologians are hard at work on their theologies, each with a dominating idea or centre. Why not the gospel as the key to the project? Why not a kerygma-focussed theology for the twenty-first century? It would be a theology with a sense of perspective, as the evangel determined what was primary and what peripheral. It would also be a theology with heart, pumping oxygenated blood through the theological arteries!

And third, we should work out *an evangelistic theology*. That means a further move. This is a theology not simply shaped by the gospel, but shaped very specifically for the gospel, and for its communication today. So this is a missionary theology, which engages with a contemporary mindset and applies theology to a particular context. It will speak freshly into its own age, defending and commending the truth, and translating the unchanging gospel into the language and stories of the culture. Theology and mission are not divorced in Scripture, and so a missionary God calls theology to serve his mission to the world.

Communal

The fourth requirement is that theology be *communal*. It must be as ecumenical as grace, and should be pursued in fellowship within the communion of saints.

First of all, this theological communion is *across the ages*. The Holy Spirit has been active over the centuries, enriching the understanding of his Church. We neglect his work at our peril. So much has been achieved during nearly two millennia, and to ignore tradition betrays ignorance and ingratitude. An awareness of history can prevent us succumbing to the heresies of the past, recognising them even in disguise. And the wisdom of the past provides us with vocabulary, insights and formulations which we should not have to live without. All this great theological heritage is of most help to us when read as a commentary on Scripture.

Then, second, theological communion should be *across the disciplines*. Scholars in theological faculties and colleges will often bemoan how little academic conversation there is among their disciplines, and increasing specialisation threatens to make the situation worse. But there are also encouraging signs, in inter-disciplinary seminars and in various publishing ventures. For example, scholars are at work on a new series, *The Two Horizons Commentary*, which aims to integrate exegesis of the New Testament with contemporary systematic and practical theology. We await further news with interest, and ask for more of the same.

And last, theological communion today must be *across the cultures*. We need the perspectives of other Christians, in a cross-cultural theological enterprise. My first theological teacher, Andrew Walls, never tired of reminding us that the centre of gravity of the Christian world had shifted through the success of the modern missionary movement. Today the majority of the Lord's people live in the non-western world, and their churches continue to grow. I am ashamed of how little contemporary theology I read from outside my own western tradition. If we do not listen to one another, we are condemned to our cultural blinkers and blindspots.

Pastoral

The fifth and final requirement in these desiderata for Christian theology is that it be *pastoral*. That is an appeal for theologians to speak not just to one another, in their own languages, but to speak to those engaged in ministry within the local church, so that we might be given a theology with which to feed the people of God.

This theology will, in the first place, enable us to nourish *Christian spirituality*. The inner life is vital. I do not have a problem with the term 'spirituality', despite its pedigree, as long as it is theologically informed. But spirituality divorced from theology can become sinfully subjective and even self-indulgent. Good theology should be as spiritually edifying as bad theology can be spiritually damaging. We want our preaching so rooted in the right kind of theology that its fruit is seen in lives of theocentric spirituality, with people passionate about devotion and the disciplines.

Such theology will, in addition, enable us to guide *Christian discipleship*. The outward life is equally important. We want piety without pietism. Our teaching and counselling have to face up to the issues with which people wrestle in their complex worlds, and help them think and act Christianly in the dilemmas of contemporary life. So we need the help of biblical scholars and ethical theologians, as we seek to hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches. The Bible is a book to be performed, and we have the privilege and responsibility of guiding some in that performance.

And then, finally, this theology will enable us to inspire *Christian hope*. There is a life to come, beyond the horizon of this one. The New Testament has none of the modern church's embarrassment about making too much of that future. Eternal realities put this short life in perspective. The glories to come are the decisive answer to the questions, longings and frustrations of experience here. Thus a futurist eschatology is crucial in theology, and in our preaching and pastoral care. We offer people the earth, a new one. That will be a world suffused with the worship of God, and one where his people will glorify and enjoy him forever.

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The new cosmos is surely the appropriate place for us to end! And the theme of doxology reminds us of where we started, with the theologian engaged in his or her task as a personal worshipper of Jesus Christ the Lord. The worshipping theologian has a vocation in this world that goes on into the next, for there will be no emeritus or emerita there. Exploration must continue forever, because the God whom we worship is inexhaustible. Doxology and theology will never be parted. After all, theology is worship seeking understanding.

THEOLOGY OF WORSHIP

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In a lecture I once attended, Stephen Sykes lamented the way in which the doctrine of ministry was treated as an inferior locus. For many years, he claimed, it was not taught in the Divinity Faculty of Cambridge. Being of second-order importance, it was left to the church colleges to consider. Similar remarks could be said of the theology of worship. It is not treated as a major locus in most textbooks, while in its Scottish setting, along with much else, it has traditionally fallen between the disciplines of systematic and practical theology.

Nonetheless, if the subject of worship has suffered from theological neglect in the past, this is less true today. It is now referred to frequently, particularly in an American post-liberal context, and in the recent work of Geoffrey Wainwright there is even an attempt to construct an entire systematics from the perspective of worship.¹ There are several reasons for this and by listing these under four headings – history, philosophy, ethics and ecumenism – some initial insight into the theology of worship can be gained.

THE STUDY OF DOCTRINE IN THE CONTEXT OF WORSHIP

History

The study of the history of doctrine reveals the way in which doxological practices preceded and shaped the formation of dogma. Without asserting an absolute priority of doxology over dogma, one can acknowledge the importance of worship in shaping Christian belief. This is already true of Hebrew religion where, in the Psalms, the celebration of salvation history, law, divine rule and wisdom all contribute to the shaping of Israel's faith. Similarly the elaborate sacrificial system and holiness code reveal long-standing practices which condition faith and belief in, for example, atonement for sin. New Testament scholarship has also made us aware of those credal fragments in the letters of Paul and elsewhere which reflect

¹ Geoffrey Wainwright, *Doxology: A Systematic Theology* (London, 1980).

established usage in early Christian worship, for example the Christ-hymn in Philippians 2.² Theology was decisively shaped by a range of practices such as praying to Jesus, baptism in the threefold name, and the celebration of the Lord's Supper as recorded in 1 Corinthians 11. In the patristic period, the development of dogma was also influenced by established practice.³ Thus in the Arian controversy, Athanasius could appeal to the widespread practice of praying to Jesus. Against Pelagius, Augustine could cite the practice of baptising infants for remission of sin. Anselm's theory of the atonement invoked the categories of the church's penitential system, while eucharistic controversies in the middle ages were determined by the language of the liturgy. One would also have to view mariology and the subsequent dogmatic definition of the immaculate conception and bodily assumption of Mary in light of entrenched practices of devotion that first emerge in the patristic period. In all this, however, it is not merely a matter of doctrine tracking widespread practice. Critical doctrinal reflection can act as a corrective upon our doxological habits.

Philosophy

The work of the later Wittgenstein has been interpreted and deployed by theologians in a range of ways, not all of which are consistent. But one widely recognised contribution of Wittgenstein is the stress on practice and forms of life in the acquisition of meaning. When a builder shouts 'slab' to his colleague he is not engaging in a simple act of naming, as Wittgenstein's earlier work had suggested.⁴ Instead he is issuing an instruction about how and when to deliver the next slab to his colleague who is laying them in a particular order. The salient point of this illustration is that meanings are only acquired through initiation into the practice and forms of life that shape the world of the building site. Words are not learned by looking out at the world and receiving examples of how to label the objects of experience. Learning takes place through action, exchange and participation in a complex set of rule-governed practices. Instead of a detached visual recognition, meaning is grasped through touch and sound in complex, communal activity.

² For discussion of the significance of worship in the New Testament see Larry Hurtado, *At the Origins of Christian Worship* (Carlisle, 1999).

³ This is revealed for example in Jaroslav Pelikan's *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition* (100-600) (Chicago, 1971).

⁴ This example is drawn from *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford, 1953), pp. 8-10.

These observations about meaning are significant for an account of theological knowledge. We know God not so much by attaching labels to experiences, events or phenomena but through participation in a range of rule-governed practices and forms of life. Another way of expressing this is to say that we can only speak of a knowledge of God in terms of exposure to and immersion in the life of the community. This will typically require catechesis, baptism and commitment to regular practice in the love of God and love of one's neighbour.

On this account of meaning, we now become better placed to appreciate the integral connection of worship to a practical knowledge of God. The worship of the community informs our knowledge of God. We are initiated into ways of seeing the world, ourselves and other people, that are theologically significant. Without the regular patterns of worship, the language of faith and its modes of perception will make little or no sense to us. This is a central theme of George Lindbeck's *The Nature of Doctrine*, one of the most influential texts of the last 20 years.⁵ We learn faith in a way analogous to a child learning its first language. Experience and belief, too long abstracted from worship in theology, are now seen to repose upon the practices of the worshipping community.

Ethics

Recent return to Aristotelian virtue ethics in both philosophy and theology has brought a renewed stress upon the importance of habit in the moral life. We act well typically through the development of good habits. These require formation through acknowledgement of the texts, authorities, traditions, and practices of the Christian community. The most important single voice here has been that of Stanley Hauerwas. Training in the Christian life, he argues, requires induction into the practices of worship, familiarity with the examples and stories of the saints, and the reorientation of one's life by the claims of Christ and his church. This is stressed in a counter-cultural spirit. The distinctiveness of Christian living requires attention to the ways in which the worship, fellowship, belief and moral witness of the church reshape our lives.

It has been pointed out that there is a Catholic moment in the ethics of Hauerwas and this is certainly true. The attention given to the authority of the church, the lives of the saints and the Aristotelian-Thomist tradition positions this style of Christian ethics much closer to Roman Catholicism than the neo-liberal Protestant views it typically criticises. On the other hand, the writings of Hauerwas need also to be seen in the context of

⁵ *The Nature of Doctrine* (London, 1985).

Reformed emphases upon personal holiness, the Christian life, the discipline of the church community and the transformation of society. The influence of John Howard Yoder and the radical reformation is also apparent in his work and enables him to describe himself as a High Church Methodist with Mennonite leanings. We should note that many of Hauerwas' recent essays are published sermons. These reflect a commitment to the power of the preached Word to change the lives of its hearers. It is through the regular practice of communal worship that we are trained to live as God's people in the world.

The church is the visible, political enactment of our language of God by a people who can name their sin and accept God's forgiveness and are thereby enabled to speak the truth in love. Our Sunday worship has a way of reminding us, in the most explicit and ecclesial of ways, of the source of our power, the peculiar nature of our solutions to what ails the world.⁶

The work of Hauerwas should be seen in the same post-liberal paradigm as Lindbeck. It is developed in a range of writings from a group of theologians. In a discussion of pastoral care, Willimon points to the importance of worship in consoling, healing, and renewing us amidst the crises of life. He appeals to worship as central to what makes Christian pastoral care different from other secular forms of counselling and therapy.⁷ Miroslav Volf, in a recent collection of essays, speaks of belief-shaped practices and practice-shaping beliefs to describe the integrity of doing and believing in the Christian life.

Christian practices have what we may call an 'as-so' structure: *as* God has received us in Christ, *so* we too are to receive our fellow human beings. True, the way in which Christ's life is exemplary has to be carefully specified. Above all, the important difference between Christ and other human beings should counter both the temptation to supplant Christ and the presumption that human beings can simply 'repeat' Christ's work. But in an appropriately qualified way, in relation to the

⁶ Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens* (Nashville, 1993), p. 171. In similar vein, Sam Wells has sought to describe the range of ways in which worship is ethically formative. 'How Common Worship Forms Local Character', *Studies in Christian Ethics* 15 (2002), pp. 66-74.

⁷ William Willimon, *Worship as Pastoral Care* (Nashville, 1979).

practice of hospitality as well as in relation to all other practices, we must say: 'As Christ, so we.'⁸

Ecumenism

The ecumenical movement has also made a contribution to the renewed sense of the importance of worship for Christian doctrine. Through study of shared practices a greater sense of ecumenical convergence has been achieved, even where this has not yielded structural unity. This has been fostered by biblical scholarship and historical study of church traditions.

One example is the process which led to the formulation of 'Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry', the Lima document of 1982. In particular, the section on the eucharist makes significant ecumenical progress by shifting attention away from rival theories of the real presence by focussing on the wider context of eucharistic worship. This was achieved in part through the liturgical reform movement and the creation of an ecumenical order of service for the celebration of the eucharist. The eucharist is set within the context of divine worship broadly considered. It contains most, if not all, of the following elements: praise; confession of sin; declaration of pardon; proclamation of the Word; confession of the faith; intercession for church and world; words of institution; anamnesis; epiklesis; commemoration of the faithful departed; prayer for the coming of the kingdom; the Lord's Prayer; the sign of peace; praise; blessing and sending. The stress on the ecumenical sharing of these aspects of eucharistic worship has contributed to a process in which historical differences are minimised, although the encyclical *Dominus Iesus* reminds us that we have still some way to travel.

THEOLOGICAL DESCRIPTION OF THE FORMS OF WORSHIP

The task here is to offer a description of worship, which is informed both by its centrality for Christian belief and practice, and also by the central credal affirmations of the faith. We should think in this context of 'description' rather than 'definition'. The attempt to define worship as if it were one single thing or activity and then to organise everything else around this is liable to cause distortion. This is a mistaken strategy for it will tend to offer an account that misses vital elements.

Attention to linguistic study of the various terms for 'worship' in its biblical and post-canonical usage is necessary but not sufficient for the

⁸ Miroslav Volf, 'Theology for a Way of Life', *Practicing Theology*, Miroslav Volf & Dorothy C. Bass (eds), (Grand Rapids, 2002), p. 250.

construction of a theology of worship. The Hebrew verb *shachah* is most commonly used to describe the activity of divine worship. It refers to the act of bowing down or rendering obeisance to whom it is due. In the Greek New Testament, the verb *proskuneo* is used in many places with much the same sense of bowing down. *Latreuo* is also employed several times for public worship, and denotes the idea of offering service. Church worship is thus described as service; we still talk about the church service in English or the *Gottesdienst* in German. The English term 'worship' itself derives from an Anglo-Saxon word for 'honour' (*weorthscipe*) and indicates that worship is an action of honouring one who is worthy. It can be used of persons other than God in different contexts. Thus, using archaic English, we might address 'the Worshipful the Mayor'. A better known example is found in the order for the solemnization of matrimony in the Book of Common Prayer. Upon placing the ring on his wife's finger, the husband says 'With this I ring I thee wed, with my body I thee worship, and with all my worldly goods I thee endow.' (The use of the term 'worship' in this context gives the lie to those who insist that Christian marriage is an irredeemable patriarchal act by which a man assumes proprietorial control of a woman's body. One can properly 'worship' one's partner in marriage, but never one's worldly goods.)

In much confessional writing, the biblical sense of honouring the divine majesty is prominent. We see this in the description of God in the Westminster Confession of Faith. 'To [God] is due from angels and men, and every other creature, whatsoever worship, service, or obedience he is pleased to require of them' (III.2). In the Reformation criticism of idolatry in the church, the honouring of God alone is frequently stressed in the exposition of the first table of the Decalogue. So the Shorter Catechism informs us that 'The First Commandment forbiddeth the denying, or not worshipping and glorifying, the true God as God, and our God; and the giving of that worship and glory to any other which is due to him alone' (Answer 47).

All this must find a place in a theology of worship, yet the honouring of God is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for an adequate description of worship. There are several reasons for this. We can honour and acknowledge God in ways that extend beyond worship, for example in our daily work, in the life of the household, in political and social activity. It is the particular form that this honouring takes which requires articulation in a theology of worship. Worship, moreover, involves a wide range of activities not all of which are entirely captured by the notion of acknowledging or honouring God. The range of forms cited in the New Testament should recall us to this diversity as should the practice of the

synagogue. Indeed the Psalms already attest the variety of functions fulfilled by public worship; these include praise, thanksgiving, celebration, recounting, proclamation, confession, petition, instruction, and lament. While Christian practice has sometimes found difficulty in accommodating lament and complaint, all these other themes are generally present in the worship of the church.

WORSHIP AS AN ACTION IN WHICH GOD IS BOTH SUBJECT AND OBJECT

As an event in which God is not merely a passive recipient of our praise, worship creates an exchange between the divine and the creaturely in which God is the subject as well as the object of worship. The dramatic character of worship has often been portrayed by the Protestant account of preaching and by the Catholic description of the eucharist. The preaching of the Word is an event in which not only the preacher speaks but God addresses the people. It is this that bestows upon worship both a gravity and a joyfulness. Although we may not accept the medieval and Tridentine doctrine of transubstantiation and its accompanying account of ordination, we should recognise that in the description of the fraction at the altar there is an acute sense of the continual action of God in the regular worship of the church across space and time. Christ is re-presented to his people each time the sacrament of his body and blood is celebrated. We should add to this account of the dramatic character of worship recent charismatic awareness of the action of the Spirit in public worship. The criticism of mainstream western theology that it was too binitarian is not without force. A fuller account of the person and work of the Spirit should enhance the sense that the Spirit is active in prompting, guiding and enabling worship in all its dimensions.

Here then worship is characterised as a performative action in which both the church and God participate. It is not merely a human acknowledgement of who God is or what Christ has done. Worship is an event by which God is known and Christ communicated; it is not of our own making for it is dependent upon the grace of God. In this regard, the act of worship is not merely a human recollection or bearing witness although it includes these. It is also an event in which God's grace works for us in repeated, regular and dependable ways, albeit in a manner that refers us to the once for all action of Christ. We can appeal in this context to the priestly theology of the Hebrews and the claim that the ascended Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father. Though difficult to formulate conceptually, this language implies that Christ continues

through the Spirit to intercede on our behalf. He continues to pray for and with us, even as we pray through him and in him. Worship here becomes the coincidence of divine and human action together.⁹

This can be a powerful and liberating insight, particularly at those moments when faith falters and our prayers become fitful. Simon Peter is told that though his faith will fail Christ has prayed for him. So also the ascended Christ continues through the Spirit to intercede for us. The awareness of Christ as the one who perpetually prays for us and also of the company of the faithful who surround us is a source of pastoral encouragement and liturgical strength. In reflecting upon the theology of Easter Saturday in the midst of his own terminal illness, Alan Lewis has written these moving words.

It was surely a terrible mistake of our fathers and mothers in the faith to make a person's deathbed state of mind the sole criterion of how he or she would stand beyond the grave before God's supposedly terrifying judgement. We face suffering, distress, and death with courage, faith and trust, not by maintaining serenity of psyche or buoyancy of soul within, but precisely by casting ourselves in all the times of emptiness, aridity, and wordlessness – as well as those still more spiritually dangerous times of optimism or elation – upon the gift of grace outside us and around us. God promises to do what we cannot do, and go where we need not go, to enter the dark valley ahead of us and defeat on our behalf the frightening foe. And the Spirit undertakes to pray for us, and stirs others to intercede on our behalf, just when we feel awful, overwrought in body or in spirit, when faith eludes intellect or consciousness and our tongues have lost all utterance.¹⁰

Nonetheless, in stressing this important point we should not overstate it so as to present worship as something that we do not do. Worship is not an intra-trinitarian transaction that takes place over our heads, unrelated to the practices of the visible, empirical congregations to which we belong. An over-stretched christomonism will lead to the enervating and implausible conclusion that in worship there is nothing much left for us to do.

To illustrate the performative character of worship, we might consider further the Psalms. It is generally assumed that these were memorised and

⁹ This is developed by James B. Torrance, *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace* (Carlisle, 1996).

¹⁰ Alan E. Lewis, *Between Cross & Resurrection: A Theology of Holy Saturday* (Grand Rapids, 2001), pp. 430-31.

recited in worship before being committed to their present literary form.¹¹ In celebrating the kingly rule of God, the Psalms not only attest that rule but also contribute to it and participate in it. It is through the praise of Israel in part that God's rule over creation is exercised. Through a covenant partnership which is given expression in the form of worship, God wills to be known and obeyed. Thus in Psalm 24, though the ark of the covenant is no longer present, the enthronement of God in the praise of the post-exilic people is enacted. Here we see why worship must have a public character. Israel and the church are called into covenant partnership with God not as an aggregate of disconnected individuals, but as a people which in its corporate, social existence worships together. This does not exclude private acts of worship and devotion, but it seems to demand the centrality of the regular, public diet of worship on the Lord's Day in fulfilment of the fourth commandment. This public event has a dramatic quality by virtue of its character as both a divine and a human action. In his Aberdeen Gifford lectures, Barth writes,

[T]he church service is the most important, momentous and majestic thing which can possibly take place on earth, because its primary content is not the work of man but the work of the Holy Spirit and consequently the work of faith.¹²

REFORMED EXPOSITION OF WORSHIP UNDER THE RUBRICS OF WORD AND SACRAMENT

In much Reformed writing, the topic of worship is dealt with by reference to the two 'notes' of Word and sacrament. What takes place in worship is expounded by reference to the reading and preaching of God's Word and the right administration of the sacraments. We find this in confessions, catechisms and theological textbooks. Here much of the exposition is set within an initial context of sixteenth-century polemics.

The need to reform the life of the church according to the Word of God entailed a good deal of attention to the range of activities that take place in worship. Thus Bullinger's Second Helvetic Confession engages in a patient description of the tasks of the minister, the sacramental relation, baptism and the Lord's Supper, religious meetings, church architecture, the language of prayer, singing, canonical hours, holy days, fasts, catechizing, pastoral care of the sick, burial of the dead, ceremonies, rites and adiaphora – the things of indifference. In the Second Helvetic Confession, we have

¹¹ E.g. Claus Westermann, *The Living Psalms* (Edinburgh, 1989), p. 4.

¹² *The Knowledge of God and the Service of God* (London, 1938), p. 198.

the nearest thing to a comprehensive description of worship in the Reformed confessions.

Although it is permitted all men to read the Holy Scriptures privately at home, and by instruction to edify one another in the true religion, yet in order that the Word of God may be properly preached to the people, and prayers and supplication publicly made, also that the sacraments may be rightly administered, and that collections may be made for the poor and to pay the cost of all the Church's expenses, and in order to maintain social intercourse, it is most necessary that religious or Church gatherings be held. For it is certain that in the apostolic and primitive Church, there were such assemblies frequented by all the godly. (Chapter XXII)

Although this is a rather low-key and urbane account of worship, it is to be commended for its attention to detail and its strong sense of the local, empirical and visible congregation. It is broader in its scope than most Reformed accounts of worship, which focus more exclusively on Word and sacrament. These require some comment.

The attention to the preaching of the Word reflects several features of Lutheran and Reformed worship. These include the return to Scripture alone over against tradition as the supreme rule of faith and life; the importance of a right understanding of the faith which is also reflected in the translation of the Bible and the liturgy into the vernacular; the commitment to education shared with renaissance humanism; and also a polemic against the medieval notion of the sacraments as effective *ex opere operato* (by the sheer performance of the act) without reference to the faith of the recipient. In the response to all these concerns, the regular preaching and hearing of the Word became of paramount importance. For much Reformation theology, the preaching of the Word is characterised in sacramental language. For Luther, the Word of God could be described as present in, with and under the words of the preacher. For the Reformed tradition, the relationship is not described in terms of a consubstantiation but in terms of the capacity of the Spirit to speak through human words which have been properly applied to the proclamation of the Scriptures. Here there is an indirect identity of human and divine speech in a manner that again recalls sacramental language. By contrast, the Roman Catholic tradition has tended to construe the sermon more as a homily, a piece of instruction, subsidiary to the celebration of the mass.

This account of the Word contributed greatly to the dramatic and performative character of worship. Where the preacher speaks, there God too will address us. This attaches to preaching, together with the training

and preparation invested in it, the highest seriousness. In both Lutheran and Reformed writing this is evident.

We may well be amazed, but the concrete situation for the preacher actually is that when he goes up into the pulpit, a printed book lies before him. And that book must be the basis of his preaching, exactly as if it had 'fallen from heaven'.¹³

One can find scriptural support for preaching in the ministry of Jesus himself and in his command to preach the gospel. Yet the isolation of the sermon from other forms of oral communication has arguably become problematic in Reformed worship. In particular, the relative loss of both instruction and discussion has caused an undue constriction of worship in our tradition, and an isolation of the preaching of the Word which does it no service.¹⁴ From the beginning of its history, instruction in the faith was important for new converts. The risen Christ bids his disciples not only to preach but also to teach all that he commands. Jesus himself had been called a teacher, a rabbi, by those around him. And this didactic task was taken seriously by the early church in instruction about the foundational events of the faith and the catechizing of candidates for baptism. Instruction never assumed sacramental status, yet it is as prominent in the New Testament as either baptism or the Lord's Supper. Whether it takes place in or alongside the weekly diet of worship, it is clear that it is closely associated with the upbuilding of the community. Similar remarks can be made with respect to discussion. Conversation is a means of grace in the ministry of Jesus. One thinks of his private exchanges with the disciples, Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman. Moreover, empirical research suggests that many more people come to faith through personal conversation, discussion and exchange than through listening to sermons.¹⁵ We should not discount the role of para-church organisations in this respect – CU, SCM, SU, Methodist Societies, YMCA, SSC, Crusaders, Youth Fellowships – where the faith was actively discussed. These complemented and enriched the preaching of sermons. Their decline should be a matter of some concern, particularly at a time when we have become conscious of the counter-cultural significance

¹³ Rudolf Bultmann, 'On the Question of Christology', *Faith and Understanding* (London, 1969), p. 131.

¹⁴ Here I am indebted to Hendrikus Berkhof, *Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids, 1979), pp. 352ff.

¹⁵ E.g. John Finney, *Finding Faith* (Swindon, 1992).

of Christian formation. The ministry of the Word is not to be constricted, but must be set within wider patterns of communication in the church.

In the traditional exposition of the sacraments, we often find a generic definition of a sacrament followed by exposition of baptism and the Lord's Supper. This is true both of confessions and catechisms. They begin by defining what a sacrament is before explaining the different senses in which both baptism and the Lord's Supper are sacramental. Despite their lucidity and precision, these statements also have their drawbacks. The generic account of a sacrament tended to emerge from eucharistic controversies about the nature of the real presence. The effect was somewhat Procrustean when baptism was presented as another species of the genus. Here, despite disclaimers, the effect of baptism was too tightly tied to the action of immersion or sprinkling in the threefold name. Thus the act of initiation became too easily detached from the context and subsequent activities which also mediated the divine grace and without which the language of baptism made little sense. In the case of the Lord's Supper, attention to and disputes over the sacramental nexus also contributed to a loss of the wider ethical significance of the sacrament, the 'as-so' connection which was described above. The regular reception of God's hospitality in the supper is closely linked in the New Testament to the hospitality that we are called to display towards others. Thus the link between eucharistic celebration and *diakonia* was arguably obscured in formal accounts of worship, but is robustly present in works such as Wolterstorff's *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*. This constriction of the sacraments may have been compounded by the tendency to infrequent celebration of the Lord's Supper, the arguments of Calvin and others notwithstanding. In the modern day Church of Scotland, though not perhaps in other traditions, we have a situation in which we can celebrate baptism too frequently and the Lord's Supper not often enough.

THE AESTHETIC DIMENSION OF WORSHIP

Any theology of worship which ignores the significance of the aesthetic is deficient. We worship God not as angels, far less as discarnate souls. Our worship is that of embodied, social persons for whom communication takes sensory forms. These include the visual, the verbal and the musical. In celebrating the beauty of creation, many of the Psalms pass effortlessly into celebration of the beauty of Israel's praise. This aesthetic requirement directs our attention to church music, the use of language in prayer and preaching, the layout of the church building, lighting and even PA systems. It is sometimes assumed that the Reformed tradition is hostile to

the intrusion of the aesthetic in worship, yet this is hardly true. It has its own distinctive aesthetic forms.

In the sixteenth century, the reform of church life involved in part an enhanced commitment to preaching, congregational participation, forms of language capable of universal comprehension, recitation of the Psalms and exclusion of all that diverted the attention of minister and people from the gospel represented in Word and sacrament. While this may have led to some iconoclastic excesses, it nonetheless represented a prioritising of key aesthetic forms as most appropriate to the communication of the evangelical faith and the glorifying of God. In a discussion of the role of singing in worship, Calvin writes of the power of music to move and inflame hearts. Conscious of its capacity to function in different ways, not all of which are virtuous, he insists upon the need for musical forms which display a weight and a majesty worthy of God. These qualities pertain to melodies that Calvin describes as moderate (*modérée*). Moreover, our singing should be of words reflecting sound doctrine so that there is a unity of the heart and the understanding. The Psalms are given to us for this purpose.

[A] linnet, a nightingale or a popinjay will sing well, but it will be without understanding. But man's proper gift is to sing, knowing what he says; after understanding must follow the heart and the affection, something that can only happen when we have the song imprinted on our memory never to cease singing it.¹⁶

Rather than eschewing aesthetic beauty, the traditions of the Reformed church reflect qualities embedded in its theological convictions. In characterising its worship, the poet and scholar Donald Davie has spoken of the simplicity, sobriety and measuredness of its style which provide a particular type of exquisiteness.¹⁷ This is exemplified *inter alia* in the

¹⁶ 'John Calvin, The Form of Prayers and Songs of the Church 1543: Letter to the Reader' translated by Ford Lewis Battles, *Calvin Theological Journal* 15 (1980), p. 164. For the original French text see *Opera Selecta*, vol. 2, pp. 12-18. I am grateful to John de la Haye for drawing my attention to this article.

¹⁷ Donald Davie, *A Gathered Church: The Literature of the English Dissenting Interest, 1700-1930* (London, 1978), p. 25. Nicholas Wolterstorff points out that loss of interest in these aesthetic dimensions of worship was connected to the exclusive position assigned the sermon in Protestant worship with the consequent overwhelming of the liturgy. *Until Justice and Peace Embrace* (Grand Rapids, 1983), p. 159.

felicitous language of prayer and preaching, a commitment to intellectual precision in the service of the Word, the use of verse and musical forms, and the wearing of unostentatious vestments. Perhaps it had its limitations, particularly with respect to the visual arts. Yet at a time when worship is threatened by a loss of beauty and the incursion of forms which merely represent the personal preference of those leading it, we might do well to study more closely the aesthetic values of our tradition. These deserve not only historical respect but renewed appreciation for their contribution to the worship of God.

THE CHURCH AS WITNESSING COMMUNITY

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The purpose of our gathering today¹ is to think together about the witnessing task of the church in the current cultural landscape. Our theme is the church's vocation to be a community that bears public witness to what the gospel announces about God's purposes for human life and fellowship. We may perhaps put our question in these terms: how do the judgement and mercy of God manifest in the Christian gospel shape the social and cultural testimony of the Christian community?

We should be clear from the outset that the primary issues are as much theological as they are moral, political and social. Indeed, the burden of what I want to say today is that whatever clarifications we may have to offer about matters of culture and public life can only have any genuine Christian cogency and helpfulness if they are rooted in theological clarifications. Cultural testimony must emerge from the church's constant and singular preoccupation, which is to give attention to God's self-declaration in the gospel, and to allow its thought, speech and action to be broken and remade through its hearing. The community of Jesus Christ is a community which is brought into being by the gospel, sustained in life by the gospel and summoned to bear witness to the gospel; and because that is true, the church can only be what it is if its entire life and activity emerges out of the event of starting again with the gospel. For the community of Jesus Christ, there is simply nowhere else to begin.

Because of this, I want to devote a good deal of the time allotted to me to talking about matters which are at first glance only indirectly related to what some may regard as the real substance of our discussion. I have very little to say about the decline of mediating structures in late capitalist societies, about the shifts in public life from virtue-based to contractual and heavily legislated modes of social relation, or about the decline of received traditions of wisdom. That's not at all because these are

¹ A paper given at a conference on Culture and the Gospel, in Westminster College, Cambridge, in March 2001.

unimportant issues: quite the opposite. But I am clear in my mind that if our Christian witness about such matters is to be just that – *Christian witness* – it must emerge from the church renewing itself in a lively, repentant and overawed sense of the sheer reality of the gospel, its claim and its promise; that is, witness must emerge from theological engagement. Three considerations in particular lead me to press the claim of theological attention to the gospel in thinking about the church's social and cultural witness.

THEOLOGY AND GOSPEL

We need to give theological attention to the gospel, first, in order to resist the moralism which so easily afflicts the church's social and cultural testimony. By 'moralism' I mean the fatal turn by which the church's human responsibility and action become the centre of gravity in its dealings with its context. When that happens, then gospel, church and witness all are distorted. 'Gospel' is instrumentalized; it becomes little more than an incitement to busy human activity, a backcloth to religious social undertakings. 'Church' becomes identified with a visible human project, an historical force, conservative or radical – a mode of human endeavour, proposing values and engaging in social and cultural debate as just one more voice at the table. And 'witness' becomes a matter of commenting on the social and cultural environment, with greater or lesser degrees of critical acumen. But moralism founders on the fact that the gospel is not a set of cultural imperatives or a blueprint for social action, but the announcement of the eschatological reality of God and God's saving governance of all things. The church is not merely a visible social quantity but the invisible new creation, the presence in history of the new reconciled humanity which can never be just one more social order. And Christian witness is not policy recommendation: it is the astonished indication of the divine reality which wholly transcends our social and cultural competence. If, therefore, we are to be protected from moralism, it can only be by being faced with the gospel as something which *resists* us, which cannot just be harnessed to whatever social and cultural projects we consider it ought to pull in its train. And the task of theology is just that: to exemplify the church facing the resistance of the gospel.

We need to give theological attention to the gospel, second, in order to ensure the Christianness of our social and cultural testimony. The church is often burdened with a sense of anxious and earnest responsibility to speak to all manner of issues set before it. Such responsibility can often issue in a kind of instability or lack of concentration, an excessive

reactivity which quickly disables Christian testimony. There are many issues on which the church will have little to say of direct relevance; indeed it will always be the case that its witness will have a necessarily strange and tangential character, simply because it persists in talking of God. The church's witness is *witness* – testimony to something laid upon it from outside; it is not the church casting around for something to say. The church is therefore neither at liberty nor responsible to address *quodlibet* whatever questions may come to it from whatever sources. Only because it has a very specific character – only because in a sense it has only one thing to say – is the church able to address the culture in a hopeful and humane way. But the church may never assume that it has already learned and put safely behind its specific character as the gospel community. In the matter of the gospel, the church is always only a beginner; and so it must begin from the beginning by doing its theology.

We need to give theological attention to the gospel, third, because Christian witness in the social and cultural sphere rests upon a Christian understanding of reality. To put the point technically: Christian witness presupposes Christian ontology. More straightforwardly: Christian witness rests upon a 'reading' of reality, a given sense of how the world really is, and therefore of how humankind should act in the world. The rule here is this: the church thinks the world is a different place from the place which the world thinks itself to be. Christian social and cultural witness testify to the fact that human society and culture are enclosed by the reality of the gospel. They are determined at all points by the saving history of God with us which the gospel declares. Like anything else, they become intelligible on the basis of the facts of the gospel: that the purpose of God the Father to reconcile all things to himself has once and for all been established; that in the power of the Holy Spirit that reconciliation is dangerously and miraculously present; that the reconciliation of all things which is the goal of human history and culture is secure. Whatever else it may say, Christian social and cultural witness must say these things: that the human condition is what the gospel declares it to be, that we are not free to be human apart from that reality; that our social and cultural activity will only be *truthful* if it is in accord with what the gospel tells us about our nature and the purpose which God has for us; and that if we ignore or subvert or improve upon that nature and purpose, we condemn ourselves to wretchedness. Close to the heart of Christian social and cultural witness is thus the command to testify to the truth.

It is often objected that to speak in such terms is to interpret but not to transform the world. But the contrast is specious. Indeed, the elevation of transforming the world to self-evident superiority over thinking truthfully

about the world is one of the deepest idolatries of modernity, the idolatry of historical constructivism, which has infected secular and Christian social thought alike. To think truthfully about the world is not to remain in a world of abstraction; it is to indicate what the world *is*; and we can only act truthfully – in accordance with our natures and the nature of the world – if we grasp its truth; and we grasp its truth by being grasped by the gospel. And one of the ways in which the church is grasped by the gospel is by doing theology.

WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

Christian social and cultural witness emerge from the church's hearing of the gospel of Jesus Christ. But what is involved in hearing the gospel? The church hears the gospel as Holy Scripture is read in the assembly of those who gather to praise the Lord Jesus in proclamation, sacrament, fellowship and service. But this 'hearing' is much more than indolent passivity; nor can it be made a matter of comfortable routine. The church hears the gospel in the repeated event of being encountered, accosted, by the word of gospel as it meets us in the reading of Scripture in the midst of the community of faith and its worship. Hearing the gospel in this way involves repentance and faith, that is, constantly renewed abandonment of what the gospel excludes and embrace of what the gospel offers. Such hearing can never be finished business. Hearing the gospel is not a skill we may acquire nor a material condition in which we may find ourselves, but a spiritual event which happens in prayer for the coming of the Holy Spirit, and in which we are always at the beginning.

What does the church hear when it hears the gospel? When we try to define the gospel, we need to resist the temptation to make it into a manageable and relatively tame message, something which can perform useful functions in our religious and cultural worlds, and which we can make our own by annexing it to our own viewpoints or projects of social transformation. The gospel cannot be owned; it is not raw material to be 'used'; it cannot even be 'known' in any straightforward way, as if it were simply one more helpful piece of religious information. This is not to say that the gospel is vague or indefinite: nothing in the New Testament suggests that the gospel is other than something clearly expressible, with a sharp and perceptible outline and content. But what is perceived and expressed in the gospel is mystery. That is, the gospel concerns God and God's actions, and so is known only in the miracle of revelation and faith, and present among us after the manner of God, that is, spiritually, and not as some kind of religious or ecclesiastical possession. In one real sense,

the gospel is not 'observable'. Once we lose sight of this, and convert the gospel into just another Christian cultural commodity, then it very rapidly becomes 'something which would survive as Good News apart from faith and without God'.² Thus: 'We do not have the Gospel, but we hear it. We do not know it as we know other concepts, but we receive it anew again and again.'³

Once again, we ask: what does the church hear when it hears the gospel? The gospel is 'the gospel of Christ'.⁴ Jesus himself, the proclaimer and embodiment of God's good news, *is* the gospel. He is not simply its bearer, the instrument through which the good news reaches us. To say that would be to reduce him to the status of prophet or herald, and reduce the gospel to some theory or message separable from Jesus and applicable as such to social and cultural affairs. But: Jesus is not a function of the gospel; he is its sum and substance. His person and acts, his proclamation, his humiliation and exaltation and rule over all things constitute and do not simply illustrate the gospel. 'If we were to sum up the content of the Gospel in a single word, it would be Jesus the Christ.'⁵

Jesus is the gospel because in and as him God intervenes decisively in the history of sin and death. In and as Jesus, God reconciles all things to himself, putting an end to humankind's hostility and alienation and restoring us to freedom, fellowship, and hope. In and as Jesus, God makes all things new, and ensures that the creation, broken by disorder and condemned to perish, will attain its true end and be glorified. In and as Jesus, the 'gospel of God'⁶ becomes reality. And because of this, the gospel is good news, in three senses.

Good News

First, the gospel is good news because in it we encounter God's gracious work for us and our salvation. The heart of the gospel is not a piece of human religious teaching, a pattern for human spiritual experience or a call to human moral commitment. It is *God's* gospel: originating in God himself, it concerns his presence and action, and points human life to its true fulfilment in fellowship with God. And, moreover, because the gospel

² K. Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans* (London, 1933) p. 368.

³ E. Schlink, *Theology of the Lutheran Confessions* (Philadelphia, 1961) p. 7.

⁴ 1 Thes. 3:2; Gal. 1:7; Phil. 1:27; 1 Cor. 9:12; 2 Cor. 2:12; 9:13; 10:14; Rom. 15:19.

⁵ G. Friedrich, 'εὐαγγέλιον', in G. Kittel (ed.), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* 2 (Grand Rapids, 1964) p. 731.

⁶ 1 Thes. 2:2, 8f.; 2 Cor. 11:7; Rom. 1:1; 15:16.

is the gospel of God, then encountering the gospel is – or ought to be – a confrontation with something deeply disturbing, something which is even, as one great twentieth-century theologian put it, ‘a thing of terror’.⁷ If the gospel is the place where we find ourselves face to face with the sovereign presence and activity of God, in a way which is ultimate and unqualified, then the gospel is always against the grain of our expectations. It will not occupy a place which we reserve for it in a scheme of our own devising, for the gospel ‘is not a truth among other truths’ but that which ‘sets a question-mark against all truths’.⁸ If this is true, then the gospel sits rather uneasily with those styles of church life and theology which make a comfortable home for themselves in a particular culture (whether radical or traditionalist), putting down roots and setting themselves the task of confirming or, perhaps, ameliorating or even transforming their surroundings. The sensitivity, good will and cultural and social scrupulousness with which such projects are undertaken may make it difficult for us to see how they are always exposed to the very considerable danger of making the gospel about something less than God – and therefore something less than good news of God’s utterly transformative action.

Second, the gospel is good news because in it we have set before us God’s act of eschatological deliverance in Christ. The intervention of God which is the content of the gospel is not merely one further factor in the history of the world, one more matter to be borne in mind as we adjust ourselves to reality. It is *the* factor, that which establishes the entire renewal of human life and history. The gospel concerns God’s achievement of and manifestation of radical newness. This re-ordering of human life from the very roots is accomplished by God in and as Jesus, whom the gospel declares to be ‘Lord’ (*cf.* 2 Thes. 1:8) – that is, the one in whom God’s irresistible and wholly good purpose for the creation is effected. In Jesus, the gospel tells us, a fundamental break has been made in the human situation, in view of which scepticism, vacillation, indifference, uncertainty, fear, hopelessness and joylessness have all been taken care of, set aside as things which do not match up to the new situation in which the whole creation has been placed. For the gospel is the presence of salvation, the freeing of all things from disorder and confinement and the gift of life in fellowship with God. The gospel is the active reality of God’s grace, God taking up the cause of those whose sin has eaten away at their humanity. It is the undefeated reality of the blessing of God. Certainly, the gospel constitutes a judgement of human life in its

⁷ D. M. MacKinnon, *The Church of God* (London, 1940) p. 26.

⁸ K. Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 35.

fallenness; but it does so only because it is the unsurpassably good news of the grace of God in Jesus, the one in whom all God's promises find their Yes (*cf.* 2 Cor. 1:19f.).

Third, the gospel is good news because it is comprehensively true. All human reality is what it is in the light of the gospel. The gospel is not a partial truth or message enclosed by a larger reality such as history or culture or morals or religion. On the contrary: by the gospel all history and culture and morals and religion are to be evaluated. The gospel is thus both particular and catholic. It is *particular* because it is stubbornly tied to the career and name of Jesus: as there is only one Jesus, so there is only one 'grace of Christ' (Gal. 1:6). But in all its particularity, the gospel is *catholic*. The events of Jesus and the new life which they generate and sustain furnish the overarching context in which all human life and relation to God take place. The gospel concerns a 'power that determines life and destiny',⁹ and its scope cannot be in any way restricted. In its very particularity, therefore, the good news is universal in reach, since it is the good news of the one in whom God gathers up all things (*cf.* Eph. 1:10).

If all this is true, then the gospel is a great deal less serene than we may be tempted to believe: because it is good news of salvation, setting before us the drama of our deliverance by God from darkness and death, it is more than anything else a matter of disorientation. There is an immediate consequence to be drawn here for the church's social and cultural witness: that witness must not proceed by transmuting the gospel into a stable, measurable, quantifiable social or cultural value. We can no more do that than we can channel a volcano into a domestic heating system. The gospel is no mere 'principle' which can then be 'applied' to issues about forms of common life or political economy. The gospel is about death and resurrection, new creation; and it is that new order of reality, rather than any immediate social applicability, which is the burden of the church's testimony.

WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

What does this mean for how we think of the church? Most fundamentally, it means that the church is what it is because of the gospel, and so we begin talking of the church indirectly, by talking of the gospel which calls

⁹ E. Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans* (London, 1980), p. 9. On the universality of the gospel in Paul, see J. Becker, *Paul: Apostle to the Gentiles* (Louisville, 1993), p. 402.

it into being and which remains its essential theme and source of vitality.¹⁰ This does not simply mean that the gospel provides a rather remote background or context for our understanding of the church. Talk of the gospel here must be direct and operative. We can, that is, speak properly of the church only if we are very strict to allow the gospel to exercise in an immediate way a controlling and critical influence. The gospel constitutes the environment of the church, the field within which it has its being, the space within which it undertakes its mission. And so the gospel acts as the ultimate critical point of reference for the church's life and proclamation: here at one and the same time the church is exposed to judgement and blessed beyond measure.

At its most basic level, therefore, the church is to be defined as assembly around the gospel. 'Church' is the event of gathering around the magnetic centre of the good news of Jesus Christ. Its dynamic is derived not primarily from human projects, decisions or undertakings, but from the presence of the breathtakingly new and different reality which is brought about by Jesus himself, the good news of God. The church exists because of a decision which has already taken place and which the good news declares: the divine decision to reconcile and glorify all things in Christ. 'Church' is not a struggle to make something happen, but a lived attempt to make sense of, celebrate and bear witness to what has already been established by God's grace. What is fundamental about the church, therefore, is not human congregation, assembly, responsibility or vocation, but election: God's decision, God's sovereign determination in which God says with relentlessly loving and creative force: You shall be my people. Whatever else we may go on to say about the witness of the church must be rooted in a deep sense that the church must allow the divine decision to stand, must as it were stand back and let that divine decision manifest itself and work its own work. There is, therefore, a proper 'emptiness' about the gospel community, in its refusal to derive its impulse from anything other than the sheer self-gift of God in the good news.

We might sum matters up by saying that if the church is what it is because of the gospel, then it is primarily a spiritual event and only secondarily a visible natural history and structured form of human common life. Put in negative terms, this means that the church cannot rely on its history or its external forms (doctrinal, sacramental, ministerial, political) as somehow guaranteeing its existence as church. In this sense, it is

¹⁰ Cf. J. Fitzmyer, 'The Gospel in the Theology of Paul', in *To Advance the Gospel: New Testament Studies* (New York, 1981), p. 155.

'invisible', that is, not simply identical with its tangible shape and a human society. Put positively, this means that the church has true form and visibility in so far as it receives the grace of God through the life-giving presence of the Spirit of Jesus. Like the gospel, the church has a 'mysterious' character: the conditions under which it exists lie within the miracle of its occurrence, and not in any prior forms through which its existence might be secured.

If the church is what it is because of the gospel, it will be most basically characterised by astonishment at the good news of Jesus. What will lie at the heart of all its undertakings will be the primitive response to Jesus' presence and proclamation: 'they were all amazed' (Mark 1:27). What is this amazement? It is being held by a reality – the reality of Jesus – which presents itself as pure gift, without desert or expectation; it is letting ourselves be taken up by that reality and its inherent authority, worth and persuasiveness; it is having settled ideas and routines ruptured and transcended; it is being disconcerted by what is at once a matter of bewilderment and delight. The life and proclamation of the church are 'evangelical' in so far as they are captivated in these ways by the good news. And this captivation is to be permanent; it cannot be left behind us as we move on to our own preoccupations or interests. '[O]nly as there is this astonishment... can there be serious, fruitful and edifying Christian thought and utterance in the Church.'¹¹

If the church is what it is because of the gospel, then its life and activities will betray an 'ecstatic' character. That is to say, the definitive activities of the church are those that most clearly betray the fact that the origin, maintenance and perfection of its life lie beyond itself, in the work and word of God which the gospel proclaims. The church's true being is located outside itself. It exists by virtue of God's decision and calling; it is nourished and sustained by the ever-fresh gift of the Holy Spirit; its goal lies in the definitive self-manifestation of the Lord Jesus at his appearing.

What activities testify to this? We may conveniently distinguish these activities into acts of the *church in gathering* and acts of the *church in dispersal*, that is, the acts of the church in its internal and its external orientations. The acts of the church in gathering are those acts by which the church is drawn towards the source of its life, and reinvested in the truth and goodness of the gospel. The acts of the church in dispersal are those acts in which the church follows the external impulse of its source of life, and is pushed beyond itself in testimony and service. It is crucial that neither the acts of gathering nor the acts of dispersal are somehow to be

¹¹ K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/3 (Edinburgh, 1961), p. 287.

considered as independent, free-standing operations which we may talk about without reference to the action of God. The gospel is not inert; it does not merely furnish the occasion for the church to get busy. Whatever the church does about the gospel is always response to the fact that God has already taken matters into his own hands. With this in mind, we turn, finally, to consider the church as witnessing community.

WHAT IS THE CHURCH'S WITNESS?

The church, we read in the First Letter of Peter, is 'a chosen race... a holy nation, God's own people'; but it is those things for an end, namely 'that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light' (1 Pet. 2:9). The church's election, that is, is teleological; 'church' is not the mere static existence of a social entity; rather, it is assembled for the end of testimony. The church is not a 'chosen race' as a form of spiritual existence which transcends the material and historical world; nor is the church a 'holy people' as a pure social region, a self-enclosed sphere of achieved sanctity into which we may withdraw. Both those modes of church life fail to grasp the real dynamic of the church's election, which is not to sheer difference or indifference but to a specific calling. Election is election to vocation, not to removal. The election of the church is not an end in itself; it is the ground and presupposition of a larger movement in which God catches the church up into his own self-declaration and fashions it into an instrument which can testify to his self-testimony. To be the church is therefore to be set apart, 'possessed' by God, for a particular end, the task of witness.

This witness is definitive of the church. The church is authentically the church in so far as it engages in witness; it is apostolic by being sent, prophetic by indicating the presence and action and word of God. Transcending the world or withdrawing from the world are not options for the church because they are a refusal of the divine commission and therefore a resistance to the dynamic of God's choice. Indeed, those ways of trying to be the church are corrupt, above all because they are forms of self-preservation, and therefore forms of sin, ways of trying to survive without the resurrection and apart from faith. But the church is the church as it does not resist the real direction of God's separating activity, which is towards the world in witness.

All that is probably well known and understood. What is less well known is the reverse side of what has just been said, namely that there is no vocation without election. The church's existence and conduct as a witnessing community is not simply a human undertaking. Rather, its

origin and dynamic derive wholly from God. The church's witness is not, as it were, a first move; the church is not of itself in its own creaturely capacity the bearer of responsibility for witness to the gospel. God himself is his own first witness. In the power of his resurrection and in the energy of the Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ goes ahead of the church and testifies of himself in the world. He is risen, ascended, enthroned and glorified as Lord of all creaturely reality, including the realities of social and cultural existence. He – not the church – is the true witness. He – not the church – is the light of the world.

This point is of critical significance for any understanding of the public life of the Christian community, for it is precisely here that a great deal of talk of the activity of the church becomes disoriented. Much church life is predicated on the assumption that God is only real, present and active in so far as the church's moral action or spirituality or proclamation make him so. Not only is this a (covert or explicit) denial of the resurrection; it is a miserable burdening of the church with a load which it cannot hope to support. The dynamic of the church's witness does not derive from its own capacity but from God's appointment. Human capacity, skill and wisdom are very far from the centre – indeed, for Paul in 1 Corinthians, eloquent wisdom, power and prestige are a positive hindrance to testimony to the gospel and depotentiate it of its spiritual charge.

Whatever ministry of witness the church may have, then, is dependent, subordinate, a rather frail accompaniment of God's self-testimony. Because the primary agent of the church's witness is God himself in the risen Christ through the Spirit's power, the church's own acts are only a sub-ministry. God's own witness does not dissolve into that of the church; the church does not replace him, but simply witnesses to his witness. God is self-communicating; God speaks for God, and God speaks of God. 'God is his own witness. I am not an apt instrument in His hands. If God makes use of men, nevertheless, a miracle is happening. If I speak, I speak because God Himself speaks and my speaking can therefore become always and only reference to God's own Word.'¹² Nevertheless, God does not will to be alone in this work of witness, but elects the church to act as the herald of his own speech. God has no need of this human service; his election of a community for this service is always a matter of divine grace, not divine incapacity. But the direction of God's grace is that there should be a human witness, an apostolic church set apart for the gospel of God

¹² K. Barth, 'The Christian As a Witness', *God in Action* (Edinburgh, 1936), p. 99.

(cf. Rom. 1:1), accompanying, assisting and indicating the self-communicative presence of God.

CONTENT

Such is the origin and the dynamic of the church's witness to the gospel. What of its content? Christian cultural and social witness is an attempt to indicate that the world and human society are a certain kind of place; they are the new creation, the place where the creative and redemptive purposes of the triune God have been established and are now moving to their final perfection. Christian witness is the joyful and critical testimony that, if humankind is to act humanly, it must act in conformity to the way the world is.

This means, first, that Christian witness will be concerned to explain that the world has a given nature. It is not an indefinite space, an open area for free play, spontaneity or inventiveness. The world cannot be made up, any more than it can be made. In rejecting this idea, Christian witness is rejecting the grand modern myth that there *is* no nature, that there's nothing that the world *is*. And it is rejecting the corollary of that myth, namely the assertion that all that there is is the will, and a world which is there, not as an order of reality with a kind of resilient otherness and purposive objectivity, but as raw material for the will's projects. Christian social and cultural witness, because it bears witness to the given character of the new creation in Jesus Christ, will therefore refuse the fundamentally *poetic* character of much late modern or postmodern culture in which making, intervening, are humanly basic, in which we don't read reality but write it.

This means, second, that Christian witness will be concerned to explain that the world as new creation has given ends. Its trajectory is not wholly indeterminate, a matter merely for human deliberation; its end is, rather, in accord with its nature. Without an account of ends, there is little barrier against the secularised eschatology of modernity, whose sheer human vulgarity is once again to be unfurled before us as we prepare to elect our government taskmasters.

And this means, third, that Christian witness will be concerned to explain that human social and cultural activity are truthful insofar as they are in accordance with the nature and end as determined by the purposes of God. Christian witness will have a particular interest in urging that good action is truthful action. The captains of modern culture, the men and women of affairs both temporal and spiritual, shake their heads at the naiveté of such witness – how can we know the truth? And how can we

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convert a theological truth into a pattern of action, a policy, a profitable culture? But may it not be that such protest is a symptom, not of the uselessness of truth but the spiritual and moral malaise of those who raise the objection?

I am very conscious that none of what I have said constitutes a set of directives about the content of Christian social and cultural witness. But before we work on directives, we need to learn how to read reality. And to do that we need to learn how to listen: how to be a hearing church, and therefore – and *only* therefore – a witnessing church. Why should the church of Jesus Christ be interested in fostering forms of neighbourliness, in resisting addictive consumption, in rejecting the reduction of education to acquisition of transferable skills, in promoting genuine public argument about social goods? Because neighbourliness, economic chastity, imagination and rational civic speech are truthful ways of being human, truthful ways of casting down Babylon and pointing to the heavenly city whose builder and maker is God. But if we are to see that, we need to begin once again at the beginning; and that is the point at which I must stop.

OPEN THOUGHTS ON OPEN THEISM

IAIN D. CAMPBELL, BACK FREE CHURCH, ISLE OF LEWIS

The Evangelical Theological Society – a scholarly fraternity of (mostly North American) biblical scholars, all committed to the inerrancy and infallibility of Scripture – will this year take a critical vote on whether to exclude two of its members, Clark Pinnock and John Sanders. The debate, the early stages of which polarized opinion at the 2002 annual meeting of the Society, focuses on whether or not open theism,¹ a theological perspective popularized by the writings of Pinnock and Sanders, is compatible with biblical inerrancy. While the two scholars in question raise concerns about dividing the society and about the political agenda being played out,² others have been more vocal in their opposition, labelling open theism as ‘gross heresy’.³ Clearly, lines are being drawn: for some, new views of God are brokering a new reformation within evangelicalism; for others, they represent the very antithesis of the evangel.

A QUESTION OF DEFINITIONS

One thing is certain: the issue is not peripheral. It touches on the very heart of our faith, because eternal life is to *know* God (John 17:3). If our ideas about God are wrong, then much else will also be wrong. R. C. Sproul is exactly right: ‘our understanding of God determines our entire theology. When the orthodox doctrine of God goes, nothing can be more systemic. If our doctrine of God is heretical, then our entire belief system will be ground into dust by this heresy.’⁴

The traditional view of God is reflected in such theologies as that of the Westminster Shorter Catechism, which answers the question ‘What is

¹ For a convenient introduction to open theism, see C. Pinnock *et. al.*, *The Openness of God: A biblical challenge to the traditional understanding of God*, Downers Grove, 1994, or log onto www.opentheism.org

² See the news report ‘Closing the door on open theists?’, *Christianity Today* (January 2003), p. 24.

³ R. C. Sproul Jr, ‘His Ways, Our Ways’, *Tabletalk* 27, No. 2 (2003), p. 2.

⁴ R. C. Sproul, ‘Tolerating the Intolerable’, *Tabletalk* 27, No. 2 (2003), p. 5.

God?' in the following manner: 'God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal and unchangeable in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth' (Question 4). And when asked 'What are the decrees of God?', the Catechism replies: 'The decrees of God are his eternal purpose, according to the counsel of his will, whereby, for his own glory, he has foreordained whatsoever comes to pass' (Question 7). These definitions are further explicated in systematic theologies such as those of Charles Hodge,⁵ Louis Berkhof,⁶ Wayne Grudem⁷ and Robert Reymond,⁸ and bequeath a view of God as a sovereign, all-powerful and all-knowing God, who sees ends from beginnings, and who has foreordained both ends and the means to them. Thus Scottish evangelicalism has inherited a powerful tradition of theology which emphasises that God is totally in control of our lives, ruling over and over-ruling the world. We have been taught that he works all things towards a pre-determined end, and that his ways are 'unsearchable' and 'past finding out'. The confessional position of much of our theism is articulated in the Westminster Confession of Faith, of which Professor John Murray said that 'in no creedal statement has the doctrine of God's sovereign and immutable decrees been stated in more forthright terms. There can be no question as to meaning and intent. Equivocal dialectic has no place.'⁹ The thesis of the Confession, Murray argues, is simply this: 'that God ordains whatsoever comes to pass and that, therefore, the ultimate destinies of men and angels are immutably foreordained'.¹⁰ This, Murray continues, includes the foreordination of sin, although couched in language that clarifies that God is neither the author nor the approver of sin.

But open theists are raising serious questions about where this theology came from. They are questioning whether, in fact, this is the God of the Bible at all, and suggesting that these concepts of God owe more to the abstractions of philosophy than to the teaching of the Bible. Open theism appeals to certain passages of Scripture to demonstrate that there are some things (including the future) which God does not know, and that he has

⁵ *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, Eerdmans reprint (Grand Rapids, 1995), esp. chapter 5, pp. 366-441.

⁶ *Systematic Theology* (London, 1959), esp. chapters 5-7, pp. 52-81.

⁷ *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, 1994), esp. chapters 11-13, pp. 156-225.

⁸ *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville, 1998), esp. chapter 7, pp. 153-204.

⁹ J. Murray, 'The Theology of the Westminster Confession of Faith', *Collected Writings*, vol. 4 (Edinburgh, 1982), p. 248.

¹⁰ Murray, 'Theology', p. 249.

not, in fact, ordained 'whatsoever comes to pass'. It argues that the God of the Bible takes risks by co-operating with us in his designs, goals and purposes.

One of the leading proponents of this view is Clark Pinnock, who said in a 1998 interview, 'I along with others have sensed the need for a better theological articulation of our dynamic relationship with God.'¹¹ In order to understand the appeal of the openness perspective, it is worth quoting at length from Clark Pinnock's interview:

...God sovereignly grants human beings significant freedom, because he wants relationships of love with them. In such relationships, at least in the human realm, either party may welcome or refuse them. We may choose to cooperate with God or work against his will for our lives. God has chosen to enter into dynamic give-and-take relationships with us which allow God to affect us and also let us affect God. As co-labourers with God, we are invited to bring the future into being together along with him. The openness model of God is a variation of what is often called 'free-will theism', and I think it makes better sense both of the Bible and of our walk with God.

The problem with the 'old' model in its Thomist or Calvinist versions has to do with the fact that it emerged out of a synthesis of the Bible and Greek philosophy. Several (but not all) of its features are unscriptural and inappropriately dependent on Hellenistic thinking. Categories like God's impassibility, timelessness, immutability, exhaustive omniscience are badly skewed. They give the impression that God is immobile and reminds one uncomfortably of Aristotle's unmoved mover. It makes God look a lot like a metaphysical iceberg....

We need to reflect more the awesome tenderness of God in bending down to us and making himself vulnerable within the relationship with us... I hope we will not be too stubborn to make reforms in our thinking according to God's word.¹²

Some evangelicals see the openness model as heralding a new reformation. Gilbert Bilezikian, in his endorsement of the 1994 IVP publication *The*

¹¹ *Free Space: An Interview with Clark Pinnock*, Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals Website, www.christianity.com/CC/article/0,,PTID307086ICHID559376ICIID1414060,00.html

¹² *Free Space: An Interview with Clark Pinnock*.

Openness of God, which brought open theism to the attention of the theological world, wrote:

Almost five centuries ago, Christians thrilled at the recovery of the truth of salvation by grace that had been hijacked from them for a millennium of church history. This book throbs today with the same excitement at the rediscovery of a God infinitely greater and freer than the cold abstractions of mediocally minded reductionist theologians make him to be.¹³

Bilezikian is one of the theological scholars involved in the Willow Creek Community Church and has taught at evangelical Seminaries in the United States. His is only one of several voices engaged in what John Piper calls 'a massive re-visioning of God'.¹⁴ Calvinists are being accused of reductionism and abstraction, of turning the personal, living, powerful God of the Bible into an aggregate of abstract attributes. It is alleged that such attributes as omniscience, immutability and impassibility imprison the God of Scripture within a framework of impersonal philosophical theology, and particularly within federal Calvinism. In order to recover the personal, dynamic, relational view of the God of the Bible, we need, according to openness theology, to change our theological models and reset our theological parameters.

Clark Pinnock also delivered a paper at the 2002 ETS annual meeting, entitled 'Reconstructing Evangelical Theology: Is the Open View of God a Good Idea?', in which he gives an *apologia* for his view. Pinnock is correct to state in his paper that 'the question before us now is whether the open view of God is a proposal that can be considered evangelical'.¹⁵ Pinnock's appeal in this paper is for Openness Theology to be given a place at the evangelical table, on the grounds that it is good to discuss new views. Pinnock makes much of the fact that 'it is not as if other evangelicals have not noticed problems in the traditional approaches'¹⁶ – God's atemporality and unchangeableness are constantly being redefined. But Pinnock also accuses those who have attacked his position of being 'a group of sectarian

¹³ Gilbert Bilezikian, endorsement on back cover of *The Openness of God*.

¹⁴ John Piper, 'We Took a Good Stand and Made a Bad Mistake: Reflections on the Baptist General Conference Annual Meeting, St Paul, July 5, 2000', www.desiringgod.org/library/fresh_words/2000/070500.html

¹⁵ Clark Pinnock, 'Reconstructing Evangelical Theology: Is the Open View of God a Good Idea?', delivered at the Evangelical Theological Society annual meeting, Colorado Springs, Colorado, 14-16 November, 2001.

¹⁶ Pinnock, 'Reconstructing Evangelical Theology', p. 6.

evangelicals'; he continues: 'I have always known there was a vigorous paleo-Calvinist credalism in evangelicalism... one senses a hardening of the categories typical of fundamentalism and an excessive traditionalism.'¹⁷ It is ironic to find open theists saying that they are simply appealing for 'Christian and academic courtesy'.¹⁸ It is difficult to advance the debate, however, when the advocates of open theism are already accusing Calvinists of an entrenched dogmatism which refuses to be open to the mind of the Spirit. The tone of Pinnock's paper makes me very concerned for the future discussion of the topic, and for the future of evangelicalism itself.

SCRIPTURAL SUPPORT FOR OPEN THEISM?

Open theism appeals to several passages of Scripture in support of its new view of God.

It appeals, for example, to passages which deal with *God's purposes and intentions*. The Bible contains statements such as the following: 'The Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart' (Gen. 6:6), or 'So the Lord relented from the harm which He said He would do to His people' (Exod. 32:14) or 'Then God saw their [the people of Nineveh's] works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it' (Jonah 3:10).

In each of these passages, the statement is made either that God was sorry for something which he had previously done, or that God changed his mind, and did not fulfil something he had previously stated as his intention. According to open theism, God's 'ultimate objectives required him to change his immediate intentions'.¹⁹ The interaction of God with Moses, or with the Ninevites is real and personal, and the actions of Nineveh in repenting become the basis of an immediate change of intention in God.

The classical view of God, it is argued, forces a meaning on these passages which Scripture will not allow them to carry. Classical theism argues that God is immutable, and that his purposes and intentions do not change. But open theism charges classical theism with subjecting the Bible to theological 'control beliefs', such as God's immutability, and not

¹⁷ Pinnock, 'Reconstructing Evangelical Theology', p. 8.

¹⁸ Gregory A. Boyd, 'Christian love and Academic Dialogue: A Reply to Bruce Ware', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 45 No. 2 (2002), p. 234.

¹⁹ *Openness of God*, p. 28.

allowing the Bible to speak for itself. If the Bible says God changed his mind, then why not accept that he responded to human initiatives and did just that – he altered his plans and changed the course of his purpose in response to the actions of men?

Secondly, open theism appeals to passages which deal with *God's actions and works*. Open theists acknowledge that there are passages in Scripture in which God can bring things about unilaterally and immediately. When he created the world, for example, God said, 'Let there be light', and there was light. Yet there are other passages which emphasise that in his actions God constantly interacts with people, and interacts in time, so that we can speak of 'before' and 'after' with respect to God.

Take the case of Saul, for example. In 1 Samuel 16:1 God says to Samuel: 'How long will you mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel? Fill your horn with oil, and go; I am sending you to Jesse the Bethlehemite. For I have provided Myself a king among his sons.' Open theism says: 'God hoped that Saul would be a good king. When Saul disappointed him, God turned elsewhere.'²⁰ God is open, and the future is open – God has taken a great risk by having Saul enthroned over Israel. Now God is disappointed, sorry that he ever allowed the accession of Saul, and he acts to anoint David not because he ordained David's rule, but because it is the only option available to him following the unexpected wickedness of Saul.

For John Sanders, such passages teach that 'God has, in sovereign freedom, decided to make some of his actions contingent upon our requests and actions. God elicits our free collaboration in his plans. Hence, God can be influenced by what we do and pray for, and God truly responds to what we do. God genuinely interacts and enters into dynamic give and take relationships with us.'²¹

Thirdly, open theism appeals to passages which speak of *God's knowledge and awareness*. A classic example is the case of Abraham, to whom God said, at the point when Abraham was willing to sacrifice his son: 'Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me' (Gen. 22:12). Or one might cite the statement of God to Israel in Deuteronomy 13:3 – '...the Lord your God is testing you to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul'.

²⁰ *The Openness of God*, p. 37.

²¹ 'Does God know your next move?', *Christianity Today* (May 2001), p. 40.

Pinnock argues that for such passages 'total foreknowledge would jeopardize the genuineness of the divine-human relationship'.²² If God really knew what Abraham would do when asked to sacrifice Isaac, or what Israel would do when confronted with tests of fidelity, then there could be no genuine personal relationship between God and man. As far as Abraham is concerned, God genuinely did not know, according to Pinnock, how he would react, and whether he truly feared God or not. God is a partner in a living, dynamic relationship with Abraham, and in order to find out whether Abraham fears God or not, God must test the depth of Abraham's commitment. Only on Mount Moriah can God truly say, 'Now I know that you fear God.'

Similarly, God can be genuinely taken aback. Consider Jeremiah 32:35 – 'they built the high places of Baal which are in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire to Molech, which I did not command them, nor did it come into My mind that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin'. Here, it is alleged, not only did God not know what Judah would do, according to Clark Pinnock, 'God expresses frustration... God had not anticipated it.'²³

The theological problem is to reconcile biblical statements about God knowing all things with statements which suggest that he discovers things he did not know and is frustrated with things he did not even anticipate. For open theism, as a recent writer puts it, 'Genuine human freedom and the omniscience of God can be reconciled... only when we acknowledge that there are some things that even an omniscient God cannot know'²⁴ (although such a God would hardly be omniscient).

This has profound implications for the whole notion of biblical prophecy. How are we to understand the predictive prophecy of Scripture in the light of the openness model which this new evangelicalism presents? Richard Rice, in his chapter on biblical perspectives in *The Openness of God* devotes several pages to discussing the phenomenon of prophecy, because he recognizes that prophecy plays a prominent role in the Bible. But he cautions us against accepting the traditional view that God predicts the future on the basis of his sovereign and exhaustive foreknowledge. He argues that prophecy is a much more complex phenomenon. Prophecy, he

²² *The Openness of God*, p. 122.

²³ *The Openness of God*, p. 122.

²⁴ P.K. Helseth, 'On Divine Ambivalence: Open Theism and the Problem of Particular Evils', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 44.3 (September 2001), p. 494.

says, 'may express God's intention to do something in the future irrespective of creaturely decisions';²⁵ or it may express 'God's knowledge that something will happen because the necessary conditions for it have been fulfilled and nothing could conceivably prevent it';²⁶ or it may express 'what God intends to do *if* certain conditions obtain'.²⁷ Rice argues that it is necessary to explore these different facets of prophecy because 'if God knows the future exhaustively then conditional prophecies lose their integrity'.²⁸ Prophecy then is to be understood as God interacting as best he can with individuals and nations whose behaviour is not predictable.

The best that God can do, therefore, is to predict his own actions, but not the actions of others. Predictive prophecy is not on the basis of supreme and exhaustive foreknowledge, but is contingent upon the fulfilment of certain conditions. God knows what *may* occur, but cannot be certain of what actually *will* occur. His omniscience means that he knows the whole range of possible futures, but how the future will unfold very much depends upon our actions, choices and prayers.

In spite of the fact that open theism wishes to define prophecy very carefully, reminding us that prophecy as a phenomenon is not confined to predictive foretelling, it has to be pointed out that the prediction of the future does, in fact, loom large in biblical prophecy. As Stephen Wellum reminds us,

There are a good number of prophecies that are neither conditional, nor mere predictions based on foresight drawn from existing trends, but prophecies that are unconditional, that convey God's intentions of what will certainly occur through the means of future human choices and actions. And it is precisely in these kinds of prophecies that God most clearly demonstrates himself to be the Lord over history (Isaiah 40-48).²⁹

And the corollary of this is that biblical inerrancy is necessarily connected to the exhaustive foreknowledge of God over all events. It will not do to say that God cannot know the future because it has not yet occurred; the

²⁵ *The Openness of God*, p. 51.

²⁶ *The Openness of God*, p. 51.

²⁷ *The Openness of God*, p. 51.

²⁸ *The Openness of God*, p. 52.

²⁹ S. J. Wellum, 'Divine Sovereignty – Omniscience, Inerrancy and Open Theism: An Evaluation', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 45 No. 2 (2002), p. 275.

Bible clearly demonstrates that God knows the future with certainty, not simply as a possibility amid a myriad other potential futures. Bruce Ware sees the openness view of a God whose foreknowledge is severely truncated as a major weakness in open theism:

Why does open theism fail? It fails, in part, because the fulfilment of these predictions involves innumerable future free choices, none of which God could know if the openness model is assumed.... How often can one appeal to God's conjecturing as the explanation for so many of these samples that are so distant in the future? How can the specificity and accuracy be explained? The fact is, open theism excludes from God the very qualities needed to explain these features.³⁰

OPEN THEISM: THE TEST OF EXPERIENCE

There is another aspect of the open theism debate: that of its pastoral implications and practical consequences. Our theology has to appeal to the Bible, and must be shaped by the statements of the Bible. But it is also practical, and a theology which cannot be applied to our personal, social or cultural lives is of little help to us.

The perspective of experience is an important one in discussions over open theism. Mark Talbot, for example, in critiquing the libertarian view of human freedom which open theism requires, begins his analysis by noting that

The open theist John Sanders and I have this in common: we have both come to our views on divine sovereignty and human freedom from reflecting on personal tragedies.³¹

³⁰ B. A. Ware, *God's Lesser Glory: A critique of open theism* (Leicester, 2000), p. 142. More than one commentator has pointed out the inconsistency of IVP publishing both *The Openness of God* and critiques such as that of Ware. Cf. also the comment by R. Nicole: 'I am not so much alarmed by the book *The Openness of God* or the advocacy of such views by some who were giving signs of heterodoxy for some time as I am by the openness of InterVarsity Press and Baker Bookhouse, established to articulate and defend the evangelical faith, in publishing such works' (review of *The Openness of God* in *Standing Forth: Collected Writings of Roger Nicole*, Fearn, 2002, p. 401).

³¹ M. R. Talbot, 'True Freedom: the Liberty that Scripture portrays as worth having', in J. Piper, J. Taylor and P. K. Helseth (eds), *Beyond the Bounds: Open Theism and the Undermining of Biblical Christianity* (Crossway, 2003), p. 77.

In the case of Sanders, the tragedy was the death of his brother; Talbot's was a personal accident. The divergent experiences led to quite different views on providence. Talbot, quoting Sanders, summarises:

...I have reached very different conclusions than Sanders has reached. Sanders concludes that God is not 'the ultimate cosmic explanation for each and every thing, including all the bad things we experience'. I conclude that nothing happens to us – nothing good *and nothing bad* – that is not ultimately from God.... I think that nothing takes God by surprise because he has ordered – or 'ordained' – every event from before creation.³²

For open theism, the idea that God ordains bad things turns the God of the Bible into some kind of distant, divine animator. On the other hand Pinnock argues that 'the beauty of the open view of God and omniscience is that it takes the Bible seriously when it presents history as real drama, not a marionette show'.³³ The fact that God does not know how events will turn out is a self-imposed *kenosis* by which God significantly interacts with his creatures. But it is doubtful whether the Bible insists on divine *kenosis* with respect to bad providences at all; is it not self-evident that 'the Bible does not evidence the slightest concern regarding the problem of evil within the scope of God's sovereignty and that Scripture does not limit his providence to that which is good' ?³⁴

We might apply the test of experience to a theological perspective on the attack on New York on 11 September 2001. Can we articulate any divine response? What is God's mind on the events which took place in New York? Did he know what was to occur?

Open theism would say that God did not know beforehand what was to take place in New York that day. He knew that it was possible that the chain of events which culminated in the attack could work out that way; but he also knew all the possible permutations of events by which providence might have been different. The actual events which unfolded demonstrate the risk God took when he made men and women with the

³² Talbot, 'True Freedom', p. 79; emphasis his. He is quoting Sanders from *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence* (IVP, 1998), p. 9.

³³ C. Pinnock, 'There is room for us: A Reply to Bruce Ware', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 45 No. 2 (2002), p. 215.

³⁴ 'Openness of God theology criticized for effort to get God "off the hook"', report of address by the Revd Dr J. Ligon Duncan III on the providence of God, Samford University, Birmingham, AL, July 2000. In SBC News and Views (www.reformedreader.org/hsbcr/news46.htm).

power of free will and of free choice. Although God might have intervened directly to prevent the attack from happening, he values freedom over everything else, and 'he does not normally over-ride such freedom, even if he sees that it is producing undesirable results'.³⁵ That is why he did not intervene to prevent the tragedy. Open theism would argue that God was profoundly affected by what he saw happening in America, like a disappointed father might be if his children let him down badly, and he had to re-adjust his immediate plans in the light of what happened. God continues to collaborate with us in the making of history; and he simply hopes that we will make the best possible choices.

But classic theism differs in its response to tragedy and difficult providence. First, it acknowledges the absolute sovereignty of God over each specific event. His throne is still ruling over all, setting boundaries to human behaviour and action (Job 14:5; Dan. 4:35; 5:26). Second, it acknowledges that sin is a mystery, but it is not afraid to ask the rhetorical question of Amos 3:6 – 'if there is calamity in a city, will not the Lord have done it?' It does not make God the author of sin, but it does confess, in humility and awe, that God ordains sin, permitting evil to be perpetrated that he might have all the glory by his grace. It bows before the throne that knew and ordained and allowed the events of 11 September to occur, and which alone is able to bring good out of the disaster and the chaos. It does not leave us wondering what to do next, on the grounds that history is only a sequence of events contingent upon our choices, but believes that events are determined by God in such a way that our actions are free not *although* they are ordained but precisely *because* they are ordained.

CRITIQUING OPEN THEISM

J. Ligon Duncan III states that

The whole program of open theism is dependent upon the proposition that a god who has to deal with the same risks, uncertainties and possibilities as do we is somehow more sympathetic, accessible and credible than the old-fashioned omnipotent and omniscient God.³⁶

One of the main attractions of open theism is its insistence on emphasising the personal and relational aspect of God's love. A real concern is being expressed by the proponents of this view, that too often

³⁵ *The Openness of God*, p. 156.

³⁶ J. Ligon Duncan, 'Our Only Comfort in Life and Death: A Pastor's Perspective', *Tabletalk* 27, No 2 (2003), p. 53.

we consider God in the abstract, using terminology which fails to do justice to the biblical portrayal of God. It is easy to talk in terms of infinity, impassibility, immutability *etc.*, and be left with an impersonal deity. The biblical emphasis is far more on the personal portrayal of God – God as Father, Husband, Judge, Shepherd, for example – and our theology and pulpit presentation must do justice to these personal portraits.

But open theism has little room for any of the traditional elements of theology proper, and its critique of historical theism insists that these elements are a hindrance to a dynamic relationship with God. Yet even a classic exposition of historical theism, such as Herman Bavinck's *The Doctrine of God*, decries the view that traditional classifications of God's attributes are incompatible with a relational view of God: 'We must not suppose... that... Dogmatics is rendered a dry, scholastic study, without practical value. On the contrary, the more it meditates on him, the knowledge of whom is its only content, so much the more is it transformed into worship and adoration.... Indeed, the knowledge of God in Christ is life itself.'³⁷

Some readers of Bavinck's *Doctrine of God* may conclude that his is, in fact, a 'dry, scholastic study'. Yet his caveat is still an important one. Beginning with Scripture, and its presentation of God fulfilling certain functions (such as watching, keeping, repenting) and taking on himself certain roles in relation to his people (as father, bridegroom, shepherd), does not preclude a philosophical analysis of those elements of his nature which are brought to the fore in his activity. The relational metaphors of Scripture are the scaffolding around the self-disclosure of God's innate and eternal nature. It may be that the debate between historic and open theism 'is not a disagreement over the authority of Scripture' but 'a disagreement about how Scripture should be interpreted'.³⁸ But if we are to take Scripture as authoritative at all, then we cannot allow an over-literalistic interpretation of some passages to blind us to the truth of others. God's repenting over Nineveh must be taken in conjunction with such statements as 1 Samuel 15:29: 'The Strength of Israel will not lie nor relent. For he is not a man, that He should relent.' Faced with such apparent discrepancies we have to embrace a *prima facie* principle that human characteristics ascribed to God are accommodations, and not absolutes. It

³⁷ H. Bavinck, *The Doctrine of God* (tr. W. Hendriksen, Edinburgh, 1977), p. 14.

³⁸ R. E. Olson, 'A Brief Analysis of the "Openness of God" Theology', paper delivered at the Baptist General Conference, June 2000, www.baptistgeneral.org/4know/analysis.htm

seems to me that the flaw of openness theology is that it interprets absolute truths about God in the light of passages where analogical language is used by way of accommodation. The result is a relativising of God, and a consequent diminishing of his glory:

This god is man writ large... full of so many of our weaknesses, but worse because he is not one of us but is touted to be God. His glory will be tarnished so fully that his appearance will evoke pity and mistrust, not devotion, awe, wonder, amazement, fear, respect and honour. God's glory and our good, tied as they necessarily are in open theism to an unknowable and unpredictable future and to the use of our freedom over which God has no control, cannot survive when the dark side of our freedom prevails.³⁹

I offer the following points of critique in the remainder of this paper.

Open Theism is inaccurate in its presentation of Calvinism

According to John Sanders, writing on 'Historical Considerations' in *The Openness of God*, Calvin's doctrine of predestination 'effectively denies any sort of mutual relationship between God and his creatures. It is all a one-way street, or, better, a novel in which the characters do exactly what the novelist decides.'⁴⁰ This caricature of Calvinistic theology, such as that of the Westminster Confession of Faith, cannot, however, bear scrutiny. Three brief statements of the Confession's theology can demonstrate this.

Conf. 3.1:

God from all eternity did, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass; yet so, as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established.

Open theism accuses Calvinism of holding a fatalistic position, and argues that if we wish to do justice to freedom of will we must move away from the concept of a God whose knowledge and foreordination of all things is total and comprehensive. But the position of the Confession is otherwise: it is that God's foreordination does *not* violate the freedom of our will; and

³⁹ Ware, *God's Lesser Glory*, p. 225.

⁴⁰ *The Openness of God*, pp. 89-90.

in fact that it establishes our freedom and the secondary causes which lie behind events in the world. Only on this basis can you grant God's absolute sovereignty *and* respect the way the world operates. Our freedom, our choices, our actions – these are not removed by the doctrine of foreordination, but are established. Similarly our responses to the gospel are free responses which are not any less free because of election or predestination; predestination is what establishes our free responses to the claims of Christ on our lives.

Conf. 3.8:

The doctrine of this high mystery of predestination is to be handled with special prudence and care, that men attending the will of God revealed in his word, and yielding obedience thereunto, may, from the certainty of their effectual vocation, be assured of their eternal election. So shall this doctrine afford matter of praise, reverence and admiration of God, and of humility, diligence and abundant consolation, to all that sincerely obey the Gospel.

Here the Confession reminds us of the practical nature of God's decree, particularly the decree of predestination. It warns us against a careless and imprudent handling of the doctrine. It tells us that because of God's decree we can have assurance and we will the more be led to admire and worship God. Election is a doctrine full of mystery and profundity, but it remains a practical and a wonderful doctrine for those who love the Lord. The Confession strikes the note of warm relational communion between the sovereign God and his people, between an eternal decree of predestination and a response of worship on the part of those who believe.

Conf. 12.1:

All those that are justified, God vouchsafeth, in and for his only Son Jesus Christ, to make partakers of the grace of adoption; by which they are taken into the number, and enjoy the liberties and privileges of the children of God; have his name put upon them, receive the Spirit of adoption, have access to the throne of grace with boldness; are enabled to cry Abba, Father; are pitied, protected, provided for, and chastened by him as by a father; yet never cast off, but sealed to the day of redemption and inherit the promises as heirs of everlasting salvation.

It is impossible to argue, in the light of such a passage, that traditional theism leaves no room for, and does no justice to, the relationship which

God has with his people through Christ. The Confession is replete with references to such a relationship. Clark Pinnock writes of the open view of God that 'instead of locating God above and beyond history, it stresses God's activity in history, responding to events as they happen, in order to accomplish his purposes'.⁴¹ But the Calvinism of Westminster wants to emphasize that it is precisely the God who is *over* history who has invaded history. Far from being abstract and impersonal, the God who decrees, elects and predestinates is the God whom we call 'Father'. Richard Rice's statement that 'traditional theism seeks to safeguard God's transcendence by denying divine sensitivity'⁴² is a simplistic misrepresentation. If that is the reason why we now need to embrace open theism, then someone has been misinformed. As Michael Horton puts it:

If Calvinism represented even in broad terms the description given to it especially by Pinnock, it could hardly have unleashed the energies for dynamic Christian action in missions, social compassion, education and the arts, vocation and countless other enterprises which it has in fact unleashed. Many of us fail to recognize Reformed theology in his polemical descriptions of it.⁴³

Open Theism is inadequate in its doctrine of the atonement

It is interesting that in *The Openness of God*, Clark Pinnock, in his chapter on 'Systematic Theology', deals with the Trinity, creation, God's transcendence and immanence, God's power, immutability, impassibility, eternity and knowledge, but says nothing about the atonement. The open model for understanding God wishes to review God's attributes in the interests of a more relational understanding. Yet there can be no relationship with God without reconciliation, and no reconciliation without atonement.

However, if we ask the question, 'Did God know that the cross was going to happen?', open theism would have to say: 'Only as a possibility. It might never have taken place, and until it took place it was part of an unknowable future; but since it happened, God made the most of it.' In open theism, providence is a big risk, and God is the ultimate chess player, who is constantly thinking out strategies, depending on the moves men

⁴¹ *The Openness of God*, p. 125.

⁴² *The Openness of God*, p. 43.

⁴³ M. S. Horton, 'Hellenistic or Hebrew? Open Theism and Reformed Theological Method', *Beyond the Bounds*, p. 233.

make. For open theism, there is no divine purpose for specific events.⁴⁴ Gregory Boyd argues that it demeans God's sovereignty to suggest otherwise, since it requires *more* authority and sovereignty for God to grant meaningful freedom to his creatures. 'It takes a truly self-confident, sovereign God to make himself vulnerable.'⁴⁵ But if this is so, and if no specific divine purpose is attached to the events which do take place in providence, then no specific purpose was attached to the cross. It simply happened, and God had to turn the actions of men into a benevolent result.

One important passage in this connection is Acts 2:23, from Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost: '[Jesus], being delivered by the determined counsel and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified and put to death.' According to Peter, the cross was no mere possibility, and no risk. It was ordained and appointed by God as the sole means of salvation; yet the acts by which the events were shaped were all free acts. Because the human agents acted freely, the agents are culpable; because God ordained the events sovereignly, the actions are efficacious. The ignorance and blindness which characterised the perpetrators of the cross do not detract from their freedom, only from their innocence.

The implications of open theism for the doctrine of the atonement are astounding. In spite of Pinnock's insistence that he is merely re-interpreting the manner of God's knowledge and working in the world, and in spite of the emphasis on grace which is evident in the literature, open theism nevertheless leaves too much open, including the possibility that Christ might never have died for us at all. There never was, apparently, a divine purpose to save sinners from all eternity, only a smart outwitting of the powers of darkness.

But as far as the atonement is concerned, the debate has just begun. Rice goes so far as to say:

Many Christian scholars now perceive the suffering of Calvary not as something Jesus offers to God on human behalf, still less as something God inflicts on Jesus (instead of on other human beings), but as the activity of God himself.⁴⁶

This, however, evacuates of meaning the biblical passages which speak of Christ as priest, offering a sacrifice, and of Christ as being made a curse for

⁴⁴ See Helseth, 'On Divine Ambivalence', p. 509.

⁴⁵ Quoted in Ware, *God's Lesser Glory*, p. 221.

⁴⁶ *The Openness of God*, p. 45.

us. It also ignores the import of passages which see atonement and reconciliation grounded in an act of imputation and of divine determinism. The logical implication of open theism is that the cross was an arbitrary act; does this mean that contemporary evangelicalism is going to have to fight for piacular, substitutionary atonement?

Open Theism is inconsistent in its interpretation of the Bible

Open theism insists that we read the Bible literally, free from theological 'control beliefs'. It will not do, its advocates tell us, to read passages like 'God repented' as if they taught that 'God did not, of course, literally repent'.

But in practice, this leaves us with an unworkable hermeneutic. Richard Rice, in *The Openness of God*, wants to make a distinction between passages which speak of God having physical features (e.g. arms, hands, mouth, face), which he says are rightly construed as symbolic,⁴⁷ and passages which speak of God's feelings. To argue that the former passages are anthropomorphisms is correct, he says; but to say that the latter are anthropopathic, in which human emotions are ascribed to God, is evidence of a 'popular and entrenched idea that God lies utterly beyond the reach of creaturely experience'.⁴⁸

It is difficult not to accuse Rice of exercising control beliefs here and being as inconsistent as those with whom he is arguing. But more fundamental still is the fact that the Bible consistently uses language which, on the surface at least, appears paradoxical. The God who says in Genesis 3:9, 'Adam, where are you?' is the same God who knows where each one of us is all of the time (Ps. 139:1-7). In relating to human experience, God reveals himself to us in metaphors which have an analogy to our experience, but which never constitute the whole reality about God. This *analogical* use of language is not an attempt to impose a control theology on the biblical narrative: it is actually a signal that the God who is beyond finite experience nonetheless relates to our human condition. An ignorant God, subjected to the constraints and vulnerability of his own passions, hardly accords with the supreme deity of the Bible.

Open Theism is indiscriminate in its use of christological categories

I am thinking here of two elements of openness theology: first, that the incarnation represented a change in God, and, secondly, that *kenosis* is intrinsic to the nature of God.

⁴⁷ *The Openness of God*, p. 34.

⁴⁸ *The Openness of God*, p. 34.

Rice seeks to develop the logic of the incarnation. What does it mean for us that the incarnate Jesus is the revelation of God? For Rice it means that all of Jesus' experiences are God's experiences – his ignorance is God's ignorance, his suffering is God's suffering, his relations with men are God's relations with men. It shows that God 'requires the cooperation of human agents'.⁴⁹ Pinnock goes further. In his exposition of open theism he says that the Son of God *surrendered* 'the divine glory in order to become a human being.... What a mystery – God wanting to be loved by us and willing to make himself vulnerable.'⁵⁰ For Pinnock, the Logos is the totality of God. But this is hardly the Bible's presentation. God (the Father) loved the world and gave his Son. There was personal transaction at the heart of covenant salvation. God did not abandon his glory in the hope that the world would fall in love with him; he gave his Son because he loved the world, so that the world would be saved through him (John 3:17). The incarnation was an enfleshment of the Second Person, but involved no change in God.

More serious, in my view, is the attempt to read back from the *kenosis* of Christ into the sovereign acts of God in history. *Kenosis* is 'self-emptying'; but as Philippians 2 makes clear, Christ abandoned none of his glory when he became man. He was emptied not by the loss of his deity, but by the assumption of our humanity. The 'emptying' of which Paul speaks is clearly metaphorical, as the King James Version translation correctly recognised by translating 'he made himself of no reputation'. Open theism not only wants to interpret the *kenosis* literally, but to read it back into the act of creation. God, according to Pinnock, empties himself of omnipotence the moment he creates the world and allows it to exist alongside himself. He empties himself of eternity by creating a temporal world. He empties himself of omniscience by relating to his creation and collaborating with men in the making of the future. Pinnock and others may see this as a logical extension of incarnational theology, but it is an example of open theism exercising its own control belief on theology, since nowhere in the Bible is such *kenosis* attributed to God; creation is not an emptying of God in any sense, and the incarnation is a self-degradation only of the Son, not of the Father and not of the Holy Spirit.

⁴⁹ *The Openness of God*, p. 44.

⁵⁰ Clark Pinnock, 'Reconstructing Evangelical Theology', p. 3.

Open Theism is quite wrong to urge the substitution of legal categories with family categories

According to Clark Pinnock, the model at the heart of the gospel is the prodigal Son model, in which love constrains the prodigal to return to his father.⁵¹ The son in the parable has choices – whether to stay with the pigs or return home. Open theism offers, it is alleged, a more dynamic model with which to interpret the gospel in the light of biblical teaching:

In the old model, God is a monarch whose will is always carried out. It is a harsh and negative model, you know, ‘Sinners in the hands of an angry God’. The newer model stresses more the love of God and his dynamic relationship with people which puts more significance on human action than the older view, which tends to be kind of fatalistic.⁵²

There are several things which must be said in response to this. First, the returning prodigal is one part of a three-part parable which Jesus told in Luke 15 to illustrate what it meant that he was receiving sinners. In the first story, a shepherd seeks a lost sheep; in the second, a woman seeks a lost coin. In neither case does the lost object make any choice to return. The emphasis falls solely on the choice of the shepherd and the woman. We cannot decontextualise one element in the story and make that the model for our interpretation of the atonement and the evangel.

But in addition to this there is the whole question of our freedom; is the parable of the prodigal son the last word on our human condition? What about the insistence of Jesus to the religious leaders of his day that ‘no one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him’ (John 6:44)? The drawing power of the Father is the only thing that can overcome the innate rebellion against God which leaves us powerless to respond to Christ. In a state of sin we are spiritually dead (Eph. 2:1), and neither able nor willing to please God: ‘the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God *neither indeed can be*’ (Rom. 8:7). In the light of this teaching, no decision to return to God is ever within the capability of man until God first draws him by grace. But this does not mean that we come to Christ against our will: our decisions are free. The decision to reject Christ is a free decision, contingent upon the blinding

⁵¹ On this, see the discussion between Clark Pinnock and Morton Smith (moderated by Greg Koukl) at www.christianity.com/CC/article/0,,PTID307086|CHID559376|CID1412798,00.html

⁵² Discussion between Pinnock and Smith (see n. 51).

power of sin in human life, while the decision to accept Christ is a free decision, contingent upon the liberating power of grace in the soul.

It is quite impossible for us to view the matter of sin and grace apart from a legal context. God relates to us in a fatherly manner, but he also relates to us through law. If we are sinners, it is because we have broken God's law; 'sin is not imputed where there is no law' (Rom. 5:13). If we are guilty, it is not simply because we have offended our heavenly Father, but because, having broken the holy and righteous (objective) standards of his law, we are exposed to his just wrath and condemnation. And if we commit sin, we are its slaves (John 8:34), bound by the chains of our rebellion and our enmity.

Open theism, in its denial of the imputation of Adam's sin to us,⁵³ strikes at the very heart of the New Testament gospel. If Adam's sin, corruption and guilt are not imputed to us, then Romans 5:12ff. makes no sense. And the parallel/contrast between the first Adam and the last breaks down entirely. To say that I am guilty because of Adam's sin is not to allege that I am punished for what someone else did. It is to say that, as the covenant head of the human family, Adam's disobedience left mankind corrupt in nature and liable to death. Otherwise, why do we sin at all? But more than this, if we deny the relationship between ourselves and Adam – that we are fallen in him, and that we are justly culpable before God – then we must also deny the relationship between ourselves and Christ. We cannot be restored and accepted in the last Adam if we are not fallen and condemned in the first:

When we seek to discover the specific character of the union which will ground the imputation of Adam's first sin we find it to be that same kind of union as is analogous to the union that exists between Christ and his people and on the basis of which his righteousness is theirs unto justification and eternal life.... Solidarity was constituted by divine

⁵³ **Moderator:** Dr Pinnock, do you hold that there is no imputation of guilt to the human race for Adam's sin?

Pinnock: Yes, I would certainly deny that doctrine.... The Bible clearly teaches 'The soul that sinneth shall surely die'. We are guilty because of our sins, not because of the sins of others. The only thing that Adam put into our condition is that we are corrupt on account of what he did. And what we do in that context is become sexual, guilt producing sinners. The idea of Adam's sin being imputed to us is very difficult to accept' (Discussion between Pinnock and Smith, n. 51).

institution and the solidarity is of such a nature that the sin of Adam devolves upon all naturally procreated posterity.⁵⁴

To insist on the rejection of legal categories as adequate for our evangelism and the presentation of the gospel is ruinous. We could not know sin apart from the law (Rom. 7:7); and apart from the complex of guilt, condemnation and death which sin involves there could be no reason for the cross. And, consequently, the open theist dismissal of imputation means that all meaning is evacuated from the atoning death of Christ. What does it mean that he was made sin for us, if legal categories are denied? To suggest that we must substitute a familial model for the legal one is to say, at last, that our choice is sufficient. The stark reality is that open theism hardly requires the atonement which Calvary provides.

Open Theism is insistent in polarising doctrines which we must hold together

For open theism, the choice is between a God of power or a God of love, a God who wants control or a God who wants involvement. Pinnock states: 'Open theists rejoice in the freedom to understand God, not as an indifferent metaphysical iceberg or solitary narcissistic being who suffers from his own completeness, but as a free and creative trinitarian person.'⁵⁵ The traditional view does not, however, regard God either as indifferent or solitary; nor is he a singular 'trinitarian person' but a trinity of Persons.

There is no reason to suppose that a God of absolute power cannot be related to creatures of time and space. A God who says, 'I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please' (Isa. 46:10) may also accommodate himself, in personal relations, to the children of men whose experience of knowing is gradual and piecemeal. A God who knows the future can be truly involved in present personal relations. A God who foreordains all things can also foreordain free-will choices as means for the accomplishing of his purposes. Indeed, the Bible is the revelation of such a God.

CONCLUSION

The pillar around which open theism is built is the supposition that since the future has not yet occurred, and is dependent upon our actions in the

⁵⁴ J. Murray, *The Imputation of Adam's Sin* (Grand Rapids, 1959), p. 41.

⁵⁵ Pinnock, 'Reconstructing Evangelical Theology', p. 3.

present, it is therefore unreal and unknowable, even by God. But, as Charles Hodge puts it, 'To deny foreknowledge to God... is to destroy the very idea of God.'⁵⁶ It is to place God's ways, thoughts and knowledge on precisely the same plane as ours, whereas they are certainly not so. In the traditional Calvinist view of God, God's transcendent power and glory, infused with all the superlative attributes which we ascribe him, has never turned him into an isolationist being, and has never threatened his relations with us. Indeed, the glory that belongs to God as the Triune God of Scripture is that he has entered into covenant with us, in order to relate to us. It is a mystery that a God craving for our love and collaborating with us in the creation of the future could conceivably be greater than the personal, sovereign God of the Bible, who says to us in covenant, 'I will be God for you.'

Jonathan Edwards has a detailed discussion of God's decrees in chapter 3 of his 'Remarks on Important Theological Controversies' (*Works*, vol. 2). At the close of the chapter, Edwards states:

I wish the reader to consider the unreasonableness of rejecting plain revelations, because [*i.e.* on the grounds that] they are puzzling to our reason. There is no greater difficulty attending this doctrine than the contrary, nor so great. So that though the doctrine of the decrees be mysterious, and attended with difficulties, yet the opposite doctrine is in itself more mysterious, and attended with greater difficulties, and with contradictions to reason more evident, to one who thoroughly considers things; so that, even if the Scripture had made no revelation of it, we should have had reason to believe it. But since the Scripture is so abundant in declaring it, the unreasonableness of rejecting it appears the more glaring.⁵⁷

That is as much the case with the open theism of our day as it was with the Arminianism of Edwards' day. If the biblical doctrine of the God of historical theism is mysterious, the opposite doctrine of an open God is even more so, and the difficulties in relating to him as a God of sovereign comfort and overruling majesty greater still. The Westminster Confession of Faith reminds us of the need for special care in our handling of the doctrine of predestination; the difficulties in presenting it, and the dangers in misrepresenting it are, however, no reason to look instead towards another kind of God with another kind of knowledge. To do so, as John

⁵⁶ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Abridged Edition, ed. E. N. Gross, Baker, 1988), p. 318.

⁵⁷ Jonathan Edwards, *Works*, vol. 2, p. 543.

Piper puts it, is 'theologically ruinous, dishonouring to God, belittling to Christ, and pastorally hurtful'.⁵⁸ The emergence of open theism calls for evangelical watchfulness and increased faithfulness to the scriptural presentation of the sovereign God who will give his glory to no other.

⁵⁸ John Piper, 'Grounds for Dismay: the Error and Injury of Open Theism', *Beyond the Bounds*, p. 384.

ROME, AUGUST 24, 410, AND NEW YORK, SEPTEMBER 11, 2001: AUGUSTINE AND THE END OF THE WORLD¹

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The city which has captured the whole world is itself taken captive.... Who would believe that Rome, built up by the conquest of the whole world, has collapsed, that the mother of nations has also become their tomb?... When the brightest light on the whole earth was extinguished, when the Roman Empire was deprived of its head and when, to speak more correctly, the whole world perished in one city, then 'I was dumb with silence, I held my peace, even from good, and my sorrow was stirred' (Ps. 39:2).... The world sinks into ruin.... The renowned city, the capital of the Roman Empire, is swallowed up in one tremendous fire; and there is no part of the earth where Romans are not in exile.²

Such were the reactions of one of the most learned Christians of the day, Jerome, away in the East in Bethlehem, to the capture and sack of Rome by the Goths under Alaric on August 24, 410. This irascible Christian scholar was given to intemperateness, and his alarmist horror was not paralleled in Augustine, but his sense of deep shock was not unrepresentative of widespread dread at the news of Rome's fall. The best-known refugee from the city, Pelagius no less, commented thus:

It happened only recently, and you heard it yourself. Rome, the mistress of the world, shivered, crushed with fear, at the sound of the blaring trumpets and the howling of the Goths.... Everyone was mingled

¹ This was the first of a series entitled 'Augustine's Tale of Two Cities', delivered as the Josephine So Memorial Lectures in the China Graduate School of Theology, Hong Kong, in January 2003.

² Jerome, *Epistle* 127:12; *Commentary on Ezekiel* 3, pref., 1, pref.; *Epistle* 128:4. Cf. *Epistle* 126:2, 'I was so confounded by the havoc wrought in the West and above all by the sack of Rome that, as the common saying has it, I forgot even my own name. Long did I remain silent, knowing that it was a time to weep.'

together and shaken with fear; every household had its grief and an all-pervading terror gripped us. Slave and noble were one. The same spectre of death stalked before us all.³

Such reactions came readily to mind in the wake of '9/11' – the destruction wrought by terrorists in New York and Washington on September 11, 2001, and the apocalyptic end-of-the-world dread which it evoked. For millions watching events live on TV it was a heart-stopping never-to-be-forgotten catastrophe. The American dating '9/11' has itself become an immediately recognizable symbol of unimaginable calamity challenging a nation's (or a world's) self-understanding. So the Moscow theatre seizure and its tragic outcome was 'Russia's 9/11', and more plausibly the terrorist bombing of Bali hotspots was 'Australia's 9/11' – and in the latter the involvement of Hong Kong people is not forgotten.

The end of the world? Or simply a day that changed the world? – which would be grave enough. The interest of this lecture lies not in an analysis of the bombing of the Twin Towers and the aftermath, but to a lesser extent in parallels with the sack of Rome in 410 and mainly in Augustine's reflections, both more immediate and longer-term, on the fate of Rome. These are presented in the hope that they may help Christian people early in the third millennium reflect Christianly about outrages such as 9/11. For whereas the whole world was very soon an expert on 9/11 – such was the extraordinary effect of mass communication on a global scale – Augustine is our only extended commentator on Rome's misfortunes. Compared with our wall-to-wall unending exposure to the horrors of 9/11, even to excess, not much detailed reportage of the sack of Rome has survived, with hardly any first-hand eye-witness. In one of his sermons after Rome's fall Augustine discloses that the congregation at Carthage had already had more than enough: 'Oh, if only he would shut up about Rome!'⁴

There were other differences too. The assault on New York and Washington was totally unexpected, and the shock was intensified by its unimaginable daring. Rome, by contrast, saw its downfall coming. August 24, 410, was Alaric's third siege of the city, and he was not the first Gothic commander to threaten it early in the fifth century. The loss of life and damage to the capital were not massive. The occupation lasted only three days, and the Goths respected the churches, being themselves Arian

³ Pelagius, *Epistle to Demetrias* 30, tr. Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* (London, 2000), p. 287.

⁴ Augustine, *Sermon* 105:12.

Christians. Later barbarian attacks on Rome during the century would also take place within agreed terms, limiting the carnage and pillage.

Yet one important similarity may validate a comparison – the almost inviolable stature of the two cities, Rome and New York, as citadels of world-wide domination. The terrorists targeted, in Washington also, the iconic centres of America's political, military and commercial supremacy as unchallenged sole world power. American soil had never – has never – been invaded by enemy forces. Rome, the eternal city, had never previously been captured – and certainly never by rude 'barbarians'! Even though the shaking of the foundations of the Western half of the Roman Empire had long been felt, Rome continued to attract boundless confidence and pride. Listen to the rhapsody of Rome's immortal greatness by the pagan poet Rutilius, writing in 417:

Hear me, Rome, queen of the world and brightest jewel
in the vault of Heaven. Hear me, mother
of men and the gods: your temples bring Heaven near;
we chant your praise as long as we have breath.
No man will ever be safe if he forgets you;
may I praise you still when the sun is dark.
Your power is felt wherever the sun's light shines,
even to the farthest edge of the world.
The sun god revolves only for you, his horses
that rise from your soil sink down to your soil.
The parching death of Africa has not stopped you;
the stiffening cold of the north made way for you.
The earth has opened a path for you; wherever
there are living things, there are you also.
You have united the distant nations; under
you, captivity has become profit.
Men who have never known justice have been conquered
and then been given rights under your laws;
what was only a world you have made a city.

The stars, which know all that has been, have never seen
a more beautiful Empire: Assyria
attempted but failed to unite the world; Persia
conquered only her neighbours; the empire
of Alexander was torn apart by endless
wars and rivalries. Rome was not larger
at her birth, rather she had wisdom and judgement.
War and peace alike were prudently used
to enhance a position that never weakened.

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Rome deserved to prevail but that she has prevailed to this extent is a mark of her strength, rather than a mark of her destiny.

To count up the glories of Rome is like counting the stars in the sky:...

Let your law extend to all the known world;
it will not die. You have lived a millennium
plus sixteen decades and now nine more years.
You need not fear the furies; the years that remain
have no limit but the earth's firmness and
the strength of Heaven supporting the stars.⁵

Nor were such sentiments restricted to non-Christians, as our opening quotations from Jerome partly illustrated. From a Christian pen such effusions are nowhere more eloquent than in the long poem of Prudentius (d. after 405), *Against Symmachus*.

Shall I tell you, Roman, what cause it was that so exalted your labours, what it was that nursed your glory to such a height of fame that it has put rein and bridle on the world? God, wishing to bring into partnership peoples of different speech and realms of discordant manners, determined that all the civilised world should be harnessed to one ruling power and bear gentle bonds in harmony under the yoke, so that love of their religion should hold men's hearts in union; for no bond is made that is worthy of Christ unless unity of spirit leagues together the nations it associates. Only concord knows God; it alone worships the beneficent Father aright in peace....

God taught the nations everywhere to bow their heads under the same laws and become Romans – all whom Rhine and Danube flood, ... those who are nurtured by Ganges or washed by the warm Nile's seven mouths. A common law made them equals and bound them by a single name, bringing the conquered into bonds of brotherhood.

Such is the result of the great successes and triumphs of the Roman power. For the time of Christ's coming, be assured, was the way prepared which the general good will of peace among us had just built under the rule of Rome.

⁵ Rutilius, *Concerning his Return* 1:45-65, 83-97, 134-8, tr. Harold Isbell, *The Last Poets of Imperial Rome* (Harmondsworth, 1971), pp. 222-5.

Come then, Almighty; here is a world in harmony; enter it. An earth receives you now, O Christ, which peace and Rome hold in a bond of union. These you command to be the heads and highest powers of the world. Rome without peace finds no favour with you; and it is the supremacy of Rome, keeping down disorders here or there by the awe of her sovereignty, that secures the peace, so that you have pleasure in it.⁶

Writing years before the sack of 410, Prudentius exemplifies the dimensions of the task facing Augustine the apologist in the wake of the plundering of eternal Rome: how could this have possibly happened to Rome, the capital of the world, to Christian Rome, which housed the bodies of the apostles Peter and Paul and the relics of other martyrs and boasted so many church buildings? How could such a disaster have come to pass in 'Christian times (*tempora Christiana*)' – a phrase used by Augustine and other writers to refer to the Christian Roman Empire, the era since Constantine when ancient prophecies had been fulfilled and kings had bowed down to serve Christ?⁷ Augustine's sermons addressed questioners appalled that Rome should have fallen, aghast that 'It's Christian times, and Rome is destroyed.... Why is Rome falling amid the sacrifices of the Christians?'⁸ As Peter Brown has written,

Rome was the symbol of a whole civilization; it was as if an army had been allowed to sack Westminster Abbey or the Louvre. In Rome, the protection of the gods for the Empire had been made explicit. For the conservatives of the previous century, Rome had been a sort of 'pagan Vatican'; a punctiliously protected city of great temples where the religion that had guaranteed the greatness of the Empire could survive and be seen to survive. The Christians had even colluded with this myth: just as Rome had assembled the gods of all nations to act as talismans, so Roman Christians had come to believe that Peter and Paul had travelled from the East to lay their holy bodies in the city. The one

⁶ Prudentius, *Against Symmachus* II: 583-94, 602-4, 606-9, 619-22, 634-40, tr. H. J. Thomson, *Prudentius*, 2 vols (Loeb Classical Library; Cambridge, MA, 1949-53), II, pp. 52-7. For similar sentiments cf. Prudentius, *Crowns of Martyrdom* II: 413-40, a prayer put in the mouth of the dying martyr Lawrence: 'O Christ, ... who set the sceptre of the world, on Rome's high citadel, ordaining that the world...' (Thomson, II, pp. 132-5).

⁷ See the important work by R. A. Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine* (Cambridge, 1970), ch. 1.

⁸ Augustine, *Sermon* 81:9.

talisman had merely replaced the other; and, after 410, Augustine had to deal with disillusioned Christians quite as much as with angry pagans.⁹

Augustine reminds us in his *Reconsiderations (Retractationes, 426/7)* that it was to counter pagan blasphemies attributing Rome's destruction to Christianity that he set about writing the *City of God*. These allegations, which we learn of from Augustine's sermons and letters in the interval before the first books of the *City of God* were compiled, voiced again centuries-old accusations to which Christian apologists had been responding since Justin Martyr and earlier. In essence these attacks claimed that Christianity caused misfortunes like the Gothic sack by robbing Rome's traditional gods and goddesses of their honour in sacrifices and other customary rites and ceremonies. As a consequence the deities had failed to prosper and safeguard Rome and its empire. Christianity also promoted useless ethics such as pacifism, ill-suited to secure imperial sway. So Augustine devoted the first five books of the *City of God* to refuting the belief that the gods were to be worshipped to gain the good things of this life, and the next five to opposing a similar opinion concerning the future life.

In fact, books 1-10 (out of 22 in all) contain much that is of far wider interest than answering these tired allegations. The *City of God* encompasses many digressions and excursions, which contribute to its length (over a thousand pages in recent English translations) as well as making it a frustrating and baffling book for the reader. For the purposes of this lecture I want to focus on a broad thread of argument which has in view not so much pagan objectors as Christian ones, or at least Christians bemused, disturbed, perplexed by what has befallen Christian Rome and Christians in Rome in particular. It is surely in this territory that we are most likely to discern perspectives to assist Christians today who try to understand 9/11 or similar calamities within a faith in God's providential purposes. For Christian preachers and teachers to fail to make such an effort is to connive in a Christian mind-set that has nothing to say about wide areas of human experience, and so abets a *de facto* deist attitude towards the world. No claim is being advanced here that we can simply read off from the pages of Augustine's *magnum opus* ready-made interpretations of such events, but at least Augustine may be a helpful tutor, pointing us to elements of a Christian evaluation of our world's history and of humanity's tragedies within it.

⁹ Brown, *Augustine*, p. 287.

Let me summarize at this point the threefold nub of Augustine's argument, which may not be immediately glimpsed from a reading of the vast and rambling *City of God*. Augustine plays down the seriousness of the sack of Rome, and in the second place also the special significance of Rome in terms of both secular and Christian history, and thirdly all of humanity's earthly existence. So he first cuts the disaster down to size, secondly desacralizes or demythologizes the fortunes of Rome and its Empire, and finally minimizes the value of all life in this transient world by comparison with the life of the world to come. On all three fronts he instructs Christians as much as, even more than, he rebuts the charges of pagans.

First, then, Augustine sets the capture and pillage of the city in sober proportions. It was the third time that Rome had been burnt in its history. 'The city that was recently on fire amid the sacrifices of Christians had already been twice on fire amid the sacrifices of pagans.... So why do you like growling against God for a city that has been in the habit of being on fire?'¹⁰ In perhaps his earliest comment on the sack, a sermon *On the Fall of the City of Rome*, Augustine insists that Rome had not been destroyed as Sodom was destroyed, that is, root and branch so that neither human being nor animal was left alive. This rejoinder countered the complaint why God failed to spare Rome, in which there were surely great numbers of righteous souls: 'in such a great number of chaste men and women dedicated to God, in such a great number of servants and handmaids of God',¹¹ it cannot have been impossible to find the requisite number of righteous persons. But Augustine rejects the parallel with Genesis 18; the two cases are not commensurate.

By contrast with the extermination of Sodom ('Behold how God destroyed a city' – if you really want to talk in these terms), God spared Rome.

From the city of Rome how many have gone forth and will return, how many have remained and have escaped, how many in the holy places could not even be touched [because of the Gothic respect of asylum].¹²

¹⁰ Augustine, *Sermon* 296:9.

¹¹ Augustine, *De Excidio Urbis Romae Sermo* 2:2, ed. and tr. M. V. O'Reilly (Washington DC, 1955), p. 57.

¹² *Ibid.*

If you want to assess the role of the righteous in the city, there were indeed many such at Rome 'and because of these God spared the city and many escaped'.¹³

And 'even those who died God spared'.¹⁴ At this point modern-day Christians have to struggle to remain on Augustine's wave-length.

Having died in a good life and in true righteousness and faith, were they not freed from the vicissitudes of human misfortune and have they not entered upon divine refreshment?¹⁵

Would that we were able to see with our eyes the souls of the righteous who died in that war! Then you would see how God spared the city. For thousands of saints are at rest, rejoicing and saying to God: 'Thanks be to you, O Lord, because you have rescued us from the troubles and hurtful torments of the flesh. Thanks to you because we now fear neither barbarians nor the devil, we do not fear hunger on earth, we do not fear the enemy, we do not fear the persecutor, we do not fear the oppressor. We died on earth, never in your sight to die, O God, and this by your gift, not by our merits.'¹⁶

Among those who died in the USA on September 11, 2001, were a number of Christian believers, whose nearest and dearest were no doubt able amid their grief to affirm something of what Augustine here affirms. But they are unlikely to have expressed it in his terms, of God 'sparing' even those who died at hostile hands, their lives cut off in mid-stream. Augustine's account of their 'dying never to die in God's sight' resonates recognizably with part of the biblical perspective on the death of the righteous, and with this Christians today will readily concur. But can the same be said of Augustine's intense sense of the inferiority of this earthly life and its ever-present tribulations? This is an important question because it touches on a fundamental theme – assumption, almost – of the *City of God*.

The sermon *On the Fall of the City of Rome* starts by depicting the kinds of people, signified by the three figures of Noah, Daniel and Job, whom God will deliver from 'the great tribulation to come on the human

¹³ *Ibid.* 5:5, O'Reilly, p. 67.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 6:6, O'Reilly, p. 67.

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race', and it ends with 1 Corinthians 10:13, the faithful God who will not allow his followers to be tested (*tentari*) beyond their endurance.¹⁷

In between, the preacher's message is one of the sufferings of just and unjust alike in their earthly course:

People are surprised... when God corrects the human race and rouses it by scourges of holy chastisement, when he imposes discipline before the judgement, and often does not choose whom he will scourge, since he does not wish to seek out whom he will condemn.¹⁸

Augustine continues almost as though the sermon were a dialogue, responding to Christians voicing their pain and distress. 'Many were carried off as prisoners' from plundered Rome – but so was Daniel, not for his own punishment but to comfort others. 'Many were killed' – but so were many just prophets 'from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zacharias', and so too many apostles, and even Jesus himself. 'But many were afflicted with various tortures': can we imagine anyone as tortured as Job?¹⁹

Augustine breaks off this relentless sequence of *ad hominem* responses, which soothe with cold comfort administered with sharp Christian reasoning.

Dreadful things have been reported to us: destruction, fires, acts of plunder, killings, tortures. It is true, we have heard many terrible things, we have groaned over everything, we have wept often, we've found it hard to be consoled. I do not refuse to believe, I do not deny that we have heard many terrible things, that many outrages were committed in that city.²⁰

'Nevertheless...' – and Augustine resumes his reflection on the travails of Job, leading to 'If we have received good things at the hand of the Lord, why should we not receive evil?' (Job 2:10). Is God not our Father 'both when he promises life and when he inflicts punishment?' The surgical knife of the preacher probes more deeply:

Think of whatever torments you will, let your mind imagine whatever human punishments it may, compare these with hell, and all that you suffer is trivial. Here tormenter and victim are temporal, there they are

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 1, 9:8, O'Reilly, pp. 53, 75.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* 2:1, O'Reilly, p. 55 (altered).

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 2:2, O'Reilly, pp. 57-9.

²⁰ *Ibid.* 3:3, O'Reilly, p. 61.

eternal. Do those people still suffer who suffered at the time that Rome was pillaged? But the rich man suffers still in hell.²¹

When writing or preaching about the sack of Rome, Augustine invariably gets on to the afflictions and 'pressures' (*pressurae*; the image is that of the olive press) of this present life. In another sermon, 'The world is devastated, the press is trodden.'

Come now, Christians... strangers on earth who seek a city in heaven, ... understand that you have come here simply in order to take your departure. You are passing through the world.... Don't let lovers of the world disturb you....

These troubles and pressures are not scandals. Be righteous, and they will be training exercises. Trouble comes; it will be whichever you wish, your education or your condemnation. Which it will be will depend on what sort of thing it finds you to be – gold, or straw?²²

So Christians must have an answer ready for the pagan – or, much worse, the bad Christian – who seeks to scandalize you by saying 'Look at all the terrible things happening in Christian times.' The answer is 'Even before this happened Christ foretold me.' The capture and plunder of Rome, which sent a shock-wave of horror rippling round the Mediterranean world, is reduced to the category of the predicted and hence to-be-expected.²³

If you wake up from sleep,

Christ immediately starts talking to you. Why are you upset? I told you about all this long ago. The reason I foretold it was so that, when bad times came, you could hope for good times, and not go to pieces.... Are you astonished at the world going to pieces? You might as well be astonished that the world has grown old. The world's like a man: he's born, grows up, grows old. Old age is full of complaints: coughing, phlegm, bleary eyes, aches and pains, weariness, it's all there.... The world has grown old; it's full of troubles and pressures....

Don't be eager to cling to an aged world, and unwilling to grow young in Christ, who says to you, 'The world is perishing, the world is aging,

²¹ *Ibid.* 4:4, O'Reilly, p. 61.

²² *Sermon* 81:7, tr. Edmund Hill, *The Works of Saint Augustine: Sermons III/3* (New York, 1991), pp. 363-4.

²³ *Ibid.*, Hill, p. 364.

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the world is going to pieces....' Don't be afraid, 'your youth shall be renewed like the eagle's' (Psalm 103:5).²⁴

Cast in the image of the threshing-floor or the goldsmith's furnace,

Rome also has endured a single tribulation, in which the godly person has either been freed or been corrected.... Let not the hardship of the godly disturb us; it is a form of trial. Unless perhaps we shudder when we see any just person endure harsh and heavy affliction on this earth, and forget what the Most Just and the Most Holy has endured. What the whole city suffered, One alone suffered. See who that One is, the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, who was seized, bound, scourged, heaped with every insult, suspended and crucified on a cross, and put to death. Weigh Rome in the balance with Christ, weigh the whole earth with Christ, weigh heaven and earth with Christ: nothing created counterbalances the Creator.... Let us therefore bear what God wishes us to bear. He who to cure and heal us sent his Son, knows, as a physician knows, what utility there is even in pain.²⁵

Augustine here touches depths rarely glimpsed in his reflections on Rome's fall and human responses to it. Yet even here he is not truly profound, for he links Christ's crucifixion with devastated Rome chiefly in the form of a comparison, in an *a fortiori* argument. There may be a hint of a more searching note at the end of the quotation – the God who sent his Son to cure us, knowing, as only a doctor does, the usefulness of pain. Does God experience the pain of slaughtered or tortured Romans, of the thousands incinerated on 9/11, because of the incomparable sufferings of Christ? At best Augustine throws out a line of suggestive reflection for others to follow up.

I earlier set out three strands in Augustine's cutting down to size an event that others, believers as well as unbelievers, visualized in colossal apocalyptic colours. The Goths had long been discerned by Christians as foreshadowed by Gog and Magog in Ezekiel 38-39 (cf. Revelation 20:8). Hence some of Jerome's baleful laments on the fate of Rome are found in his commentary on Ezekiel. Augustine will have none of it. We might even say that he reduces the ominous weight of the calamity by routinizing it, by making it but a typical, and entirely predictable, aspect of human life in a world grown old and falling to pieces. By dealing at length with the first of the three strands we have already said much about the third strand –

²⁴ *Sermon* 81:8, Hill, pp. 364-5.

²⁵ *De Excidio...* *Sermo* 8:9, O'Reilly, p. 73.

Augustine's disparagement of this vale of human woe by contrast with the heavenly bliss to come. Recall that simple sentence from his sermon, 'Understand that you have come here simply in order to take your departure.' For this world-denying otherworldliness Augustine wins no friends in the liberal broad-church religion of much twenty-first-century Christianity in the West. (I strongly suspect that the story will be different in other more vigorous regions of world Christianity.) Yet it must be stressed again, that Augustine's faith is most profoundly imbued with this sense of the imperfection and impermanence of all human life on earth, even life lived in Christ. This is obvious enough from an investigation of what he says in the *City of God* about 'the heavenly city', as he often calls the city of God.²⁶

The second strand in Augustine's reductionist exercise is the desacralizing of the history of Rome itself. Only a brief summary can be given here of how he accomplishes this in the *City of God*.²⁷ Rome appears as but one of a series of mighty empires, whose path to success has been no more honourable than that of the others. Augustine grants privileged status not even to the Christian period of Rome's empire from Constantine onwards. It receives surprisingly short treatment in the *City of God*. The blessedness of Christian emperors is placed not in their military or political successes or the length of their reign, but in their humility, humaneness and service of true religion. The greatest of them according to Augustine, Theodosius I, 'was more glad to be a member of the church than ruler of the world' (*City of God* 5:26). Augustine needed to explain why God had granted Rome such a great empire, and he found the answer in God's rewarding Rome for the single-minded pursuit of glory, in which it afforded an example of dedication and sacrifice even to citizens of the pilgrim city of God. But Augustine does not lose sight of his controlling theme: that was the limit of Rome's reward. He quoted the Gospel with gentle irony, 'They have received their reward in full.'²⁸ Nor did Rome's achievement imply that it had acted justly. On Augustine's analysis, even by the definition given by Cicero, Rome had not been a 'republic', for pagan Rome could not satisfy the terms of 'an association of people united by a common sense of right', since where God was not given his due, there could be no true justice. A lesser definition, of those 'united by a common agreement on the objects of their love', would have to serve for Rome.²⁹

²⁶ This was done in the second of my Josephine So lectures in Hong Kong.

²⁷ This was a major theme in the fourth lecture of the series.

²⁸ *City of God* 5:15, citing Matt. 6:2.

²⁹ *City of God* 19:21, 24.

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Augustine could have entertained no notion of the invincibility, the inviolability, of Rome. Yet, for reasons that will now be obvious, nor did he read the 410 sack as the beginning of the end for the Roman Empire. In Book 4 of the *City of God*, written perhaps in 415, Augustine could comment as follows:

The Roman Empire has been shaken rather than transformed, and that happened to it at other periods, before the preaching of Christ's name; and it recovered. There is no need to despair of its recovery at this present time. Who knows what is God's will in this matter?³⁰

It had not been the final catastrophe, but now, with only a few years' hindsight, just another disruption in the ebb and flow of the empire's history. Rutilius's glowing encomium of Rome's universal power and beneficence included exactly such a passage, recognizing Rome's periodic bouncing back after repulse or failure.³¹ The Christian chronicler, Orosius, who compiled *Seven Books of History Against the Pagans*, struck an optimistic note c. 417:

Although the memory of this event is fresh, anyone who sees the numbers of the Romans themselves and listens to their talk will think that nothing had happened, as they themselves confess, unless perhaps he notices some ruins of the fire still remaining.³²

Even in book 1 of the *City of God*, written in 413, Augustine had to rebuke the behaviour of refugees from Rome who had fled south to Africa:

When, by all accounts, nations in the East were bewailing your catastrophe, when the greatest cities in the farthest parts of the earth were keeping days of public grief and mourning, you were asking the way to the theatres, and going in, making full houses, in fact, behaving in a much more crazy fashion than before. It was just this corruption, this moral disease, this overthrow of all integrity and decency, that the great Scipio dreaded for you, when he stopped the building of

³⁰ *Ibid.* 4:7, tr. Henry Bettenson (Harmondsworth, 1972), p. 143.

³¹ Rutilius, *Concerning his Return* 1:119-33, tr. Isbell, p. 224 ('Fortune which is cruel today will be kind tomorrow').

³² Orosius, *Seven Books of History against the Pagans* 7:40.

theatres.... He did not think that a city is fortunate when its walls are standing, while its morals are in ruins.³³

Whatever Augustine's expectations for Rome, in the event it would not recover its former glory and vigour. The Western half fell like other ancient empires that the ancient world had seen come and go. In 410 it was already tottering towards its death, for the Goths, more accurately the Visigoths, were but the first of successive waves of migrant peoples who would within a century or so of 410 submerge the former Roman provinces in a patchwork of new kingdoms. Among these barbarian migrations, as historians still call them, were the Vandals. Originally from Scandinavia, they moved south through the Iberian peninsula, across the straits of Gibraltar and then eastwards along the North African coast. They were besieging Hippo in 430 when Augustine died, and in 439 they captured Carthage. The Roman tenure of North Africa was at an end.

The Vandals were but one of a number of ethnic hordes on the move from the north and the east into the Western reaches of the Roman Empire. The line of emperors, weak, short-lived, ineffective, continued until 476, when sovereignty in the West was formally ceded to the Eastern emperor in Constantinople. In reality the Ostrogoths held sway in northern Italy. By 410, and even before 410, the form of the Roman world had begun to pass away. Augustine recognized this in general terms without envisaging an imminent demise for imperial Rome. The world had grown old, it was perishing, passing away, going to pieces.

Augustine tuned in instinctively to Paul's counsel to the Corinthian Christians:

The time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they had none, ... those who buy something as if it were not theirs to keep, those who use the things of the world, as if they were not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away (1 Corinthians 7:29-31).

Part of the message of August 24, 410, as surely also of September 11, 2001, is precisely the impermanence of the strongest and most successful of human institutions. Rome was not exempt from the vulnerability of all

³³ *City of God* 1:33, Bettenson p. 44. Cf. *Sermon* 296:12, 'That's why Peter died and was laid to rest in Rome, is it, in order that not a stone of the theatre might fall? God is knocking the playthings of boys from the hands of ill-disciplined adults', tr. Hill, *Works of Saint Augustine: Sermons* III/8 (1994), p. 210.

cities in history, New York and Washington included. There is no doubt very much more to say about such large-scale human disasters, but if Augustine is our tutor, we shall carry at least this much away from his reflections on the sack of ancient Rome, to help us make Christian sense of every 9/11 of the twenty-first century.

The gifted editor of *First Things*, Richard John Neuhaus, provided these reflections on the first anniversary of 9/11 from New York itself:

This morning, at the corner of Fourteenth Street and First Avenue, I turned around to look again at where the towers were. It was exactly a year ago, on a Tuesday morning of such beauty as inspires songs about autumn in New York, that on the way to say the nine o'clock Mass we saw the first plane strike, and then the billowing clouds of desolation appealing to the skies. A small crowd had gathered at the corner, looking up in the curiosity that preceded shock. 'There must be thousands of people in there,' I said. 'Pray for them.' Then I went in to the altar of God to offer the Sacrifice of the Mass, the sacrifice of the cross that anticipated, caught up, and mysteriously redeemed all the desolations of time....

There are usually about a hundred people at the nine o'clock; this morning there were several times that. The first lesson was St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 7: 'For the form of this world is passing away.' The gospel reading was the beatitudes from Luke. 'Blessed are you that hunger now, for you shall be satisfied. Blessed are you that weep now, for you shall laugh.' There was in the congregation a palpable hunger, and there was weeping, and there was faith, in the painful awareness of a form of the world that had passed away.

I thought it jarring at first when an elderly priest said afterwards, 'They chose exactly the wrong time to try to take out the Church.' He was referring to this year's media storm over priestly scandals, believing, as he does, that it was mainly a scheme to destroy the Catholic Church, or at least to eliminate its public influence. I think he is wrong. The crisis was not and is not mainly about that. But he is right about the indomitable strength of the community gathered by the only hope that endures. 'For the form of this world is passing away.' 'Blessed are you who weep....' Such were my thoughts this morning as I turned back at Fourteenth and First to look once again at the bright sky where the towers used to be.³⁴

³⁴ *First Things* 127 (Nov. 2002), p. 87.

REVIEWS

The Race Set Before Us: A Biblical Theology of Perseverance and Assurance

Thomas Schreiner and Ardel Caneday

InterVarsity, Downers Grove, Ill., 2001; 344pp., £14.99; ISBN 0 85111 551 9

The stated goal of this book is to wrestle anew with some of the most pressing and perennial questions facing the believer: Can one gain eternal life and then lose it? What about those who don't persevere in the faith? Can a believer really be assured of having eternal life? Such questions have called for answers in every generation.

Schreiner and Caneday's objective is to present the biblical passages relevant to forming a 'biblical theology' of perseverance and assurance and then help the readers integrate these into a 'coherent and consistent whole' (p. 11). Their mode of discourse is intentionally irenic and pastoral, yet with a rigorous attention to exegesis.

The book begins with an introduction that lays out the plan for the book. Following this, chapter 1 surveys four interpretive schemes that have been used to explain the difficult issues of faith, perseverance, assurance and rewards. These are labelled (1) Loss-of-salvation view, (2) Loss-of-rewards view, (3) Tests-of-genuineness view, and (4) Hypothetical-loss-of-salvation view. These first three correspond generally (though not exactly) with the views held by many within Arminianism, Dispensationalism, and Calvinism respectively. The last view is not a widespread view, but one advocated by B. F. Westcott from the interpretation of Hebrews.

The first view argues that the warnings in Scripture are 'real' warnings and that the believer who does not persevere may indeed lose their salvation. The second view rejects the possibility of 'losing one's salvation' and instead interprets warnings as threats against a believer losing his or her heavenly rewards but not eternal life. The test-of-genuineness view interprets the warnings of Scripture as directed not toward true believers, but toward the false or disingenuous believer, the one who professes faith but who does not really possess salvation. The warnings prompt us to test ourselves to see whether our faith is real. The

fourth view sees the warnings (especially in Hebrews) as addressing genuine believers 'to correct the wrong idea that apostasy is not serious... lest they flirt with such apostasy' (pp. 35-6). In each case, Schreiner and Caneday deal fairly and accurately with these opposing views.

They conclude chapter 1 by presenting a fifth view, which they adopt. And herein lies the unique contribution of this book. Rather than trying to interpret the warnings of Scripture in light of one's other theological commitments (as in the case of the four views above), Schreiner and Caneday ask a different question: What is the relationship between the biblical warnings and the biblical promises? Rather than choosing between the promises or the warnings, pitting one over against the other, the authors posit that both the promises and the warnings have distinct roles in God's salvation. The promises function 'to establish belief in the God who keeps his promises and to assure us that he is faithful to his people' while the warnings 'serve to elicit belief that perseveres in faithfulness to God's heavenly call on us' (p. 40). In other words, both the warnings and the promises are real and work together as the means God uses to save his people.

The remaining chapters seek to ground this view in an impressive way through thorough exegesis of key texts. Chapter 2 lays the vital foundation by arguing for the centrality of the 'already, not yet' category as applied to soteriology. The authors explore a number of different metaphors used in Scripture to describe the multifaceted reality of salvation. These metaphors taken together show that salvation is both now and yet in the future. Chapter 3 argues that true faith is an obedient faith, *i.e.* it is seen by faithfulness, yet this is not to be misunderstood as a works-righteousness. The lengthy and crucial chapter 4 gets right to the heart of how warnings function in Scripture. The argument is that exhortations and warnings (in addition to promises) are God's means used to accomplish his persevering purposes in us. They are like road signs that project real warnings of various hazards: they warn of *conceivable* but not *probable* consequences. They must be heeded but they do not communicate the likelihood of such an accident occurring. They are means of grace to keep us on the road of faith. Chapters 5 and 6 discuss biblical examples of those who did not persevere (*e.g.* Judas) and those who did (*e.g.* Peter). Chapter 7, leaning on the work of G. C. Berkouwer, argues that assurance is not only possible in light of warnings, but is also an indissoluble part of saving faith. Assurance of salvation is to be had through the three-fold means of the fruit of the Spirit, the witness of the Holy Spirit, and especially, through the promises of God. The final chapter wrestles with the biblical tension of sovereignty and human

responsibility and concludes that the only ground for perseverance is God's unconditional election. The book concludes with a short appendix responding to William Lane Craig's 'Middle Knowledge' view, followed by extensive author, subject and Scripture indexes.

How should we evaluate this book theologically? Schreiner and Caneday's thesis regarding the co-operative function of warnings and promises is truly insightful. They acknowledge this idea is not unique to them, but comes from Berkouwer and could in fact be called 'classically Reformed'. Nonetheless, in today's theological landscape this idea of warnings and promises as means of grace together is a new and helpful way of speaking to the Calvinist-Arminian debate on perseverance. Yet this insight does not remove all the old tensions. Indeed, at times in the book (notably, chapters 5 and 6), the argument seems to falter by slipping back into the 'test-of-genuineness' view. Nonetheless, by framing the issue with a new question, the authors have provided another way of thinking that is worthwhile.

But there is another deeper theological issue being debated today with which this book overlaps. Several evangelical scholars today are questioning whether the Reformation definition of justification is too narrow to accommodate the whole scriptural witness. The nature of justification, forensic and/or transformative is being debated anew. While this is not the thesis of Schreiner and Caneday's volume, their arguments at times connect with this debate. For example, chapter 3 is subtitled, 'The Necessity of Obedient Faith' and they argue that true faith looks like faithfulness, though this is not to be misunderstood as works-righteousness. Likewise, chapter 2 takes pains to show that forensic justification is *only one of the many* metaphors that Scripture uses to speak about salvation. In both of these instances I think they are right. Nonetheless, confusion may occur for the reader who reads this book with that contemporary debate as the main issue; it is only secondary to their thesis in this volume. This potential problem is exacerbated by the fact that Dr. Schreiner has in fact written rather provocatively on the issue of justification in recent years. Some reference to this debate and the authors' position on it would have cleared up potential problems in this area.

I offer one direct critique of this volume: the question of the intended audience. The style and ethos of the book seem geared toward the thoughtful layperson. There are nice diagrams at the beginning and technical language is avoided. Significant space is devoted to explain concepts that would not likely be familiar already to the layperson (*e.g.* the 'already, not yet' idea). The stated intention is 'pastoral'. Yet the level

of detailed exegesis at points seems more than most laypeople would have the interest or ability to handle. Likewise, the chapters are at times quite long. (Chapters 3 and 4 weigh in at 55 and 72 pages respectively.) I am by no means advocating ‘dumming down’, yet from a pragmatic standpoint, I question whether the vast majority of the people in the pews who could benefit from this book would ever make it through chapter 4. More realistically, it seems the bulk of this book is best suited for a seminary student or pastor. If this is the intended audience, then some elements of the book could be revised. On the other hand, if the layperson is the audience, then much of the detail needs to be removed. The authors obviously wanted to present a well-grounded argument. This they have done. But along the way they have fallen somewhere between two intended audiences.

Overall, I think the readers of this journal will greatly benefit from the model of careful scholarship in this book as well as the real contribution this volume makes to the theological discussion.

Jonathan T. Pennington, St Mary's College, University of St Andrews

Shaping A Theological Mind: Theological Context and Methodology

Darren C. Marks (ed.)

Ashgate, Aldershot, 2002; x+144pp., £15.99 (pb); £37.50 (hb); ISBN 0 7546 0617 1

One of the contributors to this book apologises that autobiography is the lowest and most mendacious of the art forms. That is as may be, but for one reader at least the more autobiographical the essays were, the more interesting and revealing they were too. In the context of today's hermeneutical debates, it is refreshing to have access to the mind of the author.

Marks describes himself as a youngish would-be theologian, fresh out of graduate studies, wanting to ask questions that reading texts alone would not permit. The contributors to the book were invited to reflect on their theological pilgrimage, and thus to show something of the confluence of their experiences and education with their theological writings. The hope was also that the collection would provide a theological state-of-the-union by cutting across denomination, gender, specialism and location. Most of the essays fulfil the former aim, but the book is too short to realise the latter ambition.

The editor provides a preface, and a brief concluding chapter entitled, rather grandly, ‘Method as Creative Fidelity: *Habitus* and the *Sensus*

Communis'. In between, there are 12 essays. I will say something about each of them but will give more space to some.

The first is by James H. Cone, Professor of Theology at Union Seminary, who takes us back to Bearden, Arkansas, the place where he says he first discovered himself as *black* and *Christian*. He grew up in the 1940s and early 1950s, attending segregated schools, drinking water from 'coloured' fountains, watching movies from balconies, and when absolutely necessary greeting white adults at the back door of their homes. His Christian identity was shaped at Macedonia African Methodist Episcopal Church where he encountered Jesus through rousing sermons, fervent prayers, spirited gospel songs and passionate testimonies. He was always puzzled that the 'Welcome' signs outside white churches beckoning visitors to join them did not include a black person like him.

He was also disappointed with the black churches, which seemed to promote anti-intellectualism as whites promoted racism. 'It was as if the less one knew and the louder one shouted Jesus' name, the closer one was to God. I found it hard to believe that the God of Jesus condoned ignorance as if it was a virtue.' And so he tells the story of the search for a reasoned faith in subsequent theological study, and then of the turn to *blackness* in his theology, which he describes as an even deeper *metanoia* experience than his previous conversion. Much of what he says is humbling and convicting, and much of his anger is justified; racism is a contradiction of the gospel, and the racist theologian is a heretic. But while he is right to use the black experience as a perspective, it seems at last that experience becomes the touchstone for theology.

The second essay is by Edward Farley, Emeritus Professor of Theology at Vanderbilt, and is entitled 'Ecclesial Contextual Thinking'. In summary, 'The prevailing trends and movements of both churches and theologies ever call to the theologian to think against and to think past.'

In too brief a chapter, Colin Gunton, Professor of Christian Doctrine at King's College, London, provides a neat introduction to his work. He pays tribute to a Christian upbringing, steeped in the words of Scripture in family and church, and to education in the literary classics of English, Greek and Latin. He was studying 'Greats' at Oxford when Robinson's *Honest to God* appeared, and this he says introduced him to the excitement of systematic theology; by 'systematic' he means something concerned with the meaning of the Christian faith that also engages with the philosophical mind. In training for ordination he remembers with appreciation the weekly sermon class presided over by John Marsh, where the emphasis was that sermons were to be good news, and the wonderful

teaching of George Caird, whose teaching still shapes those who were inspired by it then. How important our theological teachers can be!

Writing *Yesterday and Today: A Study of Continuities in Christology* took a long time, itself important in Gunton's development. He contrasts that with today's ridiculous pressure on young academics to publish before they have had time to mature. He then turns to his interest in trinitarian theology and the stimulus afforded by John Zizioulas and the Cappadocian formulation. He concludes with reference to his ministry in 'a very ordinary church.... Nonetheless, it is generous and loving, and has taught the lesson that right theology begins here, where the Gospel is proclaimed by word and sacrament and lived out in the company of others.'

Alister McGrath's chapter is also brief, and concentrates on his work in theology and science. The Professor of Historical Theology at Oxford recounts his boyhood interest in the natural sciences, and then his studies in chemistry at Oxford, the period during which he also discovered that Christianity was more intellectually resilient than he could ever have imagined. He says from then he was determined to work at the integration of Christianity and science. He offers a quick survey of his career before returning to this theme, and the series of works on which he has recently been engaged, under the running title 'A Scientific Theology'. His expressed aim is to plot a trajectory for theology that maintains its academic and spiritual integrity while encouraging a direct and positive engagement with a scientific culture. His role model in all this is T. F. Torrance, 'unquestionably the greatest British theologian of the twentieth century', and he asks that these three volumes (2001-2003) be treated as 'landmarks in the expression of my theological mind'.

He ends on an intriguing note. While a 'scientific theology' is his major issue for the next decade, there are other agendas too. There is the relationship between theology and literature, and in particular the possibility of theology through literature. 'Why do theologians not write novels, aiming to express theological notions in a narrative manner? There are excellent philosophical models to hand in the novels of writers such as Iris Murdoch.' Does McGrath intend to write novels?

The fifth essay is by Wayne A. Meeks. The Emeritus Professor of Biblical Studies at Yale is surprised to find himself in theological company, 'for my work has privileged non-theological descriptions of the early Christian movement'. In passing, the minister he remembers best from his Bible Belt youth was a Scotsman trained at Edinburgh, whose sermons were filled with quotations from the British poets.

The next chapter is by John Milbank, Professor of Philosophical Theology at the University of Virginia. 'The Last of the Last: Theology, Authority and Democracy', is long and difficult compared with the other essays, and is the least personal of any of them.

The seventh contributor is Jürgen Moltmann, Emeritus Professor of Systematic Theology at Tübingen, and his is a thoroughly autobiographical chapter. In July 1943, when he was seventeen, he survived the firestorm that destroyed his hometown of Hamburg, but on the last night of the bombing his friend, Gerhard Schopper, was blown to pieces at his side. 'That night I cried out to God for the first time: "Where is God?", "Why am I not dead too?" and "What am I alive for?" These questions are still with me today.' He tells us about his studies, his pastorate, his academic career and his writing. He was never sure about the wisdom of the move to full-time academia. 'I was not cut out to be a professional pastor, but I liked being confronted with the whole breadth and depth of life – children and old people, men and women, the healthy and the sick, birth and death. I should, in hindsight, have liked as a theologian to remain a pastor.'

Moltmann suggests that his 1999 book, *Experiences in Theology: Ways and Forms of Christian Theology*, can be read as an introduction to his theological thinking. Having begun his major writings with eschatology, he rounded them off with *prolegomena*, or, as he puts it, *epilegomena*! Towards the end of the essay he writes movingly about his commitment to theology: 'Theology is a passion that one pursues with all one's heart, all one's soul and all one's strength. If one cannot do that, better to leave it alone altogether.' He continues: 'Theology comes from the passion of God, from the open wound of God in one's own life.... Theology springs from unbounded joy in the presence of God's Spirit.... God's pain and God's delight, consequently, are the two experiences between which theology is kept in suspense.'

The eighth chapter, by Gerald O'Collins, Professor of Theology at the Gregorian University in Rome, is frustratingly short. He pays tribute to his teachers, including Moltmann. He insists on scholarship with faith. For example, he recalls that Ernst Käsemann's lectures on Romans 'showed how outstanding biblical scholarship incorporated and required deep Christian faith and theological reflection'. And then at Cambridge, Charles Moule modelled the same. Thus, 'biblical scholarship that lacks faith will be as shallow as literary criticism that is not fuelled by a passionate love for literature. The scriptures were born of faith, aim to give rise to faith, and should be interpreted with faith.' O'Collins gives a

brief survey of his writing career, especially his lifelong concern with the resurrection.

The next two chapters are by women. Rosemary Radford Ruether, Professor of Feminist Theology at Berkeley, gives her intellectual autobiography. The topics that have interested this liberal theologian range over racism, sexism, international militarism, imperialism and ecological devastation.

Then Kathryn Tanner, Professor of Theology at the University of Chicago Divinity School, tells us how she and her generation have moved from methodological to substantive preoccupations, not talking about how to do theology, as many of their teachers did, but actually doing constructive theology, reworking Christian themes to address the issues of today's world. She argues: 'The need is not so much to show the meaningfulness of Christianity in today's world but rather what Christianity can contribute to making the world a better place.... Theology's warrant now centres on the question of whether theologians have anything important to say about the world and our place in it.' She believes they have, but as she insists later, this means being honest about the complexities of Christian lives, and taking seriously what disciplines such as sociology and anthropology reveal: 'the often messy, ambiguous and porous character of the effort to live Christianly'.

The penultimate chapter is by Keith Ward, Regius Professor of Divinity at Oxford, who is happy to belong squarely in a theological tradition that began with Schleiermacher. He believes that the most basic religious belief is, in a rather vague sense, agreed in most of the world's religious traditions. He accepts that his theology is tentative and provisional.

Finally, John Webster writes on 'Discovering Dogmatics'. The Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity at Oxford is soon to move to the Chair of Divinity at Aberdeen. He remembers the excitement of discovering theology at Cambridge, setting before him 'an immense store of texts, concepts and language of extraordinary power, a whole imaginative and intellectual world'. He recalls the presence in the Faculty of 'the great troubled genius' of Donald MacKinnon, 'who regarded dogmatics with utter seriousness and growled at anyone who did not'.

In many ways Webster found himself as a theologian when he went to teach in Canada. He learned the art of running a text seminar and spent a good deal of time inching his way through classic and contemporary texts with groups of graduate students. He also decided to teach confessionally. That meant, first, resolving to work on the assumption of the truthfulness of the Christian confession, rather than responding to its

critical denials. Second, it meant structuring the content of teaching in accordance with the logic of the confession expressed in the creeds. 'Thus my survey of Christian doctrine was (and remains) simply a conceptual expansion of the Apostles' Creed as a guide to the Gospel that is set out in Holy Scripture.'

For Webster, in the articulation of the gospel, the key theological tasks are exegesis and dogmatics. It is refreshing to hear him insist that exegesis is primary. 'Exegesis, the attempt to hear what the Spirit says to the Churches, is that without which theological reason cannot even begin to discharge its office. To this primary activity of theological reason, dogmatics is complementary but strictly subordinate.' He concludes on the operation of theological reason as an exercise in mortification, possible and fruitful only through the Spirit of Christ. 'And it is for this reason that theology must not only begin with but also be accompanied at every moment by prayer for the coming of the Spirit, in whose hands alone lie our minds and speeches.'

This is an interesting book, and in the main an easy read. It is good to learn a little more about theologians whose work has been important to us, and also to be stimulated by those whose theology is very different from ours but who can at the very least give us new questions even when they don't satisfy us with their answers. So, when theologians expound gospel truth, I want to breathe deeply. And when their connection with Scripture is more problematic? Well then I read, but I don't inhale.

Alasdair I. Macleod, Free Church, Leith

The Puritan Millennium: Literature and Theology, 1550-1682

Crawford Gribben

Four Courts Press, Dublin, 2000; 224pp., £39.50; ISBN 1-85182-5770

Interest in Puritan theology has experienced a remarkable twofold renaissance in the last 60 years. At one level the experiential character of its reformed orthodoxy has attracted many new readers of J. Owen, R. Sibbes, T. Goodwin and others. Meanwhile in the academy there has been increased interest in the role of eschatology in Puritan thought – an eschatology which may well shock those familiar only with the individual soteriology of the Puritans. In this respect Puritan literature throughout the period abounds with an end-time consciousness and what now appears as speculative apocalyptic exegesis. With the Reformation still within living memory and the working presupposition that the

Papacy was antichrist, many were inexorably drawn to a detailed historicist reading of the Apocalypse. Here we have a healthy reminder that, at least historically, 'the reformed position' on any doctrine (including eschatology) is by no means monochromic. The reformed tradition too has had its disappointed apocalypticists – a not insignificant factor in the later Puritan psyche.

As the subtitle suggests, Dr Gribben's approach is broad brush and covers the entire Puritan period. He begins with a valuable survey of the historiographical *status quaestionis* (pp. 11-25) and the development of the Puritan reading of the Book of Revelation (pp. 26-56). But this breadth is balanced by the series of detailed studies which follow (chapters 3-8) in which he traces the development of apocalyptic thought from the time of the Marian exiles, Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* (1563) and the Geneva Bible. There follow cameos of the Episcopalian-puritan James Ussher and the brilliant young Scottish commissioner to the Westminster Assembly, George Gillespie. Milton's well-known reaction to the theology of the Westminster Divines is then discussed (chapter 6). Chapters on the radical John Rogers and on John Bunyan complete the gallery of individual studies. As so often in the history of the church, so here, the reaction to the theological pyrotechnics of one age is indifference and caricature in the next. As Dr Gribben notes in his well-worded conclusion: 'Within half a century, the ideology which had underpinned a revolution was dismissed as folly. For the puritan remnant, better days were yet to come' (p.198). *The Puritan Millennium* thus tells a salutary and, in parts, sad story of hopes and expectations destined for disappointment.

To those already familiar with Iain H. Murray's *The Puritan Hope* (Edinburgh, 1971), or Peter Toon (ed.), *Puritans, the Millennium, and the Future of Israel* (Cambridge, 1970), Dr Gribben's work will provide a further broadening of horizons and deepening of understanding. Like them, but unlike the bulk of contemporary Puritan studies, the perspective here is thoroughly sympathetic to the evangelical principles of the Puritan movement. That said, Dr Gribben also seeks to take serious account of contemporary interest in the importance of hermeneutics. Potential readers should be aware that the subtitle (*Literature & Theology*) is significant and the vocabulary as well as the discussion straddles hermeneutical as well as dogmatic and historical interests. Those interested exclusively in 'pure theology' may find this either frustrating or stimulating, but hopefully both.

Sinclair B. Ferguson, Glasgow

Understanding Theology, Vols 1-3

R. T. Kendall

Christian Focus Publications, Fearn, Vol.1: 1998, 530pp., £15.99, ISBN 1-85792-4290; Vol.2: 2000, 542pp., £16.99, ISBN 1-85792-5378; Vol.3: 2001, 503pp., £16.99, ISBN 1-85792-5815

When I was a student, a relative gave me a multi-volume New Testament commentary by E. W. Barnes. It was not up-to-the-minute in terms of modern scholarship, but it had one outstanding virtue: it never failed to get to grips with difficult passages. Problems ignored by some other commentators, even most prestigious ones, were always confronted by Barnes. You might not always agree with him but you could not say he shirked the difficulties of his task.

These three volumes remind me somewhat of Barnes, for they do in the realm of Systematic Theology what he did in New Testament studies. Again, you may not always agree with the author, but he makes you think.

These studies are based on Dr Kendall's classes in his School of Theology at Westminster Chapel, London. Each is succinct, but they do not simply give headings plus a few texts. They truly wrestle with theological issues and force you both to study Scripture and to think. They also introduce the reader to major theological debates in Christian history. Their succinctness means they cover an immense amount of ground and can function as useful reference works. Those in Volume 1 were chosen by the author, while those in Volume 2 were chosen by William Mackenzie and Malcolm Maclean of Christian Focus Publications, a selection which has the author's enthusiastic approval. It is not clear who chose those in the final volume.

They are simple. Dr Kendall says that the aim of his Friday programme is to make theology simple and he certainly does this. He has obviously worked hard at making sure every sentence is crystal clear and yet he is also concerned with economy of language, for all are comparatively brief. His gift for clear expression is outstanding.

They are practical. A fine theological teacher whom I know has as his slogan, 'Theology is ethics or it is nothing.' I think R. T. Kendall would agree with that. He makes us think hard but he refuses to let us treat theology simply as an academic discipline. Great biblical truths always have practical implications and we are made to face them. A number of the topics handled in Volumes 2 and 3 belong more to Ethics or Practical Theology than to Systematics, but this is an enrichment of the volumes rather than the reverse.

Inevitably the books deal with issues that are contentious among evangelical Christians today. How could he possibly avoid them? You may find him coming to different conclusions from yourself on some of them, but he will send you back to the Bible and make you look at each of these issues again. That's got to be a good thing.

Who should have these books? Buy them for lay preachers and Sunday School teachers known to you. They will be immensely helped by them. If you are a minister or somebody else with theological training, you may think them too simple for your own bookshelves, but are you really sure of that? I have had the privilege of teaching theology for 52 years but I am very glad to have these now as additions to my own library. I may keep a book-shaped gap next to them, in case there is a fourth volume!

Geoffrey Grogan, Glasgow

The Shape of Sola Scriptura

Keith Mathison

Canon Press, Moscow, Idaho, 2001; 364pp.; ISBN 1-885767-74-9

If you want to read the best recent overall introduction to the doctrine of Scripture, a good contender would have to be Keith Mathison's *The Shape of Sola Scriptura*. Mathison offers as his basic argument that much modern Evangelicalism gravely misunderstands what the Reformers meant by 'Sola Scriptura', Scripture alone. This is treated by many present-day Evangelicals as though it meant that an individual could sit down in isolation with a Bible and deliberately ignore everything that Christians have ever said the Bible means, so as to get the Bible's message 'fresh' and 'uncontaminated' by churchly interpretation. Mathison lampoons this attitude as 'Solo Scriptura'.

Against this, Mathison argues (convincingly, in my opinion) that the 'alone' in Sola Scriptura referred *not* to the isolation of Scripture from all necessary contexts of interpretation, *but* to the specific attribute of 'infallible authority'. That is, only Scripture has *infallible* authority. But it is equally true that the Reformers never thought the isolated individual could rightly understand what the infallibly authoritative Scripture means *if he extracted himself from the framework of historic Christian belief*. The latter view was, Mathison contends, the view not of the Protestant Reformers but of the Radical Reformers (often popularly called 'Anabaptists').

In particular Mathison argues that the Reformers recognized in the patristic 'Regula Fidei' (Rule of Faith), summarized in the Western

Church in the Apostles' Creed, an indispensable norm of scriptural interpretation – the proper interpretive context for grasping the message of Scripture. The Reformers saw a reciprocal relationship between Scripture and Creed, the latter having *always* been accepted in the Church, from earliest times, as a summary of the contents of the former.

Mathison endorses what a number of historians have pointed out, *viz.* that there were broadly *three* attitudes to tradition in the religious controversies of the sixteenth century:

Tradition 1: Critical reverence for history and tradition. This was the position of the Protestant Reformation, including the Reformed constituency. The Church's theological tradition was treated with care and respect, although not given a blind or uncritical allegiance. In particular, the great creeds of the early Church were all strongly affirmed.

Tradition 2: Authoritarian reverence for history and tradition. This was the position of most if not all Roman Catholics. The theological tradition – or as the Reformers claimed, a biased reading of it – was elevated into untouchable status. No development of doctrine was permitted to undergo critical scrutiny, and therefore nothing could be corrected. Mathison plots most interestingly the evolution of this Tradition 2 concept from the twelfth century onwards (Tradition 1 having been the general orthodoxy prior to this).

Tradition 0: Total contempt for history and tradition. This view tended to be quite prevalent among many in the Radical Reformation. Any appeal to the wisdom of the past was in principle rejected. To see Tradition 0 in all its naked glory, let us consider the views of one of the greatest of all the Radicals, Sebastian Franck. Franck expressed in a sharp, shocking manner the view that lay hidden at the heart of many an Anabaptist:

I believe that because of the breaking in and laying waste by antichrist right after the death of the apostles, the outward Church of Christ, including all its gifts and sacraments, went up into heaven and lies concealed in the Spirit and in truth. I am thus quite certain that for 1400 years now there has existed no gathered Church nor any sacraments.

So for Franck, there was simply no history of the Church's understanding of Scripture. The believer was thrown naked on the Bible, as if it had been written yesterday. Franck saw this as a wonderful privilege. The results demonstrate that it was a disaster of the first magnitude, as Franck

himself and all too many other Tradition 0 Anabaptists repeated one early Church heresy after another.

I warmly commend Mathison's book. It is a well-written, well-researched, timely reaffirmation of the real Reformational tenet of *Sola Scriptura*.

Nick Needham, Highland Theological College, Dingwall

Given For You: Reclaiming Calvin's Doctrine of the Lord's Supper

Keith Mathison

P&R Publishing, Phillipsburg, 2002; xvii+370pp.; ISBN 0-87552-186-X

Keith Mathison's book, *Given For You*, is a clear, step by step introduction to the Calvinist or Reformed doctrine of the Lord's supper. Mathison laments that too many modern 'Reformed' churches have ditched the real Reformed doctrine in favour of what he calls 'symbolic memorialism'. This is the view, often labelled 'Zwinglian', which sees in the supper little more than an opportunity for meditating thankfully on Jesus' death. Mathison has no trouble in demonstrating, with a breathtaking avalanche of evidence, that this view was passionately rejected by all the major Reformed theologians of the sixteenth century (apart from Zwingli).

The authentic Reformed view, found in all the classic Reformed confessions, teaches something very different from symbolic memorialism: namely, that in the Lord's supper, the risen Christ truly gives himself to his people as the life-giving nourishment of their souls. There is a 'real presence' of Christ in the Supper. He is present here in a special way, making the eating of bread and the drinking of wine into spiritual vehicles of his self-giving to believers. We really receive Christ by eating and drinking. If an unbeliever takes part, even to him Christ offers his body and blood; but the unbeliever lacks the means to receive them (faith).

Mathison also establishes beyond reasonable doubt that the majority Reformed view in the sixteenth century saw the eating and drinking of the bread and wine, not merely as visual signs of a communion with Christ that the believer is always enjoying, but as effective instruments in the Holy Spirit's hand for actually conveying Christ's body and blood to the believer – something that obviously happens only in the supper (nowhere else can we receive Christ by eating or drinking anything, or by any similar physical action). A minority, led by Heinrich Bullinger, had a

slightly weaker doctrine here, preferring to interpret the bread and wine, less as instruments, more as signs of the constant daily self-communication of Christ to believers. But even that is far above symbolic memorialism.

What comes across practically from Mathison's survey is just how *central* the supper was for sixteenth-century Reformed Christians. It was the holiest treasure of Christian worship. No wonder Calvin wished it to be absolutely integral to all normal Sunday gatherings. After all, if Jesus really gives himself to us in the supper, who would not wish to experience this every Sunday?

While I heartily commend Mathison's important study, there are a few little blemishes that could be rectified in any future edition. On page 64, he interprets the Augsburg Interim as a 'settlement' between Lutherans and Roman Catholics. It was actually an imposition by the emperor Charles V which the majority of Lutherans defied. On page 143, Mathison thinks that John Nevin (one of his great heroes – and mine) was referring to the New England divines when he spoke of 'Puritans'. Surely he was using the term more broadly to include the English Puritans? After all, Nevin cites John Owen as the archetypal Puritan. Again, I am slightly puzzled by Mathison's choice of theologians in his survey of views; for example, he omits all treatment of the illustrious Robert Bruce in his survey of eucharistic thought in the later sixteenth- and seventeenth-century British divines (whom he calls 'English': when will Americans learn that Scotland isn't in England?). Strangely, there is a complete omission of Anglicans, many of whom in that period were thoroughly Reformed in their theology, especially on the eucharist. In the eighteenth-century section, Mathison seems to rely entirely on Nevin for his quotations from Jonathan Edwards. The debate over whether real wine should be used in the Lord's supper is not limited to America, as Mathison seems to indicate; it is here with us in the UK too. Finally, the book has no subject index.

Given For You is the essential modern handbook on historic Reformed teaching about the Lord's supper. If, having read this, you remain a 'symbolic memorialist', you will at least know that you are declaring war on the view of the supper that lay at the very heart of sixteenth-century Reformed churchmanship, worship, and piety – the view enshrined in all the classic Reformed confessions (Baptists, see the 1689 Confession 30:7). In this reviewer's opinion, you are also impoverishing your own spiritual life. Christ has something better for us than merely 'remembering' him.

Nick Needham, Highland Theological College, Dingwall

A Faith To Live By: Understanding Christian Doctrine

Donald Macleod

Christian Focus Publications, Fearn, 2002; 343pp., £15.99; ISBN 1 85792 428 2

This book by Donald Macleod, Principal of the Free Church College in Edinburgh where he has taught Systematic Theology since 1978, is a reissue of a volume first published in 1998, now enhanced by the inclusion of new two chapters on 'Justification' and 'The Trinity'. The book has its origin in two series of lectures delivered by Macleod in Glasgow in 1988-89 and 1990-91. The 26 chapters discuss many of the fundamental biblical doctrines including, 'The Deity of Christ', 'Divine Pre-Ordination', 'The Covenant', and 'The Lord's Supper'.

As the (successful) aim of the book is both to lead ordinary Christians to come to a better understanding of what they already believe, and to contribute to the rekindling of a passion for the rigorous and reverent study of Christian truth, it is very difficult to think of any Christian who would not benefit from reading it. Here is a theologian who listens to the Word and scrupulously follows where it leads. He listens also to the world; never allowing it to shape his theology, but acutely aware of the context within which he ministers that Word.

In each chapter the relevant biblical texts undergirding the topic being discussed are identified and expounded, followed by informed interaction with our rich reformation heritage in general, and with some of the now sadly neglected Scottish theologians in particular.

Macleod is fully aware, of course, that there is no consensus on many of the most basic Christian doctrines such as the nature of Scripture: 'Our view of the Bible is not the only one on offer, as all of you know... there are at least three which are widely current and deserve a brief notice.' There follows a helpful exposure of the inadequacies of the modernist, the Barthian and the neo-orthodox views in comparison with the evangelical understanding of Scripture. As many of the formulations of the Westminster Standards are utilized (and warmly commended) it is a pity that they do not figure in the index.

Perhaps the best way of describing this volume is to say that it is the modern equivalent of A. A. Hodge's *Evangelical Theology*. Macleod, like Hodge, teaches the knowledge of God with the learning of a scholar and the enthusiasm of a loving Christian, addressing contemporary issues from the standpoint of an assured confidence in the abiding relevance of historic Christianity.

If the book is rich in content, how does it read? What was said of John ('Rabbi') Duncan can equally be said of Macleod. 'He was, with all his stern regard to truth, an artist in his theologizing. He strove to give his thoughts a certain chaste beauty of form.'

From the opening chapter on 'The Inspiration of Scripture', to the concluding chapter on 'Heaven', the reader, we feel sure, will find this to be not only a veritable theological feast, but a delight to read.

John Scoales, Edinburgh

Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era

Stanley J. Grenz

Baker, Grand Rapids, 2000; 351pp., \$23.99; ISBN 0-8010-2239-8

This is a both fascinating and frustrating book. Fascinating in its mapping of the route that evangelical theology has taken and its description of the crossroads that it presently finds itself in and frustrating in its loss of direction beyond this junction.

Grenz begins with an historical survey of the origins of evangelicalism and defines its genius in the fusing of Puritanism and Pietism in 'convertive piety', which leads him to locate the heart of evangelicalism in the conversion experience rather than doctrine or practice. He then charts the development of American evangelicalism through fundamentalism and neo-evangelicalism to the critical point at which it finds itself today. He is, perhaps inevitably, selective in choosing the representative figures who have shaped its recent path: contrasting Carl Henry vs. Bernard Ramm and Millard Erickson vs. Clark Pinnock. As a result you may be more surprised by the exclusions from his list of influential figures than his inclusions. However Grenz still offers a teasing taster of important issues and highlights the main contours of the ongoing debates.

Grenz's journey moves one step further as he raises his concern, a concern that ultimately represents the challenge and value of the book. The 'new evangelicalism' was based on modernist foundations and now in the postmodern world of new science and globalization, these foundations have shown themselves wanting. This is the strength of the book: challenging the next generation of evangelical thinkers to set out on a quest for a 'post-foundationalist' theology. Grenz himself begins the exploration taking the reader with him through the fertile and productive country of faith and science with a valuable excursion into the nature of

world religions. Whilst these are essential to his conclusions they are worthy of reading for themselves as a source of apologetic material and confirmation of the value of the implications of modern physics for epistemology (it 'chastens our rationality').

Grenz's destination, however, is less than satisfying (or even clear!). For Grenz theology is a mosaic construction which is validated by an internal coherence and is formed in conversation with tradition and the Christian community whilst listening to the narrative of the Scriptures. The impression left is that theology is simply a postmodern social construction without any connectedness to any external reality. Taking his cue from scientific endeavour it was disappointing that he was unable to utilize the more expectant language of scientific models which form signposts to, or approximations of, more profound or complex realities. He attempts to make a connection to reality in eschatology: *i.e.* reality in its fullness is still to come as God brings things to finality in Christ. Theology's task is to show a vision of this coming reality and to describe how it can be manifest in the community of Christ which is the sign of the age to come. Thus community building (even outside of the church) is an indication of this coming reality and thus we must be motivated for a renewal of evangelical ecclesiology and of Christian community.

This is where this reader became frustrated. Grenz describes the history and diagnoses the present in a stimulating (albeit contentious) way but his remedy is at best imprecise and at worst questions the need for any evangelical theology. Certainly a new evangelicalism which is unleashed from the shackles of modernism is required to engage with the changing climate of postmodernism. For Grenz convertive piety returns as his rallying point for the new way (the 'center' of the title) arguing for a 'believer ecumenism' as a grass roots movement of those who are joined by a common 'convertive piety'. This he anticipates could make evangelicalism a renewing agency for the whole church. Sadly the reader is left wondering if this posits the disappearance of evangelical belief altogether to leave an experience and an attitude which many who would not designate themselves as evangelicals would share, thus robbing the church of a distinctive prophetic voice.

Read this book to face the challenges posed for evangelicalism and to pick Grenz's irenic attitude of generous orthodoxy – we need it. Grenz may not offer a clear guide to the journey we face but he does challenge us to be good companions in uncharted territory.

Iain Macaulay, Newcastle-on-Tyne

Reasonable Enthusiast. John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism

Henry D. Rack

Epworth, London, 2002 (3rd Edition); xxi+662pp., £19.95; ISBN 0 7162 0552 1

The reviewer, who is no specialist in eighteenth-century studies, approaches this work with some diffidence. John Wesley is a monumental figure and this is a monumental volume, the 3rd edition of a book which was acclaimed on its first publication in 1989. It is a product of vast erudition and prodigious reading – the select (!) bibliography extends to 12 pages and there are 82 pages of endnotes. Thoroughness of treatment is Dr Rack's hallmark; all the fascinating details are here. From the fire in Epworth rectory to the Latin inscription on Wesley's coffin, nothing is missed. It is impossible to do justice in a short review; a mere reproduction of the Table of Contents would be impressive.

It is doubtless a truism to say that John Wesley was a complex figure, with many paradoxes and tensions in his beliefs and behaviour – hence the appropriate title. Dr Rack is essentially a meticulous historian, whose own theological stance does not intrude. He is neither an apologist nor a critic, though in the introduction he expresses some regret that he has 'perhaps dwelt too heavily on the less attractive aspects of Wesley's character' and failed to emphasise his 'very real charm and geniality'. This may be so; the overall impression left with this reader is of Wesley the authoritarian.

The Introduction (like an operatic overture) sets out the themes which will be subsequently developed. Wesley was an enigmatic personality, an old-fashioned High Churchman whose activities were subversive of church order, an advocate of the 'perfection' which he had not himself attained, an 'untypical evangelical' with a 'Catholic' side.

The book is admirably structured in three sections: The Young John Wesley (1703-38), The Rise of Methodism (1738-60) and The Consolidation of Methodism (1760-91). There is a Prelude, two Interludes and a Postlude. The Prelude is a masterly essay on social and religious conditions in the early eighteenth century, with much fascinating statistical detail. There are judicious appraisals of the Church of England, of Dissent (for which Wesley had a 'lifelong distaste') and of Roman Catholicism.

In Part 1 we follow the well-trodden path from Epworth to Oxford, Georgia and Aldersgate Street. Wesley's entire life was coloured by the influence of his remarkable parents, the conscientious, impecunious

Samuel and the pious, strong-minded Susanna. And of course there was 'Old Jeffrey', the famous poltergeist, with his Jacobite sympathies! The atmosphere of eighteenth-century Oxford is well described. We read of the Christ Church undergraduate, his subsequent ordination and Fellowship at Lincoln. A theme which appears for the first time (but by no means the last) is the question of Wesley's confused relationships with women. And what of the famous Holy Club? Was it 'a futile exercise in trying to obtain salvation by works'? Dr Rack is not so sure.

'Serpents in Eden' is the intriguing title of the section recounting Wesley's ministry in Georgia. Later he was famously to write in his *Journal*: 'I, who went to America to convert the Indians, was never myself converted to God.' Was Wesley's self-criticism unduly severe? Dr Rack's assessment is more cautious. Georgia also saw the beginnings of Methodist hymnody, Wesley's relationship with the Moravians and his ineptitude in the disastrous episode of Sophy Hopkey, 'the worst of all the serpents in his Eden'.

After Georgia comes 'The Road to Aldersgate Street, the great watershed of 24 May 1738 with its "much-quoted climax" of the "heart strangely warmed"'. The interpretation of this experience depends very much on the point of view of the analyst. Dr Rack suggests that 'the conversion of 1738 was neither a temporary hiccup in an otherwise Catholic-style pilgrimage of holiness, nor an all-determining rejection of that model in favour of a simple Protestant evangelical pattern of justification by faith'.

The first 'Interlude' is a general survey of the Evangelical Revival, with many well-known figures passing before us: Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, Nicolaus Zinzendorf, Howell Harris, William Grimshaw, Lady Huntington. The origins of the revival, we are told, were influenced by 'ecclesiastical geography', social, economic and political factors. 'Early evangelicals... tended to see the Revival as a mysterious act of God.' Some readers may pause to ask: Could the evangelicals, after all, have been correct?

The story in Part 2 is one of remarkable expansion. It begins with a description of Wesley's physical appearance and goes on to recount his visit to the Moravians in Germany. There is a full discussion of George Whitefield and the celebrated predestination controversy. Other disputes involved the Moravians and 'stillness', the Anglicans and the whole matter of church order and lay preaching. We have the vexed question of 'convulsions' and other strange phenomena. All the while the zealous itineration continued: the London-Bristol-Newcastle triangle in England, with developments in Wales and Cornwall, Scotland and Ireland. The

emerging structures are described, societies, circuits, quarterly meetings and Conference, though Dr Rack concludes that 'In the end it was Wesley's authority, with or without the Conference, that mattered' and 'Despite a degree of power-sharing, then, Wesley kept holding the reins in his own hands to the end.'

The chapter aptly entitled 'Brothers in Love' paints a picture of that 'uneasy colleague' Charles Wesley, his personality, his hymns, his happy marriage and notably his 'bustling intervention' in the whole matter of his brother and Grace Murray, as 'a deliberate if well-intentioned wrecker'. This tortuous episode is expertly chronicled by Dr Rack, who describes it as a debacle. An unsympathetic observer might see elements of pantomime, but in the end Wesley's unsatisfactory marriage to Mary Vazeille, though not on the rebound we are assured, became 'one of the black legends in the Wesley canon'.

It is impossible here to do little more than list some of the topics which are addressed in Part 3, the major issue of Perfectionism, Wesley's preaching style, his attitude to culture, his views on education as seen at Kingswood school, his political opinions. The great themes pass under review: justification, holiness, faith and works, Calvinism and Arminianism, assurance, antinomianism, final perseverance, church and sacraments. All are handled with a sure touch. And Dr Rack poses the intriguing question: why did Wesley, who advocated as Methodism's special testimony 'Christian perfection' or 'perfect love' or 'entire sanctification', never himself claim to have attained it? Was he excessively self-critical?

There is a full discussion of Methodist religious experience, conversion, assurance and doubt, prayer, visions and dreams. A chapter is given over to the later phase of the Calvinist controversy, with Fletcher of Madeley on one side and on the other the learned but vitriolic Augustus Toplady, who had plenty of mud to sling at Wesley, the 'old fox'. Dr Rack sees the controversy as inevitable, with the protagonists left in their original entrenched positions. But he succeeds admirably in penetrating the 'fog of vituperation'.

Finally we have the culmination of Wesley's 'irregularities', his decision to ordain presbyters and 'superintendents', partly in response to the situation among the 'needy sheep' in America. The 'controversial and suspect' Thomas Coke figured largely here, to the horror of Charles, who felt that Coke had taken advantage of John's senility and considered that 'ordination is separation'.

There is a moving account of Wesley's last days and his death. His travelling and preaching continued until his final illness. He died on 2

March 1791, in his eighty-eighth year. 'The best of all is God is with us.' There was to be no hearse, no pomp.

In his 'Postlude' Dr Rack presents his final assessment of John Wesley's personality and piety. 'To penetrate the inner springs of this personality is not easy', he confesses. It is in this section that we come closest to Wesley the man, and savour the opinions of the earliest biographers. There was his early rising, incessant travelling, fastidious neatness, his routine of prayer and meditation. Did he pursue power for its own sake or in order to hold his movement together? Was he insensitive to ordinary human feelings? There are some surprises here, not least in the 'astonishing confession' to Charles in 1766.

Much has been omitted in the review of this notable work. There may be more light yet to break forth on the subject of John Wesley but it is difficult to believe that this masterly and closely reasoned survey will be superseded, though the experts may disagree with some of the conclusions reached. It is recommended to all who wish to dig deeply, and rewardingly, into eighteenth-century church history. Those who prefer conventional hagiography, 'emollient portrayal' as Dr Rack calls it, or who need some light bedtime reading, had better look elsewhere.

Robert Thompson, Belfast

The Century of the Holy Spirit: 100 years of Pentecostal and Charismatic renewal, 1901-2001

Vinson Synan

Thomas Nelson, Nashville, Tennessee, 2001; xi+484pp.; ISBN 0-7852-4550-2

On any reckoning this is an ambitious work; thorough, detailed and full of information not otherwise easily accessible. Vinson Synan, a pastor and academic, has assembled a team of mainly American contributors to chronicle 'the century of the Holy Spirit'. The preface identifies Pentecostal and charismatic renewal 'as the most important religious movement of the entire twentieth century'. The book sets out to try to explain the different streams that have emerged among both Pentecostals and Charismatics.

Chapters 1 and 2 cover introductory material; chapter 1 giving an overview of the century and chapter 2 tracing the roots of the movement, finding these especially in Wesley and the teaching on the 'Second Blessing'. These chapters, by Synan himself, are inevitably summary but have many interesting insights.

Subsequent chapters deal with various aspects of the renewal movement. Chapters 3-6 focus on Pentecostal and later charismatic churches. Chapter 3 tells of the Azusa Street revival where, in 1906, a significant explosion of charismatic gifts occurred. Pen portraits are given of significant figures such as W. J. Seymour and W. E. Durham. The significance of the 1910 World Missionary Conference is referred to in the global expansion of Pentecostalism, as is the spread of the movement in Russia in spite of persecution and its growth in Africa and Latin America.

Chapters 5 and 6 deal with the emergence of holiness movements in the Pentecostal Churches, and significant figures such as C. Mason and C. P. Jones are considered. There is a useful treatment of the famous evangelist, Aimee Semple McPherson.

Chapters 7, 8 and 9 cover renewal movements in the mainline denominations. Figures such as Dennis Bennett, Alexander Boddy and Oral Roberts are noted. Lutherans, Methodists, Baptists and Mennonites and new developments such as the Church of the Nazarene are sketched. Chapter 9 deals with renewal in the Catholic Church and the significance of events in a retreat house in Pittsburgh in 1967. This is one of the better chapters of theological reflection, including a brief note on the significance of Alpha courses.

Chapter 10 speaks of the significance of women in the renewal movements and of the significance of women for these movements. There are portraits of such important figures as Agnes Ozman, the young holiness preacher, Hannah Whittall Smith and Aimee Semple McPherson. More recently the impact of women in the media and in scholarship is noted.

Chapters 11 and 12 take up the story of African and Latin American Pentecostalism. Black Pentecostalism and Neopentecostalism and their significant figures are covered. The diversity of Latin American Pentecostalism is emphasised.

The final three chapters concentrate on the post World War II scene with study of healers and televangelists and the contemporary scene. The 'three waves' of renewal are outlined and statistics provided about the current strength of the various communities. An appendix – beginning somewhat arbitrarily in 200 BC – provides a chronology of renewal in the Holy Spirit. A colour outline provides a timeline and genealogy tree. There are numerous insets dealing with particular figures and many illustrations. Each chapter is followed by suggested reading.

This book is essential reading for anyone who wants to know more about the history of renewal movements in the past hundred years. It is

well documented and readable although, as with all symposia, the chapters vary in interest and cogency. For this reviewer, however, there are a number of weaknesses.

Two minor points can be made. The first is that there is sometimes tedious overlap between some of the chapters; more careful editing might have eliminated some of this. The second relates to presentation; many insets are hard to read because of the fairly light printing on grey paper.

More seriously the book seems to lack overall balance. The chapters are written by enthusiasts, in itself a good thing but there is little attempt to evaluate the experiences described. The book is history rather than theology but there is too much description and too little analysis. In particular, biblical and theological discussion is very thin and there is little attempt to relate renewal movements to other things happening in the twentieth-century church.

The emphasis is mainly American but Synan recognises this in his preface and sees the need for another book ranging more widely. It is a book to read but one to read with care and discernment.

Bob Fyall, St. John's College, Durham

Niebuhr and His Age

Charles C. Brown

Trinity Press International, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, 2002; 333pp., ISBN 1-56338-375-6

Niebuhr was part of an entire movement towards a more social and caring world. A world which though hard won through world wars, local wars and cold war may be on the verge of being lost in our time. It is pleasing therefore to greet the republication of Charles C. Brown's work *Niebuhr and His Age*. Although at times a little hagiographical in style this does not detract from a wonderful and a full-blooded account of the man and his work. A man who gave to the vast ranks of the church the prayer which begins, 'God grant me the serenity...'

It is very important especially at this time to keep in focus those who lived through the Great Depression, the end of empires, the rise and fall of the Third Reich, the Cold War and the 60's revolutions. Niebuhr's work remains contemporary because of the issues he grappled with. His constant plea that we might see secular issues from the perspective of the nature of God revealed through his justice is still central to the way we may perceive politics.

At the heart of his work is his pursuit of ethics. Central to this were his views on the fallibility of humanity and its need of a saviour. It is not easy for someone who lived through the Second World War and the horrors of Holocaust and nuclear attack to accept with ease the liberal positive attitude to sinful humanity and now its postmodern replacement of, 'We're all OK!' For Niebuhr, his Christian Realism was the only true answer in a century of anxiety and indifference.

For the student, Niebuhr clearly stands in the Neo-orthodox stream of theological enquiry. However his experience of social need was informed by the understanding of Gandhi's experience and writing. His visits to Germany before and after 1939-45 gave his theology its strong basis in reality, as did his experience in Detroit. Space does not allow for his academic abilities to be commented on or his involvement in founding the World Council of Churches.

The writer gives a clear survey of all the historical and social issues of Niebuhr's life. This is a great book if you know nothing of any of these issues because although these matters are not treated lightly, they are communicated in a clear and easy way.

For the scholar, Charles C. Brown attempts to improve upon other works, particularly that of R. W. Fox's *Reinhold Niebuhr: A Biography* (1985), and in this he succeeds. In his Appendix B he clearly states the areas in which he has chosen to do this. This appended essay is good reading for those interested in the development of the study of Niebuhr.

There is much pleasure and stimulation to be had in re-visiting this material and especially his copious quotes. Brown is without doubt a fan, but what a fine fan. He is refined and insightful, generous to all including those with whom he disagrees. There is a possibility with the production of a second edition that this work may become the classic work – which distinction some American reviewers already claim for it.

In this book there are good summaries of the vast corpus of his writings. These are succinct and pleasurable to read. The quotes are well chosen and although at times lengthy this does not detract from the flow of each chapter.

Having said all this I am not surprised that the publishers decided to make this book once again available to the many and varied readers of theology.

Robert Pickles, Chaplain, Strathallan School

A Theology of Compassion: Metaphysics of Difference and the Renewal of Tradition

Oliver Davies

SCM Press, London, 2001; 376pp., £25; ISBN 0 334 02833 7

Anyone buying this book to obtain a practitioner's guide in pastoral care or mission practice is in for a big shock. Be not deceived by the main title. The 'long-awaited' book by Oliver Davies is stern stuff and primarily a work of systematic theology in the modern sense. It plunges into an engagement with key linguistic philosophers and also tackles a whole range of weighty topics starting with classical ontology, a constructive ontology of the self, epistemology, Trinity, incarnation and eucharist. The latter two get much lighter treatment than the others. Showing considerable compassion himself, the author has constructed the book so that the intricate philosophical analysis can be leapfrogged (80 pages in all) straight into his own work of reformulation without feeling too much of a jolt on landing.

Underlying everything is the conviction that classical metaphysics and its abstract objectifying of 'being' is well past its sell-by date, but that we can, and must, hang on to our perception of the self as a continuous transcendent 'I' or 'being'. Only because of the reality of this self and its recognition of other such 'selves' can there be 'compassion' – the opening up of the self in vulnerability and self-risk to another self. 'In so far as this affirmation includes kenosis or self-emptying and self-giving, the existence of I is dialectically intensified.'

Also central to this reconstructed metaphysic is the notion of speech as the medium of being. Davies wants to move beyond theologies of 'being-as-relation' into a theology that can sit more comfortably in the postmodern world of critical linguistics. So language is key, and it begins with God and the 'silence' of the Trinity. But out of silence 'God spoke and the speaking was his Son'. Trinitarian life is a 'multiple, perichoretic dialogue of Persons in relation with Persons'. Like Moltmann, the author is committed to the public nature of the Trinitarian life, a life that is opened up and made manifest to us in the personal interactions of the Trinity. Human compassion, the dispossessing of the self, is the yielding of the self into this creative flow of Trinitarian speech. It is primarily the Trinitarian dimension which carries the book well beyond philosophy into theology and makes it a serious engagement of theology with postmodern thought.

Davies achieves all this without being a pushover for postmodernism. He strongly reaffirms the 'self'. He takes the debate about language and

text seriously but does not allow linguistic analysis to determine the nature of self. And doctrines such as Trinity and incarnation are central. But it is just here that the limitations of such a wide-ranging study appear. Although the possibilities for, say, Christian mission could be enormous, the subject is explicitly handled in only one page. The incarnation fares little better and the ecclesiology could easily expand. But we may be bleating too soon. For the last page announces a planned second volume. Hopefully, that work will develop the wider promise of the impressive Trinitarian theology of compassion formulated here.

Roy Kearsley, South Wales Baptist College/ Cardiff University

Christianity in a Post-Atheist Age

Clive Marsh

SCM Press, London, 2002; 149pp., £9.95; ISBN 0 334 02869 8

Clive Marsh is a white, heterosexual, Protestant, working-class male from Liverpool, married to a Methodist minister, who has travelled a long way from his evangelical origins. Much of his own Christian life and academic endeavour, he says, has been spent exploring the tension between what preachers were saying and what his open Bible actually said.

Marsh points out that religion today has not simply become privatised, but channelled into a host of other activities; these have in fact had their own political and social impact. He also observes that the primary Christian groupings of the future may be theological movements and spiritual traditions rather than denominations.

This book is packed with nuggets of common sense, truth painfully discovered, and controversial judgements. Examples of the last might be: you cannot be political without being party political; or, as soon as you give someone a theological education, you turn them into a liberal. But to be fair, Marsh is often using 'liberal' in its proper 'Christian humanist' sense.

Marsh still sees himself as essentially a 'chastened liberal' in theology, and Schleiermacher is one of his heroes. But he is not doctrinaire. In spite of pluralism, he recognises that religion must be concerned with the Absolute, even if a religion errs when it claims it has found it. Here it would be useful for Marsh to engage in dialogue with a more conservative position, and examine what in fact is meant by 'knowing' and 'finding'.

To be viable today, Christianity must show that it works, and connects with people's lives. Marsh is advocating a 'new Christian liberalism' which will accept the public role of Christianity. He identifies consumerism as one of the gods of our age. He affirms that faith and theology matter for society.

He advocates a 'new protesting Christianity' which puts God first, and a 'new Puritanism' which is an invitation to 'serious living'. But he accepts also that this form of Christianity may appeal more to people of his psychological type. This illustrates how Marsh very seldom actually engages with Christian doctrine. Most of his energy is spent on engaging, competently enough, with trends in society and across the churches.

But occasionally he speaks his mind, and it is a liberal mind. He believes in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, but it would not trouble him if the body of Jesus was simply destroyed by dogs. He is more comfortable with the immortality of the spirit than the resurrection of the body. He sees Christianity as a 'spacious and inviting thoroughfare, even if not a broad highway'.

Marsh does not wish to exclude the 'agnostic onlookers' and the 'theological non-realists' from the Christian search for God. He recognises that churches are in fact full of both kinds! While more conservative Christians might wish to come at this issue in a different way, it would be wrong to respond simply by writing off such enquirers, as happens all too often.

This book engages at a popular level with almost anything you might read about in one of the more serious Sunday papers. It is unclear, however, on what he bases his conclusions and prescriptions for the refreshing of the churches. You will search in vain for underlying doctrine, and I think Marsh would not expect such a searcher to join his 'new Liberal' movement. At the same time he is obviously comfortable with his job as secretary of the Methodist Faith and Order Committee to help oversee the doctrine and worship of the Methodist Church in Great Britain.

Marsh's main question is, 'Why should anyone be bothered with Christianity?' rather than 'Is Christianity true?' – though he does not deny the importance of the latter. To this extent, some readers will be left unsatisfied, while others will be challenged. Appendix 1 lists the main points of the book in the form of '95 discussion starters'.

Jock Stein, Tulliallan and Kincardine Parish Church

With the Grain of the Universe

Stanley Hauerwas

SCM Press, London, 2002; 249pp., £13.95; ISBN 0 334 02864 7

The Gifford Lectures are supposed to deal with natural theology, in practice often somewhat widely construed. Stanley Hauerwas decided to devote his series to a conversation with three distinguished predecessors, William James, Reinhold Niebuhr and Karl Barth.

Hauerwas sees James's concern with the will to believe, with its pragmatic consequences for life, as a sign that for him theology was really anthropology. He believes that Niebuhr then simply 'christianised' the arguments of James. Hauerwas thinks that 'the revelation that is required for us to know Niebuhr's god is but a reflection of ourselves'. For him, the focus was on the Jesus of ethics and not on a high Christology. Enter then Karl Barth, the hero of Hauerwas's tale, 'the greatest natural theologian of the Gifford lectures'. This judgement, that many would find paradoxical, is held to be possible because what is truly required is not argument but witness. In his concluding chapter, Hauerwas cites the Mennonite John Howard Yoder and Pope John Paul II (an intriguing pair of yoke-fellows) as outstanding witnesses of our time.

There is much to challenge and attract in this book, as Hauerwas seeks a close alignment of belief and practice, worship and thinking, so that, for him, 'theology is but a series of reminders to help the Christian pray faithfully'. Yet, while it is no doubt true that 'natural theology divorced from a full doctrine of God cannot help but distort the character of God', we are too often faced in this book with a fideistic take it or leave it. Hauerwas prophesies against what he calls 'evidentialism', but truth-seeking people are surely entitled to ask for motivations for belief. Of course, these motivations will never have the force of 'coercive arguments', or be free from the degree of circularity that goes with believing in order to understand. (The same is true in science.)

In fact, there is a place for both natural theology (hints of deity in general experience) and a theology of nature (the universe in a Trinitarian perspective). Hauerwas does not distinguish sufficiently between these two approaches. The former can help to put the question of God onto a modern or postmodern agenda. The latter can help believers to take science seriously and without fear. It is striking that both James and Niebuhr felt, quite mistakenly, the anxiety that science had imposed on us the picture of a closed universe, devoid of meaning.

The book makes quite considerable demands upon its readers, especially in its discussion of Barth's concept of *analogia fidei*. There is a

substantial (literal) subtext, contained in the lengthy footnotes in which Hauerwas conducts often illuminating conversations with contemporary thinkers. A particularly significant interlocutor for him is Alasdair MacIntyre. Overall, the text is as provocative and stimulating as one would have expected from its author.

John Polkinghorne, Queens' College, Cambridge

Max Weber in Theological Perspective

Thomas Ekstrand

Peeters, Leuven, 2000; 235pp.; ISBN 90-429-0944-7

The great German sociologist Max Weber thought there were two general problems for religion in the modern world. First, modern cultures were 'rationalized'. He did not mean by this that our thoughts and actions were reasonable or pleasant. Rather he meant that science, with its stress on evidence and rational argument, was so dominant that claims to knowledge based on revelation and concerning the supernatural were increasingly unconvincing. The plausibility of revelation was further reduced by his second problem: pluralism. From their own travels and from second-hand accounts, modern people know very well that other people serve other Gods. More than that, modern people are themselves divided between competing revelations. It is thus impossible to believe naively, simply taking for granted what everyone else believes. Modern people are forced to be 'heretics': having to choose their religion in a context where choice is not the easiest option.

There are three possible theological responses to Weber's depiction of modernity. John Milbank represents one of them: simply reject as inaccurate such descriptions of the problems facing belief. For Milbank, social science descriptions are no more compelling than any other set of ideas. Social science relativises by showing the social origins of belief. Social science is itself a matter of belief. It too has social origins. Hence it is no more compelling a source of descriptions of the world than are the Brothers Grimm. So Christians can ignore sociologists such as Weber and carry on as before: an option that may be personally satisfying but does not address the fact that the continuing steady decline in church adherence rates since 1945 suggests Weber was right.

Naturally the Milbank option did not occur to Weber. The choice he imagined lay between simply throwing yourself into the bosom of a particular religious tradition and re-shaping religion so that it did not struggle against modernity. As you cannot evaluate the truth claims of

religious propositions as conventionally presented, you might as well take a deep breath, pick an option and embrace it wholesale. If you cannot thus abandon your critical faculties, then you need to reconstruct religion.

Thomas Ekstrand's book is his doctoral thesis. It lays out those parts of Max Weber's social science that depict the problem of modernity in a fashion that is admirably clear given that English is not his mother-tongue. He is particularly good on the late nineteenth-century German philosophical background to Weber's thought and on his epistemology. Being a Christian who is not willing to abandon his reasoning powers in favour of unquestioning loyalty to some church, Ekstrand is determined to find some space in Weber for Christianity and some encouragement to theology. He appreciates that the loyal embrace response to modernity is limited. It is all very well for someone who has been positively raised in a particular religion to prefer submission over critical evaluation but such a strategy is unlikely to impress outsiders. It does not offer a viable apologetics or evangelistic programme. Given the fact of religious diversity, people have to be offered some good reasons to prefer one religion to another.

The strength of the book is in its first part: the elaboration of Weber's thought. Ekstrand says: 'I focus on such interpretations that make his texts maximally relevant for my integrative purpose. I shall show that there are ideas in Weber's thought which make it possible to accept certain forms of revisionary theologies without opting out of the cultural conditions of modernity' (p. 4). The weakness is that it takes him so long to get to outlining those theologies (basically the final chapter) that we get little more than programmatic advertisement. As he admits: 'I hint at a direction in which I think such revisions should go if they should be compatible with Weber's understanding of modernity' (p. 202).

Ekstrand is far clearer than Milbank but arguably no closer to reconciling Christianity and modernity. One problem of his sketch of the elements of what he calls 'Christian utopian realism' ('utopian' because theology should point to the good life; 'realism' because we need to distinguish ends from adequate means to achieve those ends) is that his desirable features of a theology will not produce a single product. Although his approach rules out certain sorts of belief, it does not result in a single best option. The second problem is that I am not sure that a good theology in Ekstrand's view would be particularly Christian. Indeed, given that most of what Christians have traditionally believed and enshrined in the credal statements of their various churches is outlawed by Ekstrand, it is a bit hard to see why he wants to retain the adjective 'Christian' for his utopian realism.

Academic theologians should find much of benefit in Ekstrand's work but I fear there is little in it for the Christian looking for confirmation of Christian orthodoxy or the evangelist looking for arguments that Christianity is especially well-suited to the modern world.

Steve Bruce, University of Aberdeen

Who Is Jesus? History in Perfect Tense

Leander E. Keck

Fortress, Minneapolis, 2001; x+207pp.; ISBN 0-8006-3170-6

This volume is a recent addition to the series 'Studies on Personalities of the New Testament' edited by D. M. Smith.

The title of the book might lead the browser to believe that this is simply another contribution to the 'quest of/for the historical Jesus'. Keck, however, believes that his book belongs in a somewhat different category (p. 2). The clue to understanding Keck's particular approach is found in the word 'is' in his title and then in his somewhat cryptic subtitle. Keck draws on Greek grammar for the concept of the 'perfect tense'. The ancient Greeks, he tells us, 'used the perfect tense of a verb to distinguish the ongoing import of completed action from its sheer occurrence in the past' (p. 1). Drawing on this metaphor, then, Keck admirably sets out to do justice both to the fact that Jesus cannot be understood apart from the historical reality of Jesus of Nazareth and to the fact that he also has ongoing significance for Christians.

The book is divided into five chapters. After the introductory chapter, Keck considers 'Jesus the Jew'; 'Jesus the Teacher'; 'Jesus' Death and the Living God'; and 'Jesus in the Moral Life'. Throughout these chapters there is plenty of helpful comment on the text of (primarily) the Synoptic Gospels read against the background of the OT and other non-canonical Jewish literature and in conversation with a substantial volume of recent scholarly literature. Most of the discussions are fairly standard fare for a modern book on Jesus, such as the helpful section on the kingdom of God. More distinctive and interesting – though entirely hypothetical – is the section on 'the Jew Jesus might have been' (pp. 52-5). Many readers will not be entirely satisfied with Keck's reading of the cross and the resurrection, but may be somewhat heartened by the extent to which he does read these events both historically and theologically.

In general, Keck adopts a positive approach to the reliability of the biblical text, distancing himself from more outlandish views. However,

he seems rather uncomfortable with the similarity of N. T. Wright's portrait of Jesus to the Christ of Christian faith (p. 46) and he regards some portions of the Gospels as substantially the result of the redactional creativity of the evangelists (e.g. pp. 89-90 on Matthew's discourses).

With respect to the 'contemporary significance' aspect of Keck's book, this is sometimes understood primarily in terms of the application of the words and actions of Jesus to the situations of the early Christian communities (e.g. pp.103ff.). At other times, however, he goes some way towards drawing out the significance of the biblical accounts for contemporary issues, such as Jewish-Christian relations (p. 62) and a substantially non-western Christian church (pp. 63-4). Sometimes one is left with the feeling that he has not dealt with some of the harder questions. His concluding reflection on what it means to live 'for Jesus' sake' is particularly potent.

In short, this book is a useful survey of the synoptic material from a constructive, though not evangelical perspective, which will provide the reader with a useful, though not entirely satisfactory, orientation to study of Jesus as a figure of history with more reflection on his ongoing significance for Christians than is normally found in such works.

Alistair I. Wilson, Highland Theological College, Dingwall

The Practice of Theology: a Reader

Colin E. Gunton, Stephen R. Holmes and Murray A. Rae (eds)
SCM Press, London, 2001; 484pp., £15.95; ISBN 0-334-02816-7

With only one serious drawback, this is a magnificent book. It is a collection of source readings, not in practical theology but in theological method. The editors, from the University of London, have made a quite admirable selection. An illuminating essay introducing each section surveys the issues at stake and there is a three-line introduction to each reading guiding us what to look for.

There are three main sections: Sources for Theology, The Nature of Theological Claims, and Doing Theology Today. Each section has 3-5 subsections with divisions; in each division there are several examples of influential writers in that field on the timeline 180 AD to the present. Thus we end up exploring:

- Where do I go to talk about God: Scripture, tradition, reason, experience?

- Can we know anything about God anyway? How do we know what we know? The nature of religious language. Neutral and committed knowledge.
- What's special about doing theology in our day? Modernity and postmodernity. 'Local' theologies: liberation theology and feminist theology are the examples taken. Christian theology in a multi-faith world.

A fourth section is an extended essay by Colin Gunton on doing theology in the modern western university. Three useful appendices provide details of authors and sources of documents, a basic timeline from Plato to Vatican II and a glossary of technical terms used.

There is collected here in one volume a most expertly chosen selection of the germinal things so many of us probably remember vaguely and can now find easily, thanks to Gunton *et al.* Origen putting the allegorical interpretation of Scripture in a perfect four lines; the particular contributions of Barth, Torrance, so many. And the balance is admirable. Here are Jonathan Edwards, Warfield and Newbigin as well as Anselm, Feuerbach and Mary Daly's feminism. The passion for theology, moreover, shines through every editorial comment: the conviction that the Jesus event changes everything. And all (well, nearly all) clearly explained.

The range of authors selected is immense. Of course one could carp. The emphasis is western. From the sixteenth century there are only Luther, Hubmaier, John of the Cross and Calvin: not Beza, Bucer, Cranmer, Knox, Latimer, Tyndale. Of scholastics we have Aquinas and Duns Scotus but not Boethius, Lombard, Bonaventura. But what impresses is not what is omitted but how much has been included, and how wisely.

The only disappointment is the lack of an index. In a work of this sort the omission is unconscionable. However, this book is an absolute gem: an education in theological method in one volume.

C. Peter White, Sandyford Henderson Memorial Church Glasgow

For the Beauty of the Earth – A Christian Vision for Creation Care

Steven Bouma-Prediger

Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, MI, 2001; 234pp.; ISBN 0-8010-2298-3

This book forms part of the 'Engaging culture' series edited by William A. Dryness and Robert K. Johnston. The series 'is designed to help

Christians respond with theological discernment to our contemporary culture'. This volume does just that, and in part is a response to the many Christians the author has encountered who see no connections between theology and ecology. The book succeeds in its two stated aims: to put Christian theology and contemporary ecology into dialogue, and to persuade convincingly that authentic Christian faith requires ecological obedience. To care for the earth is integral to Christian faith, is the author's central claim.

The first chapter enchanted me. Inspiring descriptions of three very different habitats: forest, mountain and lake, succeeded in instilling a renewed wonder and awe at the beauty and intricacy of the natural world. There is also an emphasis on the importance of identifying our place, as a starting point for caring for the earth.

After detailing the standard list of environmental woes, the book goes on to a very lengthy rebuttal of the argument that Christianity is to blame for our current environmental crises, while admitting that 'while the Christian faith is not necessarily anti-ecological, we have too often acted as if it were'. The next 97 pages propose a theology and ethic of earth-care in great depth and detail.

This book offers a very thorough treatment of the theology of creation care. It presupposes no previous knowledge, and is therefore suitable for newcomers. However, its sheer length and depth ensure that the main readership will probably be theologians, theology students or committed lay readers. Although most theological terms are explained, not all are, and there is frequent use of Latin terms which are not translated, leaving this particular reader frustrated.

The author quotes from other authors at length, often using three or more quotes to illustrate each point. While this offers a useful window onto the relevant literature, it adds to the wordiness of the book and contributes to a loss of momentum. Contemporary and historical ethical positions on creation care are also explained in perhaps more detail than necessary.

This book is ideal for those who want a detailed theology of creation care. However, for those seeking a more succinct, but equally persuasive, treatment, a range of other books are available, such as 'Greenhouse Theology' by Ron Elsdon. Elsdon's book has the added attraction of addressing the question of what we can do as practical out-workings of this theology and illustrates the good work that some churches and Christian organisations are already doing. These areas are not covered by Bouma-Prediger. Lastly, the context of the book is American, and it will therefore appeal especially to an American readership, but I have no doubt

that it will both inspire and inform anyone new to the theme of creation care.

Victoria Beale, Society, Religion and Technology Project

The End of the World. A Theological Interpretation

Ulrich H. J. Körtner

Westminster John Knox, Louisville, 1995; 367pp., \$31; ISBN 0 664 25631 7

Do not be fooled. This book is not what the title makes it seem. There is not too much theology, at least as the word is normally understood in Britain and America. And it does not shed too much light on the end of the world either. Instead it is a dialogue with the idea of 'apocalyptic'. Why is there a genre called apocalyptic? What function does it perform? What are its merits for today?

The author's sourcing reveals his sympathies. We frequently see the names of Hegel, Kierkegaard, Schelling and Heidegger – with Jasper, Tillich and Sengler bringing up the rear. The most common word inhabiting the discussion? 'Anxiety'. We are looking at a typically German approach: erudite, critical and dialectical. Körtner is happy to wear his existentialist sympathies clearly on his sleeve – and on his buttonhole and bonnet as well! He reveres the whole tradition right up to and including Bultmann. Even the formidable combination of Fuchs, Ebeling, Käsemann, Conzelmann and Bornkamm is not enough to overthrow the wisdom of Bultmann (p. 236)! Bultmann's scepticism on the New Testament takes its toll on Körtner's confidence in a traditional Christian apocalyptic. Moreover, the author spends more time with non-Christian apocalyptic, especially in Judaism, than with the New Testament versions.

All this may sound completely unpromising for traditional believers looking for more light on a dark subject. However, it *is* an illuminating study, though not recommended for the casual reader. Körtner forces us to take 'the end of the world' seriously. Western society has become accustomed to the myth of progress. That is, a 'bad end has not been figured in'. Again and again he kicks away our supports, insisting that we face the chilling fact: the human race is now at last capable of self-destruction in but a few moments. What should theology be like in such a time? It should be the theology of apocalyptic. Apocalyptic is designed to challenge this easy optimism in a day when any awareness of catastrophe, after a while, vanishes away. Apocalyptic draws our attention

to that which is beyond history and now is the hour for us to make this journey.

At the heart of apocalyptic is anxiety (which the author analyses repeatedly). Apocalyptic is primarily two things: 'pastoral care for those plagued by anxiety' and exhortation 'to repent or to transform one's behaviour and life'. Wisdom for all of us – even though we cannot, like Körtner, go on to emasculate the concept of apocalyptic into a way of handling anxiety Christianly.

This is a deep and haunting book but strictly for the patient enthusiast. For such a reader it will yield many fruitful and sobering thoughts – but you will need to be willing to think as the German philosophical tradition thinks and to suspend frustration at Körtner's fairly chronic and disappointing scepticism towards the New Testament!

Roy Kearsley, South Wales Baptist College/ Cardiff University

Reluctant Saint? A Theological Biography of Fletcher of Madeley

Patrick Streiff

Epworth Press, Peterborough, 2001; 406pp., £19.95; ISBN 0-7162-0546-7

This study of the life and work of John William Fletcher of Madeley (1729-1785), a Swiss-born Anglican clergyman and the leading figure of the second generation in Wesleyan Methodism, has been produced, appropriately, by a Swiss theologian. Patrick Streiff is Lecturer in Modern Church History at the University of Lausanne and a minister of the United Methodist Church. A revised version of his doctoral dissertation (University of Bern, 1983) and translated from the original German by G. W. S. Knowles, this is a work of careful and lucid scholarship. Streiff provides us with an authoritative and fascinating account of Fletcher's development as a Christian, pastor and theologian and, in doing so, makes a significant contribution to an understanding of eighteenth-century Methodism. Extensive use is made of primary sources, including many previously unpublished letters of Fletcher. In an appendix is listed, with sources, all letters from and to Fletcher and all his written works. This work will be indispensable for future Fletcher research.

Streiff divides his material into five chronologically ordered parts. Part I traces Fletcher's early years (1729-1750) from his birth as Jean Guillaume de la Fléchère, in the town of Nyon on Lake Geneva, to his departure for England in 1750. Particular attention is paid to the enduring

influence on him of his theologically minded uncle, Théodore Crinsoz de Bionens, and of the 'reasonable orthodoxy' (the form in which the Dutch-English early Enlightenment had come to fruition within the church) to which he was exposed while studying at Geneva.

Part II deals with Fletcher's first ten years in England (1750-1760). His service as private tutor in the Hill family, his early contacts with the Methodists and growing friendship with the Wesleys, his deep spiritual struggles and experience of grace in conversion, are all recounted in gripping detail. Unpublished letters to his family shed new light on Fletcher's life during this period.

Part III covers his first ten years as Vicar of Madeley in Shropshire (1760-1770). Opposed by some for his 'Methodist' style of preaching, Fletcher devoted himself to the task of bringing the gospel to the entire population. His patent sanctity made a deep impression. Many people came to faith through his Christ-centred preaching. John Wesley, who had disapproved of Fletcher's taking this position, made repeated but unsuccessful attempts to persuade him to leave Madeley to play a national leadership role in the wider Methodist movement. Nevertheless, Fletcher associated with the itinerant Methodist preachers in Shropshire and with efforts to form unions of Anglican clergy who were close to Methodism. He was successfully persuaded by Lady Huntingdon to take general oversight of the new theological college at Trevecca, as duties at Madeley permitted. The college was open to both Calvinistic and Wesleyan Methodists and Fletcher, who saw himself as mediating between these two streams, hoped to be able to promote an ecumenical spirit and greater understanding between the two.

Part IV is the most theologically meaty part of the work. Here, Streiff deals with Fletcher's contribution to the controversies which developed in the 1770s between Arminian and Calvinistic Methodists. Fletcher's theological position fundamentally reflected that of John Wesley whose teachings it was his aim to defend. While Fletcher emerged as the leading theologian of Wesleyan Methodism, his constant aim was reconciliation between the two groups. The conflicting understandings of soteriology, in particular the place of human responsibility in the process of salvation, which he saw as central to the controversy were not, he believed, of such a nature as should undermine the fellowship of Christian believers. The dispute over the doctrine of perfection he understood as due to mutual misunderstanding of the differing frames of reference within which either side approached the subject. The irenic spirit in which he conducted his polemics is notable.

In Part V attention is given to Fletcher's last years (1778-1785), including a three-year convalescence in his home town of Nyon. His later literary activity, various projected theological works and his continuing, though limited, work among the Wesleyan Methodists are described. John and Charles Wesley both judged him the right man to take over leadership of the movement. In the event, however, Fletcher predeceased them both. Although tensions existed in their relationship, John Wesley regarded Fletcher as unequalled among all he knew in devotion to God. It was thus inevitable that 'against his will John William Fletcher became the saint of Methodism' (p. 299).

This scholarly yet accessible study will appeal to a wide range of readers and should do much to rescue from neglect a life whose true greatness earlier hagiographical treatment perhaps tended to obscure. A fine bibliography and index enhance the usefulness of the work.

Angus Morrison, St Columba's Old Parish Church, Stornoway

Holiness to the LORD: A Guide to the Exposition of the Book of Leviticus

Allen P. Ross

Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, 2002; 496pp., \$32.99; ISBN 0-8010-2285-1

'Preached any good series of sermons recently? How about a series on Leviticus?' No, I did not really think you would have, but here is just the book which might whet your appetite for such a task by its lucid and insightful focus on how to discern the contemporary application of Leviticus. Though Ross shows that he is well acquainted with recent literature on Leviticus, his aim is not to provide an exhaustive commentary. Instead he focuses on the more neglected but nonetheless vital task of examining how the move should be made from the Old Testament text to a modern, Christian exposition and sermon derived from on it. The author does this in traditional fashion by close analysis of the text in its original context with a view to identifying in the wider setting of the whole of Scripture the timeless theological ideas that are expressed in the particular passage being examined. For the purposes of this analysis Leviticus is divided into 44 major sections, and after the theological core of each section is identified, a general summary of the passage is provided along with a detailed outline. This is not a sermon outline as such. The objective is not to short circuit sermon preparation, but to show how the passage should be analysed with a view to

identifying its significant features. There is then discussion of how the text should be expounded before concluding observations set out a succinct thematic summary of the passage and its relationship with other Scriptures and especially with the development of corresponding themes in the New Testament.

The task undoubtedly presents a great challenge because of the distance between the modern reader and Leviticus. Ross again uses the technique he had employed to good effect in his earlier study on Genesis, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis* (Baker, 1988), and he continues to apply it here with the same consummate clarity and skill.

However, Leviticus is undoubtedly a theological book, and commentaries of any sort have to set out conclusions on a variety of controversial matters. I found it surprising that more was not said about atonement – a key theme in Leviticus. The subject is first discussed at length on pages 54-6 and then later in passing on pages 92-4, but Ross does not discuss the view that the verb *kipper*, 'to atone', is denominative and that the basic idea is derived from the noun *koper*, 'ransom'. He prefers to link the root with an Akkadian term 'to wipe off' and identifies its ritual use as a term for expiating the potential wrath of God, not for appeasing his kindled wrath. The emphasis on the need for a substitute to purge the guilty through the shedding of blood is clearly and repeatedly brought out.

One expository model that Ross develops to bring out the parallels between Leviticus and modern situations operates at three levels (p. 214). At one level applications refer to the people of God who are portrayed in both Testaments as a 'kingdom of priests', and at another level the connection between Aaron and Jesus as high priests is employed. These are both uncontroversial, but the third level of correspondence based on the priests – who are identified as Israel's hereditary priesthood and the church's divinely appointed ministers – is an unusual Protestant analogy which needs to be carefully formulated and which might well be misapplied by less careful hands. Ross makes clear what he intends by it when in his treatment of Leviticus 8 he summarises the key theme of the chapter as 'Those who lead the congregation in spiritual service must be fully consecrated to the LORD'.

Another area where Ross's understanding of the text departs from the traditional reformed view is as regards the Sabbath, where he rejects the Sabbath as a creation ordinance and considers the obligation to observe it as being on a different footing from the rest of the moral law and argues there is no continuing requirement to make one day in seven special.

Each section of the book is provided with an appropriate bibliography which should lead to a deeper appreciation of the message of Leviticus. However, there are no indexes of any sort. This is therefore not a book that is easily accessed with just a general idea of a theme, or to see if it sheds light on a particular New Testament passage. In such circumstances the reader has to have prior awareness of which sections of Leviticus are of potential relevance before the material in the book can be successfully located. But it is worth searching for answers because there is much here to stimulate.

John L. Mackay, Free Church College, Edinburgh

The Faith of Israel: A Theological Survey of the Old Testament (Second Edition)

William J. Dumbrell

Apollon, Leicester, 2002; 347pp., £16.99; ISBN 0 8010 2532 X

The second edition of William Dumbrell's *Faith of Israel* reminds me of a certain well-known TV advertisement – 'it does exactly what it says on the tin' ... or 'on the cover', in this case. Dumbrell's fine work is all that it claims to be: a *survey* of the main *theological* themes of each book of the Old Testament. Which, when one thinks about it, is a mammoth task which, it must be said, Dumbrell undertakes extremely well.

The first edition of this book was written in the early 1980s, so Dumbrell felt that an update was needed if its relevance was to be maintained. He suggests, 'Further work on the text has produced new insights as to the purpose of the canon and how the individual units contribute. Information gleaned from scholarship since the early '80s has been included. Basically, however, if the content has changed somewhat, the thrust of the earlier edition has been maintained.' So if you already have the first edition and are wondering whether or not you should buy the second edition, then the answer to that question very much depends upon your reasons for buying the book in the first place. The theological themes of the Psalms have not changed since the early '80s; the discussion in the secondary literature, however, has moved on greatly. So if one is looking for a discussion of OT themes then the second edition is not necessary, but if an awareness of the state-of-play in contemporary scholarship is desired then the second edition is, indeed, an important update. Generally speaking, Dumbrell seems to take a slightly more 'canonical' approach in the second edition, the main themes of each OT book being identified with sections of the text of that book. This

approach seems preferable to the perhaps, more 'thematic' discussion of the first edition. Also, the larger format of the second edition does make for a better reading experience.

The book is divided up into four sections following the canonical structure of the Hebrew Old Testament – the Books of the Law (Genesis-Deuteronomy), Former Prophets (Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings), Latter Prophets (Isaiah-Malachi, apart from Lamentations and Daniel) and the Writings (Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ruth, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Esther, Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, Chronicles). Some may quibble that a Christian approach to the interpretation of the OT should follow the Christian canonical structure. However, as Dumbrell's central thesis is to present the scriptural basis of faith of the 'pre-Christian era' covenant community and his task is primarily an exegetical one (*i.e.* seeking to understand the themes of each OT book as the original hearer would), it seems entirely appropriate to follow the structure of the Hebrew canon with its Law, Prophets and Writings development. This approach also makes a broad connection between the faith of Israel and the historical development of Israel, two foci which are largely separated in other introductions to the OT. Whilst the exact nature of the link between these two areas of study will always be a question which is open to some degree of debate, this does seem to be a debate which is worth having. The publication of the second edition of *The Faith of Israel* may well act as a catalyst in reawakening discussion about the relationship between Israel's faith and her history.

Each chapter varies somewhat in content dependent upon the length and significance of the biblical book under discussion – 26 pages for the lengthy prophecy of Isaiah, whereas Nahum receives less than three pages. The ambitiously holistic nature of Dumbrell's work will inevitably leave some readers disappointed with the attention given to individual books. By way of example, it strikes me that given the significance of the Psalms in the hearts and minds of the community of believers, the treatment of the Psalter is unduly brief, focussing as it does on no more than three major psalmic themes. Doubtless, individual readers may feel that other books deserve greater attention than they receive, however, on the whole the attention paid to each individual book seems appropriate to their size and significance.

Each chapter includes discussion of the structure, themes and theological significance of the OT book under consideration, including comment on the placement and impact of that book within the larger canon of the Old Testament. Perhaps the best way to give a flavour of Dumbrell's work is to interact with a single chapter by way of example.

Chapter 5, as one would expect, brings the Book of Deuteronomy under consideration. Dumbrell starts off with a brief summary of the theology of Deuteronomy: 'The book is a collection of words of command and instruction, words of preaching and exhortation contained in a series of speeches by Moses just prior to entering the Promised Land. The speeches underline the redemptive grace of God, to whom obedience is to be expected. Deuteronomy is thus a book of Torah, a book of preached law. Torah is the instruction and teaching that, grounded in the Exodus redemption, will retain the Promised Land' (p. 57). He then goes on to outline Deuteronomy's background in ANE suzerain-vassal treaties, prior to a structural analysis of the whole book. This analysis, broadly speaking, divides consideration of the book into sections following the pattern of the various Mosaic speeches in Deuteronomy. However, this helpful idea wavers a bit towards the end of this introductory section, leaving the reader a little unsure as to quite what is to be done with Deuteronomy 31-34. Within these broader sections, a brief summary is given defining the content of each subsection or chapter of the canonical text. So, as part of the consideration of Moses' second address, we are given a brief and helpful rundown of the content to be found in each chapter, be it paraenetic or legal material.

The second major section of the chapter deals with the themes of Deuteronomy. Dumbrell picks out and discusses the major theological strands woven throughout the fifth book of the Law, discussing such concepts as the land, the altar law, rest, holy war, *torah*, law and love and, finally, deuteronomic humanitarianism. Each of these themes is given brief exegetical and theological consideration, bringing out some application from the observations made in the more descriptive initial consideration of the make-up of the book. Chapter 5 concludes with a paragraph-length summary of the Book of Deuteronomy and an equally brief overview of the Pentateuch. Most of the chapters follow the same or a similar pattern with descriptions of the content found in each OT book combined with discussions of its theological themes.

Dumbrell's book is an immensely helpful summary of and introduction to the theology of OT Israel. His analyses make sense of texts which are often difficult to understand as a whole without some background knowledge of setting, history and culture. He goes beyond the purely descriptive to answer the 'So what?' questions. Dumbrell's discussion of the theology of each OT book brings a real sense of significance to his consideration of the content of each book. I am quite sure that the theological similarities between Israel's faith and the contemporary Church's understanding of Christianity – similarities which

Dumbrell makes readily apparent in this book – will be a great eye-opener to many Christians who only rarely delve into the OT and view it as full of nothing but wars, genealogies, incomprehensible animal sacrifice and legalism. For these things, Dumbrell is to be roundly congratulated.

If I have a criticism, it is a relatively minor one: I am a little unsure to whom this book is addressed. I could not find an explicit statement describing the ‘target audience’ in this second edition. If to the scholar (and I am sure it is not), then the interaction with the secondary sources and discussion is too brief. If to the undergraduate student (and I suspect this may be the case), then some of the interaction with scholarship assumes too great a degree of knowledge. If to the ‘thinking Christian’ (who will benefit immensely from this book), then the interaction with the scholarly community is largely unnecessary. Drawing example from the Deuteronomy chapter once again, the reader is told that Deuteronomy 12-28 ‘has normally been associated with Josiah’s reforms of the late seventh century’ (p. 60). If Dumbrell’s book is addressed towards the theology undergraduate as an initiation into Deuteronomy studies, some additional explanatory information regarding the scholarly background to this thesis would be helpful. A brief summary of the theories of de Wette and Wellhausen, and how these have impacted studies in Deuteronomy would provide a very helpful framework for theology students encountering OT studies for the first time. One other detail that I think would benefit the readers of *The Faith of Israel* would be to have subject-specific bibliographies at the end of each chapter rather than a single comprehensive bibliography at the end of the book. This would provide an easy point of entry into more advanced studies in the scholarly literature surrounding each book of the OT.

However, these comments should not be allowed to colour the reader’s impression of the overall strength of this volume. William Dumbrell has written an excellent and very helpful introduction to the theology of the Old Testament – it is especially a book from which undergraduate theology students and Christians who are interested in doing more reading in the OT will benefit immensely. Dumbrell’s grasp of both the theological issues and scholarly debate is remarkable and *The Faith of Israel* is an excellent first port of call for anyone wishing to think seriously about the meaning and significance of any OT book.

Jamie Grant, Highland Theological College, Dingwall

Fertility and Faith: The Ethics of Human Fertilization

Brendan McCarthy

Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester, 1997; 288pp., £12.99; ISBN 0-85111-180-7

Every few weeks, it seems, there's some new development in human reproductive technology. Parents are choosing whether to conceive a boy or a girl; children have been born with genetic material from three parents; children are being born 'to order', to act as cell donors for ailing siblings; cloned human embryos have been produced.

Many of these developments are considered in the Warnock Report, and it certainly seems worth revisiting the Warnock debate. Mr McCarthy claims that 'A weakness of many Christian contributions to the Warnock debate was that... [o]pinions were expressed concerning this or that technique without first establishing a defensible moral framework for the discussion', and seeks to offer such a framework. After considering the relationship between morality and legislation, he examines the biblical passages relevant to the status of the embryo, and the status of the embryo in Christian thought through the ages. Having concluded that human embryos are 'bearers of God's image... and hence must be treated with the same respect and dignity as any other members of the human race', he goes on to tackle sexual ethics. Then from this generally conservative foundation, he addresses specific techniques and issues, such as artificial insemination by husband or by donor, *in vitro* fertilisation, and embryo research. Alas, since the book predates 'Dolly', human cloning is barely mentioned.

I regret to have to say that I found this book almost unreadable. This wasn't due to the content, although I did find the philosophical material hard going. (I'm neither a theologian nor an ethicist – just a parish minister with a science background.) Nor was it due to the exhaustive approach, which makes for some tedious repetition, as Mr McCarthy himself notes. It was mainly due to the writing style.

In my former career I was taught a useful rule of thumb for assessing readability. In a piece of writing for educated non-specialists, the average number of words per sentence and percentage of less familiar words should add up to around 30. If their sum is below 25, the writing may seem patronising; if it's above 35, many readers will struggle. On the page of the book which I analysed, 15% of the words were technical or polysyllabic, and there were 30 words per sentence on average. Neither would have been too bad on its own – 15% unfamiliar words is par for the course in technical writing, and 'highbrow' English uses around 30 words per sentence. But combine them...!

So I can't commend this book to anyone but specialists. And this is a great pity, since Mr McCarthy has put together a lot of valuable material, which I'd like to see more widely available. I found the historical conspectus of the Church's view of the human embryo especially useful. But someone who goes to this book to learn will have to work harder to get something from it than is reasonable.

Richard T. Corbett, Broxburn Parish Church

Revelation

Grant R. Osborne

Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, 2002; 869+xxpp., ISBN 0 8010 2299 1

This formidable commentary on the Book of Revelation, by the professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, is clearly the fruit of much reading and much thought. It is the third title to appear in the Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament series, under the general editorship of Moises Silva. The series, which is committed to the authority of Scripture, aims to be scholarly but readable, and particularly to meet the needs of preachers. It promises well.

After careful discussion, Osborne favours John the apostle as the author of the book and the reign of Domitian (mid 90s) as its date. He notes that the book is apocalyptic but not pseudonymous: he does not say that this is natural, since no-one in the first century imagined that the great canonical apocalypse of Daniel was pseudonymous, but it is in fact natural, as Josephus and other first-century evidence about Daniel shows. The uncanonical apocalypses produced by Daniel's host of imitators were of course pseudonymous, and Osborne is very well read in these also. He holds that the symbolism of the book should be explained against the background of first-century usage, especially apocalyptic. Of the traditional schools of interpretation of the book, he has least use for the historicist, but thinks that the other schools may be to some extent combined, though with a futurist emphasis. He thinks that the Beast and the False Prophet, though expressive of anti-Christian tendencies throughout history, will finally be revealed as individuals.

Osborne firmly calls the Beast the Antichrist, and identifies him with the antichrists of 1 John and with the Man of Sin of 2 Thessalonians. He holds that the Beast is a political figure, whereas the False Prophet is a religious figure. There are difficulties here, because the antichrists of 1 John and the Man of Sin of 2 Thessalonians are both clearly religious figures. They originate in the church (1 John 2:19; 2 Thes. 2:3) and

propagate heresy (1 John 2:22, 26; 4:2-3; 2 John 7; 2 Thes. 2:4, 9-12). It might be easier to identify them with the False Prophet, were it not that the False Prophet makes men worship the Beast (Rev. 13:12), whereas the Man of Sin claims to be worshipped himself (2 Thes. 2:4). Perhaps the Antichrist should rather be thought of as a corporate entity, both political and religious, not unlike present-day Rome, though much further sunk in error.

On the question of the Millennium, Osborne favours pre-millennialism, though not dispensationalism. He points out that in Jewish eschatology, both Essene and Pharisaic, a preliminary period following the coming of the Messiah is sometimes expected, before the final consummation, and he takes John's expectation to be the same. It is worth pointing out, however, that in Jewish eschatology there was only one eschatological war (that of Ezek. 38-39; Dan. 11:40-12:1; Zech. 12-14, and the dependant Pharisaic and Essene texts), not two, whereas pre-millennialism gives us an eschatological war before the millennium (that of Rev. 19:11-21) and another one after it (that of Rev. 20:7-10). Osborne points out that the Beast and the False Prophet lead the anti-Christian armies in the first war, but Satan himself in the second. However, when the war is anticipated in Revelation 16:12-16, all three leaders are spoken of. The definite article in Revelation 20:8 (*'the war'*, i.e. that of chs 16, 19) may be significant.

Altogether, this is a helpful and thought-provoking commentary.

Roger Beckwith, Oxford

Christian Mission in Western Society

Simon Barrow and Graeme Smith (eds)

Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, London, 2001; 270pp., £11.50; ISBN 0-85169246-X

This book is a selection of essays gathered together from two separate conferences, one on the theme of 'Mission in Western Society', and the other commemorating the 1400th anniversary of the death of Columba and the arrival of Augustine in Britain, a congruence of dates which provided the opportunity for contributors to contrast Celtic and Anglo-Saxon forms of Christianity.

Topics covered include such apparently diverse issues as the legacy of Columba, the current degree of Christian inculturation in Europe, feminist theology, issues surrounding mission in and from Black communities in the UK, and Christian political discourse, as well as

essays looking more specifically at mission and modernity. Most of the contributors are European, although an international perspective is provided by a Korean, an Indian and a South African. Theologically the vast majority share an ecumenical as opposed to an evangelical approach to the nature of Christian mission.

Sadly the book, while containing some helpful insights, does not really provide the kind of analysis of the contemporary situation which the title suggests it will do. This is in part due to its being a collection of papers from not one but two conferences. Inevitably there is a sense of only loose connectedness between many of the essays. The other thing which reduces its usefulness is that it is a book *by* theologians and missiologists *for* theologians and missiologists. Most of the essays are filled with terminology which those outside the discipline of missiology will find difficult, and some are so full of technical language as to be virtually impenetrable.

The ecumenical nature of the contributors means that there is an at least implicit acceptance of the pluralist position with regard to the uniqueness of Christ and the relationship with those of other faiths. There is therefore little attention paid to questions of the nature of evangelism and conversion. There is also a strong tendency to dismiss evangelicalism as a kind of retreat from the challenges which the transition from modernity to post-modernity presents. The irony of this is that in both the UK and the world, it is the Pentecostal churches which are the fastest growing. Only the articles by Joe Aldred and Allan Anderson take this into account. It is this which makes them especially important for evangelicals to read, though Aldred's in particular makes humbling reading as well. He is very critical of Western imperialism which has accompanied much Christian mission, and though he may be accused of overstating his case, all white Western Christians should take note of his views, especially as the balance of world Christianity swings (irrevocably?) away from the West to the Non-Western world.

Of the other contributions, the essays on Celtic Christianity by Adrian Hastings and Michael MacCraith are good value, especially as they effectively challenge claims that Celtic spirituality is the universal panacea for all Western Christianity's ills. Bert Hoedemaker's essay on mission after modernity is thought-provoking, and Simon Barrow's concluding chapter brings into focus many of the key issues which the contributors have touched on, albeit often rather tangentially. It would have been a better book altogether if this had been the opening chapter, and if contributors had then been invited to respond to his insights. However, the overriding impression is that any attempt to reflect on the challenge

of mission in western society must include insights from the evangelical and charismatic/Pentecostal wing of the church if it is to be truly helpful.

David Miller, International Christian College, Glasgow

Virtual Morality

Graham Houston

Apollos, Leicester, 1998; 224pp., £14.99; ISBN 0 85111 461 X

Graham Houston's *Virtual Morality* is an exploration of the interface between technology and Christian morality, and is particularly focussed on the moral issues raised by Virtual Reality systems. The book is based on Houston's 1996 PhD thesis. The subtitle, *Christian Ethics in the Computer Age*, hints at a wider scope, but in fact the book rarely, if ever, strays into areas of computer use apart from VR.

The study aims to work on the boundary between Christian ethics and the philosophy of technology. Houston makes the claim that philosophy of technology stands in the same relation to Christian ethics as philosophy of science does to systematic theology. Within the overall context of a view that there are such things as objective moral values, and that technology in general is not morally neutral but heavily value-laden, he explores the particular issues raised by computer-generated environments which present the participant with a simulation of some activity – exploring a remote planet, perhaps, or performing intricate surgery, or engaging in some form of combat – which is on the one hand utterly absorbing and life-like, yet on the other has no real outcome outside the simulated world. His concern is that by giving their participants the opportunity to do things which would be impossible, unlawful, or socially repugnant in real life, the designers of virtual environments may (deliberately or otherwise) be affecting people's real-world behaviour: that what they come to regard as acceptable within the 'game' may start to influence their conduct outside it; or, conversely, that the behaviour people are willing to engage in within the virtual world may, even though it results in no physical harm, be an indicator of the sort of (*e.g.*) murderous or lustful heart-attitude of which Jesus spoke in Matthew 5:21ff.

Houston's assertion is that, for both designers and participants, morality in a virtual world cannot be divorced from real-world morality. He proposes an 'Ethics of Christian Realism' as a toolset for dealing with the issues raised by VR technology, and goes on to propose, following Kallman and Grillo (1996), a systematic process for the ethical evaluation of VR applications.

Virtual Morality is unashamedly academic in its approach. The subject-matter, and the level at which it is treated, would suggest a target audience of postgraduate and final-year undergraduate students in the fields of moral philosophy or Christian ethics, and might also be of interest to students of computer science or psychology.

Its origins as a doctoral thesis are evident, and therein lie both its strength and its weakness. The intellectual rigour of the treatment is exemplary: every point is carefully argued, every source meticulously acknowledged. The reviewer found much to admire in the care taken over the writing, but was on occasions moved to wonder just how well the work had fared in the transition from a paper written to satisfy the requirements of a degree to a book intended to benefit a wider audience. The survey Houston gives of existing work in the areas of technology and ethics will make this a useful resource for those approaching this specialist area for the first time, though a more discursive approach might have made the book more attractive.

Julian Turnbull, Gullane

Theology at the Void. The retrieval of experience

Thomas M. Kelly

University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Indiana, 2001; xxviii+188pp., \$20; ISBN 0 26803 352 8 (hb), 0 26803 353 6 (pb)

This book started life as a doctoral thesis at Boston College. It is not particularly light reading.

It will be interesting for specialists who want to think about the theological implications relating to language and experience in the context of the post-modernist/deconstructionist debate, and with particular relation to specific thinkers, such as F. Schleiermacher, W. Proudfoot, G. Lindbeck, G. Steiner and K. Rahner.

All questions concerning religious language are frighteningly complex. Kelly says in his introduction that the issues which determine theology are philosophical, hermeneutical and anthropological, *e.g.* what is a human being, what is language and what is theology?

These meta-theological questions are placed in the context of modernism and the postmodernistic reaction. These terms are defined and make the context of the book.

Kelly's intention is to write in a way that is dialectical in confronting different theologians, contextual in regard to recent debates about language, and ecumenical, considering the questions raised in interreligious debate.

The author has chosen to look at foundationalism, its critics and defenders. Schleiermacher is a key figure, in the post-ontological era, with his notion of religious experience. The problem is that experience is under fire, as it implies interpretation through language, and how does language, which can be slippery and ambiguous, correspond to reality?

Kelly examines the interpretation of Schleiermacher and his critics. Can the subject be central in interpreting religious experience and does her interpretation correspond to reality? Postmodernism replies in the negative. Human experience is not common; each individual experience is mediated by means of contextualised language.

The author presents this problem by an analysis of four thinkers who all relate, in one way or another, to Schleiermacher, and refer to him: W. Proudfoot, G. Lindbeck, G. Steiner and K. Rahner.

Schleiermacher's turn to the subject was a reaction against onto-theology. Lindbeck's post-liberal view of the relation of experience and doctrine rehabilitates Barth's notion of the word of God. Steiner's *Real Presences* lays the way open to transcendence. The *dénouement* is possibly in Rahner's 'theology of mystery': – humans are grounded in holy mystery. Between the original actualisation of experience and theoretical knowledge are conceptualisation in language and communication, which mean that experience and reflection are never really separate.

This opens a world of dialogue for Protestants. What about the *sola Scriptura*? It seems that Rahner's theology still relates to the nature/grace duality of Thomism, which Barth so rigorously rejected, together with the references to analogy which Kelly introduces (pp.132ff.). At this point the Protestant reader might well find himself in agreement with Lindbeck, and be willing to leave his questions about ontology hanging.

Kelly's book has two drawbacks. One has the impression that the preface and introduction (pp. xiii-xxviii) were written after the conclusion. When the conclusion is reached there is a sense of *déjà vu* – the cards handed out at the start are the same at the end. Secondly, Kelly has a penchant for Karl Rahner. Rahner's method seems to underlie his criticism in general, and the presupposition that Rahner has the right approach underlies the other critical chapters.

Absent from the bibliography on the subject, for starters, are the important works of L. Gilkey, *Naming the Whirlwind* (1969), D. H. Kelsey, *The uses of Scripture in recent Theology* (1975), R. Lundlin, *The culture of interpretation* (1993), A. C. Thiselton's magisterial books

on hermeneutics, T. F. Torrance's article on the hermeneutics of Schleiermacher (*SJT*, 1968) and Alvin Plantinga.

A whole new world awaits you!

Paul Wells, Aix-en-Provence

Science and Its Limits. The Natural Sciences in Christian Perspective

Del Ratzsch

InterVarsity Press, Downer's Grove, Illinois; Leicester, England, 2000 (second edition); 191pp., £9.99; ISBN 0 85111 466 0

Science and Its Limits is an excellent examination of what science is, of what it is not, and of its limits. The book is specifically aimed at Christians, helping them to grapple with such questions as: 'Is there a conflict between science and scripture?', 'Should science and theology take account of each other's findings?' and 'Is science important for Christians?' To all such questions, and many more, Del Ratzsch gives careful consideration and very balanced answers. The author is Professor of Philosophy at Calvin College, Michigan, and throughout the book is closely argued philosophically. But if the book demands thought it is nonetheless very readable. There are helpful headlines subdividing the text of each chapter, comprehensive footnotes at the end of the book (several of which are extremely interesting), an index and a small bibliography.

The present edition is an expanded version of *Philosophy of Science* first published in 1986. The main additions are the chapter on 'Intelligent Design' and the Appendix.

There are chapters on 'Science: What is it?', 'The Traditional Conceptions of Science', 'Philosophy of Science in the 1960s & 1970s', 'The Contemporary Situation', 'The Competence of Science', 'The Limitations of Science', "'Scientific" Challenges to Religious Belief', 'Design & Science', 'Christianity & Scientific Pursuits', 'Christianity & the Specific Content of Science' and the Appendix: 'Speaking the Truth in Love'.

Each chapter examines the main positions held on each topic and outlines all the main arguments for and against. Chapters 1 and 2 look at the presuppositions of science and the traditional view of science (characterised by rationality, empiricism and objectivity), from its beginnings with Bacon to the school of positivism and its decline, and the objections of Popper. Chapters 3 and 4 outline the revolution of Kuhn, postmodern developments, and contemporary understandings.

SCOTTISH BULLETIN OF EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY

Chapters 5 and 6 consider how far scientific theories can be taken to be 'true' or 'real' and proven true, false or simply confirmed, and what science can not tell us. Chapter 7 examines the various challenges to religious belief from science. Chapter 8 is a long and careful consideration of how far nature exhibits the characteristics of design and whether these can be said to point to a Creator. Chapters 9 and 10 consider the importance of science for Christians, how much science and Christian belief have in common, and how they may be considered to be related.

Throughout, the book encourages people not to take a simplistic, one-sided view, but to be open to the arguments of the other side. Nevertheless, the author comes down clearly on what he considers to be the possible Christian positions and indicates which he considers the most viable. The appendix, aimed specifically at helping Christians with different positions to listen to the other side, and to continue to 'speak the truth in love', is most helpful and timely. The book can be warmly commended.

Robert T. Walker, Edinburgh

Groundwork of Science and Religion

Philip Luscombe

Epworth Press, Peterborough, 2000; 274pp., £12.95; ISBN 0 7162 0535 1

This book is a very useful overview of the relations between science and theology. It is very readable, well laid out, with numerous headings to break up the text, extensive footnotes at the end of the book, and a good index. The author sees the importance of trying to get the 'wide picture' and trying to relate together as many fields as possible. Throughout, the author is alive to the complexities of the many issues, seeing how there are arguments on both sides, though he usually ends by indicating where his own sympathies lie.

There are nine chapters: 1. A Large Map – The Relation of Science and Religion; 2. Religion and the Rise of Science; 3. Darwin's Century – Warfare and Harmony; 4. What is Science? – The Philosophy of Science; 5. Making Science – Sociology and the claims of 'Truth'; 6. Scientific Views of the World; 7. Relating Science and Religion; 8. Doing Theology in a World of Science; 9. Creation Waits: Making a Theology for Today.

After a short introductory chapter, chapter 2 gives a good account of the rise of science and the various factors involved, while chapter 3 is an excellent summary of the background to Darwinism, Darwin's own

theory (what it was and what it wasn't) and the progress of its reception. It is particularly useful for helping to dispel some of the common myths, for example, that Darwinism was supported by scientists and opposed by churchmen. Chapter 4 analyses the various views of what science is before coming down on the side of a qualified realism, and then the next chapter examines the claims of postmodern sociology that science can be explained as a social construct with no claims to objective insight. Luscombe concludes that science cannot be so easily denied its claim to some measure of objective reality.

Chapter 6 outlines major scientific views of the world from Newton to Einstein and quantum mechanics. There are good accounts of the nature and meaning of quantum theory, the principle of natural selection, the role of chance, chaos theory, and the anthropic principle. Chapter 7 discusses different models for the relation of science and theology, conflict, independence, dialogue and integration, concluding that science and theology can each help each other, to understand creation better, and to see it as a whole under the love of God. Chapter 8 outlines the work of some important exponents of theology in a scientific world, Torrance, Pannenberg, Gilkey, Hardy, McFague and Hodgson, while the final chapter attempts to summarise crucial features of the Christian message today, suggesting that it is no longer possible or necessary to interpret the Fall as the occasion of death and evil entering the world.

The book has its weaknesses: it is unfortunate that Luscombe misunderstands both Torrance and Barth at crucial points, and seems to think that Alister McGrath has no interest in science. When he also says that 'within a few years' science will finally succeed in giving us a TOE, or theory of everything, his customary caution and balance seem to have forsaken him. Nevertheless, the book can be recommended as a good, balanced, and very readable introduction to the complex relation between science and theology.

Robert T. Walker, Edinburgh

Reading Proverbs with Integrity

Craig Bartholomew

Grove Books Ltd, Cambridge, 2001; 23pp., £2.50; ISBN 1 85174 485 1

How many sermons have you preached or heard from the book of Proverbs recently? Craig Bartholomew points out that the book has been the 'Cinderella of Old Testament study'. The aim of this little book is to assist the preacher in his preparation of a series of sermons. His desire is

to bring the light of recent scholarship into the study of the 'ordinary' pastor. In particular he interacts with Van Leeuwan and R. E. Murphy.

There is a chapter on 'How not to read Proverbs'. He points out that the fragmentary approach is not all that helpful. The book of Proverbs has a context and reading one particular proverb out of context can be wrong and even dangerous. He notes that Proverbs 12:21 could prove that calamity comes from the committing of one particular sin. The author is also not in favour of preaching on topics within Proverbs, topics like discipline, initiative. He argues that these individual topics also require a context. He complains that Proverbs misses out other big issues like kingship, politics, justice and courtroom ethics. We can hardly complain because holy writ excludes some topics which we believe should be included!

Bartholomew suggests that the main interpretive key is to be found in chapters 1-9. These chapters reveal that the book is about creation ordered by the wisdom of God. The underlying metaphor reveals a world made by God in which there is a tussle between wisdom and folly. There is the battle of choice between two ways, two loves, the wife or the harlot, the fool or the wise man.

The value of this book is that a scholar has read other scholars and is able to condense and feed his reading into the study of the pastor. The value of this short book is to highlight that wisdom is about hard issues like politics, sex, family and work. It is good also to note the high Christological emphasis of Proverbs as the wisdom of Proverbs is ultimately fulfilled in Christ and the two ways are brought before us in the New Testament through the wise and foolish builders. This is a worthwhile read.

David C. Meredith, Smithton-Culloden Free Church, Inverness

When Grace Transforms: The Character of Christ's Disciples Envisioned in the Beatitudes

Terry L. Johnson

Christian Focus Publications, Fearn, 2002; 176pp., £7.99; ISBN 1 85792 770 2

Terry Johnson is the senior pastor of the Independent Presbyterian Church in Savannah, Georgia. He was editor of the *Trinity Psalter* for the PCA, and has written *Leading in Worship*, a resource book for presbyterian ministers, and *The Family Worship Book*, a resource for family devotions. His book, *When Grace Comes Home: How the Doctrines of Grace Change Your Life*, was described by J. I. Packer as 'sweet, strong, classic, pastoral Calvinism'.

In his new book, Johnson expounds the beatitudes of Matthew 5. A preface sets the sayings in the context of the Sermon on the Mount, and a rather cursory first chapter introduces the beatitudes as a unit. Then follow eight chapters dealing with each beatitude in turn, and a brief concluding chapter reinforces the consistent emphasis that Christian authenticity is a matter of the heart.

Many others before him have expounded these beatitudes, and Johnson makes good use of the contributions of Thomas Watson, Martyn Lloyd-Jones, John Stott, James Montgomery Boice, Sinclair Ferguson, and others. But above all, he makes excellent use of Scripture, with a wealth of quotations, from Old Testament and New, illustrating each chapter. A great deal of biblical homework is done for the expositor.

This is not a scholarly book, but it is a serious and a practical one. Johnson underscores the antithesis between the Christian and the world, insisting on the fundamental seriousness of the blessed life. The drawing of distinctions is uncompromising. He is good on spiritual application, warning against counterfeits to the beatitudes and identifying barriers to them, but also giving practical helps towards the development of these qualities. There is a passion for godly character and holy living throughout.

There are indexes of persons, subjects and Scripture. Most of the subject index is headed 'Scripture Index', continuing a typographical carelessness which kept surfacing. It seems not everything is as carefully proofread as *SBET*.

The book is dedicated to J. I. Packer and J. A. Motyer, revered teachers of Johnson during studies in England, and each of them provides a warm commendation. Packer comments that the expositors who edify are the 'diggers who dissect the heart.... Terry Johnson is a digger, and his businesslike exploration of the beatitudes is a clarion call to discipleship in depth.' Johnson offers a spiritual workout for the Christian, and another helpful companion for the preacher expounding these surprising sayings.

Alasdair I. Macleod, Free Church, Leith

The Pauline Writings (IBR Bibliographies)

M. Seifrid and R. Tan

Baker, Grand Rapids, 2002; 245pp.; ISBN 0-8010-2482-X

This most recent and unusually substantial addition to the useful IBR series of annotated bibliographies will provide theological students

(particularly postgraduates) and scholars with an important resource as they construct bibliographies for research and teaching. A total of 846 numbered items are arranged in numerous categories. The level of annotation on each item ranges from substantial paragraph to the two-word comment, 'brief survey' (p. 25). The significance of the numbered items is somewhat unclear as numerous other items are mentioned in brief introductions to each section. While no published bibliography can be exhaustive, this selection of titles is remarkably comprehensive and well chosen. Seifrid and Tan demonstrate particular familiarity with German scholarship in monographs and journals which will, no doubt, increase the value of the book for research students, but decrease its value to those who do not read German. Those who need bibliographies such as this will welcome this volume warmly.

Alistair I. Wilson, Highland Theological College, Dingwall

The Eternal Now

Paul Tillich

SCM, London, 2002; 133pp., £9.95; ISBN 0-334-02875-2

Until this re-publication, the earlier edition of 1963 was only available from second-hand suppliers. This collection of sermons shows Tillich at his most mystical and psychological. He deals with the problems of the ministry in a succinct manner. The legendary comment from the Union Seminary student who first heard these sermons says it all, 'We aren't sure we understand him; but he certainly understands us.'

Robert Pickles, Chaplain, Strathallan School

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