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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).

Contributors are free to express their own views within the broad parameters of historic evangelicalism. The opinions of contributors may not be assumed to be those of Rutherford House or the Scottish Evangelical Theology Society.

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## EDITORIAL

To serve as an editor of a theological journal reminds one very forcefully of the communal character of Christian service. If others do not think, read, write and submit their work to me, then there is very little I can do by myself to provide our readers with a completed journal. Thankfully, I have not had that fearful experience recently! I trust that I will not have it in the future, either. I am very grateful to all those who share the gifts that God has given to them by writing for publication, specifically in *SBET*, but also elsewhere. When I think of how much I have learned from those authors who have taken the brave step of submitting their ideas to public scrutiny in print (a very daunting thing to do, as I now know all too well), I realise that I would be much the poorer if they had held back. They could have kept their learning to themselves and simply given the benefit to a small number of people who could listen to them speak face to face, but instead they made their ideas and research available to others throughout the world. Some, no doubt, have various motives for publishing – which of us, in fact, can claim that we do not have mixed motives? And there may well be various legitimate motives for publishing: identifying a particular idea as one's own; defending one's ideas against opposing views; fulfilling the requirements of an academic contract; etc. But to those whose motivation is fundamentally to seek to serve their Lord by using their gifts in writing I say: keep going! I hope to hear from many of you soon!

Some *SBET* readers may feel, however, that they have nothing to offer in terms of submission of articles to *SBET*. Where is your part in this ministry? Whether or not you ever submit an article (and don't rule out the possibility too quickly), let me encourage you to consider ways in which you can, indeed, contribute to this communal ministry.

Firstly, let me encourage you to pray for the authors who write for *SBET* and for the ministries in the midst of which they do their writing. Perhaps writing an academic article does not seem to be a matter for prayer but we must not give in to the dualistic tendency to believe that we must pray for the Lord's enabling and blessing for preaching and evangelism but that an author simply requires a good brain and resources for careful research. Perhaps some readers (although I can hardly believe it of *SBET* readers) hold the view that the academy is just a hindrance to the church and that there is no point in praying for it. If we hold such an attitude, we may

will get what we asked for! Pray that authors will be enabled to think clearly, write simply, state the truth boldly and disagree with others graciously. If we wish to see articles which will do the church good, let's pray for them.

Secondly, please pray for potential authors. That is, please pray that the Lord would raise up future writers. Ask that he would stir in the hearts of some, who may never have dreamt of writing an academic article, a desire to serve the church through research and writing and a commitment to submit to the whole process of training and study that will involve. The church throughout the world needs able teachers, but they don't spring up overnight. Pray now for the authors of the future.

Thirdly, will you support the ministry of *SBET*? I do not simply mean that you will pay your annual subscription fees (although please do) but that you will encourage others to read the journal and draw attention to its value (if that is how you regard it) whenever possible. If you have found material in the journal helpful, will you let us know and explain why it was helpful so that we can encourage more of the same? If you found material unhelpful, will you explain why graciously and constructively and accept that others may not share your opinion? If you think there are issues which *SBET* should address, will you let us know (and perhaps suggest someone who might tackle the subject well)?

Perhaps, to some, these requests do not seem appropriate in the pages of an academic journal, but this journal is self-consciously an *evangelical* journal; committed wholeheartedly to the gospel and to the church. We strive for the highest standards and for the good of Christ's church. Will you stand with me in seeking the best for *SBET* so that it may offer the best to the church?

### *In this number*

The opening article is the Finlayson Memorial Lecture, given by Professor John Webster of the University of Aberdeen at the Conference of the Scottish Evangelical Theology Society in April 2005. As indicated in the last *SBET*, this paper was the second of two lectures on the topic of 'Discipleship'. 'Discipleship and Calling' was published in *SBET* 23.2 (2005) and I am very pleased to see the companion paper, 'Discipleship and Obedience', in print now. I pray that, together, these articles will not simply provide readers with intellectual stimulation but will spur us on to follow the way of faithful discipleship.

It is a particular pleasure to welcome the contribution of Dr Claire Kaczmarek for several reasons. Firstly, Dr Kaczmarek has written an able historical study of Thomas Chalmers, a figure who still has great

significance for the church in Scotland. This study was presented in an earlier form at an international symposium on religion and politics at the Calvin Institute, Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA. Secondly, it is a delight to have an article by a female scholar in *SBET*, the first in many years, and I hope that the publication of this article will be an encouragement to other women to submit their work for publication. Thirdly, as a French woman, Dr Kaczmarek follows in the footsteps of Professor Henri Blocher in providing a valuable contribution to *SBET* from continental Europe.

The third article is part one of a two-part study of the nature of Christ's obedience by Dr Daniel Kirk, of Biblical Seminary, Hatfield, PA, in the USA. Dr Kirk takes an exegetical approach to the question of whether New Testament references to Jesus' obedience relate to his whole earthly life or solely to his death on the cross.

Our fourth article is written by the Revd Dr Andy Saville, who is Assistant Minister, All Saints, Fordham and Eight Ash Green, Essex. Dr Saville wrote his doctoral thesis for Coventry University on Annihilationism, and in this article he presents a clear discussion of the doctrinal arguments for this view, together with counter-arguments.

I wish to thank these authors for their work and for offering the results of their research to *SBET*. May these articles be read widely and carefully for the glory of God and the good of his church.

*Alistair I. Wilson*

## DISCIPLESHIP AND OBEDIENCE (FINLAYSON MEMORIAL LECTURE, 2005)

JOHN WEBSTER, KINGS COLLEGE, UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

In the first lecture we began our exploration of the call to discipleship by attempting a theological reading of the narrative of Jesus' summons of the first four disciples in the opening chapter of Mark's Gospel, that extraordinarily compelling event in which Jesus comes and claims others for himself, turning their world upside down and establishing them as his followers. Three questions guided our thoughts on the material. First, who is the one who calls to discipleship? He is one who has been marked out at his baptism as the definitively new and unsurpassable revelation of God; he is God's only Son, the one in whom and as whom God's rule is perfected; he is the gospel of God in person. And so in him the course of human life and history is decisively reordered, for he is the fulfilment of time and the presence in the world of the kingdom of God. The one who calls is 'God with us', summoning us with unconditional and wholly legitimate authority. Second, what is the substance of his call? It is drastically simple and drastically compelling: 'Follow me'. In that call, those who are summoned encounter the self-establishing word of God's love and grace: love and grace in their imperative force, as decree and therefore as command. What is decreed and so commanded is that those called must *follow* Jesus, walking behind him, not as his equal but at a distance; and they must follow *Jesus*: not some principle, truth or cause illustrated by him, but Jesus himself as he goes on his way. Third, who are those who are called by him? They are in and of themselves nothing: no readiness or disposition makes them suitable recipients of the call. Rather, they are made disciples by his summons alone. In that summons, the divine determination is brought to bear upon them, and they are appointed to a task, namely, the task of following the one who manifests himself as their Lord and directs them to life in this movement.

This second lecture will be taken up with giving a theological description of this movement, viewed this time not primarily from the side of the one who issues the call but from the side of those who are determined and directed by it. What is to be said of this movement of discipleship as a human reality? What is it to follow this determination and

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take this direction? Once again, we shall be led in our reflections by the witness of Mark, finding in the apostolic testimony not simply a distant echo of Jesus' calling of his disciples in the past, but also his present summons, the call of the one who as Lord is indefatigably alive, our contemporary, speaking to us and making us his own.

### THE MOVEMENT OF OBEDIENCE

Most generally described, the human movement of discipleship is a movement of *obedience*. How can this obedience be characterised?

First: discipleship is a matter of obedience because to encounter Jesus is to encounter his purposive will. His only words to Simon and Andrew, and later to Levi, are imperative. Jesus makes himself present, and his presence carries with it a requirement. Grace – that is, Jesus himself, the actuality of God's rule, order and blessing – includes within itself a summons to action. As Jesus comes, so he makes those to whom he comes into *followers*. They are not *beati*, those who already possess all blessedness and from whom nothing is required; they are not simply *illuminati*, those on whom the light of revelation shines. They must stride out towards their coming blessedness; they must walk in the light. They are summoned to movement, because they are *in via* not *in patria*. The self-revelation of Jesus includes the revelation of his resolve that human life should be life in this direction. In the Christian faith, Calvin reminds us, knowledge is 'knowledge not only of God but of the divine will'.<sup>1</sup> Put rather differently: the conclusion under which these first disciples are placed by the reality of Jesus, by the coming of the one who is God's gospel and kingdom, is also and necessarily an imperative. It is an imperative which rests upon a conclusion, which directs them to Jesus' enactment of that which is decreed by God; but what is decreed is, precisely, human action or movement in accordance with the conclusion under which we have been placed.

Some care is needed at this point, however. If it is important to stress that the divine conclusion under which we are placed by the reality of Jesus encounters us with imperative force, it is no less important to stress that the imperative by which we are met in Jesus is rooted in and brings to bear upon us a divine conclusion. Grace commands obedience; but obedience is commanded by and only made possible by grace. Calvin, once again:

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<sup>1</sup> J. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. J. T. McNeill, trans. F. L. Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), III.2.ii, p. 545.

From what foundation may righteousness better arise than from the Scriptural warning that we must be made holy because our God is holy? Indeed, though we had been dispersed like stray sheep and scattered through the labyrinth of the world, he has gathered us together again to join us to himself. When we hear the mention of our union with God, let us remember that holiness must be its bond; not because we come into communion with him by virtue of our holiness! Rather, we ought first to cleave unto him so that, infused with his holiness, we may follow whither he calls.<sup>2</sup>

The movement which the disciples make in following Jesus rests, therefore, on a prior action of God, that is, upon the work of mercy in which 'he has gathered us together again to join us to himself'.

Discipleship is no exception to the rule that in all things Christ is pre-eminent. Grace does not fall away when we begin to talk of obedience to the call to be followers of Jesus, as if the divine conclusion were simply an initial impulse or cause, propelling us into autonomous action. The human venture of obedient discipleship, both in its beginning and in its continuation, is wholly enclosed by one fact: Jesus Christ is in our place. He has once for all replaced our corruption and disobedience by his pure embrace of the Father's will; as substitute, representative and head of the human race, he has achieved our rescue and done what our ruined humanity cannot do: he has rendered obedience to God. If there is a corresponding human obedience – if James, John, and all the others, including we ourselves, do indeed obey his call and follow him – it is not in order to secure fellowship with God simply by fulfilling some command. It is because this movement and direction is one which has already been established in Jesus; what remains, therefore, is only that it be echoed, filled out and attested in our own obedience. To obey Jesus' command is to follow him; it is not to start a fresh movement but to enter into one which precedes us and catches us up into itself. Calvin, again, sums the matter up with customary clarity and brevity: Scripture, he says, 'finds occasion for exhortation in all the benefits of God'.<sup>3</sup>

The necessity of clarity in this matter of the relation of grace and obedience in a theology of discipleship can be illustrated well from Bonhoeffer's well-known and highly-charged reflections in *Discipleship* on what he terms 'costly grace'. 'Cheap grace is the mortal enemy of our church' runs the famous statement: 'Our struggle today is for costly

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<sup>2</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, III.6.ii, pp. 685f.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, III.6.iii, p. 687.



grace.<sup>4</sup> Bonhoeffer's book in its entirety is directed against a perverted conception of grace as entirely undemanding, as 'the church's inexhaustible pantry, from which it is doled out by careless hands without hesitation or limit'.<sup>5</sup> Conceived in this way, grace simply leaves the world as it is, 'everything can stay the same'.<sup>6</sup> This conception of grace is the counterpart of a church which has made its peace with the world by eliminating any sense that grace carries with it an imperative. Bonhoeffer believed that this conception of grace as limitless and unconditional absolution from responsibility had assumed a deeply corrupting form in twentieth-century Lutheran theology and church life in Germany. Grace had become what he called a 'presupposition'<sup>7</sup> – an excuse, absolution in advance, and therefore 'the bitterest enemy of discipleship'.<sup>8</sup> The large-scale collapse of Christian witness in the Third Reich is directly attributable to the fact that 'we absolved an entire people, unquestioned and unconditionally'.<sup>9</sup> And so: 'Like ravens we have gathered around the carcass of cheap grace. From it we have imbibed the poison which has killed the following of Jesus among us.'<sup>10</sup>

What are we to make of this remarkable judgement? Bonhoeffer grasped what most others in his situation failed to grasp, namely that the disarray and distress of German church life was part of a larger theological and spiritual defection, a warping or narrowing of the church's understanding of the gospel in which the sheer unconditional character of grace was allowed to expand beyond all bounds into the total content of the Christian message. The power of his book is the transparency and concentration with which he insists that the gospel does indeed carry an imperative within itself, that gospel without law cannot really do the work of the gospel, which is to heal and restore human life. Like other writings from the middle period of Bonhoeffer's work, it is also impressive for its pastoral purity and simplicity, its unremitting exposure of the evasions by which men and women insert something between themselves and the command of God in order to deflect the summons of Jesus to discipleship. Yet might one not ask whether the force of Bonhoeffer's protest is such that he has not quite adequately integrated grace and obedience? There is much in the

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<sup>4</sup> D. Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), p. 43.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

book which is still tied to the disintegration of gospel and law which sometimes threatens the Lutheran tradition. Bonhoeffer tries to struggle free from the antinomianism of the mainstream Lutheran Christianity of his day by relentless emphasis on 'cost'. Yet we may ask, at one level, if the cost of discipleship can be properly understood without the kind of extended description of grace as *gift* which Bonhoeffer is unwilling to provide, precisely because he fears it may be perverted into an excuse. Does Bonhoeffer really demonstrate that law flows from gospel, from election and calling? Does it really emerge with the right kind of profile that discipleship – *costly* discipleship – is rooted in a conclusion, an eternal indicative which is itself also an imperative? Is such talk of the conclusion under which the disciple stands always a compromise, an evasion, as Bonhoeffer fears? May it not also and most properly be the ground on which the disciple stands, that which makes the 'cost' of discipleship more than a demand? At another level, we may perhaps register a worry about Bonhoeffer's handling of the notion of the 'costliness' of obedience to the summons to discipleship. Of course, as we shall see, obedient discipleship entails cross-bearing, the loss of self. But cost is not all: to lose one's life is indeed to save it; mortification is the obverse of vivification; obediently to follow Jesus is to come alive. There is, in other words – perhaps because of the pressure of circumstance – a certain loss of teleology, a foreshortening of the movement of discipleship, to be corrected, maybe, by a richer theology of resurrection.

None of this should deflect from the enduring significance of this astonishing book. But it may, perhaps, suggest that rather than speaking of *costly* grace it might be better to speak of *commanding* grace. The grace of God is identical with Jesus and the fulfilment of the divine resolve in him as he takes our nature upon him, and overcomes all that thwarts God's purpose for his creatures. That grace regenerates; it recreates and so restores us to life in fellowship with the holy God who calls us to holiness and so to obedience. The grace in which our obedience is rooted is God's purposive will as conclusion and command, by which we are quickened to life.

#### THE BEGINNING AND CONTINUATION OF DISCIPLESHIP

From here we proceed to a second characterisation of the movement of obedience to which we are summoned by the command of Jesus to follow him. It is a movement which has a beginning and a continuation. It is characterised by a very particular kind of commencement, and it unfolds in a very particular direction.

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Both the beginning and the continuation are aspects of the same basic reality, namely regeneration. Regeneration is the entire conversion of the fallen creature away from self-will and self-direction towards glad embrace of the divine will and direction which is set forth in Christ. The beginning of discipleship is, as it were, the most concentrated moment of regeneration; it is the abandonment of a ruined way of life and setting out on a new way. The continuation of discipleship is the repetition, outworking and extension of regeneration, what the older divines called *conversio continuata* or *conversio secunda*, continued or second conversion, in which the turning of repentance is expanded into a movement of life. At the beginning of discipleship, the one called is summoned to a decisive turn to the law of our being which has been decreed and effected for us by the mercy of God in Christ; in its continuation, the disciple lives from and under that law of our being in persistent obedience. We now turn to some description of each of these moments.

First: how does obedience take its rise? What is the human form of its beginning? 'Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you become fishers of men." And immediately they left their nets and followed him. And going on a little farther, he saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who were in their boat mending the nets. And immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and followed him' (Mark 1:18-20). The repeated word 'immediately' is striking in Mark's presentation. There is no interval between the call of Jesus and the movement of following on the part of the disciple. Jesus' summons does not come as an invitation to be considered at leisure by those to whom it is issued; the response for which it calls is not the weighing of alternatives or the construction of a moral judgement. Indeed, those who respond to the call of Jesus with reluctance ('let me first go and bury my father'; 'let me first say farewell to those at my home' [Luke 9:59-62]) are simply not fit for the kingdom of God. Jesus' summons excludes all temporizing. His summons looks for what Bonhoeffer calls 'simple obedience',<sup>11</sup> obedience in which we do not insert our deliberative reason between ourselves and the command, subduing that command to our discrimination. To heed Jesus' command conditionally, with some measure of reservation, patronizing it with our favour at some points and holding aloof at others, is simply not to hear it as what it is, the command of God. Obedience is immediate obedience.

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<sup>11</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, pp. 77-83.

Yet we may wonder if this is entirely adequate. Does it not risk making obedience a mere reflex action, eliminating any sense of intelligent moral participation in this event? Can such a response really be the recovery of human life and vocation, or is it simply handing oneself over to divine tyranny? In response, we may perhaps put the matter thus. The immediacy of response which is commended in Mark's presentation indicates the fact that the beginning of discipleship is the coming into being of a *new* reality. For the one called to discipleship to pause, reflect upon the call, or seek to tidy up a previous existence, would be to fail to grasp that discipleship does indeed mean regeneration, the rebirth of the person. There is no significant continuity with the old; that which has gone before is not the basis for what lies ahead nor the power in virtue of which the one called is able to make the turn which is required by Jesus. The old has, indeed, been set aside as hopelessly compromised, as flight from God, as death. To stand beneath Jesus' summons, is to exist in a wholly new determination, to hear the declaration of an eschatological condition which precedes any attitude which the hearer may take up towards it. To be called by Jesus is to be established in the domain of regeneration, not invited to consider its possibility. And therefore to obey the call and immediately to follow Jesus is the only possibility; there is no old life worth continuing. At the moment of the call, we have the moment of new creation; in following Jesus, the disciple does not continue an old life in a new direction but, responding 'immediately', enters the domain of life.

Moreover, the beginning of discipleship is characterized by immediacy because it is the human side of election. Here, in the turn of life towards the command of Jesus, the divine decree becomes visible. The alacrity and lack of reflection in the response of Jesus' hearers indicates how discipleship is an answer to an antecedent decree. Jesus' call says, in effect: this is what has been determined from all eternity; this is the law of your being, the existence granted to you by the creator and reconciler of all things; in this alone your perfection will consist. What corresponds on the human side to the summons of Jesus is thus not choice but action in accordance with the truth established by the purpose of God. This is why, as Barth notes,<sup>12</sup> the beginning of discipleship can never be a matter of self-selection. 'Follow' does not mean 'choose to follow'. If it did, it would simply be a continuation of the old order of self-determination. The call of God in Jesus is not one more object of my self-direction, one more opportunity held out to me as a path to self-fulfillment. To follow, and to do so immediately, means to do the only thing which is legitimate and in

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<sup>12</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV/2, p. 535.

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correspondence with the law of one's being; it means to move towards the perfecting of one's nature, not to select or invent a nature for oneself. A chosen good is no good; a chosen god is no god. This absence of self-determination in the beginning of discipleship is offensive to natural reason. But, like the death which precedes resurrection in Christian baptism, it is the other side of coming alive. The absence of self-will is the chastening and displacement of the creature's pride, not in order to humiliate the creature but precisely so that the creature may live and have its being in turning towards and moving after Jesus. Already at the beginning of the life of discipleship, that is, we have the law of Christian existence: to lose one's life is to gain it; to seek to retain one's life is to lose everything.

The immediacy of the beginning of the life of discipleship seems utterly hazardous, indeed irresponsible. Yet although from a human point of view it is so, in truth it is secure and well-grounded, precisely because it does not have its rise in the creature but in the divine determination. What guarantees and legitimates the human wholesomeness of the turn to Jesus is not any kind of creaturely vigilance, but the purpose of God. Exactly because the one who is called to discipleship hears *this* summons from the mouth of *this one* ('Follow me'), there is no need for the anxious interval in which once again we take up responsibility for ourselves and our own protection. Our following can be immediate, our welfare need not concern us, because the divine call is intelligible, trustworthy, wholesome and self-evidently for our good. It is the law of our *being* – not the law of our destruction – which announces itself in this call at the beginning of the life of discipleship. What, next, is to be said about following which succeeds this initial turn?

### THE FORM, SHAPE AND DURATION OF DISCIPLESHIP

The beginning of the disciple's life is not an act which constitutes obedient discipleship in its entirety. It is, rather, a beginning which reaches towards a future, a turn which is the first act of a movement or history. That history cannot be collapsed into the moment of its inception. There is a beyond and a goal to the call of Jesus. The conclusion under which he places those whom he calls is not such that it simply shifts them at a stroke from one category (non-disciple) to another (disciple). It is a conclusion which is a determination for life, and therefore it takes form as human history with shape and duration. What is to be said of this form, shape and duration?

First: in speaking of the persistence of the life of discipleship, we are not speaking of a continuation which leaves behind the moment of beginning. The continuing history of the life of discipleship does not mean that over the course of time the arresting immediacy of its beginning is left behind, so that between us and the call of Jesus we interpose some knowledge which we have acquired over the course of time, some disposition which has been built up steadily over long experience and which inclines our lives in obedience to the call of Jesus. Immediacy does not fall away, to be replaced by reliance upon accumulated experience or achieved maturity. The disciple is always a beginner, always starting out afresh, always the *new* creation. This is because discipleship is always a matter of 'receiving the kingdom of God like a child' (Mark 10:15). Here, of course, to be a child is not to be innocent but to be utterly without competence or acquired status, to possess nothing on which one might rely, to be utterly contingent. Discipleship involves permanent contingency. This is why investment in the language of practice, habit and virtue in the theology of the Christian life – such language enjoys renewed prestige in contemporary theology – is in important respects unwise. Unless carefully deployed, it can import a theology of the human person in which the movement of the new creation does not figure large, in which regeneration is less an eschatological moment which enacts a new form of life, and more a process which can be attributed to the disciple in a relatively unproblematic way. But, once again, the law of the disciple's being, the path along which the disciple moves, is not grounded in the disciple; it is in Jesus and the divine decision enacted in him.

Second: the continuation of discipleship is one in which the turning of the disciple to Jesus in obedience to his command takes form as a history. In that history there is reiterated the primal movement which characterises its beginning, namely the abandonment of a way of life which has been set aside by the call of Jesus and the taking up of a new way as his follower. Both in its beginning and in its continuation, discipleship involves dying and coming to new life.

This theme receives one of its most perceptive and authoritative expositions at the hands of Calvin in Book 3 of the *Institutes*, in the opening description of mortification and vivification as the structure of Christian existence:

If we ... are not our own but the Lord's, it is clear what error we must flee, and whither we must direct all the acts of our life. We are not our own: let not our reason nor our will, therefore, sway our plans and deeds. We are not our own: let us therefore not set it as our goal to seek what is expedient for

us according to the flesh. We are not our own: in so far as we can, let us therefore forget ourselves and all that is ours. Conversely, we are God's: let us therefore live for him and die for him. We are God's: let his wisdom and will therefore rule all our actions. We are God's: let all the parts of our life accordingly strive toward him as our only lawful goal. O, how much has that man profited who, having been taught that he is not his own, has taken away dominion and rule from his own reason that he may yield it to God! For, as consulting our self-interest is the pestilence that most effectively leads to our destruction, so the sole haven of salvation is to be wise in nothing and to will nothing through ourselves but to follow the leading of the Lord alone.<sup>13</sup>

The idiom is Pauline; but what Calvin finds in Paul is very close to what can be found in Mark, especially in the long central section of his Gospel (Mark 8:27–10:45, and especially Mark 8:27–9:1; Mark 10:32–45) where the theme of discipleship in relation to Jesus' passion is explored at length. 'Jesus called to him the multitude with his disciples, and said to them, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it.'" (Mark 8:34f.). In summary form: obedience to the command to follow the Son of Man involves self-denial and cross-bearing. To be a disciple is to lose one's life and so – and *only* so – to save it. How may this be spelled out a little more closely?

The movement of discipleship is mortification; to obey the summons to follow Jesus is to face the necessity of continuing renunciation. Peter sums the matter up in his perplexed and sorrowful statement in Mark 10:28: 'we have left everything and followed you'. Taking its rise in complete renunciation, discipleship continues as relinquishment, a death which is also a dying. Having been separated from their past by the call of Jesus, the disciples are now required to enact and repeat that separation as a way of life. Four forms of this mortification deserve particular mention.

1. The disciple is required to renounce the confidence and prestige conferred on those who have possessions. 'Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it will be for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!" And the disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said to them again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God"' (Mark 10:23–25). 'Those who have riches' are those whose possessions – not just material, but social, intellectual,

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<sup>13</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, III.7.i, p. 690.

personal – are enjoyed as a kind of power or solidity, as bestowing firmness of identity, as instruments which make their possessors *safe*. Such possessions, possessed in this way, make the rich into a kingdom to themselves; and precisely in this way they are kept outside the kingdom of God. Put differently: possessed treasure impoverishes, because it prohibits us from having treasure in heaven. The movement which the disciple is required to make thus intervenes between possessor and possessions, and in this way presses home to the fullest extent the turn which has taken place in response to the initial call. Having left everything, the disciple must continue to leave everything behind.

2. The disciple is required to renounce absorption in human relationships. James and John leave their father Zebedee; the disciples, Jesus says, are to leave brother, sister, mother, father, children. There is much more at play here than a call for the disciples to join themselves to Jesus the itinerant prophet, of which some recent New Testament historians have made much. The call to renunciation of natural patterns of kinship is directed to a deep disorder of human life, by virtue of which relations with others may bear within themselves the possibility of destructiveness. Those relations are, of course, forms of created being, and so signs of the order and blessing which come from God. But in the light of the summons of Jesus, they are not a sphere apart from him, a natural and self-evidently safe and unquestionable reality into which the call of the gospel does not trespass. They are relative to Jesus. He is not simply a factor alongside these relations, an additional element in the network of human association, a possible extension of its range. He is their Lord; he therefore dispossesses them of any claim to finality. This being so, the disciple is to eschew the kind of captivation by them which gives them absolute value or dignity. By the summons of Jesus, the entire world of absolute human attachments has been dissolved. 'What is questioned is the impulsive intensity with which he allows himself to be enfolded by, and thinks that he himself should enfold, those who stand to him in these relationships. What is questioned is his self-sufficiency in the warmth of these relationships, the resolving of their problems, and the sphere of their joys and sorrows. What is questioned is his imprisonment in them...'<sup>14</sup> Jesus' call to fellowship with himself outbids and relativizes all other forms of human belonging.

3. The disciple is required to renounce status, honour and fame. 'Jesus called them to him and said to them, "You know that those who are supposed to rule over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men

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<sup>14</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV/2, p. 550.



exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:42-45). The movement of the life of the disciple, that is to say, involves renunciation, not only of pride of possessions and security of personal relations considered as absolute claims, but also of prestige, particularly the prestige which comes from ranking higher than others. The summons of Jesus overthrows this ordering of human life: among his followers, precedence and subsequence, first and last, above and below, the arrangement of persons in hierarchies, no longer has definitive significance. These stations, and the entitlements which go along with them – self-worth, the esteem of others, privilege of access to goods and power – are no longer of any account. Among those who follow Jesus, it shall not be so. It shall not be so because the condition and movement of discipleship is determined by the reality of the Son of Man who came as servant: to follow him is to drink his cup, share his baptism, serve, renounce life itself.

4. Enclosing all these renunciations, however, is the most fundamental abandonment: the loss of self. Self-loyalty, self-disposition, self-affirmation, obedience to that intense impulse to survive: in the movement of discipleship, all this is to be laid aside. ‘If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me’ (Mark 8:34). Mortification means denying oneself, extracting oneself from the entire bundle of attachments which resists conversion and the movement of following Jesus. It means taking up one’s cross, dispossession to the extent of precisely not securing one’s own life from destruction. It means to follow him: to set off and to continue in the direction of the one who calls us into the fellowship of his sufferings. To defy the command to follow Jesus at this point would be simple ruin for the disciple. ‘Whoever would save his life will lose it’ (Mark 8:35). All this renunciation must be; but it *must* be because it *can* be, because the great renunciation has already taken place. Jesus himself has made this mortification possible by giving his life. Renunciation is not, therefore, an insecure gesture or wager. Like the conversion which stands at the beginning of the life of discipleship, it is simply the enactment of what has already taken place. The old has passed away, the new has come. Because this is the disciple’s condition – because the time is fulfilled, because the kingdom of God is utterly real and unshakably established – then the disciple can engage in this movement of renunciation, knowing that to do so is not to die but to

come alive: 'He who loses his life for my sake and for the gospel's will save it' (Mark 8:35).

#### DISCIPLESHIP AS COMING ALIVE

So far, I've tried to suggest that the movement of discipleship is one which entails renunciation in the different realms of human existence – the realms of goods, of personal and domestic relations, of honour and the public sphere, and, above all, renunciation in the little kingdom of my relation to myself. Being a disciple means losing one's life across all these domains. But precisely as such it is a matter of *saving* one's life: of coming alive, vivification. This further statement is crucial to an understanding of the nature of Christian discipleship; indeed, not to see this is to fail to discern the movement of grace in which the obedience of discipleship is caught up. To stop short at mortification, and make the continuation of discipleship simply into extended dying, is radically to misperceive the direction of the grace of God which reaches us in Jesus' call. God's grace, as it presents itself here in imperative form as his command, is the gift of life. Let me explain this point.

We have seen that both the call to discipleship, and the disciples' obedient response to that call, rest on God's foreordination of his creatures. The call of grace announces the election of grace. But God's foreordination of humankind is nothing other than his purposive love. Election is love, creating and delighting in that which is created, giving reality, integrity, shape, form and direction to that which is not God; what election gives is, in a word, *life*. God's determination of humankind is not only a pre-temporal decision, but also teleological; it has a goal, and its goal is the perfection of the creature. Creaturely perfection is the creature coming to be itself, without restriction, complete in fellowship with God.

Only within this larger understanding of the purpose of God to bless his creatures with life does it make sense to speak of mortification. In following the command of Jesus, in renouncing goods, relations, status and even life itself, what is happening to the disciple? The disciple is not engaging in some act of self-destruction, as if mortification were a value in and of itself, apart from any place it might have in the true end which God holds out to human life. Mortification is abandonment of what has already been disqualified, judged and set aside by the call of Jesus to new life. What the disciple leaves and loses is not the life-giving order of created existence, but disorder, the attachment and bondage which feeds on our creaturely substance and destroys us. 'Follow me!' This command, and the divine conclusion which it announces, is not to be understood only in terms of its

cost, but also in terms of the gift of life which it brings in its wake. To obey this summons is to act in accordance with the law of our being, to be what we are. And what we are is those who are appointed to *live*. Because God loves his creatures, willing that they should attain to full integrity of being, to perfection, then God commands us to lose our lives so that he may exalt us. 'Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life.'" (Mark 10:29f.)

This emphasis upon discipleship as vivification should not, of course, be taken as compromise with a culture which values self-fulfillment and self-preservation above all things. There are different forms of fulfillment and preservation, and not all of them are noble. Those which press themselves upon us so insistently in the dominant civic and economic and sexual images of our culture are often pretty tawdry. They organize the private and the public spheres around choice and acquisition. What they hold out in the way of human fulfillment presents itself as a rather colourful and stimulating way of life, well-stocked with goods and experiences; but in reality, it is a sad affair. It has no deep sense of human nature or the ends of human life; it has little place for human fellowship and generosity; it trades away human worth with breathtaking ease. It diminishes, because it cannot fulfill or preserve. The summons to discipleship, by contrast, protects, vivifies and dignifies, by directing us to the perfection of our nature. It is from that summons that we are to learn what our nature is. Such learning is indeed costly. It begins with hearing a command; it continues in the realization that much needs to be laid aside. But precisely so does it set us free to live. 'Turn my eyes from vanities', prays the psalmist, 'and give me life in thy ways' (Ps. 119:37).

#### MAKING DISCIPLES?

By way of conclusion, let me offer a final remark about how the theology of discipleship which I have outlined relates to the church's task of making disciples.

In and of itself the church does not make disciples; God does. To talk about the making of disciples we need to talk first of all about God: about election and grace, about the coming of the Son of God, about his manifestation as Lord, about his summons. Only when we have done that long and hard, may we move on to discuss the command to go and make disciples of all nations. That, of course, is why a theology of discipleship

is necessary: to make sure that in talking about the church and its mission we keep talking about God. There is a concealed naturalism (sometimes it is not so concealed) in much of our thinking about the church, as a result of which everything can seem to hang on the church's assumption of responsibility for the work of the gospel. This naturalism has a deeply depressing effect on the church's mission, because it expects the church to be what it cannot be: the agent through whom God's purpose in the world is realized. It quickly casts the church into the role of being one more voluntary society seeking to persuade others to join its ranks, and devising all manner of strategies to make discipleship more attractive to a greedy culture. Disciples are not made in such a fashion. Disciples are made as the living Christ summons men and women to take up his call, fulfilling his eternal purpose of giving them life. Disciples are made as he strides through the world which he has reconciled to himself and does his own work among his creatures.

In this light what is to be said of the work of the church in making disciples? Jesus Christ speaks and acts. The task of the church is not to take upon itself his office as prophet, as if he had somehow retired from the scene. Its task is, rather, the twofold task of testimony and obedience. The church *testifies* to the call of Christ. It bears witness to his presence, to the eloquence of his grace as the risen one who speaks to us. It does not seek to make that eloquence clear or persuasive or authoritative, because his word is already all those things in itself. In the Spirit's power Jesus Christ himself is clear, persuasive and authoritative in his command to men and women to follow him. He does not require interpreters but witnesses, to attest to what he has already said and says, not to say it with greater cogency than he himself can manage. Second, the church *obeys* the call of Christ. In doing so, it gives practical attestation of his power to remake human life and direct it to perfection. The church obeys his call by doing what disciples do: by leaving everything and following him. It sets out in an ever-fresh act of beginning; it continues in the movement of renunciation, finding it none other than the way of life. Living this baptismal existence, the saints testify to the one who issues his summons both to them and to their fellows, to those who will suffer until they themselves leave everything for the sake of Christ. The saints' testimony and obedience are together a sign of life to the world. They attest the deeply *humane* character of the confession that we are not our own but the Lord's. The saints, moreover, know – or at least ought to know – that the work of attestation far exceeds their ability. That is why the first act of the ministry of the church is to pray for the coming of the Holy Spirit.

# THOMAS CHALMERS (1780-1847) AND THE 1843 DISRUPTION: FROM THEOLOGICAL TO POLITICAL CLASH

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## INTRODUCTION

Thomas Chalmers is one of the leading figures of the 1843 Disruption which occurred in the Church of Scotland. He was strongly involved in the Ten Years' Conflict, and as the first Moderator of the Church of Scotland – Free, he presided over the first General Assembly in May 1843. He is mainly known as a symbol of the struggle for ecclesiastical freedom against State intrusion. However, in this article I will argue that, on the contrary, Chalmers was actively involved in advocating cooperation between State and Church, and that portraying him as a single-dimension 18th-century Evangelical is far too restrictive. After presenting a short biography, I will consider the complex processes behind the theological, political and social clash – dating from the Union of Parliament – which lay at the root of the 1843 Disruption. Following an examination of Chalmers' policy in the framework of the Disruption, I intend to show how he combined both his ideas of traditional Calvinism as an Evangelical and his ideas of rationalism as a pragmatic parson in urban Scotland, fighting for spiritual independence and against poverty.

Thomas Chalmers is quite difficult to define as he was a polymath and in that respect he remained faithful to the tradition of the Enlightenment. He is described in the *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology* as a 'preacher, theologian, Church leader and social reformer'.<sup>1</sup>

In addition, as an academic professor, he taught a wide range of subjects: Moral Philosophy, Theology, Mathematics, Natural Science, Chemistry and Political Economy. The eclectic churchman provoked strong reactions as he was both admired and dismissed. In his concept of a harmonious and religious community, the economist Thomas Malthus

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<sup>1</sup> A. C. Cheyne, 'Thomas Chalmers' in *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), pp. 158-61.

regarded him as an ally: 'I consider you as my ablest and best ally'.<sup>2</sup> In a letter to Thomas Chalmers, Thomas Carlyle paid tribute to the politician and churchman: 'with a Chalmers in every British parish much might be possible!';<sup>3</sup> whereas Karl Marx referred to him as the arch-parson: 'Parson Malthus and his pupil, the arch-parson Thomas Chalmers'.<sup>4</sup>

Thomas Chalmers was born in 1780 in Anstruther in the Lowland county of Fife. Chalmers' father, John Chalmers, was a merchant in thread and dye works. He was also involved in local politics as he became a magistrate in Anstruther. His mother, Elizabeth Hall Chalmers, was mainly involved in helping the paupers of the parish, in addition to leading a busy family life. His parents' commitment in both political and social life undoubtedly spurred his future involvement in politics and social concern.

Thomas was the Chalmers' sixth child, and had a strict Calvinist education. He attended the parish school of Anstruther, and matriculated at the University of St Andrews at the age of eleven in 1791. During his stay at the University he studied a wide range of subjects such as the Humanities, Mathematics, Chemistry, Philosophy and Divinity. Chalmers graduated in late 1798, and became 'a lad o'pregnant pairs'.<sup>5</sup> He became the minister of Kilmarnock in 1802, and at the same time he was an assistant in the Mathematics Department at St Andrews University. He became conscious of the incredible power of the Kirk at the University and its close connection with politics. As a matter of fact, Thomas Chalmers had to struggle to attain his academic ambitions. In his youthful enthusiasm, he first regarded the Moderate ascendancy in the Kirk as a possible instrument of his career ambitions.

George Hill, Chairman of the Academic Board at St Andrews, was a Moderate in the Kirk, but his ideas jeopardized the independence of the Kirk from State control. One of the major positions of the Scottish Reformation was the spiritual independence of the Church of Scotland from the State. The ecclesiastical Moderate party within the Kirk was increasingly linked with the political Tory party (the Establishment), in

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<sup>2</sup> 'T. R. Malthus to T. Chalmers', 22 July 1822, Thomas Chalmers Papers, New College Library, Edinburgh in S. J. Brown, *Thomas Chalmers and the Godly Commonwealth*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 116.

<sup>3</sup> W. Hanna, *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Thomas Chalmers*, 4 volumes (Edinburgh: Constable, 1849-1852), vol. 4, p. 201.

<sup>4</sup> K. Marx, *The Capital*, 3 volumes (New York: F. Engels, 1967), vol. 1, p. 617. Cited in Brown, *Godly Commonwealth*, p. 116.

<sup>5</sup> 'A lad o'pregnant pairs' was a term to define a candidate for the ministry of the Church of Scotland, who was under 21 years. Chalmers was only 19.

particular with the Tory Henry Dundas. Hill wished to avoid agitation, and in order to maintain a kind of consensus, he shared the Tory view of patronage, essentially benefiting the landed interests. Patronage was the system which allowed the local landowner to appoint the local parish minister whether or not the person appointed was acceptable to the local congregation. The patron of the parish imposed his candidate for the ministry, and parishioners were eventually compelled by decisions of the Court of Session to accept the applicants. However, the Moderate leadership was gradually challenged by another faction within the Kirk: the 'Popular Party' or the 'Evangelical Party'. This party was opposed to absolute patronage, which it regarded as undermining the spiritual independence of the Kirk. Patrons had political connections in Parliament, and Evangelicals saw that phenomenon as the ascendancy of political over ecclesiastical power.

As leader of the Evangelical Party in the 19th century, Chalmers initially placed emphasis on the possibility of a Church-and-State alliance. He believed in the 'establishment principle', i.e. that the State had an obligation to maintain and support the Church but had no right to legislate in any spiritual matters – these were the exclusive province of the Church. Chalmers was soon disappointed.

Since the time of the Reformation, parishioners had elected their ministers. Nonetheless, as the Moderates gained the ascendancy in the Church and collaborated with the government through the law courts in upholding the rights exercised by landowners to impose their chosen ministers on their local congregations, Chalmers and the Evangelical Party found the situation intolerable. Accordingly, led by Chalmers, one third of the Kirk seceded and founded the Church of 'Scotland – Free in 1843, i.e. free from patronage and State intervention. This became commonly known as the Free Church of Scotland, and the secession as the Disruption of the Church of Scotland.

#### THE ECCLESIASTICAL ALLIANCE CHALLENGED: A THEOLOGICAL CLASH

Whilst historians generally agree that the issue of patronage was a major factor in the 1843 secession, there were also theological reasons to explain the emerging differences, which endangered the alliance between Church and State and led to the final conflict.

The notion of a covenanted land, a people who recognise that their first loyalty is to God, is part of the cultural heritage of the Reformation. The

origins of the Church of Scotland's disruption date back to the early 18th century and correspond to the time of the 1707 Treaty of Union.

At the 1707 Treaty of Union, as Scotland lost political independence to the benefit of England, the Kirk became a kind of 'ghost Scottish parliament', where ministers, deacons, elders and academic representatives could debate contemporary issues. Within the new political context, two ecclesiastical/political/theological parties emerged in the Kirk: the Moderate and the Evangelical Parties. From then on, political and temporal issues increasingly permeated the ecclesiastical ones. It was, to be sure, an enriching amalgam. Nevertheless, it was also a source of conflict. There was an ecclesiastical clash due to theological conflicts, which would eventually lead to a Church-and-State divorce.

#### THOMAS CHALMERS AND THE MODERATE PARTY

The early 18th century was also the source of an intellectual revival – a great age where culture flowered: 'The eighteenth century is rightly hailed as the age when Scotland became one of the most important centres of intellectual culture in the western world.'<sup>6</sup> Sir Walter Scott, Robert Burns, David Hume, Adam Smith and Adam Ferguson<sup>7</sup> were symbols of the substantial cultural development which took place in Scotland in the 18th century. The Kirk actively participated in nation building within the new cultural context. As an illustration, the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* was first published in Edinburgh between 1768 and 1771, and most of the articles were written by Church of Scotland ministers – from the Moderate Party. Thomas Reid and William Robertson were significant figures in the Moderate Party which nourished the Enlightenment:

The advantages of common-sense Realism were judged to be considerable. It cohered with theism, since God is both the source of the common-sense principles, for he has implanted them in our nature.<sup>8</sup>

Scottish common-sense Realism was a golden mean between strict Calvinism and liberalism. Thomas Chalmers found himself in line with Moderate common-sense views, which he mostly shared until 1812.

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<sup>6</sup> M. Lynch, *Scotland: A New History* (London: Pimlico, 1992), p. 353.

<sup>7</sup> Walter Scott's *Waverley* (1814), Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), David Hume's *The Treatise of Human Nature* (1739), Adam Ferguson's *Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767).

<sup>8</sup> P. Helm, 'Scottish Realism' in *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology*, p. 759-60.



During his studies, he joined the Theological Society where he was required to prepare discourses and to participate in debates. He always tried to link theology to Europe's political events and to Britain's economic and social context, at that time when war was raging between Britain and France.<sup>9</sup> Chalmers was strongly opposed to war, and defended freedom. He argued via the prism of Christian faith in a sermon he preached on 12 November 1796:

[The Christian] submits to the wanton exercise of extensive authority with a becoming patience and composure, and his love of order, harmony, and peace often prompts him to forgo the advantages which would result from resisting the encroachments of power.<sup>10</sup>

Delivering this type of sermon was, to Chalmers, an opportunity to challenge the university authorities. Actually, he realized that university and politics were closely linked. St Andrews University was dominated by the Tory party which was in favour of war. However, Chalmers was not a Democrat either, although he gave the impression that he belonged to the Whig Party. He offered a liberal Christian view in line with a faith nurtured by what he named later the 'spirit of the times':

Although the subject matter of theology is unalterably fixed ... is there not a constant necessity for accommodating both the vindication of this authority and the illustration of this subject matter to the ever-varying spirit of the times? ... In theology, as well as in all the other sciences there is indefinite room for novelties both of thought and of illustration.<sup>11</sup>

Until 1812, Thomas Chalmers found equilibrium as an enlightened minister between his strict Calvinist education and the changing world around him:

[The Scottish common-sense] also enabled busy preachers to maintain a largely non-theoretical stance in the pulpit, while at the same time

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<sup>9</sup> The Napoleonic wars.

<sup>10</sup> T. Chalmers, 'Blessed are the Poor in Spirit', unpublished student sermon, 12 November 1796, Thomas Chalmers Papers in Brown, *Godly Commonwealth*, pp. 8-9.

<sup>11</sup> T. Chalmers, *Posthumous Works*, volume 9, xv, (Edinburgh: W. Hanna, 1847-1849) in J. Roxborough, *Thomas Chalmers: Enthusiast for Mission* (Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 1999), p. 231.

vindicating certain metaphysical positions widely believed to be endorsed by Scripture.<sup>12</sup>

Admittedly, it was perfectly consistent with his double profession as a Kilmany minister and as an assistant of mathematics at St Andrews University. He was licensed minister of the Church of Scotland in July 1799. To Chalmers, this was not vocational: 'The choice of their profession [ministers] often depends on the most accidental circumstances, a whim of infancy, or the capricious destination of parents.'<sup>13</sup> Indeed, his father, John Chalmers, put pressure on him, and did his utmost to support his son's ecclesiastical career. The newly-licensed minister had another ambition as he wished to secure a university position. He viewed the ministry as 'the malignant touch of ordination'.<sup>14</sup>

As an assistant of mathematics at St Andrews University, he realized that not only were university and politics closely connected but also church and politics: university was a place of power – ecclesiastical and political power. A post of Moral Philosophy was vacant, but for political reasons, Chalmers did not obtain it. The Head of the Faculty, namely George Hill, was a Tory, and he would not let any Whig in. Indeed, Professor Hill – a Professor of Divinity and a St Andrews parish minister – was a key figure in Scottish church life, and succeeded William Robertson as a leader of the Kirk in 1785. Thomas Chalmers was very disappointed not to obtain the position. Moreover, as he was not working full-time in his parish owing to his assistantship in the university, he was verbally attacked for being a pluralist – he was combining a parish living and a university position – by both his congregation and the Kirk. In 1804, he was summoned before the Presbytery of Cupar for having neglected his parish. Chalmers strongly defended his position.

However, the Moderate principles which he had shared were no longer in line with his ambitions. Family bereavements, the failure of the publication of his first book – *Enquiry into the Extent and Stability of National Resources* (1808) – and mainly illness, all contributed to transforming Chalmers into an Evangelical. His spiritual conversion represented a turning point in his life, and brought about a significant change in his thinking.

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<sup>12</sup> P. Helm, 'Scottish Realism', p. 760.

<sup>13</sup> T. Chalmers, *Observations on a Passage in Mr Playfair's Letter to the Lord Provost of Edinburgh, relative to the Mathematical Pretensions of the Scottish Clergy* (Cupar, 1805), p. 47.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.

While convalescing, he read the *Pensées* of Blaise Pascal, a French mathematician and philosopher in the Jansenist tradition, who favoured a spiritual life to the detriment of an exclusively intellectual one. Despite his new spiritual vision, he never gave up his Moderate political tenets. He simply emphasized the significance of doctrine, and he reasserted his faith in the Westminster Confession.

#### THOMAS CHALMERS AND THE EVANGELICAL/ORTHODOX/POPULAR PARTY

The Moderate and the Evangelical Parties were founded at the same time. To be more precise, there were tendencies which gradually took the form of parties. The Evangelical Party was more orthodox, more doctrine-centred and abided by the standards of the Westminster Confession of Faith. However, it reaffirmed the overarching authority of the Bible over the doctrine and the Confession.

In 1717, the Kirk was divided over the question of redemption. Indeed, Professor John Simson of Glasgow University questioned the extent of redemption,<sup>15</sup> introducing the excess use of natural reason. He was condemned for heresy. Given Moderate tenets, Thomas Boston found an answer to the controversy by means of an English Puritan work: *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*. The General Assembly condemned this as antinomian.

In 1726, Moderate theology was back to the scene of controversy with the question over the divinity of Christ in the form of Arianism, which was viewed as heresy. After these dates, a series of heresies arose in the Kirk, and permanently widened the gap between the Moderates and the Evangelicals. The former faction became increasingly rationalist and the latter group stood firm as a Bible-centred party. Everything undermining Christianity via the prism of reason rather than faith was regarded by the Evangelicals as unscriptural. One of the leaders of the Evangelical Party was John Witherspoon of Paisley. He strongly opposed the Moderates in his *Ecclesiastical Characteristics*.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Did redemption concern all the people or just the elect? See J. R. McIntosh, *Church and Theology in Enlightenment Scotland: The Popular Party, 1740-1800* (East Linton, Tuckwell Press, 1998), p. 16.

<sup>16</sup> The whole title is *Ecclesiastical Characteristics: or the Arcana of Church Policy being an humble attempt to open up the mystery of Moderation, wherein is shown a plain and easy way of attaining to the Character of a Moderate Man, as at present in Repute in the Church of Scotland* (1753).

There was a real theological division, and there was a wide range of tendencies within the Evangelical Party: from evangelical Calvinists such as Thomas Boston and Ebenezer Erskine to some more liberal ones such as James Oswald and William Hamilton. However, whatever their theological differences were, there was a sound piety amongst them. The Evangelical Party grew at the same time as an evangelical movement<sup>17</sup> emerged during the 18th century, and the two nurtured one another. The revivals and awakenings which happened in Scotland,<sup>18</sup> England<sup>19</sup> and America<sup>20</sup> gave an impetus to the Scottish Evangelical Party. The Cambuslang Revival (1740) was the beginning of a series of awakenings in Scotland. Revivals were scenes of spectacular conversions. Chalmers' conversion, however, had nothing to do with the spectacular type of conversion which took place in Cambuslang. He was not an 'enthusiast'.

During the profound solitude of his illness, he read William Wilberforce's *Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians*. This form of Evangelicalism was consistent with an active man open to politics and to intellectual life. To Chalmers, Wilberforce was a living example of the fulfilled Evangelical who was involved in the anti-slavery movement and who participated in politics as a Member of Parliament.

In the wake of his conversion, Chalmers started to communicate his conversion experience by means of preaching in various evangelical congregations throughout Scotland.<sup>21</sup> As a result, he was gradually recognised as a symbol of the evangelical movement in Scotland.

Young Evangelicals in charge of writing the *Edinburgh Encyclopaedia* invited Chalmers to write articles on Christianity and trigonometry. He was very successful and gave a new tone to 'Scottish Evangelicalism'. In that newly-arising evangelical opportunity, Chalmers could finally meet his ambitions. As his faith grew, he strove to apply it to the reality of the changing world.

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<sup>17</sup> Defining the characteristics of the Evangelical movement is rather difficult as there is an incredible variety of criteria. However, the following terms would generally be agreed: Christ-centrism, Biblicism, conversion, and activism in the sphere of social concern. See McIntosh, *Church and Theology*.

<sup>18</sup> William McCulloch (1691-1771).

<sup>19</sup> George Whitefield (1714-1770) and John Wesley (1703-1791).

<sup>20</sup> The New England Congregationalist Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758).

<sup>21</sup> He was invited by Robert McCulloch, Minister of the parish of Dairsie. Robert was the son of William who participated in the Cambuslang Revival.

In 1814, owing to his growing fame, he was called by the congregation of the Tron Parish Church in Glasgow to its ministry. This was in fact one of the poorest districts of the city. He reorganized the parish, divided it into 40 portions, and appointed elders and deacons to run each portion. He created a Sabbath school, and encouraged teachers to debate different methods of teaching, constantly improving the quality of studies. Despite the increasing number of poor children in the parish and the dramatic illiteracy, he undertook to educate the whole population of the parish efficiently through communal responsibilities and Christian virtues. As a result, following lengthy negotiations with the local authorities, he was granted the right to create a new parish: St John's. From then on, Chalmers was a social reformer – drawing up new economic and social theories to fight against pauperism and the Poor Laws – and an evangelical reformer – reforming society by increasing piety within Scotland.

To conclude, Chalmers' theological clash with Moderate tenets was not so obvious even though he strongly relinquished the Moderate Party as a whole. In fact, he did not completely adhere to traditional 18th century Evangelicalism either. He gave a more 'moderate' image of the Evangelical Party. Nevertheless, the theological conflicts had already divided the Kirk, and had also shaken the ecclesiastical alliance between the Church and the State.

#### THE CHURCH-AND-STATE ALLIANCE CHALLENGED: A POLITICAL CLASH

From the time of John Knox, there had been an alliance between the Church and the State. At the Treaty of Union, Scotland remained independent in matters of religion, education and justice. The Church of Scotland was an Established Church. Participation of the Kirk in social life was expounded in the First Book of Discipline (1560) and in the Second Book of Discipline (1578). It was complemented by the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647).<sup>22</sup> However, the role of the State in Church affairs remained ambiguous, notably as far as the issue of patronage was concerned. Because patronage linked the Church and the landowning class, it was regarded as a political and temporal intrusion in the 'body of Christ'.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Brown, *Godly Commonwealth*, Introduction, xv.

<sup>23</sup> For more reading on patronage see K. R. Ross, 'Patronage' in *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology*, pp. 649-50; McIntosh, *Church and Theology*, pp. 92-124, and M. Fry, *Patronage and Principle, A Political History of Modern Scotland* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1987).

The question of patronage had been a glitch in the well-organized Church of Scotland since the Reformation. It was a remnant of the medieval Roman Catholic Church, and was part of the social landscape of Scotland, deeply anchored in Scottish tradition. Lairds used to build churches and to endow priests. Patronage was condemned as a papal corruption by the *First Book of Discipline*, and the Law of Patronage was repealed. It stated that pastors were to be elected by the congregation. Nonetheless, patrons were entitled to present a candidate given their financial support of the Church parish. In theory, equity was the ruling principle. Yet there were still traces of corruption. In 1649, patronage was abolished by Parliament but remained in practice in some parishes. In 1690, the Presbyterians made an attempt to secure the abolition of it: patrons and ruling elders could nominate a minister. If the congregation disapproved, the Presbytery would give the final say. Needless to say that, within the new law, the issue of patronage was to become prominent. After the Union of Parliaments in 1707, the Act of 1712 was passed and patronage was restored.

#### PATRONAGE IMPOSITION VERSUS CONGREGATIONAL CALL: AN ECCLESIASTICAL AND SOCIAL CLASH

Whereas up until the Act of Union, opposition to patronage had mainly involved attempts to end hierarchical government within the Church of Scotland, whether of Papacy or Episcopacy or domination by the Sovereign, the new political landscape after the Treaty of Union redefined the real meaning of the controversy, focusing on social class and privilege. It had coincided with the revolutionary ideas which developed in Europe and America. The restoration of patronage gave rise to a series of schisms within the Kirk. Each Lesser Church claimed to represent the traditions of the past, defying the Parent Church (the Established Church).

As a whole, their disputes concerned essentially social questions: in 1733 the Associate Presbytery seceded over the Burgess Oath – only burgesses were allowed to work in trade, and to be a member of a guild. Similarly, Thomas Gillespie and Thomas Boston dissented and established the Relief Church in response to the Moderate Party's support of patronage. The Moderates under the leadership of Robertson had dominated the ecclesiastical landscape until the early 19th century. They were mostly ministers of high social standing, closely intertwined with patrons because they belonged to the upper strata of society, a minority of Scots.

In contrast, the Evangelical Party gradually became the Popular Party as it mainly represented the crofters, the Scottish working classes, who had

traditional Presbyterian values, and also the new rising middle-class merchants who did not enjoy the same power within the Church as the old Scottish landed aristocracy.

As an evangelical activist, Thomas Chalmers fought against pauperism in the slums of industrial Glasgow. The Evangelical became a philanthropist, the champion of religious charity and a sworn enemy of the Poor Laws.

#### THE DANGER OF COMBINED ISSUES: FROM ECCLESIASTICAL TO POLITICAL DISPUTE

The Ten Years' Conflict was characterised by several issues, which contributed to undermining the Church-and-State alliance. In 1833, the Church was already divided: the Popular Party was gaining ground, and the Moderates were in disarray. As I have mentioned earlier, a series of theological and ecclesiastical conflicts had weakened the Kirk, which was no longer the sole Presbyterian body in Scotland. The Dissenters were to become the main rivals in politics.

Chalmers was at the height of his career as an evangelical social reformer and a Divinity Professor. His sermons were very popular in Britain and started to gain fame in America.

At that time, he was busy working on the Church Extension Scheme, which was part of his missionary ideal. While ministering in Glasgow, he had been confronted with crowded churches. Thus, he started a large campaign to double the number of Glasgow churches by means of State endowment and private subscriptions collected in the framework of Church Extension Societies. Chalmers and his supporters proved to be real 'managers'. However, the joint efforts of both Church and State would hasten the undertaking. To increase the number of churches, Chalmers drew up bill after bill to convince Parliament of the necessity of endowing the Kirk to enable the new churches to reduce seat-rents.

He was closely linked with the MP William Gladstone, the future Prime Minister, who could connect Chalmers to Parliament in order to contact Sir Robert Peel, the British Tory leader. It seems that the churchman had no other choice than to go through the evil necessity of patronage to meet his ambitions. In pamphlets, Chalmers showed a total commitment to that scheme to such an extent that the government and the Dissenters felt persecuted. The Whigs who treated him as utopian, an injurious and a disgraceful parson, soon opposed Chalmers. The State had withdrawn from its traditional role of sustaining the Kirk.

When the Popular Party started to gain power in the General Assembly, Thomas Chalmers immediately drew up a measure to revive congregational power over the patron's decision-making: the 1834 Veto Act. The objective was to give the congregation power to veto a patron's preferred candidate to a parish appointment. However, the Act was weakened as some parishes did not abide by it.

The 1834 Auchterarder case was the beginning of a series of cases which undermined the functioning of the Veto Act. Robert Young was presented by the patron, the Earl of Kinnoul, but was vetoed by the congregation. The case went to the Presbytery, Synod and to the General Assembly. Young's appeal was rejected since the veto was consistent with the Veto Act. Finally Young took legal action against the Kirk by raising the matter in the civil courts, namely in the Court of Session. In 1838, the civil justices regarded the veto as an infringement upon the civil rights of patrons. The justices' vision of equity was diametrically opposed to that of the Church. The Kirk decided to appeal against the decision to the House of Lords. Unfortunately, the Kirk was defeated again. Although he had done his utmost to preserve the Church-and-State alliance, Chalmers could not submit to the humiliation of State intrusion in Church affairs. It became evident that the government's refusal to endow his Church Extension programme and the invalidity of the Veto Act meant that the Kirk could be considered an Erastian church, questioning the foundation of Presbyterianism.

The Kirk undertook to revise its ecclesiastical laws in order to reaffirm its spiritual independence. In a speech to the General Assembly, Thomas Chalmers stated that Church and State were 'Two Kingdoms': the State had a power over Church building and endowment, yet the Church maintained spiritual independence over ordination and induction. To Chalmers, the conflict became a 'holy warfare'.<sup>24</sup> The defence was set up via a Non-Intrusion Committee presided over by Chalmers. He was still trying to negotiate but the tone of his discourses became increasingly forceful. As a result, he gradually lost political support. On the one hand, the Earl of Dalhousie, a Tory who supported Chalmers's campaign, refused to participate in the Kirk's rebellion. On the other hand, Lord Cockburn, who did not give up Chalmers, was conscious of the total stand-off with the government:

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<sup>24</sup> H. Watt, *Thomas Chalmers and the Disruption* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1843), pp. 181-2.



if it be a Whig Government, the answer must be – ‘You boast of your hatred to us, and wish us to renew the persecution of Dissenters; we won’t run our heads against an English and Irish post to please you.’ If it be a Tory one, the answer will be ‘[...] you are against patronage and the law, get gone.’ If it be a Radical – ‘We hate the Church; your ruin rejoices us.’<sup>25</sup>

Chalmers’s mediation hopes became increasingly weak as another patronage dispute came to birth: the 1839 Dunkeld case. Just as in Auchterarder, Thomas Clark was rejected by the congregation; he appealed to the General Assembly, and he was also defeated. Another probationer, Andrew Kessen, obtained the ministry. Clark went to civil court which put an interdict on Kessen’s induction. As the Kirk refused to abide by the civil law, the court issued a second interdict, and threatened the Kirk leaders with imprisonment for breach of interdict. In December 1839, Chalmers wrote a pamphlet<sup>26</sup> in which he vividly defended the Veto Act, arguing that the Act had dramatically improved the parish cohesion, and restrained the conflicts over patronage. Indeed, Chalmers advocated traditional values and respect for the past.

The patronage dispute reached its climax in the 1837 Strathbogie case. The case was quite similar to the Dunkeld one. Yet the ending was different. Instead of ignoring the civil court’s decision, the Strathbogie Presbytery proceeded with it. This generated an internal church conflict that the General Assembly settled by suspending the seven Strathbogie ministers. The civil court placed an interdict upon the replacement of ministers in their churches, but the Kirk held open-air religious services. The endless controversy had to be settled. In 1840, Chalmers asserted the independence of the Kirk over the degrading encroachments of the State:

Be it known, then unto all men that we shall not retreat one single footstep, – we shall make no submission to the Court of Session. They may force the ejection of us from our places: they shall never, never force us to the surrender of our principles.<sup>27</sup>

After having written several letters and articles in the *Witness* – a newspaper started by the Evangelical Party – Chalmers addressed

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<sup>25</sup> H. Cockburn, *Journal* (Edinburgh: 1874), volume 1, pp. 230-1, in Brown, *Godly Commonwealth*, p. 304.

<sup>26</sup> T. Chalmers, *Remarks on the Present Position of the Church of Scotland, Occasioned by the Publication of a Letter from the Dean of Faculty to the Lord Chancellor* (Glasgow, 1839).

<sup>27</sup> W. Hanna, *Memoirs*, volume 4, pp. 145-6.

politicians directly without any intermediaries over the Veto Act. As the convener of the Non-Intrusion Committee, Chalmers and a deputation went to London to make a final attempt to reach a compromise with Melbourne's Whig government. Melbourne disdained Chalmers, refusing to speak to him. Nevertheless, the deputation returned home full of hope about a possible reconciliation via Whig support. In order to secure an agreement, Chalmers corresponded with the Earl of Aberdeen, a leading Tory. In his youth, Chalmers was rather a Whig. After his conversion, he was a Tory. In 1840, he was neither. It was essentially a strategy to find a harmonious solution. Consequently, Chalmers had been quite astute in wavering between both camps. Indeed, the Whigs had changed their minds, and were no longer taking the Kirk into account to draw up the legislation, whereas Aberdeen offered to introduce a bill which would modify the Veto Act and would prove satisfying to both the Church and the State.

#### THE VETO ACT AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Lord Aberdeen recognized the independence of the Kirk in spiritual matters. He favoured the parishioners' vote for or against a minister. Yet, in the event of the rejection of the minister by the congregation, he advocated for justification before the Presbytery in order to avoid any kind of congregational corruption. As a former rural minister, Chalmers knew that uneducated peasants would have difficulty in expressing their reasons:

We hold ourselves free, though not obliged, to exclude a presentee because of the strength of the popular dislike, though not substantiated by express reasons, a case which may occur, though not once in a hundred, – I believe not once in a thousand times.<sup>28</sup>

Thus Chalmers defended the principle of *liberum arbitrium* in a letter to Aberdeen:

First, the obligation laid on the Presbytery to give its judgment exclusively on the reasons of [dissent], instead of leaving a *liberum arbitrium* in all circumstances of the case ... Second, because the Bill, in its whole tone and structure, subordinates the Church to the Civil power in things spiritual ...<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Brown, *Godly Commonwealth*, p. 314.

<sup>29</sup> Fourth Earl of Aberdeen, *The Earl of Aberdeen's Correspondence with the Rev. Dr. Chalmers and the Secretaries of the Non-Intrusion Committee: From*

The churchman and the politician were unable to reach a compromise about the social aspect of the issue. The reason was that the social question was both a spiritual and political issue. The controversy happened when the 1832 Reform Bill<sup>30</sup> was passed, which contributed to amalgamating the congregational vote and the national 'class war'.<sup>31</sup> The Reform Act's rejection of the peasant vote reinforced the defense of the Veto Act by the Evangelicals and mostly the rural parishes.

As a result, the combination of the Veto Act, the Reform Act and the evangelical revivals<sup>32</sup> strongly influenced the creation of the Free Church of Scotland. The Kirk was politically excluded by the government, which put an end to the principle of the 'Two Kingdoms'.

Chalmers and the Evangelicals made a last attempt to negotiate with the Government: the General Assembly of the Kirk passed the Claim of Right which was a final appeal:

We are making an appeal to English justice; and that we hope will not be in vain. We are letting the capital of the empire know as a gross case, and grievous, and multiplied oppression, which is now going on in one of the provinces – an oppression which, if not remedied, will have the effect of trampling down the Church of Scotland into utter insignificance; will despoil all her moral weight ... will dis sever her from the State altogether.<sup>33</sup>

The situation was no longer ambiguous, and all possible efforts had been made to restore confidence between the Kirk and the State. On 18 May 1843, during the Church of Scotland's General Assembly, Thomas Chalmers and the other Evangelicals 'signed the tabled protest, proceeded out of the church, followed by an even greater number not commissioned

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14<sup>th</sup> January to 27<sup>th</sup> May 1840 (Edinburgh and London: 1840), 'Thomas Chalmers to Aberdeen', 12 May 1840, in Brown, *Godly Commonwealth*, p. 316.

<sup>30</sup> The 1832 Reform Act gave a right of vote to middle-class males who owned their dwelling.

<sup>31</sup> T. C. Smout, *The History of the Scottish People 1560-1830* (Bungay, Suffolk: Collins/Fontana, 1969), p. 419.

<sup>32</sup> Several evangelical revivals started in Kilsyth in 1839 and extended to the counties of Angus, Aberdeenshire and Ross-shire.

<sup>33</sup> W. Hanna, *Memoirs*, volume 4, pp. 297-8, in Brown, *Godly Commonwealth*, p. 329.

who had signed as adhering with them to it. That was the dramatic and crucial moment of the Disruption.<sup>34</sup>

The Church of Scotland – Free was freed from the Government's encroachments in spiritual matters. But the negative aspect was that it was also freed from financial support. Hence, Thomas Chalmers organized the Kirk with evangelical collective efforts:

It was an inward and a right spirit, we hope, which animated the devotions and the doings of the first General Assembly ... but the inward principle should not prevent, nay, the very strength of it will prompt us onward to the outward business of the House of God.<sup>35</sup>

The Tory Lord Cockburn witnessed the precariousness of the Seceders: 'They have descended from certainty to precariousness, and most of them from comfort to destitution, solely for their principles'.<sup>36</sup>

The Free Kirk was an impressive foundation: churches, manses, missionaries, theological colleges, schools and Sunday schools. The new Kirk was a symbol of the evangelical unity which Chalmers wished to extend all over the world. 'The Christian good of Scotland' prevailed over everything as the churchman became aware that schisms were the enemy of Christian unity:

Who cares about the Free Church compared with the Christian good of the people of Scotland? Who cares for any Church, but as an instrument of Christian good? For, be assured that the moral and religious well-being of the population is infinitely of higher importance than the advancement of any sect.<sup>37</sup>

## CONCLUSION

This article was an attempt to conflate the complex factors which led to the 1843 Disruption, showing that it was the result of underlying processes which had developed from a theological starting point to become a political clash. The key role played by Chalmers in the Disruption remains indisputable. Nonetheless, it deserves to be reconsidered in the context of

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<sup>34</sup> H. Watt, *Thomas Chalmers and the Disruption*, p. 298.

<sup>35</sup> T. Chalmers, *A sermon preached at the Opening of the General Assembly*, pp. 5-6, in H. Watt, *Thomas Chalmers and the Disruption*, p. 315.

<sup>36</sup> A. L. Drummond and J. Bulloch, *The Scottish Church 1688-1843: The Age of the Moderates* (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1863), pp. 248-9.

<sup>37</sup> T. Chalmers, 27 December 1845, in W. Hanna, *Memoirs*, volume 4, p. 394.

## THOMAS CHALMERS AND THE DISRUPTION

the increasingly pluralistic society of 19th-century Britain. Given the mingled complex issues, I chose to illustrate the evolution through different aspects – theological, social and political – in order to find a balance between Thomas Chalmers, the symbol of the Disruption, and the historical constraints within which he founded the Free Church of Scotland.

# THE SUFFICIENCY OF THE CROSS (I): THE CRUCIFIXION AS JESUS' ACT OF OBEDIENCE

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## INTRODUCTION: AN INTRAMURAL DEBATE

By all accounts, a lively discussion arose at the Westminster Assembly in September of 1643 when the commissioners set themselves to revise Article Eleven of the Thirty-Nine Articles, the article on justification.<sup>1</sup> In particular, a day-long debate unfolded over the question of the active obedience of Christ.<sup>2</sup> The committee working on Article Eleven proposed that the original 'we are accounted [*sic*] righteous before God, only for the merits of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ' be changed to 'we are accounted righteous before God . . . only [*sic*] for our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ [*sic*] sake, his *whole obedience* and satisfaction being by

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<sup>1</sup> The summary of the debate that follows is derived from Chad B. Van Dixhoorn, 'Reforming the Reformation: Theological Debate at the Westminster Assembly 1643-1652' (Ph.D. Dissertation: Cambridge University, 2004), 270-344. Previous summaries of the justification debate are dependent on Alexander F. Mitchell, *Minutes of the Sessions of the Westminster Assembly of Divines* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1874), lxx-lxxvii; and *idem*, *The Westminster Assembly: Its History and Standards* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publications, 1884), 149-56. Thus, recent works that comment on this discussion in the Assembly will all have to be re-evaluated to the extent that Van Dixhoorn's thesis (and the minutes appended to it) qualify and correct Mitchell's interpretation of the Assembly's minutes. These recent works include William S. Barker, *Puritan Profiles: 54 Influential Puritans at the Time When the Westminster Confession of Faith was Written* (Fearn, Scotland: Mentor, 1999), 158, 176; Peter J. Wallace, 'Whose Meaning? The Question of Original Intent', n.p. [cited 29 November 2004], online: <http://www.nd.edu/~pwallace/intent.htm>; and Benjamin T. Inman, 'God Covenanted in Christ: The Unifying Role of Theology Proper in the Systematic Theology of Francis Turretin' (Ph.D. Dissertation: Westminster Theological Seminary, 2004), e.g., 303.

<sup>2</sup> Van Dixhoorn, 'Reforming', 293; Mitchell, *Minutes*, lxx-lxxvii.

God imputed unto us.<sup>3</sup> The minutes of the Assembly indicate that by adding the phrase ‘whole obedience’ the revised article would ‘hould [*sic*] out both the active and passive obedience of Christ’.<sup>4</sup> A minority contingent, under the leadership of Thomas Gataker, argued for changing the proposed language by striking out the word ‘whole’. The ensuing debate revolved around whether the nature of Jesus’ righteousness that God reckons to the sinner in justification is both Jesus’ active righteousness (i.e., his whole life of obedience to the law of God) and passive righteousness (i.e., his obedience in the act of his death), or whether the righteousness associated with Jesus’ death is, by itself, the righteousness that avails for sinners in justification.<sup>5</sup> Although the majority of commissioners sided against Gataker, William Twisse, and Richard Vines in their understanding of the issue, and even voted against them in their framing of a revised Thirty-Nine Articles, the Assembly nevertheless crafted the language of the Westminster Confession so as to allow for the ‘passive righteousness only’ position. They struck out the word ‘whole’ and thereby left the precise nature of the imputed righteousness of Christ ambiguous.<sup>6</sup> The final form of the Westminster Confession of Faith and

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<sup>3</sup> Van Dixhoorn, ‘Reforming,’ 293 (*italics added*).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, citing Minutes folio 1:10v. The Minutes are transcribed in an appendix of Van Dixhoorn, ‘Reforming’.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 292-319; Mitchell, *Minutes*, lxvi. Gataker’s own study on justification, *An Antidote Against Error Concerning Justification* (London: J. C. for Henry Brome, 1679), lends weight to the view that he was defending a ‘passive righteousness only’ view at the Assembly. Van Dixhoorn points out that the minority contingent appealed to Anselm of Canterbury as providing historical precedent for its position, a precedent acknowledged by both parties in the debate (‘Reforming’, e.g., 297). Anselm had argued in *Cur Deus Homo* that obedience to God was due from Jesus as a human, so that it was in delivering himself to death, something above and beyond the obedience required of a human, that God’s honour was restored (*Cur Deus Homo*, 2:6).

<sup>6</sup> Van Dixhoorn, ‘Reforming’, 324-26. Mitchell gives a somewhat distorted presentation of the issue in two ways: (1) he indicates that omission of the word ‘whole’ from the Confession resulted from the vote that was taken at the conclusion of the debates; (2) he presents the debate about the Thirty-Nine Articles as though it were a debate about the final form of the Confession (*Minutes*, lxxv-lxxvii). The available minutes are somewhat more shrouded in mystery: they do not tell how the final form of the Confession came to reflect the desire of the minority group. Nonetheless, the presence, length, and importance of the earlier debate supports the basic thesis that

Catechisms demonstrates a fact that contemporary theological and ecclesiastical discussions often ignore, namely, that the outcome of the Assembly's work was a consensus document. Part of their consensus-building included making allowance for a range of views with respect to the precise nature of Christ's righteousness.<sup>7</sup>

Despite the fact that his summary must now be nuanced in light of Van Dixhoorn's work, William S. Barker rightly highlights this facet of the Assembly's work:

One of the interesting debates in the summer of 1643 pertained to the question of the imputation of Christ's active obedience, as well as his passive obedience, to the believer in justification. Daniel Featley, echoing Archbishop James Ussher, argued for the imputation of Christ's active obedience. Ranged against him were such figures as William Twisse, Thomas Gataker and Richard Vines, who contended that it was Christ's passive obedience alone that was imputed to the believer for justification. Such formidable theologians succeeded in getting the term 'whole obedience' removed from the phrase 'imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them' in Chapter XI of the Westminster Confession, but the imputation of Christ's active obedience was thus included; and in the Savoy Declaration, under John Owen's influence, it would be sharpened into 'Christ's active obedience unto the whole law, and passive obedience in his death for their whole and sole righteousness'. The Westminster divines, in such controversies, sought to be clear and faithful

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the Westminster Confession of Faith, as written and adopted, made room for the minority view through its concession to an ambiguous formulation.

<sup>7</sup> Thus the reluctant conclusion of Van Dixhoorn: 'Those divines who did not hold to the doctrine of the imputation of the active obedience of Christ could be satisfied with the statement if they believed that it was a consensual construction, not *teaching* their position, but not *excluding* it either. Members who held to the doctrine of the imputation of the active obedience of Christ but still wanted a consensual statement of the matter could likewise vote for this formulation, for it allowed their doctrine. Those who held to the imputation of the active obedience of Christ and who thought that the *Confession* allowed only for their position could be happy. However, the divines who held to the doctrine of the imputation of the active obedience of Christ, who thought that the *Confession* and catechisms were consensual but wanted to *exclude* the theology of their opponents, were bound to be dissatisfied and likely voted against the wording of the *Confession* and catechisms; such were the majority who revised the Assembly's *Confession* in the 1650s ('Reforming', 328-29).



to Scriptural language, yet to allow for shades of difference within a generic Calvinism.<sup>8</sup>

As in the case with the infra- and supralapsarian positions on predestination, two views are included within the Westminster Standards, and any debate between parties holding one view or the other is an ‘intramural debate’ taking place within the arena of Westminster orthodoxy.<sup>9</sup>

At present, just as during the time of the Assembly’s original deliberations, a majority of Westminster Calvinists hold to the imputation of the active righteousness of Christ.<sup>10</sup> The purpose of the current study is to argue the case for the minority (yet well-documented and confessional) position, that the righteousness connected with Jesus’ death, by itself, is

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<sup>8</sup> Barker, *Puritan Profiles*, 176; cf. 158; see also Wallace, ‘Whose Meaning?’, n.p.

<sup>9</sup> The language of ‘intramural debate’ with respect to this issue is employed in Inman, ‘God Covenanted in Christ’, 303.

<sup>10</sup> Meredith G. Kline has championed this view, e.g., *By Oath Consigned: A Reinterpretation of the Covenant Signs of Circumcision and Baptism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 26-38. More recently it formed part of his critique of Daniel P. Fuller in an article entitled ‘Covenant Theology Under Attack’ in the magazine of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, *New Horizons* (February 1994). The article is available on the internet at [http://www.opc.org/new\\_horizons/Kline\\_cov\\_theo.html](http://www.opc.org/new_horizons/Kline_cov_theo.html) (accessed May 12, 2004). Despite his differences with Kline on the nature of covenant and law, John Murray concurs with him on the necessity of Jesus’ active obedience (John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955], 21, 45). The active righteousness view is represented in the Southern Presbyterian tradition in America by Robert Lewis Dabney, *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1985), 625-6, and in the Northern, Princetonian tradition in America by Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (3 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 3:118. Francis Turretin, the seventeenth-century continental theologian, clearly articulates the active-righteousness view in his *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (3 vols; ed. James T. Dennison, Jr.; trans. George Musgrave Giger; Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1994), Fourteenth Topic, Question 13 (pp. 2:445-55). A recent representative of this view in the Continental Reformed tradition is Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (4th ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 515. On a more popular level, the active righteousness position seems to be enshrined in the document, ‘The Gospel of Jesus Christ: An Evangelical Celebration’, *Christianity Today* (June 14, 1999): 51-6.

the righteousness that avails for sinners in justification. By addressing a number of exegetical and theological concerns, I intend to demonstrate that this minority position is at least worthy of greater attention than it has received.

This first essay will investigate the most common biblical passages used to support the doctrine of the active obedience of Christ. As Van Dixhoorn highlights, the commissioners to the Westminster Assembly envisioned their task as one of articulating the doctrine taught by Scripture on this point.<sup>11</sup> Exegesis of several key passages, especially Romans 5, undergirded the arguments on both sides of the debate. This first essay will honour their intention to produce a biblically sound theology by revisiting the passages that give rise to the language of Jesus' obedience and righteousness.

Part two of this study will begin with an investigation of the theological logic by which NT writers delineate the relationships between Christ, his righteousness, justification, and works. Recognizing that theological coherence is an important standard to pursue beyond exegesis of particular words, we will see that the NT writers wrestled with the very question that the active-righteousness position seeks to answer, but with a decidedly different outcome. Our study will conclude by addressing a few lingering *theologoumena* and particular texts that lend indirect weight to the minority position. It is my contention that such attention to the relevant texts will indicate that the NT writers look, without exception, to the obedience of Jesus in his death, and the righteousness procured by it, as the grounds of justification. Humanity cannot be justified by the law, not simply because we as fallen people cannot fulfil its precepts, but also, and even more importantly, because we see that even the One who lived perfectly (a) saved us through his death rather than through the law, and (b) was himself cursed rather than blessed by the law.

At this point it is important to highlight that neither the advocates of the minority position at the Westminster Assembly nor the current essay dispute that Jesus was, in fact, sinless or 'actively righteous'.<sup>12</sup> That is to say, all affirm that Jesus is the only human being ever to love God perfectly and love neighbour perfectly throughout the whole course of his life. To put it another way: all parties agree that Jesus takes away the sin of the world only as the 'spotless lamb of God'. The point of contention lies in whether Jesus' whole life of obedience (more particularly, obedience

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<sup>11</sup> Van Dixhoorn, 'Reforming', 309-14.

<sup>12</sup> In this sense, 'active righteousness' is not in question, but rather assumed, in the following study. See Turretin, *Institutes*, 2:445-6.

to the law) must be imputed for the justification of the believer, or whether the righteous act of Jesus' death is sufficient for our justification. Jesus' sinlessness is not in dispute, nor is imputation in dispute.<sup>13</sup> The point of discussion is narrowly focused on the question: What is the righteousness by which the believer is justified in Christ?

Before addressing passages that are adduced to support the majority position, I cite John Owen here at length, by way of introduction, to summarize this position.<sup>14</sup> Even though other authors do not posit all the same arguments or proof texts, the substance of Owen's position represents the conservative Reformed traditions. Owen states the position against the sufficiency of passive righteousness thus:

Notwithstanding that there was *no wrath* due to *Adam* yet he was to obey if he would *enjoy eternal life*. Something there is moreover to be done in respect of us, if after the slaying of the enmity and the Reconciliation made shall enjoy life; *being reconciled by his death*: we are saved by that *perfect Obedience* which in this life he yielded to the Law of God. There is a distinct mention made of *Reconciliation*, through a *non-imputation* of sin as Ps. 32:1; Luke 1:77; Rom. 3:25; 2 Cor. 5:19; and *Justification* through an imputation of Righteousness, Jer. 23:6; Rom. 4:5; 1 Cor. 1:30; altho these things are so far from separated that they are *reciprocally* affirmed of one another; which as it doth not evince an *Identity*, so it doth an eminent *Conjunction*: and this last we have by the life of Christ.

This is fully *expressed* in that *Typical Representation* of our *Justification* before the Lord, Zech. 3:3, 4, 5; two things are there expressed, to belong to our free Acceptation before God. 1. The *taking away of the guilt of our sin*, our filthy robes; this is done by the *death* of Christ. Remission of sin is the proper *fruit thereof*; but there is more also required, even a *collation* of Righteousness, and thereby a right to life eternal; this is here called *change* of raiment; so the Holy Ghost expresses it again, Isa. 61:10, where he calls it plainly the *garment of salvation*, and

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. Van Dixhoorn, 'Reforming', 319-20.

<sup>14</sup> Owen will serve as the principal interlocutor throughout most of our study, due to the representative nature of his position, and because of his concern to offer exegetical arguments (rather than merely assertions) for the active righteousness position. It should be noted that the purpose of this essay is not so much to provide an exhaustive survey of the historically accepted position, but rather to argue exegetically with respect to one facet of that tradition. Hence, we will be engaging historical figures simply to clarify the positions against which we are arguing.

the *robe of Righteousness*: now this is only made ours by the *obedience* of Christ, as the other by his death.<sup>15</sup>

Owen views the results of Christ's work negatively and positively. Negatively, he sees that the death of Christ takes away sin, removing what hinders humanity's relationship with God. Positively, he believes that Jesus' obedience in keeping the law earns the righteousness by which humanity is, positively, judged to be righteous (i.e., justified).<sup>16</sup> The present study affirms the biblical testimony to the effect that the righteousness by which humanity is justified is, in fact, Christ's righteousness – a righteousness that persons 'wear' like a garment.<sup>17</sup> The argument offered here challenges neither *solus Cristus* nor imputation;

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<sup>15</sup> John Owen, *Of Communion with God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost* (2nd ed.; London: for William Marshall, 1700), 223 (italics original). See Sinclair Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1987), 86-7. Owen's concerns with regard to the dual nature of Christ's work are shared by Turretin, *Institutes*, 2:447; Dabney, *Systematic Theology*, 625-6; Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3:118-19; Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 515; Kline, *By Oath Consigned*, 31-5; Murray, *Redemption Accomplished*, 45. The debates at the Westminster Assembly took a similar track, in that the proponents of the imputation of the active righteousness of Christ argued that the death of Jesus merely restored humanity to its pre-lapsarian state (Van Dixhoorn, 'Reforming', e.g., 302).

<sup>16</sup> On the page antecedent to the block quotation provided here, Owen explicitly states that the obedience he has in mind is Jesus' obedience to the law (Owen, *Of Communion with God*, 222). The reader should note the conjunction between the phrases 'active obedience' and 'active righteousness' on the one hand and 'passive obedience' and 'passive righteousness' on the other. In each case, the quality of the obedience determines the quality of the righteousness. Thus, e.g., saying that Jesus' passive obedience (i.e., his obedience unto death on a cross) is sufficient for justification is tantamount to saying that passive righteousness is sufficient for justification.

<sup>17</sup> In affirming the positive element of justification, though without reference to the active righteousness of Christ, we argue for a position different than that associated with the passive righteousness position by Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 515. He associates the denial of the imputation of active righteousness with Piscator and the Arminians, who also deny the positive side of justification. The burden of the current argument is to demonstrate that union with Christ in his death (and resurrection) is sufficient to attain the positive element of eternal life as well as the 'negative' element of remission of sins.

rather, it challenges the assertion that the *locus* of the righteousness imputed in justification is Jesus' life of law-keeping rather than his death on the cross.<sup>18</sup> Having set out the issue to be investigated, we turn now to an analysis of the NT texts that are regularly employed to support the active righteousness position.

## JESUS' ACT OF RIGHTEOUS OBEDIENCE

### 1) *Romans 5:18-19*

In the history of this dispute (including the debates at the Westminster Assembly) the passage most often invoked to support Jesus' active obedience as the locus of justification is perhaps Romans 5:18-19.<sup>19</sup> It reads:

Therefore, as through one trespass [there was] condemnation for all men, so also through one act of righteousness (*di' henos dikaionatos*) [there is a result leading] to justification of life (*eis dikaiosin zoes*) for all men. For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience (*dia tes hupakoes tou henos*) the many will be made righteous.<sup>20</sup>

Two facets of this passage touch on the issue of the quality of Christ's righteousness: (1) Is *di' henos dikaionatos* in v. 18 rightly translated 'through one righteous act' (NIV, NASB, ESV text) or 'through one [man's] righteous act' (KJV, RSV, NRSV, ESV footnote)? (2) To what obedience does Paul refer when he says in v. 19, *tes hupakoes tou henos*?

With regard to the first question, either translation of *di' henos dikaionatos* produces a bit of a quandary for the active righteousness position, since the description of Jesus' work that results in justification is given in the singular: *dikaionatos*. Thus, even without *henos* underscoring its singularity, the active righteousness position must provide some sort of plausible interpretation of the singular as representative of a

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<sup>18</sup> Van Dixhoorn, 'Reforming', 319-20.

<sup>19</sup> E.g., Owen, *Of Communion with God*, 222; Kline, *By Oath Consigned*, 31; Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), 746-7; for the discussion at the Westminster Assembly see Van Dixhoorn, 'Reforming', 310-14.

<sup>20</sup> All translations are the author's unless otherwise noted.

whole lifetime of law-keeping righteous actions (plural).<sup>21</sup> Thus, arguments at the Westminster Assembly included the suggestion that the reference to a righteous act is synecdochal.<sup>22</sup>

It is the second question, however, where support for the active righteous position is mainly anchored.<sup>23</sup> John Owen provides two reasons why the 'obedience' in view here is not Jesus' obedience in going to death but rather his lifelong obedience of law-keeping. First, Owen asserts that the contrast between Adam and Christ that Paul draws in 5:19 requires an 'active' understanding of Jesus' obedience because it must serve as an exact opposite to Adam's 'active' disobedience.<sup>24</sup> Owen's argument here is guilty of equivocation. Adam's disobedience is, to be sure, the 'active' disobedience to a positive command that he received from God. But when we compare the work of Jesus, his willing death on the cross must also be looked at as an act of obedience to God's (the Father's) command (cf. Gal. 1:4).<sup>25</sup> Owen is using 'active' here in a different sense from the way in which it is employed in the distinction between active and passive obedience. Both result from what we might call active submission to divine commands: the content of the obedience qualifies it as either active (obeying the law) or passive (obeying the command to die). But without establishing that Adam's one act of disobedience was his active disobedience to the whole moral law, Owen cannot use the Adam-Christ comparison to argue that Jesus' parallel obedience must be active obedience to the whole moral law.<sup>26</sup> The Fall narrative, however, along with Paul's

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<sup>21</sup> John Murray seems to make such a move in his comment on 5:19: 'Undoubtedly it was in the cross of Christ and the shedding of his blood that this obedience came to its climactic expression, but obedience comprehends the totality of the Father's will as fulfilled by Christ' (*The Epistle to the Romans* [2 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968], 1:205).

<sup>22</sup> Van Dixhoorn, 'Reforming', 311-12.

<sup>23</sup> Turretin, *Institutes*, 2:450, and Kline, *By Oath Consigned*, 312, both indicate the centrality of Romans 5:19 for the notion that Jesus obeyed the law to procure righteousness for his people.

<sup>24</sup> Owen, *Of Communion with God*, 222.

<sup>25</sup> Murray, *Redemption Accomplished*, 20; *idem*, 'The Obedience of Christ', in *Collected Writings of John Murray: Vol. 2, Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1977), 151-7.

<sup>26</sup> On this see Turretin: 'He [Paul] considers what is opposed to the disobedience of Adam, but as that was a violation of the whole law, so also the former must be a fulfilment of the whole law' (*Institutes*, 2:450). Unfortunately, Turretin does not lend clear support to his assertion that Paul views Adam's *one* transgression as a transgression of the whole

interpretation of it in Romans 5, points particularly to the one *peculiar* command that God gave by which the fate of the many rested in Adam's hands: the command concerning the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. A comparison with Jesus would more naturally fall to the one *peculiar* command that God gave by which the fate of the many rested in his hands: the command concerning the tree on which Jesus died.<sup>27</sup>

An important feature of Romans 5:12-21, not always given its full weight, is the thoroughgoing *contrast* that Paul draws between Adam and Christ. As C. E. B. Cranfield comments on vv. 15-17, 'He has shown that, apart from the one point of the formal similarity between the relation of Christ to all men and the relation of Adam to all men, they stand over against each other in utter dissimilarity.'<sup>28</sup> If Romans 5:12-21 is to be adduced in support of the majority position, it would be necessary to demonstrate that the point of comparison between Adam and Christ in Romans 5 comes at the point of the active (i.e., law-keeping) nature of their obedience, particularly in view of the fact that 5:12-21 is rife with comparison *and contrast* of these two figures. It is therefore the responsibility of the exegete to argue that a particular point of comparison is similar when Paul himself does not draw such a conclusion. Paul could have said, in 5:15, that in contrast to the many dying by the one man's transgression, the many receive the gift through Jesus' law-keeping. But he does not. Rather, Paul says that it comes by Jesus' grace. Likewise, Paul could have said in 5:16 that, in contrast to condemnation coming out of one transgression, the gift comes out of many acts of righteousness.<sup>29</sup> But Paul does not. Rather, Paul says that it comes out of many *transgressions*. Paul could have said in 5:17 that, in contrast to death reigning through one man's transgression, 'righteousness reigns through one man's life of law-keeping. But Paul does not. Rather, Paul says that the reign of grace and life comes through one – Jesus Christ. Paul does not say what Owen's exegesis should lead him to say in the places where Paul is explicit about the nature of the life-giving person and work of Christ. It

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(moral?) law. The context of Romans 5 argues rather strongly against it.

<sup>27</sup> Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 344; Simon Légasse, *L'épître de Paul aux Romains* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2002), 372-3; so, too, Vines at the Westminster Assembly (Van Dixhoorn, 'Reforming', 310-11, citing Minutes folio 1:12v).

<sup>28</sup> C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (2 vols.; ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975), 1:288.

<sup>29</sup> Murray, *Romans*, 1:196, feels the weight of this disjunctive juxtaposition and pauses to explain why the parallel is not what one would have expected.

is therefore questionable to assert that Paul's description of Adam's work requires a predictable counterpoint with regard to the work of Christ. There is only one certain comparison between the two figures, one point at which Adam is a type (*tupos*, 5:14): the one represents the many.<sup>30</sup>

Owen's second argument for active obedience in Romans 5:19 is that obedience means *doing*, 'something to which passion or suffering cannot belong.'<sup>31</sup> In other words, for Owen, the semantic range for 'obey' is simply not broad enough to encompass Jesus' suffering. The NT data, however, do not support this assertion. On the contrary, whenever the phraseology of obedience is applied to Jesus in the NT it describes Jesus' obedience in going to death on the cross. The NT uses the language of Jesus' obedience only three times. In addition to Romans 5:19, Philippians 2:8 says that Jesus became obedient to death (*hupokoos mechri thanatou*), and Hebrews 5:8 relates that Jesus learned obedience through the things he suffered (*emathen aph' hon epathen ten hupakoen*). Even a cursory reading of these other verses makes clear that Jesus' obedience consists at least in part, if not in its entirety, in Jesus' suffering and death.<sup>32</sup>

Along with Romans 5:19, Philippians 2 and Hebrews 5 are the only passages in the whole NT that speak of Jesus' work using the language of obedience (or obedient). It is therefore imperative that they be allowed to set the agenda for discourse regarding the quality of Jesus' obedience.

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<sup>30</sup> See Moo, *Romans*, 334, 343; Cranfield, *Romans*, 1:283. Cranfield later comments that certain phrases are added in the apodosis of 5:17 'to emphasize what is for Paul the one real point of likeness between Christ and Adam, namely, the fact of one man's action's being determinative for the existence of the many' (287).

<sup>31</sup> Owen, *Of Communion with God*, 222.

<sup>32</sup> For Philippians 2:8 referring to Jesus' death see John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Philippians, Colossians and Thessalonians* (trans. John Pringle; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 58-9; Murray, 'Obedience,' 154; *idem*, 'The Death of Christ,' in *Collected Writings of John Murray: Volume 1, The Claims of Truth* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1975), 36-9; Moisés Silva, *Philippians* (Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary; Chicago: Moody Press, 1988), 119-21; Gordon D. Fee, *Paul's Letters to the Philippians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 216. For Hebrews 5:8 referring (at least in part) to Jesus' death one can refer even to John Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews* (7 vols.; Evansville, Ind.: Sovereign Grace Publishers, 1960), 4:523; see John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews* (trans. John Owen; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 123-4; William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1-8* (WBC 47A; Dallas: Word, 1991), 121.



In the process of giving his reading of Philippians 2:8, John Murray indicates the two possible interpretations of *hupekoos mechri thanatou*: ‘When Paul says that Jesus was “obedient unto death, even the death of the cross”, he does not mean that he was obedient up to the point of death, but obedient to the extent of yielding up his life and dismissing his spirit in death.’<sup>33</sup> In other words, Murray is saying that *mechri* does not indicate that death is the last in a temporal succession of obedience but that death is a great act of obedience.<sup>34</sup> Turretin’s exegesis of the passage takes a both/and approach.<sup>35</sup> He argues for an inclusion of Jesus’ whole life of obedience ‘both because that obedience is referred to the whole emptying (*kenosin*) and humiliation of Christ (which appeared not only in his death but in his whole life) and from other passages where that obedience is described by the imprinting of the law upon his heart and his active obedience of it (Ps. 40; Heb. 10:5).’<sup>36</sup> Yet, the flow of the passage in which the phrase in question appears does not appear to align well with the first leg of Turretin’s argument. Widely regarded as an early hymn, Philippians 2:6-11 records the humiliation of Christ in two successive steps, using parallel form:<sup>37</sup>

vv. 6-7a: God empties himself

Who, though he was in the form of God did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped

vv.7b-8: the God-man humbles himself

And being found in human form

<sup>33</sup> Murray, ‘Death of Christ’, 37.

<sup>34</sup> See Herbert Smyth, *Greek Grammar* (rev. Gordon M. Messing; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1956), §1700.

<sup>35</sup> Turretin, *Institutes*, 450-1.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Fee, *Philippians*, 214-15. The visual representation offered here was created based on his exegesis of the passage and his labels for the two stages.

but emptied himself	he humbled himself
taking the form of a servant	becoming obedient to the point of death
being born in the likeness of men	even death on a cross

In each step, the hymn tells what stage Jesus is in ('form of God' and 'likeness of humanity' respectively) when he performs a given action. The finite verbs ('emptied' and 'humbled' respectively) tell what Jesus does as the one whom the hymn describes in the opening of each section.<sup>38</sup> Hence, Jesus as one in the very form of God emptied himself (*heauton ekenosen*, v. 6); and as one in the likeness of a human he humbled himself (*etapeinosen heauton*, v. 8). In addition, in both v. 6 and v. 8 the participial clause following the main verb tells *how* it is that Jesus performed the action in view.<sup>39</sup>

This is where the contested phrase, *genomenos hupekoos mechri thanatou*, fits into the flow of the passage: it tells the means by which Jesus the human humbled himself.<sup>40</sup> It is not the case, as Turretin indicates, that the obedience refers to the emptying and the whole life of humiliation as well. Quite to the contrary, the moment of humiliation is realized not at the incarnation but in the death on the cross itself.<sup>41</sup> Philippians 2 does not support the majority view. Attention to both structural and grammatical constructions strongly supports the conclusion that the obedience in view is Jesus' death on the cross.

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<sup>38</sup> Silva, *Philippians*, 119, argues that such a two-stage reading is overly wooden. His primary concern, however, is to underscore that Jesus' death on the cross is not merely a function of his humbling himself but also of his emptying himself. Thus, although Silva interprets the parallelism differently, he still sees obedience in the passage as focusing on the cross rather than on a lifetime of law-keeping.

<sup>39</sup> Fee, *Philippians*, 217. In other words, the participle is a participle of means (Silva, *Philippians*, 120). Thus, NASB and ESV: 'He humbled himself by becoming obedient' (Phil. 2:8).

<sup>40</sup> Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 630.

<sup>41</sup> This general line of interpretation is also taken by Michael S. Horton, 'A Dying Man's Consolation: The Active & Passive Obedience of Christ', in *Modern Reformation* 5 (March/April 1996). Cited August 2, 2004. Online: <http://home.christianity.com/local/48470.html>.

We can also see that external considerations raised by Turretin, i.e., an appeal to Psalm 40, cited in Hebrews 10:5, fall somewhat short of establishing his point. Hebrews 10:5 reads: ‘Therefore coming into the world he says, “Sacrifice and offering you have not desired, but a body you have prepared for me.”’ This citation of Psalm 40 is part of a longer citation of Psalm 40:6-8 that the writer of Hebrews ultimately interprets thus: ‘By which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all’ (10:10).<sup>42</sup> The will of God that Jesus obeys in Hebrews 10 is none other than the command to die on the cross.<sup>43</sup> Geerhardus Vos summarizes this passage accurately: ‘the will of God here referred to is specifically the will that the Messiah should suffer and die’.<sup>44</sup>

As the broader tradition of Reformed exegesis indicates, the passage in question speaks of the passive obedience of Christ.<sup>45</sup> Interestingly, John Owen’s own exegesis of Psalm 40 indicates that the Psalm ultimately refers to Jesus’ passive obedience: ‘He gave himself a sacrifice to God of a sweet smelling savour. And this he did willingly, as became him who was to be a Sacrifice. The law of this obedience being written in his heart, Ps. 40: 8; that is, he had a readiness, willingness, desire for its performance.’<sup>46</sup> Owen interprets God’s command to Jesus to die on the cross as the ‘law’ that was written on Jesus’ heart as prophesied in Psalm 40:8. Notwithstanding the assertions of Turretin, Philippians 2:8, one of the three texts in the NT that applies the language of obedience to Jesus, stands over against Owen’s argument that Jesus’ death is not properly labelled obedience. The so-called passive obedience of Jesus is true obedience, we might even say ‘active obedience’, to the command concerning his passion.

Hebrews 5:8 is also problematic for the majority position. We have already seen that Hebrews 10 looks to the death of Jesus as his ‘doing

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<sup>42</sup> A number of interesting variances between MT, LXX and Hebrews exist, but investigation of these would take us beyond the scope of the present study. The variations are discussed by Calvin, *Hebrews*, 225-30; see William Lane, *Hebrews 9-13* (WBC 47b; Dallas: Word, 1991), 262-63.

<sup>43</sup> Calvin, *Hebrews*, 229-30; Owen, *Hebrews*, 6:470-1.

<sup>44</sup> Geerhardus Vos, ‘The Priesthood of Christ in the Epistle to the Hebrews’, in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation* (ed. Richard B. Gaffin; Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980), 147.

<sup>45</sup> See above, n. 36. The summary of Lane is apt: ‘In the following paragraph (vv. 5-10) the writer argues that the ineffective sacrifices of the old covenant have been superseded by the sufficient sacrifice of Christ’ (Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, 262).

<sup>46</sup> Owen, *Of Communion with God*, 226-7 (italics original, underscore added).

God's will' (Heb. 10:5-8); the same idea is expressed in Hebrews 5:8: 'Although being a son, he learned, through the things which he suffered (*hon epathen*), obedience (*ten hupakoen*).' The association of suffering and obedience in Hebrews 5:8 undermines Owen's argument cited above that obedience means *doing*, 'something to which passion or suffering cannot belong'.<sup>47</sup> As does Philippians 2:8, Hebrews 5:8 explicitly connects what Owen determines to be improper: obedience and Jesus' death. Our understanding of the passage finds support from within the Reformed tradition, as Calvin prepares for his comments on Hebrews 5:8 with these words on the preceding verse: 'Why was it that he dreaded death except that he saw in it the curse of God, and that he had to wrestle with the guilt of all iniquities, and also with hell itself?'<sup>48</sup> When Hebrews 5 speaks of Jesus' obedience, it has his death in view.

Within the context of Hebrews two more things can be said to underscore that Hebrews 5:8 views Christ's sufferings as the locus of his obedience. First, the passage speaks of Jesus' high priesthood. The theology of high priesthood that the author of Hebrews develops revolves entirely around two ministries of Jesus: (1) giving up his life on the cross, and (2) interceding for the saints in heaven.<sup>49</sup> Hebrews' theology of the priesthood is summarized well in the Westminster Shorter Catechism, answer 25: 'Christ executeth the office of a priest, in his once offering up of himself a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice, and reconcile us to God, and in making continual intercession for us.'<sup>50</sup> Owen gives this same summary of the priestly office of Christ: 'The general acts of the Lord Christ as the high priest of the church are two, – namely, *oblation* and *intercession*.'<sup>51</sup> In keeping with the theology of both the book of Hebrews and the Catechism, Hebrews 5:8 speaks of Jesus as a priest who suffered on behalf of his people. Such mortal suffering is explicitly referred to as Jesus' obedience to God.

A further indication that 5:8 has so-called passive obedience in mind comes from William Lane: 'The crucial consideration is that in Hebrews

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 222.

<sup>48</sup> Calvin, *Hebrews*, 123. Owen himself also substantiates an association between obedience and Jesus' death in his comments on Hebrews 5:8 and 10:7 (*Hebrews*, 4:523; 6:470-1).

<sup>49</sup> See Vos, 'Priesthood of Christ', 132-3, 139, 141.

<sup>50</sup> Vos notes that Hebrews stands almost alone in describing Jesus' ministry in terms of a priestly office ('Priesthood of Christ', 126). The conjunction between Hebrews' articulation of Jesus' priesthood and the Catechisms' articulations of the priesthood is therefore not surprising.

<sup>51</sup> Owen, *Hebrews*, 2:194.

the verb *paschein*, which ordinarily means “to suffer”, is used only of the passion of Jesus and takes on the nuance of “to die” (2:9, 10; 9:26; 13:12).<sup>52</sup> Again, we highlight that Owen’s argument against a truly ‘passive’ obedience lies in the incompatibility between suffering and true obedience. Vos, however, states how these two are related in Hebrews 5: ‘It must be plain to the most superficial reader that “obedience” here has a very specific meaning: it is obedience to the call of suffering.’<sup>53</sup> Thus we conclude that in Hebrews, as in Philippians, it is precisely passive obedience that is in view when the NT authors predicate obedience of Jesus.

Our exegetical forays into Philippians and Hebrews have been for the purpose of assessing the contention of the active-righteousness position (using Owen as an example) that ‘obedience’ in Romans 5:18-19 must refer to Jesus’ life of law-keeping more generally. There are only two NT passages outside of Romans 5 that speak of Jesus’ obedience, or obeying, and in both it is precisely Jesus’ passive obedience, and *not* simultaneously his active obedience, that is in view. Without further exegetical argument from Owen based on Romans 5 itself, we are at least on firm ground to be wary of the majority position’s reading, if not fully justified in concluding the absence of exegetical basis for such a view. The presupposition created by the other NT passages that speak of Jesus’ obedience explicitly is that his death is in view.<sup>54</sup>

Owen had suggested the insufficiency of the cross to render fully the connotations of the word ‘obedience’ in Romans 5. However, the exegetical considerations of Romans 5 itself, together with the biblical theological factors of the remaining NT evidence, do not support the

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<sup>52</sup> Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 121. The latter two references, Hebrews 9:26 and 13:12, are particularly clear in making Lane’s point.

<sup>53</sup> Vos, ‘Priesthood of Christ’, 147.

<sup>54</sup> Space does not allow discussion of other arguments in favour of a passive righteousness reading of Romans 5:18-19, although two can be mentioned: (1) Paul has already spoken of Jesus’ work and righteousness on at least two occasions in Romans (3:21-26; 4:23-25) and in both cases he speaks of Jesus’ death (and resurrection), but not his law-keeping; (2) the law in Romans 5-8 does not come in alongside of grace and righteousness on the Christ side of the Adam-Christ divide; rather, it comes in alongside of sin and death for the purpose of increasing transgression (5:20). This latter point is especially significant, since it illustrates that Paul turns the presumed role of the law on its head: it does not come in as an entity which leads to righteousness and life, but rather as an entity that exacerbates sin, transgression and death.

majority position that Romans 5:19 must have reference to Jesus' whole life of law-keeping.

## 2) *Matthew 3:15*

If Romans 5:18-19 is most often adduced to speak of Jesus' obedience, Matthew 3:15 takes pride of place with respect to Jesus' righteousness. In the context of John's reluctance to baptize Jesus, Jesus counters, 'Let it be so, for thus it is necessary for us to fulfil all righteousness (*dikaiosunen*).'<sup>55</sup> Owen comments:

That whatever is required of us by vertue [*sic*] of any Law, that he did and fulfilled. Whatever was required of us by the Law of Nature in our state of *Innocency*, whatever kind of Duty was added by morally positive, of Ceremonial Institutions, whatever is required of us in way of *Obedience* to righteous, Judicial Laws, He did it all... So Matt. 3:15. He said *it became him to fulfil all Righteousness, pasan dikaiosunen*, all manner of Righteousness whatever; that is everything that *God required*, as is evident from that general *Axiome* to the Baptism of *John*.<sup>55</sup>

The argument, then, is that Jesus' response to John's protestation in Matthew indicates that Jesus came to do everything God commands his people to do, including baptism. Thus *all* righteousness is fulfilled.<sup>56</sup>

Richard B. Gaffin, however, offers a better way forward for understanding this saying of Jesus within the context of Jesus' baptism. Gaffin places the baptism of Jesus within a broader framework of Jesus' baptismal ministry; as John says, Jesus will baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire.<sup>57</sup> This ministry is the harbinger of the eschatological judgment with its 'dual outcome of salvation or judgment'.<sup>58</sup> In order for Jesus to fulfil his Spirit-and-fire ministry, however, Jesus himself must

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<sup>55</sup> Owen, *Of Communion with God*, 214 (italics original).

<sup>56</sup> Turretin concurs with Owen in this reading, suggesting that 'fulfil all righteousness' indicates a numerical completion of the works of law God has assigned to humanity to perform (*Institutes*, 2:451-2); see also Horton, 'Dying Man's Consolation', n.p.

<sup>57</sup> Richard B. Gaffin, Jr, *Perspectives on Pentecost: New Testament Teaching on the Gifts of the Holy Spirit* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1979), 14-20.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 15. On fire, water, and Spirit imagery in descriptions of eschatological judgment, see W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, Jr, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew* (3 vols.; ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark; 1988), 1:316-17.

receive the baptism of the Spirit and the baptism of fire.<sup>59</sup> The Messiah must himself take on the judgment due his people by becoming associated with sinful humanity in its sinfulness so that his own baptismal ministry might result in salvation. Jesus' baptism with water, then, is an anticipation of a later baptismal judgment he must endure: it is a precursor to the cross.<sup>60</sup> This representative sin-bearing, argues Gaffin, is the point of Jesus' being baptized by John.<sup>61</sup>

Yet it would seem that such an understanding of Jesus' words falls neatly on the side of Jesus' passive righteousness. The Messiah's undergoing a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins is precisely what Jesus has in view when he says to John, 'It is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness': this indicates that Jesus fulfils all righteousness by becoming identified with sinful humanity in its sinfulness (i.e., on the cross), rather than by becoming identified with humanity in its need to obey whatsoever prescripts God might determine to lay upon humanity. To suggest that Matthew 3:15 supports the active righteousness view is to give insufficient weight to the nature of the 'command' that Jesus was obeying.<sup>62</sup> It is not submission to a rule in general that is in view, but submission to God's baptismal provision for sinful humanity, that is, submission to the sign of Jesus' own forthcoming 'baptism' on the cross. As D. A. Carson comments, 'the Servant's first mark is obeying God: he "fulfils all righteousness" since he suffers and dies to accomplish redemption in obedience to the will of God. By his baptism Jesus affirms his willingness to do his assigned work.'<sup>63</sup> When read within the context

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<sup>59</sup> Gaffin, *Perspectives*, 15-16. Much to the same effect is Kline, *By Oath Consigned*, 58-9.

<sup>60</sup> Murray, 'Obedience of Christ', 151; Kline, *By Oath Consigned*, 58.

<sup>61</sup> Gaffin, *Perspectives*, 15-16.

<sup>62</sup> Earlier, John Calvin had rejected the line of interpretation offered by Owen (*Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke* [2 vols; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998], 1:202). Although he does not argue for a proleptic enactment of the passion in the same way that Gaffin does, he does make tantalizing reference to the union that believers can have with Christ in baptism, because of Christ's own baptism, and cites Romans 6 as proof (1:202). He further comments with respect to John's protestation that Christ calls attention to his own role as a servant, and makes reference to Philippians 2:7 (1:202). So Calvin sees Jesus' baptism as an act of obedience to God, done so that humanity might share baptism in common with him, but he does not work out the allusions to other passages which rightly point in the direction of baptismal *death* as the point of contact.

<sup>63</sup> D. A. Carson, *Matthew* (The Expositor's Bible Commentary 8; Grand

of John's message of coming baptismal judgment, as a number of exegetes within the Westminster Calvinist tradition have urged us to do, Jesus' declaration about fulfilling all righteousness must be taken in tightest connection with his passive obedience, and hence the passive righteousness he obtained by the cross.<sup>64</sup>

### 3) *Galatians 4:4*

Paul describes the salvific activity of God in the following manner in Galatians 4:4-5: 'God sent forth his son, born from woman, born under the law (*genomenon hupo nomon*), so that he might redeem those under the law (*tous hupo nomon exagorase*), so that we might receive adoption.' Owen understands Paul here to be saying that Jesus' birth 'under the law' teaches that Jesus came in such a fashion that he might keep the law on behalf of his people:

It must needs be, that whilst he had his *conversation in the flesh*, he must be most *perfectly and absolutely holy*. But yet the *prime intendment* of his accomplishing of holiness, which consists in the complete obedience of his *whole life* to any Law of God, that was no less for us than his suffering Death: That this is so, the Apostle tells us, Gal. 4:4, 5. *God sent forth his Son made of a Woman, made under the Law, to redeem them that were under the Law*: this scripture formerly named, must be a little farther insisted on. He was both *made of a Woman*, and *made under the Law*, that is, obedient to it for us. The end here both of the *Incarnation* and *Obedience* of Christ to the Law, (for that must needs be here understood by the Phrase *hupo nomon genomenos*, that is disposed of in such a condition, as that he must yield subjection and obedience to the Law) was all to redeem us. In those two expressions, *made of a Woman*, *made under the Law*, the apostle doth not knit his Incarnation and Death together, with an exclusion of the obedience of his life... Now we were *under the Law*, not only as obnoxious to its *Penalties*, but as bound to all the *Duties* of it. That this is our being *under the Law*, the Apostle informs us, Gal. 4:21.<sup>65</sup>

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Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 108.

<sup>64</sup> This interpretation of the baptismal scene points toward an area where further discussion might be warranted, namely, the significance of righteousness itself as that (polyvalent?) category extends beyond obedience to the commandments of God.

<sup>65</sup> Owen, *Communion with God*, 220 (italics original). See Ferguson, *John Owen*, 87. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 515, appears to be reading the passage in much the same way.



Both Owen and Robert Lewis Dabney envision two possible readings of Gal. 4:4: either (a) Jesus was made subject to only the penal aspects of the law, such that the verse speaks about his passive obedience only; or (b) Jesus was made subject to the prescriptive elements as well, such that the verse speaks about the necessity of his active righteousness for the redemption of humanity.<sup>66</sup> Certainly Owen and Dabney are correct in their insistence that one could not be subject to the penalties of the law without also being subject to its injunctions.

A careful examination of *hupo nomon*, however, reveals that the question at issue is neither law as prescript nor law as that which metes out punishment, but rather, as Herman Ridderbos contends, law as a ruling power whose reign has come to an end.<sup>67</sup> Paul's usage of the phrase throughout his letters substantiates this claim (see Rom. 6:14-15; 1 Cor. 9:20; Gal. 3:23; 4:4-5, 21; 5:18), but his articulations in Romans 6 are particularly clear.<sup>68</sup> In Romans 6:12-15, Paul contrasts two possible ways of life: one way involves serving impurity and lawlessness, the other involves serving God and righteousness. In a striking turn, he urges his readers to live in accordance with their salvation, to serve God and righteousness, precisely because they are *not* under law. In other words, being 'under law' is not an equivalent expression to 'obeying God'. In keeping with Paul's statement in 5:20 that the law came in alongside (*pareiselthen*) sin and death for the purpose of increasing transgressions, so we find in ch. 6 that obedience to God and being under the law fall on opposite sides of the Fall/Salvation divide.<sup>69</sup> Like sin and death, law is a

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<sup>66</sup> Dabney, *Systematic Theology*, 626.

<sup>67</sup> Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (trans. John Richard de Witt; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 148: 'This whole negative significance – described in all kinds of metaphors – which the law has for man and which makes him live in a condition of slavery, Paul expresses in the set phrase 'to be under the law' (*hupo nomon einai* ...).' It seems to be in recognition of the redemptive-historical qualification placed on 'law' in Galatians that John Murray interprets Galatians 4:4 as referring to the ceremonial law (*Redemption Accomplished*, 45).

<sup>68</sup> J. Louis Martyn shows how Paul employs the language of 'being under something' throughout Galatians as an indication of the inimical powers that enslave humanity (*Galatians, A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* [AB 33a; New York: Doubleday, 1997], 370-3).

<sup>69</sup> For a helpful summary of Romans 6, especially with regard to Paul's concern about sin and death as powers that Christ overcomes in the eschatological events of his death and resurrection, see Moo, *Romans*, 350-2.

power that rules at cross-purposes to God's desired life of righteousness;<sup>70</sup> unlike sin and death, however, it has a God-ordained (but not salvific) function to perform in the accomplishment of redemption (5:21).<sup>71</sup>

Against such a backdrop we return to Galatians 4:4 and find that Jesus' work of redemption required him to enter the realm where not only sin and death held sway, but also that particular sphere where the law came in alongside to exercise its authority alongside of them. J. Louis Martyn comments on Galatians 4:4 to this effect: God sent his Son 'into the malignant orb in which all human beings have fallen prey to powers inimical to God and to themselves'.<sup>72</sup> To this extent the conclusion of Murray is apt: 'In him the Mosaic law realized its purpose, and its meaning received in him its permanent validity and embodiment. Consequently he redeemed from the relative and provisional bondage of which the Mosaic economy was the instrument.'<sup>73</sup> Galatians 4:4 is not an indication of the nature of Jesus' obedience; it is rather an indication of the power to whose grip Jesus submitted in order to redeem those who were held in its grasp.<sup>74</sup> Indeed, submission to the law is in view, as Calvin comments, but when we ask what such submission entails, and how it is effectual for the redemption of God's people, it must be placed alongside Jesus' submission to other governing powers in the cosmos – powers such as sin and death.<sup>75</sup> The question of *how* his submission earned redemption for God's people (see *exagorase* in Gal. 4:4) is the larger question that the current study is seeking to answer. And the answer this study offers, in the plain language of Paul in Galatians, is that 'Christ redeemed (*exagorasen*) us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse on our behalf' (Gal. 3:13), which is to say by going to the cross, by hanging on the tree (see Part II on Gal. 3:13).

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<sup>70</sup> See Murray, *Romans*, 229: 'Law can do nothing to relieve the bondage of sin; it accentuates and confirms that bondage. It is this last feature of the impotency of the law that is particularly in view in the clause in question.'

<sup>71</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 349.

<sup>72</sup> Martyn, *Galatians*, 390.

<sup>73</sup> Murray, *Redemption Accomplished*, 45. Although it is not entirely clear from this citation, we likely differ from Murray in terms of what the content of that 'purpose' might be, as our continuing discussion will make clear.

<sup>74</sup> Thus John Calvin rightly highlights that Galatians 4:4 refers to Jesus' subjection to the law (*Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians* [trans. William Pringle; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998], 118).

<sup>75</sup> On Calvin's comment see the preceding note.

4) *Romans 8:3-4*

This final exegetical foray serves as a transitional point in our study. It corresponds with the current section in that it involves us in an exegetical debate about the meaning of a passage used to support the active righteousness position. But it also illustrates the theological question that the active righteousness position strives to answer: what does God do for humanity in the face of humanity's failure under the law? The passage in question reads as follows:

For what the law could not [do], in that it was weak through the flesh, God [did]: sending his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh in order that the righteousness of the law (*to dikaioma tou nomou*) might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

John Owen offers an interpretation representative of the majority position:

That whatever *Christ did as Mediator*, He did it for them *whose Mediator* he was, or in whose stead, and for whose good, He executed the Office of a Mediator before God: This the Holy Ghost witnesseth, *Rom 8:3*...Because that we *could* not in that condition of weakness, whereinto we are cast by sin, come to God, and be freed from condemnation by the Law; God sent Christ as Mediator to do and suffer whatever the Law required at our hands, for that end and purpose, that we might not be condemned, but accepted of God. It was all to this end, *That the Righteousness of the Law might be fulfilled in us*; that is, which the Law required of us, consisting in Duties of Obedience, this Christ performed for us.<sup>76</sup>

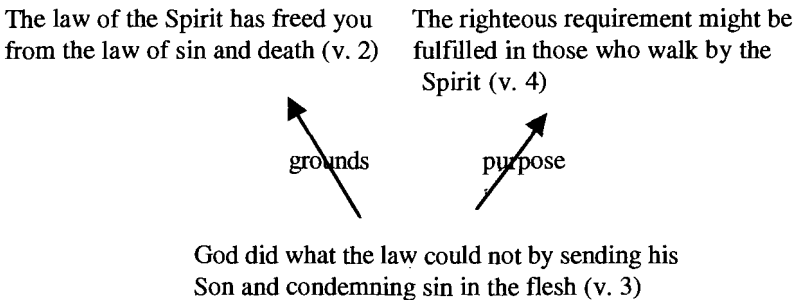
In step with the theology of the active righteousness view, Owen sees the passage teaching a two-fold work of Christ vis-à-vis the law: (1) in the phrase 'for sin, condemned sin in the flesh' he sees Jesus fulfilling on behalf of God's people the law's demand for death and condemnation (i.e., the passive righteousness of Christ); (2) in the phrase, 'that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us' he sees Jesus fulfilling on behalf of God's people the positive, prescriptive requirements of the law (i.e., the active righteousness of Christ).<sup>77</sup> Turretin highlights the

<sup>76</sup> Owen, *Communion with God*, 217-18 (italics original).

<sup>77</sup> Similarly, see Turretin's argument based on Romans 8: 'Christ, therefore, supplying what the law could not do in us must accomplish what the law demanded of us and is called "righteousness" (*dikaioma*) or the right of law (viz., "a right to life") which arises from its fulfilment, not only as passive, but also as active. For since the law and commands of God are the

theological concern of the active righteousness position when he interprets *dikaionoma* as ‘right to life’.<sup>78</sup> He sees obedience to the prescripts of the law as the prerequisite to participating in life with God.

This raises once again the question of whether Paul has Jesus’ active righteousness in view. Romans 8 concludes the preceding discussion with a triumphant declaration of the results of the eschatological transfer that has occurred for those who are in Christ: ‘There is therefore now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus’ (Rom. 8:1).<sup>79</sup> Forensic language of escaped condemnation (v. 1) finds its ground (*gar*, v. 2) in the transfer of lordship from the (Mosaic) law of sin and death to the freeing law of the (Holy) Spirit of life (v. 2).<sup>80</sup> The transfer from the realm of the law of sin to the realm of the ‘law’ of the Spirit, in turn, finds its ground (*gar*, v. 3) in the activity of God described in vv. 3-4. More specifically, v. 3 tells the reader the action on which Paul’s claim in v. 2 is based, and v. 4 tells the reader the purpose (*hina*) God had in mind when performing the action of v. 3. The result of Paul’s logical construction is that v. 3 grounds both v. 2 and v. 4 in parallel fashion, forming the logical basis of v. 2 and giving the basis for a further purpose in v. 4. We can represent this diagrammatically as follows:



*Figure 1*

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same, punishments cannot be said to fulfil the law or its commands, but to satisfy the denunciations of the law’ (*Institutes*, 2:415).

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> Moo is particularly helpful in laying out the eschatological and participatory nature of Romans 8 (*Romans*, 471-73).

<sup>80</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 474. See Frank Thielman, *The Law and the New Testament: The Question of Continuity* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1999), 27.

The first implication of the logic of Paul's argument is that v. 3, in picking up a shortcoming of the Mosaic law, addresses the negative statement about the law in v. 2. As Paul makes clear throughout Romans 6–7, the law came as a spiritual entity into a world ruled by sin and death, and it was therefore unable to make fleshly people spiritual. That is to say, the inability of humanity to fulfil the law (the problem that the active righteousness position purports to solve) is a live question for Paul. His answer to the question is God's intervention in Christ. Verse 3 indicates that Paul finds God's first-order intervention to solve the 'problem' of the law in the death of Christ (i.e., in Jesus' passive obedience/righteousness).

Indeed, most commentators agree that v. 3 speaks of the death of Jesus (his act of passive obedience). For example, in the citation from Owen's work above, he says, 'Because that we *could* not in that condition of weakness, whereinto we are cast by sin, come to God, and be freed from condemnation by the law; God sent Christ as Mediator to do and suffer whatever the Law required at our hands, for that end and purpose, that we might not be condemned, but accepted of God.'<sup>81</sup> Immediately thereafter he states the purpose of this action by quoting v. 4. These comments indicate that Owen interprets God's giving of his Son 'for sin' in terms of the penal suffering that the law requires. To much the same effect is Calvin's comment that 'Paul clearly declares that our sins were expiated by the death of Christ because it was impossible for the law to confer righteousness on us.'<sup>82</sup> Murray demurs slightly, arguing instead that Paul speaks in v. 3 about the death of Christ voiding sin of its *power*.<sup>83</sup> Without getting into the nuances of the debate Murray takes up with Calvin and others, we note that all these commentators see v. 3 as a reference to the work of Christ on the cross. *This* is God's answer to the insufficiency of the (Mosaic) law.

The most significant point of contention has to do with whether v. 4, reflecting the purpose of God's condemnation of sin in the flesh of Christ, speaks of Jesus' obedience to the law on behalf of sinful humanity. Turretin adduces Romans 8:3-4 in support of the active righteousness position through an appeal to the nature of 'just requirement' of the law. He asserts that punishment is insufficient to warrant such a label.<sup>84</sup> The problem with Turretin's explanation of the verse, however, is that his focus on word usage is not accompanied by any discussion about the

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<sup>81</sup> Owen, *Communion with God*, 217-18 (italics original).

<sup>82</sup> John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, (trans. and ed. John Owen; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 279.

<sup>83</sup> Murray, *Romans*, 1:277-82.

<sup>84</sup> Turretin, *Institutes*, 2:451.

logical flow of the verses in question. Turretin thus gives no account of how it is that the death of Christ can serve as the logical grounds for the reckoning of his active righteousness. Owen's interpretation of the verse is stronger in that it gives due weight to the *hina* that connects vv. 3 and 4. He says, in effect, that it is Jesus' death on the cross that allows God to reckon to believers Jesus' active righteousness that he performed on their behalf.<sup>85</sup>

Douglas Moo argues that Romans 8:3-4 demonstrates that both Jesus' death and his law-keeping provide the righteousness by which believers are justified. He argues for the position that the *dikaioma* of the law is fulfilled in believers by the imputation of Christ's law-keeping on their behalf while arguing against the position that it is fulfilled by means of Christians themselves walking according to the Spirit. He puts forward two primary arguments in favour of his own position: (1) the passive verb *plerothe* indicates that the fulfilment comes to Christians from without and is therefore not something they do on their own; (2) the failure of humanity to fulfil the law is precisely the problem that needs to be overcome (v. 3a); therefore, the actions of believers could never overcome the barrier of the flesh that prevents humanity from obeying the law of God.<sup>86</sup> Moo then puts forward his conclusion (what we will label point 3 for easy reference): 'only through a perfect obedience of the law's demands' can the inability of the law be overcome.<sup>87</sup> Next to this claim Moo lays another: (4) 'In laying upon him the condemnation due all of us (v. 3b; cf. v. 1), God also made it possible for the righteous obedience that Christ had earned to be transferred to us.'<sup>88</sup>

Moo's first objection, that *plerothe*, being passive, indicates divine rather than human action, is by no means a necessary conclusion. Paul describes the believer as walking according to the Spirit (v. 4). The position against which Moo argues claims that it is by means of the activity of God the Holy Spirit that the *dikaioma* of the law is fulfilled – a perfectly legitimate reading of the passive voice. Points 2 and 3 are the heart of Moo's argument. Moo rightly claims that Paul's theology holds that truly sinful human flesh is incapable of obeying the law's demands (v. 3a; cf. 7:5, 25). The problem with advancing such an argument at this point, however, is that Moo has lost sight of where v. 4 falls in the logic

<sup>85</sup> Owen, *Communion with God*, 218.

<sup>86</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 483.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 483. To much the same effect was Thomas Goodwin at the Westminster Assembly (Van Dixhoorn, 'Reforming,' 312-13.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 483.

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of the argument. Romans 8:4 is not the *grounds* by which the inability of the law is overcome; rather, is the *purpose* for which the inability of the law is overcome through the death of Christ (v. 3). Whereas Moo says 'only through a perfect obedience of the law's demands' can the inability of the law be overcome,<sup>89</sup> Paul puts the matter exactly opposite: it is *because* the inability of the law has been overcome (through Christ's death [vv. 2-3]) that the righteous demands of the law can be met.

That is to say, Moo has only established an argument that stands on the other side of the cross, before God acting in the death of Christ. He has not addressed the eschatological 'now' in which the believer lives thanks to God's sending his Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin. Once we take full stock of the *hina* that connects vv. 3 and 4, point 3 of Moo's argument is reduced to the level of bare assertion. He claims that the inability of the law can only be overcome through perfect obedience to it (how he understands 'fulfilment of the righteous requirement' in v. 4.) Hence, Moo's vision of the passage is something like this:

The law of the Spirit has freed you  
from the law of sin and death (v. 2)

grounds

God did what the law could not by sending his  
Son and condemning sin in the flesh (v. 3)

makes possible

The righteous requirement  
[might be] fulfilled [in those who walk by the Spirit] (v. 4)

*Figure 2*

The passage, however, locates fulfilment of the law's righteous requirement after God's action in the *cross of Christ* to overcome the inability of the law. To be sure, this sacrifice could not be effective apart from the sinlessness of Christ. The point of our intramural debate, however, is not whether or not Christ was sinless; all agree that Jesus

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<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 483.

perfectly loved God and loved neighbour throughout the whole course of his life. The question in focus is whether or not this life of 'law-keeping' is reckoned to believers in justification.

Moo has replaced the grounds and means by which God overcame the inability of the law (i.e., the death of Jesus on the cross) with what he takes to be the teaching of v. 4 (i.e., the imputation of the active righteousness of Christ). He then argues that the death of Christ made possible the imputation of Christ's active righteousness. Thus he not only sees what he understands to be the teaching of v. 4 to be the means by which God overcomes the inability of the law (what v. 3 speaks of); he *also* wants to use v. 3 as the logical ground of v. 4! Because Moo's argument depends on a transposition of the logical flow of vv. 3 and 4, his points 2 and 3, the heart of his argument for the accounting of Jesus' law-keeping to believers, does not stand as argued.

The exegete against whom Moo is directing his argument is John Murray.<sup>90</sup> Murray views v. 4 as of a piece with a larger argument in which the believer's freedom from the power of sin and the law are in view. Thus, v. 4 indicates the effect in the believer 'of the judgment executed upon the power of sin in the cross of Christ and of the inwardly operative power of the Holy Spirit based upon and emanating from the once-for-all accomplishment in the cross of Christ'.<sup>91</sup> The strongest argument Murray marshals for his position is contextual:<sup>92</sup> the description of the believers as those who walk according to the Spirit is in keeping not only with the preceding, positive indication of the work of God in v. 2 (a positive indication that v. 3 logically grounds), but it is also in keeping with the subsequent verses.<sup>93</sup> The following verses indicate that believers live by the Spirit, therefore setting their minds on the Spirit, with the implication that their thoughts and actions, being spiritual, please God.<sup>94</sup> Murray's position finds further strength in that he recognizes the redemptive context in which v. 4 occurs, and so he can hold it in contrast with other, negative

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<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> Murray, *Romans*, 1:283.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:283-4.

<sup>93</sup> Légasse comments on the importance of the 'law of the Spirit' in ch. 8: 'L'absence de condamnation est aussitôt justifiée par la substitution d'une loi à une autre, la première délivrant l'humanité de la seconde. La première est la "loi de l'Esprit de la vie". Le rôle de l'Esprit dans la nouveau statut de l'humanité est développé dans la suite du chapitre' (*Romains*, 483).

<sup>94</sup> On the importance of the Spirit for Paul's description of salvation in ch. 8, see James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8* (WBC 38a; Dallas: Word, 1988), 414-16.



statements about the law that find their grounds in the state of the cosmos and humanity before the cross of Christ.<sup>95</sup>

In addition to Murray's points, one more argument presents itself from the flow of vv. 2-4. Romans 8:2 speaks of the two sides of the aeonic divide: the 'law' of the (Holy) Spirit of life in Christ sets believers free from the (Mosaic) law of sin and death. Verses 3 and 4 take up these two aeons in reverse order. The negative side, the law of sin and death, God overcomes by giving his Son to die. The purpose of this death is the spiritual freedom in which the believer walks.<sup>96</sup> Thus, vv. 3 and 4 together explain v. 2. In parallel with the transition that Paul describes in 7:1-6, 8:2-4 portrays the spiritual life of the believer as the counterpoint to bondage under the law, and shows the transition from one state to the other initiated in the cross of Christ.<sup>97</sup> Moreover, it is *in* Christ that the believer participates in this new era – a union that centres on Christ's death, resurrection and exaltation.<sup>98</sup>

Verse 4 envisions the life of the believer as a transformed entity: the believer now lives differently than the unbeliever – not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.<sup>99</sup>

Romans 8:3-4 is significant for this study inasmuch as the passage directly addresses the question of what God does in the face of the failure of the law. Given the tremendous weight that Reformed theologians have placed upon the active righteousness of Christ, Paul's silence here is deafening. He does not say that God met the problem of the law's failure through Christ's success before the law; rather, he says that God met the problem of the law's failure through Christ's death on the cross. The active righteousness position argues for more than Jesus' sinlessness as something that qualifies him to die for believers (this is the common ground between the two positions). In addition, it argues for the imputation of Jesus' record of law-keeping to the account of believers. Paul omits this additional datum in Romans 8:3-4. As we turn in Part II of this study to deal with the theological question more directly, and attempt to establish positively the various interrelationships among law, righteousness, Christ, and salvation in the NT, we will find that the

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<sup>95</sup> Murray, *Romans*, 283.

<sup>96</sup> See Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, 424.

<sup>97</sup> On the comparison between 8:1-4 and 7:1-6 see Légasse, *Romains*, 482-3.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 483.

<sup>99</sup> A fuller investigation of Romans 7-8 (impossible to perform here) would further underscore that Paul does in fact have a transformed life in view for the believer in this context.

answer Paul gives in 8:3-4 is the answer that he gives *every* time he confronts the failure of the law to provide salvation. Having given humanity a spiritual law that was incapable of making them spiritual people, God provided the means for humanity to become spiritual by giving his Son on the cross and raising him from the dead.

#### CONCLUSIONS: EXEGETICAL BASIS FOR THE ACTIVE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF CHRIST

We have considered four main passages (Rom. 5:18-19; Matt. 3:15; Gal. 4:4; Rom. 8:3-4) often invoked in support of the doctrine of the imputation of the active righteousness of Christ, and have found, in step with the best of the Reformed exegetical tradition from Calvin and Owen to Vos, Ridderbos, Murray and Gaffin, that the passages do not teach that Jesus' law-keeping is reckoned to believers for their justification.<sup>100</sup> Moreover, Philippians 2:8 and Hebrews 5:8 also indicate that Christ's obedience refers to his death, not to his law-keeping. All these NT writers show themselves to be of one voice when they speak of Jesus' obedience: he obeys the Father's command to die. This is the obedience of Christ that we find in the NT.

The question still presses itself, however: how does God respond to the failure of humanity under the law? The NT writers take up this question, but their answer is not what the advocates of the active righteousness position would lead us to expect. In the second part of our study, we will turn our attention from examination of exegetical supports to examination of the theological framework that the NT writers develop as they themselves deal with the question of humanity's failure under the law. There we will see the NT focus on the sufficiency of the cross of Christ for obtaining eschatological blessing for humanity.

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<sup>100</sup> Again we want to underscore that the question is not about *whether* Christ's righteousness is imputed; the debate at hand revolves around the *quality* of the righteousness that is, in fact, reckoned to believers.

# ARGUING WITH ANNIHILATIONISM: AN ASSESSMENT OF THE DOCTRINAL ARGUMENTS FOR ANNIHILATIONISM

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Over the last thirty years the traditional doctrine of hell has increasingly been criticised from within evangelicalism, chiefly from the perspective of Annihilationism which has rapidly become the leading alternative.<sup>1</sup> Despite this challenge to the traditional view there has been little assessment of Annihilationism at the doctrinal level. In this article I want to assess the main doctrinal issues raised by Annihilationism and to argue that while it does point out a major weakness in the traditional position that requires its modification, it has significant weaknesses of its own that require its rejection.

By 'Annihilationism' I mean the doctrine that the damned are extinguished after a period of torment in hell. I will use 'Annihilationism' to cover both Annihilationism and Conditionalism (or Conditional Immortality) as they are commonly used synonymously in the literature, and even where an anthropological distinction is maintained, the ultimate end of the wicked remains the same.<sup>2</sup> I will use the term 'extinction' to refer to the final cessation of the existence of the damned, and I will refer to the period of suffering before extinction as 'torment'. By 'Traditionalism' I mean the doctrine that the damned in hell experience eternal conscious torment.

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<sup>1</sup> The ACUTE (Alliance Commission on Unity and Truth amongst Evangelicals) report for the UK Evangelical Alliance concludes, 'Conditionalism [is] a minority view, but a not insignificant one.' (ACUTE, *The Nature of Hell* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2000), p. 6.)

<sup>2</sup> For a detailed analysis of the terminology see K. S. Harmon, 'The Case Against Conditionalism' in *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell*, ed. Nigel M. de S. Cameron (Grand Rapids: Baker/Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1992), pp. 196-9.

The lack of study of Annihilationism at the doctrinal level was noted in the extensive nineteenth-century debate about Annihilationism,<sup>3</sup> and remains a feature of the recent debate, which may be dated from the publication of John Wenham's book *The Goodness of God* in 1974.<sup>4</sup> Kendall Harmon notes '[hell's] comparative neglect at the level of systematic analysis in recent study'.<sup>5</sup> The importance of the doctrinal level is recognised, for example, in Packer's judgement that 'the mainspring of Conditionalism is not exegetical but theological'.<sup>6</sup>

#### THE CHIEF DOCTRINAL ARGUMENTS

The same basic doctrinal arguments form something of a litany in the literature. Succinct summaries of the chief annihilationist arguments are provided by Travis, Pinnock and Stott from the annihilationist side;<sup>7</sup> Packer, Grudem, Carson and Peterson from the traditionalist side.<sup>8</sup> The

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<sup>3</sup> See for example B. B. Warfield, *Hastings Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* s.v. 'Annihilation', ed. J. Hastings (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1908-1926), p. 548, col. 2.

<sup>4</sup> J. W. Wenham, *The Goodness of God* (Leicester: IVP, 1984). Eryl Davies describes this book as a 'watershed'. (Eryl Davies, *An Angry God? The Biblical Doctrine of Wrath, Final Judgement and Hell* [Bryntirion: Evangelical Press of Wales, 1992], p. 10.)

<sup>5</sup> K. S. Harmon, *Finally Excluded From God? Some Twentieth Century Theological Explorations of the Problem of Hell and Universalism with Reference to the Historical Development of These Doctrines*. D.Phil. diss. (Oxford University, 1993), p. 21. Harmon is referring to the study of hell both within evangelicalism and beyond.

<sup>6</sup> J. I. Packer, *God's Words* (Leicester: IVP, 1981), p. 209.

<sup>7</sup> S. H. Travis, *Christian Hope and the Future of Man* (Leicester: IVP, 1980), pp. 134-5; *I Believe in the Second Coming of Jesus* (London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1982), pp. 198-9; C. H. Pinnock, 'The Conditional View' in *Hell: Four Views*, ed. William V. Crockett (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1992), pp. 143-55. John Stott's position is a matter of some debate. For example he writes, 'Scripture is not absolutely plain... The late Professor F. F. Bruce... added: "For myself I remain agnostic". My position is similar.' (Stott, 'The Logic of Hell: A Brief Rejoinder', *Evangelical Review of Theology* 18 [1994], p. 34). In *Essentials* Stott seems to conclude with greater certainty: 'I do not dogmatise about the position to which I have come. I hold it tentatively...' (J. R. W. Stott and D. L. Edwards, *Essentials* [London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1988] p. 320).

<sup>8</sup> J. I. Packer, *The Problem of Eternal Punishment* (Cheshire: Orthos, n.d.), pp. 12-13. (The content of this booklet was originally published under the

most recent summary has been provided by the ACUTE report for the Evangelical Alliance.<sup>9</sup>

My own summary is that there are three main doctrinal arguments used by annihilationists in this debate. These may be stated briefly.

First, that an erroneous belief in the immortality of the soul has served as an argument for Traditionalism.

Second, that the traditionalist hell is unjust because the punishment is excessive in terms of its duration, while the annihilationist hell is a less severe punishment and therefore more just. A linked argument is that a traditionalist hell displays God as unloving.

Third, that the traditionalist hell is unbiblically dualistic, while the annihilationist hell avoids or reduces the problem. A linked argument is that a traditionalist hell would permanently limit the bliss of the saints.

I will add a fourth set of arguments from the link between hell and the atonement which, while not prominent in the debate, are significant.

One of the distinctive features of the literature is that the majority of the doctrinal arguments used by annihilationists are stated negatively, as an argument *against* Traditionalism, rather than positively as an argument *for* Annihilationism. This is because Annihilationism is usually understood to be an alternative to Traditionalism, and thus a refutation of Traditionalism is seen as a significant part of the case *for* Annihilationism. Therefore in determining annihilationist doctrinal positions it is necessary to assess their criticisms of Traditionalism, as well as direct arguments for Annihilationism.

### ***1. The Immortality of the Soul***

Travis gives this as the first of his arguments supporting Annihilationism:

The Bible does not teach that the soul is naturally immortal, but that resurrection is a gift of God. This suggests that God grants resurrection to those who love him, but those who resist him go out of existence.<sup>10</sup>

While this might suggest extinction at death, all evangelical annihilationists hold that there is a limited period of life after death for

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same title in *Crux* 26/3 [September 1990]); Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester: IVP, 1994), p. 1150; D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Leicester: Apollos, 1996), pp. 518-20; R. A. Peterson, *Hell on Trial: The Case for Eternal Punishment* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing, 1995), pp. 162-78.

<sup>9</sup> ACUTE, *Nature*, especially Chapter 7.

<sup>10</sup> Travis, *Hope*, p. 134.

the damned given for the purposes of retributive punishment in hell. The argument continues that the traditional understanding of hell has been suggested and supported by the premise that humans are naturally immortal. Pinnock heads his second argument in favour of Annihilationism 'Immortality of the Soul' and he highlights this development:

Presumably the traditional view of the nature of hell was originally constructed in the following way: People mixed up their belief in divine judgement after death (which is scriptural) with their belief in the immortality of the soul (which is unscriptural) and concluded (incorrectly) that the nature of hell must be everlasting conscious torment.<sup>11</sup>

One of the main theses of Froom's massive two-volume work entitled *The Conditionalist Faith of our Fathers* is that 'innate Immortal-Soulism' is the main reason for the Traditionalist view of hell.<sup>12</sup> In the nineteenth century Edward White, an annihilationist, wrote, 'Here, in the popular doctrine of the soul's immortality, is the *fons et origo* of a system of theological error.'<sup>13</sup>

While agreeing that belief in the immortality of the soul has been influential in the history of the debate in favouring Traditionalism, Fudge, an annihilationist, rightly argues that the immortality of the soul can be logically affirmed or denied by both traditionalists and annihilationists: 'In *either* case – among mortalists or immortalists – there is no reason why anthropology should govern eschatology.'<sup>14</sup> So for example Pinnock, who is a mortalist, acknowledges that God *could* give immortality to the wicked<sup>15</sup> while Stott holds to a form of the

<sup>11</sup> Pinnock, *Conditional*, pp. 148-9.

<sup>12</sup> LeRoy E. Froom, *The Conditionalist Faith of Our Fathers*, 2 vols, (Washington: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1965).

<sup>13</sup> Edward White, *Life in Christ: a Study of the Scripture Doctrine on the Nature of Man, the Object of the Divine Incarnation, and the Conditions of Human Immortality* (3rd ed., London: Elliot Stock, 1878), p. 70.

<sup>14</sup> E. W. Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes: A Biblical and Historical Study of Final Punishment* (Houston: Providential Press, 1982), p. 76. [The second edition of this book is *The Fire That Consumes: The Biblical Case for Conditional Immortality* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1994, 2nd rev. ed., Revising Editor, Peter Cousins). Since this 2nd edition is largely a condensation, with a small amount of new material added in footnotes, I will usually quote from the first edition unless stated.]

<sup>15</sup> Pinnock, *Conditional*, p. 149. Two traditionalists who hold precisely this view are Fernando and Pawson. (Ajith Fernando, *Crucial Questions About*

immortality of the soul and yet is open to the view that the damned are ultimately extinguished.<sup>16</sup> Thus immortalists can allow for the final extinction of the wicked, while mortalists can allow for the eternal preservation of the wicked. Fudge correctly summarises:

The crucial question does not really concern man's natural mortality or immortality, therefore, for both sides concede the ultimate point to the greater sovereignty of God. The issue really becomes a matter of exegesis. Since God is *able* to preserve or destroy His human creature, what does Scripture *indicate* that He *will* do to those He finally expels to hell?<sup>17</sup>

Therefore this doctrinal argument is not decisive and Peterson is right when he concludes that 'This argument [about immortality] has been vastly overrated...'.<sup>18</sup>

## 2. *The Justice of Hell*

Crockett claims that this is 'the issue that bothers evangelicals *most* about the doctrine of endless conscious punishment – that an eternal punishment for temporal sins seems cruel and unfair.'<sup>19</sup> In fact Crockett has highlighted two distinct, but related, issues: that of fairness, or justice, and that of cruelty, where the assumption is that an unjustly severe punishment is motivated by cruelty. I will deal with each aspect in turn.

In turning to the issue of the justice of hell, there is little systematic exposition of the justice of the annihilationist position itself. Indeed it is often difficult to ascertain their position and, where it can be, there seems to be a variety of positions held.<sup>20</sup> In particular it is not clear if annihilationists believe that extinction is itself a finite punishment, and so less severe than Traditionalism in terms of its length, or an infinite punishment, but less severe than Traditionalism in terms of its intensity. I want to argue that on either view there are difficulties for

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*Hell* (Eastbourne: Kingsway, 1991), pp. 42-3; J. D. Pawson, 'God Of Love, God Of Justice', *Alpha* (Feb. 1993), p. 33.

<sup>16</sup> Stott, *Essentials*, p. 316.

<sup>17</sup> Fudge, *Fire*, p. 57.

<sup>18</sup> Peterson, *Trial*, p. 177.

<sup>19</sup> W. V. Crockett, 'Response to Clark H. Pinnock', in Crockett, *Hell: Four Views*, p. 171 [italics mine].

<sup>20</sup> I have given a detailed exposition of the variety of positions in chapter 2 of *Arguing with Annihilationism* (Ph.D., Coventry University, 2000).

Annihilationism, but that extinction must in fact be a finite punishment. Further, some traditionalists have argued that extinction is not a punishment at all, which I will refute.

Most annihilationists in the recent debate argue that the traditionalist hell is an unjust punishment because it is excessive primarily in terms of its duration and, for some, secondarily in terms of its intensity, being too severe. Clearly this is only an argument *for* Annihilationism if the hell of Annihilationism is held to be a less severe punishment, and therefore more just. John Stott argues:

The third argument in favour of the concept of annihilation concerns the biblical vision of *justice*.... Would there not, then, be a serious disproportion between sins consciously committed in time and torment consciously experienced throughout eternity?... no finite set of deeds that individual sinners have done could justify such an infinite sentence.<sup>21</sup>

Clark Pinnock uses the heading 'Justice' for the fourth of his five arguments for Annihilationism, under which he argues that:

the traditional doctrine of the nature of hell... depicts God acting unjustly... It is too heavy a sentence and cannot be successfully defended as a just action on God's part. Sending the wicked to everlasting torment would be to treat persons worse than they could deserve.<sup>22</sup>

Traditionalists have also recognised that this is a common argument put forward by annihilationists. Grudem notes as the third of four arguments: 'the apparent injustice involved in the *disproportion* between sins committed in time and the punishment that is eternal'.<sup>23</sup> The argument is therefore not over the principle of justice as retributive<sup>24</sup> but over its application. So, Wenham can write: 'My problem is, not that God punishes, but that the punishment traditionally ascribed to God seems neither to square with Scripture nor to be *just*.'<sup>25</sup>

It is the expected conclusion from this argument that infinite punishment is excessive punishment for finite sins, that annihilationists

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<sup>21</sup> Stott, *Essentials*, pp. 318-19.

<sup>22</sup> Pinnock, *Conditional*, p. 151-2.

<sup>23</sup> Grudem, p. 1150 [italics original].

<sup>24</sup> Travis and Pinnock are exceptions here.

<sup>25</sup> J. W. Wenham, 'The Case for Conditional Immortality' in *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell*, ed. Nigel M. de S. Cameron (Grand Rapids: Baker/Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1992), p. 185 [italics original].



would hold that extinction is a finite punishment. Carson writes that ‘many annihilationists [hold] that punishment must be finite because we are finite and our actions are finite’.<sup>26</sup> However, a surprise of the annihilationist literature is that there is no clear reference to extinction as a finite punishment. Rather, those annihilationists who address the issue seem to hold that extinction is an infinite punishment. Henry Constable, a nineteenth-century annihilationist, refers to two ways in which the punishment is infinite: ‘*Endless annihilation is an endless or an infinite punishment... Annihilation, therefore, is an infinite punishment, both as it is endless, and as the quality of good lost is infinite...*’.<sup>27</sup> In the recent debate, Fudge writes:

If death is seen to be destruction without limitation (which the traditional view has not allowed), then is not penal death [extinction] *itself* an *infinite* punishment, especially if it is an eternal death which is forever irreversible?<sup>28</sup>

I will now examine in turn the three views that extinction is an infinite punishment, no punishment, and a finite punishment.

### ***2.1 Extinction as an infinite punishment***

Clearly if extinction is itself an infinite punishment because unending, then any annihilationist objection expressed simply in terms of the comparison between infinite punishment and finite sin is self-refuting. Therefore if annihilationists want to sustain this objection they must argue that it is not an infinite punishment *per se* which is unjustly severe, but only a certain type of infinite punishment, that is unending

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<sup>26</sup> Carson, *Gagging*, p. 534, n. 52.

<sup>27</sup> H. Constable, *The Duration and Nature of Future Punishment*. (London: Edward Hobbs, 1886), pp. 23-4 [italics original].

<sup>28</sup> Fudge, *Fire*, p. 232 [italics original]. See also E. W. Fudge and R. A. Peterson, *Two Views of Hell: A Biblical and Theological Dialogue* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2000), pp. 192-3. Some annihilationists, such as Fudge, even argue that extinction is actually a more severe punishment than unending torment, usually drawing on analogies from this life. For example, Fudge claims that ‘throughout human history men have willingly chosen the severest tortures... rather than face the final cutting off of their expected years of life’ (Fudge, *Fire*, p. 198). My reading is that Fudge is making an *ad hominem* argument to counter the charge that extinction is *no* punishment by showing that the analogous punishment of execution is considered penal.

torment. However, among the difficulties of making this argument are the following:

First, the most common form of this argument uses human penal analogies, and it is widely held that execution is a more severe punishment than life imprisonment, although the comparison is less clear if the alternative is a life of torture. Further, the difficulty in arguing decisively from the analogy of capital punishment is stated by O'Donovan:

The conventional answer, that [capital punishment] is just a little more severe than being sentenced to prison for life, is highly controversial, for... one could argue with great persuasiveness either that it is immeasurably more severe or that it is immeasurably more lenient.<sup>29</sup>

That said, most writers on both sides of the recent debate hold or assume that extinction is a less severe punishment than unending torment.<sup>30</sup>

Second, there is a long-standing theological position, traceable at least from Augustine, that existence is such an intrinsic good that the damned would prefer continued existence even in a tortured state. A modern form of this argument is made by Gerald Bray, a traditionalist: 'However bad it may be, continuing existence is a better state than total annihilation, because it preserves the dignity of the individual person.'<sup>31</sup>

Third, annihilationists who argue that extinction is an infinite, though less severe, punishment, face the challenge of arguing for the justice of such an infinite punishment. Yet it is hard to see how they could do this if they reject the classic traditionalist argument that sin against God, who is an infinite being, deserves infinite punishment. There are a number of other arguments, besides this 'classic' argument, which traditionalists use to justify a traditional hell, but which are not

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<sup>29</sup> Oliver O'Donovan, *Measure for Measure: Justice in Punishment and the Sentence of Death* (Bramcote: Grove Books, 1977), p. 19.

<sup>30</sup> A sign of this assumption is seen in the widespread concern prior to the recent debate that an annihilationist hell would limit the deterrent effect on sin and the incentive to repentance by non-Christians and to evangelism by Christians. See, for example, the section 'Secrecy and Dishonesty' in D. P. Walker, *The Decline of Hell: Seventeenth-Century Discussion of Eternal Torment* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964) pp. 3-8.

<sup>31</sup> Gerald Bray, 'Hell: Eternal Punishment or Total Annihilation?', *Evangelical* 10/2 (Summer 1992), p. 23.

obviously available to an annihilationist.<sup>32</sup> The two chief alternatives are that the damned continue to sin in hell and thus deserve further punishment; and that the guilt of the damned isn't satisfied by suffering and therefore always remains to be punished. However, both these arguments seem to be justifications for a continuation of torment, as Stott acknowledges with respect to the former when he writes,

I question whether 'eternal conscious torment' is compatible with the biblical revelation of divine justice, unless perhaps (as has been argued) the impenitence of the lost also continues throughout eternity.<sup>33</sup>

Fourth, if extinction is an infinite punishment, there is the problem of justifying a finite, separate period of torment preceding it.<sup>34</sup> The usual response, besides arguing that this is the testimony of Scripture, is that a period of torment allows for different degrees of punishment in hell.<sup>35</sup> However, it remains difficult to see why the difference in finite degrees of torment don't fade into insignificance alongside an *infinite* punishment of extinction. Annihilationists could of course respond that although the period of torment and the doctrine of degrees that follow from it may seem insignificant, they are not thereby shown to be wrong.

In conclusion, if annihilationists hold that extinction is an infinite punishment because unending, they need to clarify that their argument is not against an infinite punishment *per se*, but against the severity of the infinite punishment of Traditionalism, if they are not to be self-refuting. However, once it has been admitted that both sorts of hell are infinite punishments, the objection that classic Traditionalism is too severe is hard to argue decisively, although it is widely-held opinion by both sides in the recent debate that endless torment is a more severe punishment than extinction.

However, I believe that extinction cannot be an infinite punishment, since for a punishment to be retributive it must be experienced, but

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<sup>32</sup> The most extensive range of alternative justifications of endless punishment is discussed by Shedd in his third chapter entitled 'The Rational Argument' in W. G. T. Shedd, *The Doctrine of Endless Punishment* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1990 [1885], pp. 118-170.

<sup>33</sup> Stott, 1988, p. 319.

<sup>34</sup> This difficulty has been noted by several annihilationists. See, for example, Fudge, *Fire*, p. 200.

<sup>35</sup> See, for example, Harold Guillebaud, *The Righteous Judge: A Study of the Biblical Doctrine of Everlasting Punishment* (Taunton: The Phoenix Press, 1964), p. 65.

extinction can only be experienced in prospect, and this cannot be a complete apprehension of it in its infinite extent. I will develop this argument in the following section, in response to the charge that extinction is no punishment at all.

## 2.2 *Extinction as no punishment*

Some traditionalists argue that extinction is no punishment at all. Tidball notes it as the first objection raised against Annihilationism: 'Many [traditionalists] have to be persuaded that annihilation is punishment, since it makes hell out simply to be a state of non-existence.'<sup>36</sup> The argument is usually that punishment involves suffering and therefore needs to be experienced and that by this criterion extinction is not a punishment.<sup>37</sup> Support for this point is found in Walter Moberly's book *The Ethics of Punishment*, in a final chapter entitled 'The Conception of Eternal Punishment'. Moberly argues that after extinction 'there would be no suffering, for there would be no consciousness left to suffer... Hell then would not be a state of punishment.'<sup>38</sup> I think that this is correct and therefore the damned cannot be said to be punished after extinction. However, it is wrong to conclude that extinction is not a punishment at all, since the damned may be able to contemplate their coming extinction in a way analogous to that in which a criminal could contemplate their execution in this life. In this case they would be able to comprehend, though only partially, the future loss and so suffer in the present, thus meeting the criteria for punishment. However, they could not experience it as an infinite punishment in the present, since a finite mind could not fully grasp the prospect of an infinite future, and thus not experience an infinite loss.<sup>39</sup>

Therefore I conclude, against several traditionalists, that extinction is a punishment. I would also conclude, against writers on both sides, that it is not an infinite punishment. Therefore I disagree with the conclusion

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<sup>36</sup> Derek Tidball, *Who are the Evangelicals?* (London: Marshall Pickering, 1994), p. 154; see also Grudem, *Systematic*, p. 1150.

<sup>37</sup> See, for example, J. H. Gerstner, *Repent or Perish: With a Special Reference to the Conservative Attack on Hell* (Ligonier, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1990), p. 153 and Shedd, *Doctrine*, p. 92.

<sup>38</sup> Walter Moberly, *The Ethics of Punishment* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), pp. 349-50.

<sup>39</sup> See also Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, rev. by Edward Hickman, 2 vols. (Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), vol. 2, p. 88, II.2.

of Blomberg who argues: 'the problem of infinite punishment for finite sin is not resolved by Annihilationism: those who would cease to exist would still do so for an infinite period of time'.<sup>40</sup> Rather the punishment of an annihilationist hell *is* finite, a point which I now assess.

### 2.3 *Extinction as a finite punishment*

An obvious advantage of this position is that a finite punishment is clearly less severe in terms of duration than Traditionalism. However, there are also several possible criticisms.<sup>41</sup>

First, a number of traditionalists in the recent debate have argued that if annihilation is a finite punishment then it can be completed, and after its completion the damned should be translated to heaven. For example, Carson argues:

One might reasonably wonder why, if people pay for their sins in hell before they are annihilated, they cannot be released into heaven, turning hell into purgatory. Alternatively, if the sins have not yet been paid for, why should they be annihilated?<sup>42</sup>

I think that this argument is sound for an annihilationist hell where the only penal element is the torment. However, I don't think that the argument stands if extinction is a punishment, even a finite one. If extinction is a finite punishment, the annihilationist can simply argue that it is one that has a permanent consequence which necessarily rules out any subsequent translation to heaven.

Second, an annihilationist who wants to argue that hell is a finite punishment has to refute what I call the *classic* traditionalist argument that sin against God is deserving of infinite punishment. An example from the nineteenth century is from Shedd: 'The doctrine that sin is an infinite evil and involves infinite guilt, because of its objective reference to an infinite Being, is one of the commonplaces of theology.'<sup>43</sup> An example from the recent debate is made by Paul Helm: 'Hell is without

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<sup>40</sup> Craig Blomberg, 'Eschatology and the Church: Some New Testament Perspectives', *Themelios* 23/3 (June 1998), p. 4. See also John Blanchard, *Whatever Happened to Hell?* (Durham, Evangelical Press, 1993), p. 225; Stanley Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1994), p. 830.

<sup>41</sup> These would apply *a fortiori* if extinction is no punishment.

<sup>42</sup> Carson, *Gagging*, p. 530. See also for example Grudem, *Systematic*, p. 1151; and Blanchard, *Whatever*, p. 223.

<sup>43</sup> Shedd, *Doctrine*, p. 152, n. 48.

limit because the offence justly punished is committed against one of infinite, immeasurable holiness and goodness.<sup>44</sup>

One response is to argue that such equating of infinities is too inexact to allow for such a definite conclusion about the nature of hell. One of the clearest statements of this comes from Blocher, a traditionalist:

We shall excuse ourselves of all calculus of infinities, and hide behind a quotation from Charles Hodge... 'Men are apt to involve themselves in contradictions when they attempt to reason about the infinite. The word is so vague and so comprehensive, and our ideas of what it is intended to express are so inadequate, that we are soon lost when we seek to make it a guide in forming our judgements.'<sup>45</sup>

However, even Hodge goes on to state that 'the evil of a single sin... is in one sense an infinite evil... The guilt of sin is infinite...'<sup>46</sup> and the challenge for the annihilationist is to demonstrate that sin is not an infinite evil deserving of an infinite punishment.

Another response is to argue that sin against an infinite being is not worthy of an infinite punishment. Pinnock argues on the basis of the analogy of modern legal judgements:

We do not accept inequality in judgments on the basis of the honor of the victim, as if stealing from a doctor is worse than stealing from a beggar... No judge today would calibrate the degree of punishment on a scale of the honour of the one who has been wronged.<sup>47</sup>

However, Pinnock's analogy breaks down because legal systems do often determine punishments according to the person wronged, even if not necessarily according to the medieval concept of honour, because people are not just private individuals but representative persons. Thus, for example, the murderer of the Queen would receive a greater punishment

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<sup>44</sup> Paul Helm, *The Last Things* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1989). For the argument's place in the tradition, see D. P. Walker, *The Decline of Hell: Seventeenth-Century Discussions of Eternal Torment* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964), p. 43.

<sup>45</sup> Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (New York: Charles Scribner's and Co., 1884), p. 878, quoted by Henri Blocher, 'Everlasting Punishment and the Problem of Evil' in *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell*, ed. Nigel M. de S. Cameron (Grand Rapids: Baker/Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1992), p. 299. See also, for example, Fudge, *Fire*, p. 232.

<sup>46</sup> Hodge, *Systematic*, p. 878.

<sup>47</sup> Pinnock, *Conditional*, p. 152.

than the murderer of a mere citizen because the Queen is head of state and thus her murder is also an assault upon the state. By extension it could be argued that to sin against God is to commit the greatest wrong, since God is in some sense infinite. Therefore the task remains for the annihilationist to demonstrate that sin against God does not deserve an infinite punishment, as is so commonly argued in the tradition.

Several annihilationists, and some traditionalists in their summaries of Annihilationism, give a separate argument that the traditionalist hell displays God as unloving or cruel. As with many of the annihilationist arguments, it is presented as an argument *for* Annihilationism, although it is in the form of a criticism *against* Traditionalism. An example of this argument is Pinnock's third argument for annihilation which is headed 'Morality'. He writes, 'the traditional view... depicts God acting in a way that contradicts his goodness and offends our moral sense'.<sup>48</sup> Pinnock states the importance of this argument when he writes:

The idea that a conscious creature should have to undergo physical and mental torture through unending time is profoundly disturbing, and the thought that this is inflicted upon them by divine decree offends my conviction about God's love. *This is probably the primary reason why people question the tradition so vehemently in the first place.*<sup>49</sup>

Crockett draws a similar conclusion when he comments: 'Pinnock's most powerful point [is] the moral argument.'<sup>50</sup>

However, for evangelicals hell only displays God as unloving or cruel if it is unjust. This point is made by Wayne Grudem:

With respect to the argument from the love of God... if (as Scripture abundantly testifies) it is consistent for God to punish the wicked for a certain length of time after the last judgement, then there seems to be no necessary reason why it would be inconsistent of God to inflict the same punishment for an unending period of time.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Pinnock, *Conditional*, p. 149.

<sup>49</sup> Pinnock, *Conditional*, p. 164 [italics mine].

<sup>50</sup> William Crockett, (ed.) *Hell: Four Views* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), p. 171.

<sup>51</sup> Grudem, *Systematic*, p. 1150. See also Packer's second annihilationist argument (*Problem*, pp. 12-13). Grudem is less persuasive when he argues that, 'the same difficulty in reconciling God's love with eternal punishment would seem to be present in reconciling God's love with the idea of divine

Grudem is not arguing here that an unending punishment *is* just, but that *if* it is just then it is consistent with the love of God for him to inflict it. Thus the issue reverts to that of the justice of any particular punishment.

In conclusion, the annihilationist hell is a finite punishment, and while many traditionalist criticisms fail, the chief issue for annihilationists is to argue that sin against God is not deserving of an infinite punishment.

### ***3. The Dualism of Hell***

The argument is commonly made by annihilationists that a traditionalist hell results in an 'unbiblical dualism'<sup>52</sup> of unending evil, with the further claim, often implied rather than stated, that Annihilationism avoids, or at least reduces, such dualism and thus offers a preferable doctrine of hell.

In this section I will examine two aspects of this argument which are distinct but sometimes conflated in the literature as both being aspects of continuing evil: first, the argument that traditionalism produces what I will call 'sin dualism' which is the state of some continuing to sin for eternity; second, what I will call 'suffering dualism' which is the state of some continuing to suffer for eternity. I will argue that a simple charge of suffering dualism against Traditionalism is self-refuting, since Annihilationism does not avoid it either. However, the charge of sin dualism is valid and requires a modification of Traditionalism.

#### ***3.1 Sin Dualism***

Pinnock presents this argument under the heading 'Metaphysics':

A final objection to the traditional doctrine of the nature of hell is cosmological dualism... evil and rebellion continue in hell... heaven and hell go on existing alongside each other forever in everlasting

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punishment at all...'. The problem here is that some divine punishment may have other purposes, such as reformation, unlike the eternal punishment of hell.

<sup>52</sup> Fudge, *Fire*, p. 372, n. 18. Travis writes of 'an eternal cosmological dualism' (*Hope*, p. 135)



cosmological dualism... Only if evil, death, devils, and the wicked go into oblivion does history issue in an unqualified victory.<sup>53</sup>

Stott's argument for Annihilationism is more tentative but he makes a similar point when under the heading 'Universalism' he charges Traditionalism with failing to take account of the 'universalist' texts of Scripture.

[T]he eternal existence of the impenitent in hell would be hard to reconcile with the promises of God's final victory over evil, or with the apparently universalistic texts... These texts... lead me to ask how God can in any meaningful sense be called 'everything to everybody' while an unspecified number of people still continue in rebellion against him and under his judgement. It would be easier to hold together the awful reality of hell and the universal reign of God if hell means destruction and the impenitent are no more.<sup>54</sup>

Atkinson emphasises the importance of this issue:

As long as we hold that the wicked live for ever in conscious misery in hell and especially if we hold what seems to be *the most terrible aspect of that view*, that they continue for ever to sin in hell, this word of the apostle raises grave difficulties. While sinners live and continue to sin, how can God be all in all?<sup>55</sup>

This issue of dualism is also recognised as a key annihilationist argument by traditionalists. Sinclair Ferguson highlights the importance of this issue when he writes that,

This is perhaps the most powerful and appealing theological argument against the orthodox doctrine: how can God be 'all in all' (1 Corinthians 15:28) if there is an 'outside' in the final world order.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Pinnock, *Conditional*, pp. 152, 155. See also Fudge, *Fire*, p. 372, n. 18; P. E. Hughes, *The True Image: The Origin and Destiny of Man in Christ* (Leicester, IVP, 1989), p. 406.

<sup>54</sup> Stott, *Essentials*, p. 319.

<sup>55</sup> Basil F. C. Atkinson, *Life and Immortality* (Taunton: The Phoenix Press, n.d.), p. 112 [italics mine].

<sup>56</sup> Sinclair Ferguson, 'W. G. T. Shedd and the Doctrine of Eternal Punishment', *The Evangelical Library Annual Lecture 1994*, (Lewes: F. C. M. Trust, 1994), p. 13.

Such continuing sin is certainly a well-established feature of the traditional position, as is indicated by the title of Leckie's chapter surveying Traditionalism: 'Everlasting Evil (Dualistic Solution)'.<sup>57</sup> A typical example from the recent debate of belief in the continuation of sin is from Carson, who uses it as an argument for the continuation of punishment:

[H]ell's inmates are full of sin. They hate and attract retribution, they still love only themselves and attract retribution, they are neither capable of nor desirous of repenting, and attract retribution. As dark as these reflections are, I suspect they go a long way to providing a rationale for the eternal nature of hell and its torments.<sup>58</sup>

The usual response to this charge of dualism in the tradition is that sin justly punished is a good and not an evil, as Blocher summarises: 'Together with Saint Augustine, the classical line insists that punishment, in truth, is no evil added, but the balancing *cancellation* of evil, the moral order repaired, the good vindicated.'<sup>59</sup> I think that this argument is successful as a response to the charge of 'suffering dualism', as I will argue below. However, it is less satisfactory when hell is considered not just a place of suffering, but a place of sin. Since sin involves rebellion against God's rule, continuing sin in hell involves the continued rejection of the very thing that the 'universalist' texts emphasise being universally acknowledged. While the classic traditionalist view argues for the external restraint of sin, so that the damned cannot spoil the cosmos any further, it does not go further and argue for the removal of sin by their inner transformation so that they acknowledge God's rule and the justice of their punishment. Where the damned continue to sin I believe the annihilationist charge of unbiblical dualism is sustained. However, a view of hell in which the damned continue to suffer in hell, but no longer sin, would respond to this charge more effectively. Such a modified Traditionalism, of a hell without the continuation of sin, has been proposed by Henri Blocher.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> J. H. Leckie, *The World To Come and Final Destiny* (2nd ed., Edinburgh: T&T. Clark, 1922).

<sup>58</sup> Carson, *Gagging*, pp. 533-4.

<sup>59</sup> Blocher, *Everlasting*, p. 292 [italics original].

<sup>60</sup> See especially Blocher, *Everlasting*, and my exposition of this position in 'Hell Without Sin – A Renewed View of a Disputed Doctrine', *Churchman* 119/3 (Autumn 2005), pp. 243-61.

Another response, made by Donald Macleod, responds to the charge of cosmic dualism by arguing that hell is *outside* of the ordered cosmos and thus lies outside the scope of the universalist texts:

Yet to speak of this as an eternal, cosmic, dualism is misleading. Cosmic is exactly what it is not. Cosmic (hence cosmetics) is beauty. It means ordered reality. In that sense hell is not part of the cosmos... It is Outside. Light-less. Lawless. Love-less: the place where men indulge, and suffer, the collapsed moral order which unbelief and impotence have chosen.<sup>61</sup>

However, this is to reject the traditional argument that hell *is* part of the 'cosmos', the 'ordered reality', because it is a just punishment for sin and therefore not evil but a good. Therefore Macleod's argument would seem to heighten the very dualism he is trying to avoid. Further, I think that the annihilationist argument referred to by Ferguson above still stands, and that hell is to be included within the orbit of the universalist texts.

Therefore I think that annihilationists are right to conclude that this continuation of sin by the damned (and the demons) does create an unbiblical dualism. However, the solution offered by annihilationists faces at least two problems of its own.

First, Annihilationism has a temporary period of sin dualism of its own, since no annihilationist has rejected the notion that the damned continue in sin.<sup>62</sup> It seems that the annihilationist hell is as dualistic as the traditionalist one, at least until the last sinner is extinguished.

Second, it can be argued that Annihilationism has its own form of permanent dualism. Langton Clarke, a former professor of Divinity at Durham University, wrote in the early part of the twentieth century:

But how is [evil] to be expelled? There is the way of Annihilation – expulsion of sin by the destruction of the sinner. But... if this were the method of cure, who would be the victor – God or sin? Would not the

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<sup>61</sup> D. Macleod, 'Must we all become Annihilationists?', *Evangelicals Now* (June 1991), p. 14.

<sup>62</sup> This also raises the question how annihilationists would respond to the argument, made regularly by traditionalists, that continuing sin deserves continuing punishment, and that if sin never ends then neither does punishment.

victory remain with the evil which compelled God to uncreate His own creation?<sup>63</sup>

Blocher writes about the ‘waste’ of Annihilationism and contrasts his own position in which ‘the existence of the lost shall not amount to a total waste, neither for the universe, nor for God, nor for themselves....’<sup>64</sup> A more complete and therefore satisfactory solution would be one in which not only is there no continuing sin after the Last Judgement, but also in which the damned continue to exist and serve a purpose, recognised and accepted even by themselves. Again, I believe that the modified form of Traditionalism proposed by Henri Blocher offers just such a better alternative, and thus ameliorates the major problem annihilationists have identified with Traditionalism, which Atkinson calls ‘the most terrible aspect of that view’.<sup>65</sup>

### 3.2 *Suffering dualism*

Occasionally annihilationists argue that the continuation of suffering is itself an evil which produces an unbiblical dualism. Thus Atkinson began his quotation above ‘As long as we hold that the wicked live for ever in conscious misery in hell...’. If annihilationists argue simply that *any* suffering in hell is dualistic then it is self-refuting since the damned also suffer in an annihilationist hell. If they respond that temporary suffering is not dualistic, then this must be because suffering justly inflicted is a good. However, if it is a good for a finite period it must remain so as long as the punishment remains just. An example of this response to ‘suffering dualism’ is given by Helm:

[W]hile there is pain in hell, and pain is in some sense an evil, the pain of hell is *deserved* pain. It is penal pain. If pain *per se* is an evil, then hell is the triumph of evil. But if, on the other hand, hell is a just place, because none suffer there except those who deserve to suffer, and none suffer more, nor less, than they deserve, then hell is not evil.<sup>66</sup>

Therefore the issue of suffering dualism collapses into the prior issue of the justice of the punishment.

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<sup>63</sup> J. L. Clarke, *The Eternal Saviour-Judge* (John Murray: London, 1904), p. 109.

<sup>64</sup> Blocher, *Everlasting*, p. 311.

<sup>65</sup> Atkinson, *Life*, p. 112. See footnote 60 above.

<sup>66</sup> Helm, *Last*, p. 114 [italics original].

More commonly the issue of suffering arises in the argument that the sight or knowledge of the continuing suffering of the damned will diminish the blessedness of the righteous in heaven. It is the first reason Michael Green gives for his rejection of Traditionalism:

What sort of God would he be who could rejoice eternally in heaven with the saved, while downstairs the cries of the lost made an agonising cacophony? Such a God is not the person revealed in Scripture as utterly just and utterly loving.<sup>67</sup>

J. I. Packer also notes this argument:

Let us look at the biblical arguments used [by annihilationists]. They reduce to four... Fourth, it is said that the joy of heaven will be marred by knowledge that some continue under merited retribution.<sup>68</sup>

The response to the annihilationist argument depends upon the point they are making. If they are arguing that *unjust* suffering would diminish the bliss of heaven then traditionalists would agree with them, and the issue collapses again into the prior question of what is a just punishment for the damned.

Packer states that,

since in heaven Christians will be like God in character, loving what he loves and taking joy in all his self-manifestation, including his justice, there is no reason to think that their joy will be impaired in this way.<sup>69</sup>

However, if annihilationists suggest that *any* suffering of the damned, even if just, serves to diminish the bliss of heaven, then this would rule out any period of suffering of the damned after the Last Judgement.

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<sup>67</sup> Michael Green, *Evangelism Through the Local Church*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1990), p. 69. See also J. W. Wenham, 'The Case for Conditional Immortality' in *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell*, ed. Nigel M. de S. Cameron (Grand Rapids: Baker/Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1992), p. 189; and Fudge, *Fire*, p. 196. This argument is in sharp contrast to the common argument in the tradition that the knowledge of hell added to the bliss of the saints. This was even used as an argument against Annihilationism, since the saints would lose the blessing of contemplating the damned. See the discussion in 'The Abominable Fancy' in Walker, *Decline*, pp. 29-32.

<sup>68</sup> Packer, *Problem*, pp. 12-13.

<sup>69</sup> Packer, *Problem*, p. 18.

Conversely, if it is argued that the diminution of the bliss of the righteous is acceptable, but only for a limited period, then this raises at least two further problems.

First, the annihilationist position introduces what one might term a 'new Intermediate State' into eschatology, with a period between the Last Judgement and the extinction of the final sinner in hell. On this view there would seem to be a period of diminished bliss for the saints while those in hell continue in torment, followed by unalloyed bliss only after an unspecified period, with the extinction of the last person in hell.<sup>70</sup> This is to introduce a novel doctrine that is nowhere in the tradition. There is also the wider issue of whether there are such significant events after the Last Judgement. It could be argued that the notion of any event for the damned after the Last Judgement is to evade the force of it being the *last* judgement. The same problems would also seem to attach to the unending suffering of demonic beings in hell, and thus the annihilationist has to argue that Satan and his angels should be extinguished too. Pinnock argues this in the quotation above, but he is rare amongst annihilationists in acknowledging this. While I don't think that this raises any significant further doctrinal difficulties, it encourages caution in proceeding since there is almost no such claim in the tradition.<sup>71</sup>

Second, even if the damned are removed the memory of them would remain to diminish the bliss of heaven. An obvious response is to argue that the memory of the damned will be erased from the minds of the righteous, as P. E. Hughes does.<sup>72</sup> This is not an argument restricted to annihilationists, and from the traditionalist side Blanchard suggests that both God and the blessed will forget at least their own sins.

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<sup>70</sup> This seems to be recognised by Guillebaud, *Righteous*, p. 6.

<sup>71</sup> It is also exegetically problematic: one of the strongest texts in support of a traditionalist position is Revelation 20:10 which refers to Satan and his angels. Indeed several traditionalists have used the eternal existence of Satan as an argument against Annihilationism. See for example Edwards, *Works*, vol. 2, p. 85, II.4.

<sup>72</sup> Hughes, *True*, p. 407. Not all annihilationists take this line: see, for example, Guillebaud, *Righteous*, p. 11. The ACUTE report notes this option, but judges that there is some biblical evidence against it (ACUTE, *Nature*, pp. 109-10).

If we dare to use such language [from Jeremiah 31:34], God will have a mental block as far as the sins of his people are concerned. What is more, so will [the blessed], or they could not be perfectly happy.<sup>73</sup>

However, one difficulty with this position is to determine how one can have selective memories of one's past life on earth without recalling the existence of the damned. Further, even if the memories of the righteous were purged, there remains a permanent reminder of torment in heaven in the marks of Christ's passion that he bears in his resurrected body. Indeed the annihilationist objection I am considering here makes it difficult to see what place there can be for remembering the cross, either in heaven or now on earth, since it shows the suffering involved in the just punishment of sin.

In conclusion, I believe that the charge of dualism is correct where the damned in hell continue to sin and remain in a state of rebellion. However, the charge of dualism fails where the damned merely suffer punishment without continuing to sin and rebel against God.

#### *4. Hell and the Atonement*

Finally I turn to examine the implications of a link between the doctrine of hell and the doctrine of the atonement. The paucity of discussion of this link is highlighted by Edward Fudge: 'The literature concerning final punishment contains a number of surprises, and one of the greatest is the scant attention given to the death of Jesus Christ.'<sup>74</sup> The value of, and need for, further study is stated by the ACUTE report:

questions of hell are never far from questions of soteriology – that is, the doctrine of salvation and theories of atonement. Although detailed

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<sup>73</sup> Blanchard, *Whatever*, p. 180.

<sup>74</sup> Fudge, *Fire*, p. 215. On the annihilationist side Fudge's own discussion is a rare exception, devoting a whole chapter to the question, entitled 'Golgotha and Gehenna (Jesus' Death and the Punishment of the Lost)' (Fudge, *Fire*, Chapter 12). See also Atkinson, *Life*, p. 103. Recent traditionalist discussions of this link and its implications for the doctrine of hell are even rarer and briefer than those of annihilationists, although the most significant contribution is by Peterson, with whom this section shares its chief conclusions. (Peterson, *Trial*, pp. 213-16, and in E. W. Fudge and R. A. Peterson, *Two Views of Hell: A Biblical and Theological Dialogue* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2000), pp. 105-7; 174-9. See also R. A. Morey, *Death and the Afterlife* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1984), pp. 101-3; Gerstner, *Repent*, pp. 159-62.

exploration of this link lie beyond our remit here, we believe it to be an important and fertile area for further research.<sup>75</sup>

The logic of the link between hell and the atonement is summarised by Morey:

Christ took the punishment for sin which His people would have suffered... the nature of Christ's vicarious punishment will be a good indication of the nature of divine punishment of rebel sinners.<sup>76</sup>

The middle term in the link between the atonement and hell is thus a doctrine of vicarious punishment, usually understood by evangelicals as penal substitution. It is on the basis of this link that writers on both sides of the recent debate speak of 'Christ suffering hell'.<sup>77</sup>

Annihilationists make two related arguments on the basis of this link, of which I will focus on the second argument, since it alone relates directly to the validity of Annihilationism. First, negatively, Jesus did not suffer a traditionalist hell because he didn't remain eternally on the cross, but his suffering came to an end with his death.<sup>78</sup> Second, positively, Jesus did suffer an annihilationist hell because he suffered a period of torment followed by death, which is understood as extinction. Thus Fudge entitles the section in which he discusses the death of Christ 'Jesus' Death Involved Total Destruction', in which he argues that Christ's human nature, both body and soul, was extinguished on the cross.<sup>79</sup> Similarly Froom begins a section headed 'Christ Truly "Died" According to Prediction, Fulfilment, Attestation' with this statement:

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<sup>75</sup> ACUTE, *Nature*, p. 104.

<sup>76</sup> Morey, *Death*, pp. 101-2.

<sup>77</sup> The ACUTE report makes a rare error, with respect to both the recent debate and the tradition, when it claims that, 'Traditionalists have tended to... [state] that the death of Christ was a one-off conscious punishment which cannot be used as an analogy for eternal conscious punishment after final judgment' (ACUTE, *Nature*, p. 104).

<sup>78</sup> See, for example, Fudge, *Fire*, pp. 232-3; Wenham, *Case*, p. 185; Atkinson, *Life*, p. 103.

<sup>79</sup> Fudge, *Fire*, pp. 381-2 [italics original]. See also Atkinson, *Life*, pp. 62-3; p. 103. Peterson notes the astonishing reluctance of Fudge to rule out the possibility that the whole person of Christ, deity and humanity, was extinguished, but proceeds on the assumption that Fudge does not hold this (Peterson, *Two Views*, pp. 176-7).



It is essential to establish the fact that Christ *died* on Calvary – truly *died*. And no inner or real self, or being, *as a separate, continuing entity*, lived on during the period between His giving up of the “ghost,” or “expiring,” and His resurrection on the “third day.”<sup>80</sup>

I think that annihilationists are correct that the doctrine of penal substitution entails the extinction of Christ’s human nature. However, I will argue that this understanding of Christ’s death results in unorthodox doctrines of the incarnation and the resurrection, and these constitute strong grounds for rejecting the annihilationist doctrine of hell.

The implication for the incarnation is that if Christ’s human nature was extinguished at death then the incarnation ceased at that point. This, it can be argued, contradicts Chalcedonian Christology. John Cooper summarises the teaching of the Council of Chalcedon on the inseparability of the two natures after the incarnation, and then points out the implication of holding that Christ’s human nature was extinguished on the cross.

*Now if the extinction – re-creation account of Jesus’ resurrection is true, then the teaching of Chalcedon is false. The two natures of Christ are separable and were in fact separated between Good Friday and Easter Sunday. The human being Jesus completely ceased to exist... So the divine-human person Jesus Christ did not exist for the interim.*<sup>81</sup>

The traditional understanding of the death of Christ is that his human body and soul were separated, and that this does not constitute a cessation of the incarnation. Peterson draws the conclusion that he believes annihilationists should make:

I conclude: instead of Fudge’s appeal to systematic theology strengthening his case for Conditionalism, it weakens it considerably. Indeed, to hold that Jesus’ humanity was annihilated on the cross brings one into conflict with Chalcedonian Christology. Such a prospect ought to cause conditionalists to re-examine their views, for the Bible teaches

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<sup>80</sup> Froom, *Conditionalist* (Washington: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1965), vol. 1, p. 377 [italics original].

<sup>81</sup> John Cooper, *Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting. Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), pp. 144-5. See also R. A. Peterson, ‘The Hermeneutics of Annihilationism: The Theological Method of Edward Fudge’, *Presbyterian* 21.1 (1995), p. 27; Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1941), p. 339.

that Christ did suffer the pains of hell, but not as they are conceived by Annihilationists.<sup>82</sup>

The implications for the resurrection are several. First, if Christ's human nature was extinguished at death then re-creation is required rather than resurrection. Resurrection is impossible after an annihilationist hell since there is nothing left to resurrect. Gerstner states this objection succinctly: 'God can't raise what is not there to raise.'<sup>83</sup> Cooper, in the quotation above, refers to 'the extinction – re-creation account of Jesus' resurrection'. Morey concludes, 'If [Annihilationists] are consistent, they will have to end up denying the bodily resurrection of Christ as do the Jehovah's Witnesses.'<sup>84</sup> Therefore if Christ was extinguished he cannot have been resurrected. Conversely, since the New Testament witnesses to the resurrection of Christ's body he cannot have been extinguished.

Second, there is a further difficulty with respect to the soul: even if something extinguished *can* be said to be resurrected, there is no doctrine in the New Testament of the resurrection of the *soul* of Christ. Gerstner makes this point in a comment on John 2:19:

If the soul had perished with the death of the body, as [P. E.] Hughes assumes, it would have perished permanently because the soul, according to the Annihilationists, has no independent existence apart from the body... Our text refers to the resurrection of Christ's body, not His soul,

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<sup>82</sup> Peterson, *Hermeneutics*, p. 27. Fudge offers a response to Peterson's arguments from the atonement, and states that, 'Perhaps the most extreme of Peterson's red herrings is his argument based on the Council of Chalcedon's statement known as the Definition of the Union of the Divine and Human Natures in the Person of Christ (issued in the year 451)' (Fudge, *Two Views*, p. 205, in section pp. 204-7). Fudge's main argument seems to be that Peterson is wrong to rest an argument on anything but Scripture, and in doing so has been overly influenced by fallible human logic, yet he does not directly refute the points that Peterson has made.

<sup>83</sup> Gerstner, *Repent*, p. 92.

<sup>84</sup> Morey, *Death*, p. 102. Morey also argues that if Jesus suffered extinction then his body would have ceased to exist at the moment of his death, and not simply cease to be animated: 'If the Annihilationists were right, then Christ should have disintegrated on the cross and would have ceased to exist in body and soul' (*Death*, p. 102). He also notes that this is another conclusion drawn by the Jehovah's Witnesses (*Death*, p. 102). Therefore there could have been no deposition or entombment of Christ's body.

which according to Hughes, must be gone forever since no re-creation of the soul is mentioned in the text.<sup>85</sup>

However, mortalists have argued that the soul as well as the body of the dead would be resurrected. Therefore while annihilationists need to account for the re-creation of Christ's soul, there is at least one, albeit minority, position which evangelicals could appeal to.

Third, and related to the issue of the incarnation, for the Annihilationist the first Easter morning marked a new incarnation, since Christ would now be taking to himself newly-created flesh. Peterson also makes this point, although confusingly he talks about 'resurrected flesh' rather than 're-created flesh' following extinction:

Furthermore if Jesus were annihilated on Calvary, and his natures separated because his humanity ceased to exist, then his resurrection constituted another incarnation. This incarnation would differ from the first in that this time the Word would take to himself resurrected flesh. Notwithstanding, it would be a second incarnation.<sup>86</sup>

Robert Anderson also made this point in the nineteenth century: 'So we say if *the Man* Christ Jesus did not rise from the dead a wholly *new* being was called to life at the resurrection.'<sup>87</sup>

In conclusion, on the premise of the link between the atonement and hell that is held in this debate, there are significant difficulties for the annihilationist position which I believe are great enough to conclude that Annihilationism is an unacceptable position for an Evangelical.

Of course many annihilationists argue that the cross wasn't a traditionalist hell. John Wenham notes that,

Many stress that on the cross Jesus suffered the pains we deserve. But, though he suffered physical torture, the utter dereliction of separation from the Father, and death, he did not suffer endless pain.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Gerstner, *Repent*, p. 44. Gerstner is inaccurate to state that all annihilationists reject the possibility of the independent existence of the soul. See under '1. The Immortality of the Soul' above.

<sup>86</sup> Peterson, *Hermeneutics*, p. 27.

<sup>87</sup> Robert Anderson, *Human Destiny: After Death – What?* (London: Pickering and Inglis, 1913), p. 95, footnote [*italics original*].

<sup>88</sup> Wenham, *Case*, p. 185; see also Atkinson, *Life*, p. 103.

However, the classic traditionalist response is that Christ did not need to suffer endless pain to make substitution, since he was able to bear the infinite punishment of hell in a finite period of time because of his divine nature.<sup>89</sup> The most common version of the argument uses what I call a 'divine multiplier' whereby the sufferings of Christ in his human nature are held to be of infinite value because of the union with the divine nature. To this, annihilationists have tended to respond that the argument is unduly speculative.<sup>90</sup> However, it has no objectionable doctrinal consequences, and a defence of Traditionalism at this point is not essential to a refutation of Annihilationism.

### CONCLUSION

I have examined each of the main doctrinal arguments in the literature, and I have concluded that none are as decisive as many annihilationists believe.

The argument from the immortality of the soul is not decisive, even if it has been influential.

Under the argument from justice I argued that the annihilationist hell is actually a finite punishment, and might be defended from a collapse into a form of purgatory if it can be argued it is a finite punishment with permanent consequences. The chief remaining doctrinal task for annihilationists would be to demonstrate that the 'classic' argument for an infinite hell as a just punishment for sin against an infinite God is not successful. I also concluded that the claim that God is unloving turns on the argument about the justice of hell.

The argument about dualism is, I believe, the most significant of all the annihilationist arguments when formulated in terms of a dualism of continuing sin. I think that annihilationists have served to expose a damaging weakness in the traditional view at this point. However, I argued that Annihilationism has its own temporary dualism. I suggested that a modified Traditionalism, in which the damned continue to suffer but cease to sin, would offer a more satisfactory response to this problem.

Finally I argued that the link with the atonement is well grounded and raises major objections to Annihilationism which are sufficient for its rejection by evangelicals.

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<sup>89</sup> See, for example, Grudem, *Systematic*, pp. 577-8.

<sup>90</sup> See, for example, Fudge, *Fire*, pp. 232-3.

## REVIEWS

### **The Evangelical Conversion Narrative. Spiritual Autobiography in Early Modern England**

D. Bruce Hindmarsh

Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2005; 384 pp., hardback, £60; ISBN 0199245754

Spiritual autobiography is a fascinating literary genre. It emerged properly in the seventeenth century when a more introspective emphasis in their theology led Puritans like Bunyan and Baxter to write very full accounts of their personal experiences, thus breaking the Reformers' customary silence on such matters. It was amidst the mass conversions of the Evangelical Revival a century later, however, that the genre really reached its zenith. Whether male or female, young or old, educated or uneducated, these eighteenth-century converts wrote narratives, and the result is a rich collection of spiritual autobiographies dating from that period. It is this collection in particular that Bruce Hindmarsh has set out to analyse.

The major discovery to emerge from his analysis is that each ecclesiastical community embraced by the revival had its own form of conversion narrative. The Methodist narratives marshalled by John Wesley centred on a tortured struggle. The Moravian narratives encouraged by Count Zinzendorf involved a calm surrender. The Scottish Presbyterian narratives supervised by William McCulloch in Cambuslang were driven by the principle of *solī Deo gloria*. Apparently none of Wesley's narrators had undergone a Moravian form of conversion, and none of Zinzendorf's narrators had experienced a Scottish Presbyterian form of conversion. Hindmarsh infers from these findings that converts were interpreting, and not merely recording their experiences. They were imposing upon their own lives the model of conversion espoused by their communities so that every detail conformed exactly to the norm. Hindmarsh's tone is not cynical: he never questions whether these writers were truly converted. The issue is whether they had been converted in precisely the way they felt they had been; the way their communities wanted them to have been.

Hindmarsh's other significant discovery is that, due to its historical situation, this collection of spiritual autobiographies is unique. It 'appeared on the trailing edge of Christendom and the leading edge of modernity' (p.

340). The narratives display a degree of self-reflection that sets them apart from impersonal pre-modern biography; but it is always self-reflection within a community, which sets them apart from post-Christian autobiography with its aggressive autonomy. These writers had a strong sense of individual identity, but they found that identity in the context of 'intimate group meetings where the fellowship was close and people spoke more freely to each other than ever they had before' (p. 344). Hindmarsh pertinently observes the relevance of this to our own, post-modern age with its crisis of identity.

This book is hugely readable throughout. Quotations from conversion narratives are plentiful enough to give the reader a feel for the genre but never become tedious or overwhelming. Hindmarsh's treatment of the most cherished people and events in evangelical history is refreshingly balanced, neither hagiographical nor iconoclastic. It might be questioned whether 'Spiritual Autobiography in Early Modern England' is the most appropriate subtitle for a book that devotes a whole chapter to a revival that took place in Scotland. And a comment on the impact of mass spiritual autobiographies on Cambuslang's Presbyterianism would have been welcome. Was the parental expectation of faith developing gradually from infancy de-emphasised with this heightened emphasis upon conversion? But these are small points and I certainly recommend this new work on the Evangelical Revival. Its immediate concern with spiritual autobiography makes the book interesting but not obscure. It is not just for literary specialists. These eighteenth-century conversion narratives are of general historical and theological significance, and Bruce Hindmarsh's study of them is most welcome.

*Dan Peters, Cambridge Presbyterian Church*

## **The Westminster Handbook to Evangelical Theology**

Roger E. Olson

Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY, 2004; 328 pp., £25; ISBN 0664224644

What is an evangelical? As a start to answering that question, Roger Olson begins his book with some handy definitions for readers to pick their way through. And he also does a useful job of disentangling 'evangelical' from 'fundamentalist' and 'charismatic'. A pamphlet resembling this section should be given away to every library of broadcasters in Britain, since the distinctions Olson makes completely escape the current crop of TV programme-makers.

However a word of warning. Although the author is easy in style, well informed and well organised (or should that be 'organized'?) the title of this book is unintentionally misleading for UK readers. The book is really a primer of evangelicalism and its theology *in the United States*. True, the very clearly written history section with which Olson begins, traces evangelicalism to the 16th century European Reformation, European 'pietism' and the revival movements of the 18th century in the British Isles. But from that point on, evangelicalism appears mainly to be a North American phenomenon. In fact, the history section focuses primarily on Princeton, J. G. Machen, the early and later Fundamentalists, the 'battle for the Bible' and the work of the Billy Graham organisation.

Beyond the entry on the World Evangelical Fellowship there is not much awareness of *global* evangelical thinking. Since the future of the movement probably rests with church in the non-western world, this field merited a lot more attention, in fact a section to itself even if it had to be written by another specialist. There is, for instance, significant theological writing from evangelical authors in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Shocking as this may be, some of these authors are being read in theological training centres more than Warfield!

'Gold standard' theologians then become obvious: Warfield, Ramm and Carnell (even though the latter two were really apologists) but not J. I. Packer or the prolific Alister McGrath who are both so popular in North America, nor Samuel Escobar and René Padilla who changed the face of evangelical theology of mission at and after Lausanne. The rise in the 20th century of evangelical theology and training bodies on the mainland continent of Europe enjoy no entries. You will look in vain for entries on the remarkable modern recovery of theological evangelicalism in the Church of England and its sister bodies, or of a similar movement in the Church of Scotland, or the resurgence of Protestant Reformation theology, or the arrival of mature Pentecostal theology in Europe. In the large section on well-known personalities, 14 of the 16 entries are American. And further definitions are needed to show differences between American evangelical theology and that of other western forms.

From the history section, one is left with the impression that evangelicalism is always a movement of theology whose whole meaning for existence is entirely introverted: internecine wars of attrition about the Bible and detailed internalised doctrine for the elite. The account of *Christianity Today* is one refreshing exception to this parody.

So is this a bad book? No, not at all. It is very well written and informative. It also contains a number of alerts for British evangelicalism to note with serious attention. Some of the energy-sapping introversions

which still seem to plague parts of the American scene also threaten the UK scene. Given the defensiveness, traditionalism, introspection and navel-gazing which can keep evangelicals fruitlessly busy here, Olson is well worth reading and should be taken as a prophetic warning to the UK.

*Roy Kearsley, South Wales Baptist College/Cardiff University*

## **The Rise of Evangelicalism**

Mark Noll

Apollós, Leicester, 2004; 316 pp., £16.99; ISBN 1844740013

*The Rise of Evangelicalism* by Mark Noll is the first volume in a five-volume set that will consider the development of evangelicalism in the English-speaking world since the seventeenth century. The author, a well-known writer on American evangelicalism, is co-editor of the series with David Bebbington. This volume covers most of the eighteenth century, focusing in the main on the revivals associated with Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield and John Wesley, and discussing some of their effects on British and early American society.

While the term evangelical had been used almost as a synonym for Protestant in the century following the Reformation, Noll has chosen to use it as describing a movement that has minimised denominational distinctives and instead stressed the necessity of the new birth and holy living. This movement rose out of English Puritanism, European Pietism and Anglican spirituality, and it is not difficult to sense it was a reaction against a sterile form of Protestantism. George Whitefield stands out as the spokesperson for this movement, and no doubt denominational distinctives were not a priority for him (others were not so ready to abandon their convictions on church polity, as was seen in the refusal of Ralph and Ebenezer Erskine to endorse Whitefield when he preached, with much success, in Church of Scotland congregations).

The second half of the seventeenth century was a time of significant change. Developments in international trade between Europe and America were utilised by the evangelicals to begin and maintain trans-Atlantic links that furthered their cause. They also became increasingly involved in attempting to improve social conditions, with the best-known response being their opposition to the slave trade.

Noll has written an engaging and comprehensive account of a movement that can be observed from two different viewpoints. At one level, the large number of converts from the revivals that gave the movement much of its impetus was the work of the Holy Spirit, as were the spiritual practices that these converts engaged in. At the same time, the



movement was a social force that contributed to the changing culture that was adjusting to the opinions of the Enlightenment. Noll manages to maintain both viewpoints in balance as he steers the reader through a complex story.

This volume is an excellent beginning to what should be a valuable collection.

*Malcolm Maclean, Free Church of Scotland, Scalpay, Isle of Harris*

## **To Know and Love God. Method for Theology**

David C. Clark

Crossway Books, Wheaton, Ill. 2003; 494 pp., £35; ISBN 1581344848

This outstanding book is one of those books that delivers far more than it promises. It promises to be an introduction to theology that deals with all the normal subjects such as epistemology and hermeneutics. What it delivers is a scintillating and often profound engagement with the post-modern intellectual and cultural world in which evangelical theology is to be done. The book reminded me in some ways of D. A. Carson's *The Gagging of God* in its scope and winsomeness. Clark touches on an immense number of intellectual issues with a confident lightness of touch that rarely fails him. As a philosopher of religion he is naturally interested in philosophical issues, the demanding discussion of which sometimes defeated me, but otherwise the book is a pleasure to read. Like climbing a mountain the book requires effort and has its tough patches, but the view is spectacular and that makes the effort worthwhile.

There are a number of clear features of the book. It is an *evangelical* introduction to theology. Clark writes from a commitment to classical Protestantism that is both confessional and experiential. Clark's approach is *eclectic* and *eirenic* in that he refuses to be pigeon-holed on some issues such as the rival claims of perspectivalism and objectivism in epistemology. Good academic that he is, he can see the arguments on both sides of a question, but in the end he always judiciously states his view. His eirenicism will no doubt help to commend his theology to those who disagree with him, both inside and outside the evangelical fold. Whatever issue Clark deals with he is always culturally, intellectually and theologically *engaged*. While written primarily for evangelicals this work is not in-house. Clark engages with liberal theology in its various forms as well as with current philosophy. In some ways this is the most valuable aspect of the book. It highlights the points where evangelicalism in the 21st century must engage the world intellectually. If you like, this is a map for the battle of the mind in which we must be engaged.

But the most distinctive feature of the book is the purpose of evangelical theology that Clark consistently adheres to and threads through his chapters. For him the purpose of theology is *sapientia* or wisdom. Theology is not an end in itself, but rather must serve to enable God's people to become wise in the business of godly living. Sadly this purpose has all too often been lost sight of in theology, and even evangelicals have fought the battle on the arid territory of modernism. Clark calls us back to the vision of theology that inspired the Reformers and the Puritans, not to mention the church fathers.

After surveying the theological field (chapter 1), Clark moves on to deal with biblical authority and interpretation (chapter 2), contextualisation in a globalized and multicultural world (chapter 3), epistemology (chapter 4), the unity of theological disciplines (chapter 5), academic theology (chapter 6), theology and spiritual life and the church (chapter 7), science (chapter 8), philosophy (chapter 9), world religions and pluralism (chapter 10), language (chapter 11) and theological language and spiritual life (chapter 12).

I suspect that this book will establish itself as a mainstay in the field for a long time to come. Its value is in vindicating the integrity of evangelical theology in the face of the challenges of post-modernism. Considering the anti-intellectualism of so much evangelicalism today Clark's book is a welcome intellectual and spiritual antidote that should help the people of God rediscover the riches of God's wisdom in Christ for the whole of life.

*Kenneth Brownell, East London Tabernacle, London*

## **Western Humanism: A Christian Perspective**

J. D. Carter

Photon Publishing, North Canton, Ohio 2005; 267 pp., \$17.99; ISBN 0974005398

Dr Carter is a scientist who has used his retirement to study Christian philosophy. He himself became a Christian after reading *Mere Christianity* by C. S. Lewis.

To believe that humans 'can be moral – outside of a genuine relationship to the God of Scripture – is a gross error in thinking'. With this fundamental premise, the book is for Christians and others who may want to know how a biblical philosophy differs from secular humanist thought. The author sees history from Genesis onwards as cycles of faithfulness to God's revelation, followed by reversion to humanism, well

defined by the ancient Greek Protagoras as 'Man is the measure of all things.'

Part one is a critical historical survey, from ancient Greece through to the four figures of Darwin, Nietzsche, Freud and Marx. Until the 19th century, western humanism was largely shaped by Plato's threefold division of human nature into intellect, will and emotion, with the first as the controlling feature. Since then it has grown more secular and in some ways reverted to pre-socratic thinking which believed that truth was whatever seemed true to the individual. Likewise the view of Socrates, that you can acquire virtue through self-knowledge, has led to the modern obsession with education and its importance in the humanist programme.

The Hebrew Scriptures, in contrast, teach that humans by themselves are unable to either understand or accomplish the good, and that one comes to a knowledge of what is ultimately real only through faith in God's revealed truth, and for that in turn one must be 'supernaturally enabled'. Israel's refusal to believe her God is the reason why humanism is today the dominant philosophy of the Jewish people.

The book takes us through a summary of intellectual and church history, with a number of interesting cameos such as the conflict between Erasmus and Luther over free will. Carter defends Newton against the charge of deism. He uses Darwin's autobiography to discuss the problem of evil. He draws out the lasting significance of Nietzsche's stress on will over intellect, and his mistrust of conscience. He shows how Freud encouraged people to throw over the sexual standards derived from Scripture which in his view crippled society with guilt; and how Marx and Engels attacked marriage.

Part two looks at modern humanism and the pursuit of wealth and pleasure, modern humanism and the family, modern humanism and religion. Dr Carter points out that alongside secular humanism, there is the non-secular humanism which has invaded a large area of modern Christianity. The result is that people today either have no purpose in life, or a purpose which is self-centred; self-help books assume that behaviour change is entirely within the control of the human will. Without Scripture, there are no moral criteria which do not ultimately end up as simply the views of those seeking legitimacy for them; this in effect follows Nietzsche back to the ancient Greek sophists, who wrongly believed that image determined reality.

This is a good book of its kind, although in the final chapters Carter is a bit selective about the moral issues discussed – he considers greed but not the problems of capitalism, for example, and deals rather briefly with abortion – although he does hint that such issues are not always

straightforward. He also takes a quick look at selected theological controversies like open theism, and shows that C. S. Lewis moved during his life from a position of stressing free will to a greater stress on the sovereignty of God.

The author seems to be a fairly strict creationist, and argues that if Jesus made a reference to a person in the Old Testament (e.g. Noah or Jonah) that is proof in itself that the event was historical. There are a few irritating features in the book, such as citing Scripture sometimes in a 'thee' and 'thou' version, use of sexist language, and spelling Marx's colleague Engels 'Engles'.

Readers should also be aware that Carter at no point seeks to engage in dialogue with his humanist opponents, and this is clearly explained when he outlines his approach in the introduction. That said, the book is an impressive tour of Western intellectual history and useful in its summaries of the views of influential thinkers, which are always long enough to do them justice.

*Jock Stein, Tulliallan and Kincardine Parish Church*

## **Answering God: Towards a Theology of Intercession**

Robert Ellis

Paternoster Press, Carlisle, 2005; 220 pp., £14.99; ISBN 184227340X

## **Intercessory Prayer: Modern Theology, Biblical Teaching and Philosophical Thought**

Philip Clements-Jewery

Ashgate Publishing, Aldershot, 2005; 158 pp., £40; ISBN 0754638286

As with buses, so with theological books: you wait for ages, and then two come along at once – two studies by Baptist pastor-theologians at the end of an apparently long fallow period, in addition revealing the unsung contributions of many others before.

There are interesting overlaps: both engage closely with Vincent Brümmer (always misspelled as Brummer in Ellis), Barth and Moltmann; both specify Paul Fiddes' help, and even the blurbs converge: God is the one 'whose answers and purposes combine' (Fiddes on Ellis); God 'both influences and is influenced by the creation' (Clements-Jewery; also pp. 6, 147). 'Reciprocity' (Ellis, p. 112) and 'two-way contingency' (Clements-Jewery, p. 8; Ellis, p. 175), then, are at the heart of these studies, neither of which constitute light bed-time reading!

And yet there are differences of style and content, as the impressive bibliographies of both books demonstrate. Ellis amasses direct questions; Clements-Jewery constructs the convoluted sentences of a doctoral dissertation. Ellis is more Barthian and Trinitarian, Clements-Jewery closer to Process Theology. Ellis borrows from Samuel Balentine's *Prayer in the Hebrew Bible* the *leitmotif* that God is 'one who is personal, accessible, loving, powerful, and compassionate' (p. 2); whereas Clements-Jewery sets out to find 'an intellectually respectable, logically coherent and theologically satisfying account of petitionary and intercessory prayer' (p. 6). Ellis expounds Augustine, Calvin, Cullmann and Open Theism; Clements-Jewery introduces David Crump (*Jesus the Intercessor*) G. P. Wiles (*Paul's Intercessory Prayers*) (neither mentioned in Ellis), John MacMurray and the Process theologians.

Unfolding the ambiguous pun of the title, Ellis has four chapters on the theme of 'answering'. His first chapter, 'Starting with Scripture: The God who Commands us to Pray', looks (over-briefly) at Jacob and Moses, Jesus, John, Paul, Hebrews and James, presenting the useful language of 'negotiation' (p. 20) and proposing that 'our prayers are God answering God' (p. 31). (Incidentally, in a lovely misprint, R. E. Brown's 'the Christian is in union with Jesus and Jesus is in union with the Father' becomes 'the Christian is in union with Jesus and Jesus is in union with the Father' [p. 29]!) Clements-Jewery's parallel chapter on the biblical material limits itself to the New Testament, with the loss of those critical Old Testament perspectives which produce the 'dread of anthropomorphism' (p. 75) on which many studies founder (but ignore at cost), but with the gain of more detailed and well-documented studies of Luke's material on prayer in his Gospel and Acts, of prayer and the Holy Spirit in Paul, and of the relationship between Jesus' heavenly and earthly intercession.

Ellis' Chapter 2 – 'Beginning a History of Intercession' – suggestively places Augustine, Aquinas and Calvin in the same boat as Kant and Schleiermacher in terms of their view of prayer primarily as a matter of effecting internal shifts. But the sub-title of the chapter – 'The God who is Free to Answer' – is the direction Ellis would like to go in, and where he finds Barth so nourishing, 'Here be wonderful quotations': God 'is affected and moved' by creation (p. 79); God allows humanity 'to participate in His omnipotence' (p. 80). Clements-Jewery does not cover this ground.

Ellis' longest and most difficult chapter, Chapter 3 ('The Answering God: Prayer and the Doctrine of God'), stresses the importance of a Trinitarian vision of God in order to locate a sense of reciprocity when we speak of God 'answering' our prayers (p. 112). Acknowledging a debt to

Terrance Tiessen's *Providence and Prayer*, his exploration of time, eternity and 'multi-temporality', omniscience, omnipotence and God's self-limitation suggests that, instead of demonstrating control and coercion, Jesus reveals God's polyphonic nature, God's persuasive and patient love (p. 147).

The themes of this chapter of Ellis are more clearly distinguished in two separate and weighty chapters in Clements-Jewery. His Chapter 3 raises the question of (human → God) participation in prayer, asking 'Why is it Necessary to Pray?', while Chapter 4 raises the opposite (God → human) question 'Is God Capable of Answering Prayer?', which he concludes with 'a resounding "yes!"' (p. 89). Chapter 3 investigates 'persons in relationship', glancing briefly at John Oman and H. H. Farmer, H. E. Fosdick and E. S. Brightman, and then, in a more detailed, impressive overview, at John MacMurray's 'form of the personal' (pp. 57-63), concluding (to illustrate his style) that 'Petitionary and intercessory prayer may thus contribute to the making of history through the mutual personal interaction of human beings through the transcendent-immanent God who is present throughout the creation' (p. 64). Leading the reader judiciously through the forest of early debates on God's immutability and impassibility in Chapter 4 (as Ellis does *passim*), Clements-Jewery neatly distinguishes God's immutability, understood as God's ability to feel (Sarot, p. 83), as God's faithfulness to his own character (p. 86), from God's impassibility (I expand his language here), understood as the absence of defect, compulsion or fickleness in God (neither author refers either to Weinandy's *Does God Suffer?* or Jüngel's *The Doctrine of the Trinity*). This is good.

Clements-Jewery then has two further balancing chapters on 'How does God Work in the World?' and 'How does Prayer "Work"?' The former takes up Austin Farrer's language of 'double agency' in providence to expose Maurice Wiles' virtual deism and reject Paul Helm's position of 'middle knowledge'. The next chapter on how prayer works (pp. 115-35) is a surprise loose cannon: the only chapter in both books where a whole series of unargued assumptions and logical jumps keeps erupting. Traditional theism is suddenly identified with externality and coercion; concepts of God's otherness, absence and distance are all smuggled in without differentiation or analysis; the presence and action of God produces 'passivity and a desire to escape responsibility'; 'modern science' is to be the measure of theology (pp. 115-16, 122, 127, 145). In turn, there emerges a Process Theology with the impersonal feel of an evolutionary gnosticism where only 'God' appears (no Jesus or the Spirit), and where

elements are claimed for Process Theology that are not unique to it at all (pp. 134-5).

Ellis' final 40-page chapter ('Towards a Theology of Intercession: Praying In, With and To the God who Answers') rejects any view of prayer as 'therapeutic meditation' (Clements-Jewery's 'eudaemonism', p. 49), and concludes the 'answering' theme of his book. 'By praying', he states, 'we begin, strangely, to answer God' (p. 161). So argument is of the essence of prayer (pp. 166, 171), even to the point of the 'possibility of resistance to the divine purpose' (pp. 175-79). Though he accepts some of the insights of Open Theism and Process Theology, he is nonetheless finally convinced that prayer is not simply offered *to God*, but takes place *within God* (p. 180). 'There is room in the almighty liberty of God for the created liberty of man' (Moltmann). Clements-Jewery, in his own final eleven pages entitled 'Towards a Theology of Intercessory Prayer', offers a more seemingly traditional summation, somewhat at odds with the conclusions of his previous chapter.

Both these quite different books deserve careful study, for the authors struggle with virtually intractable theological quandaries. Ellis is more accessible and orthodox, Clements-Jewery more trenchant, but, in the end, less satisfactory. These are undoubtedly the two most important recent theological studies of intercession. But it is the hints and the absences that suggest a whole set of different questions.

What would happen if we developed a theology of intercession on the basis of Jesus' phrase 'the Father'? Why has the resignatory 'Thy will be done' swallowed up the more future-directed 'Thy kingdom come'? Is there such a thing as 'necessity' in God? Why is the Western Mystical – let alone the Eastern Orthodox – tradition so totally absent here? Why not combine the element of desire (Clements-Jewery [Pittenger], p. 129) with the Orthodox reading of *eros* to feed the fires of intercession? Where is the groaning, the longing, the tears, the desperation, the wrestling, bleeding heart? Instead of being distracted by omnipotence, why not set Bonhoeffer's theme of the 'powerlessness' of God (p. 76) in the crucible of the reciprocal, sacrificial *kenosis* of God and ourselves? Does not the over-assertion of the inalienability of human freedom automatically write out divine 'intervention'? But is a totally unsought vocation from God 'coercion' or 'manipulation'? Is a miraculous healing a 'violation' of human freedom? Have these words not become Aunt Sallies? Are there not major consequences to be drawn from the occasional reference to creativity in God and ourselves? What are the cultural connections between Process Theology and the Brave New World of post-World War II North American

utopianism? And what would Chinese Christians think? But, as they say, that might be another book....

*Philip Seddon, STETS (The Southern Theological Education and Training Scheme), Salisbury*

## **Ecclesiastes: A Peculiarly Postmodern Piece**

Doug Ingram

Grove Biblical Series, Cambridge, 2004; 28 pp, £2.75; ISBN 1851745793

Ecclesiastes is an extremely frustrating book. Its reader is immediately struck by its resonance with contemporary questions and struggles. It seems to express postmodern uncertainty, not to say cynicism. Yet, one does not have to read far before one is left wondering whether that was what the author intended or whether in fact, in spite of a full-frontal encounter with the blunt realities of life, the author has written a spiritual book – perhaps even a book of traditional and conservative spirituality – designed to inspire a robust piety. While biblical scholars may have the luxury of not having to decide between the two, preachers will have to choose the perspective from which they are going to expound the text.

Doug Ingram has provided us with a superb introduction to the problem in a little booklet whose length belies its value. A great deal of insight is packed within the slender covers of this Grove booklet. He deftly introduces us to the debate, using quotes from a number of key scholars while managing to maintain a light touch.

Central to his argument is an examination of a key word: ‘vanity’; a key phrase: ‘under the sun’; and a key passage: 1:1-11. *Hebel* can be variously translated negatively as ‘absurd’, ‘empty’, or ‘meaningless’ or more positively as ‘enigmatic’, ‘transient’, or ‘mysterious’. ‘Under the sun’ may either imply that this world is all there is or that there is a limit to what the Teacher has observed on earth but he believes there are other spheres of reality that might cast experience here in a different light. Similarly, the key passage Ingram examines may either be read as bemoaning the dreary futility of the endless round of nature or as a celebration of nature’s dependable regularity. Ingram helpfully sets out side by side two contrasting ways of reading this passage, each of which are legitimate interpretations of the Hebrew.

Ingram resists the idea that it is left to the interpreter to determine whether Ecclesiastes is to be read pessimistically or optimistically. That would be to slightly miss the point. He argues that Ecclesiastes is not ambiguous by accident but by design. As a realist the Teacher has chosen an ambiguous way of writing to mirror the ambiguity of human life.



‘Different people’, he writes, ‘with different presuppositions “read” the world, life and death differently’. Equally different people with different presuppositions come to different conclusions about the meaning and intention of this book. Such is life!

In a final crucial couple of pages Ingram raises the implications of this for the way we view Scripture, preach Ecclesiastes and relate to a postmodern culture. Some very helpful things are said here that suggest some positive ways forward, even though the grip of ambiguity is not loosened.

Almost twenty years ago I preached though this book in a series of sermons that were subsequently published (*That's the way it is*, Christian Focus Books). After all these years I could preach a different series from an entirely different perspective and both would, I believe, be legitimate readings of Ecclesiastes. For some time I have thought I would like to preach it as if it were a manual of piety (bringing to the fore the role of God in our lives and his world) rather than as a work of proto-evangelism (life ‘under the sun’ doesn’t make sense if you leave God out). Now Ingram suggest a third way; namely, from the perspective that life really is ambiguous. I wish I had had this little booklet to hand when I was preaching on Ecclesiastes. It would have been of great help. Preachers who will never have access to the scholarly works that lie behind it will benefit from that thinking and consequently their preaching will be deeper, more real and less boringly predictable as a result.

*Derek Tidball, London School of Theology*

## **SCM Study Guide to Science and Religion**

Jean Dorricott

SCM Press, London, 2005; xii+251 pp., £14.99; 033402975 9

The author of this book, Jean Dorricott, is a member of the British Association for the Advancement of Science and an active member of ecological societies. She completed her first course in Theology at Selby Oak in the 1960s and has continued to study the whole area of Science and Religion since then. She is also a member of the Science and Religion Forum founded by Dr Arthur Peacocke, and has published in the areas of Feminist Theology and Christian Parapsychology.

This book is an introduction for undergraduate students to the issues surrounding the dialogue and relationship between science and religion. Both science and religion formulate views about the origin and meaning of the universe. It is reasonable to put both to test. Therefore, a balanced and judicious dialogue between science and religion is vital in pursuing the

truth. Is God only partly involved in his creation, as the author of this book seems to believe? Consequently does God not have a special plan for humanity and the universe? What is the meaning of the author's claim that 'we have the future in our hands and we create ourselves as we want'?

The book has two main parts. The first part undertakes an ambitious journey through scientific discoveries about our universe from a diversity of disciplines: astrophysics and physics, biology and anatomy, psychology and sociology. God (or Reality) is studied in the light of these discoveries starting with the theories of the Big Bang and the fine-tuning of the universe, continuing with the Darwinian theory of Evolution together with some theories about the source of morality. Through this brief and disjointed journey, the reader learns that life happened through a combination of chemistry and chance and has no meaning; the universe itself has no purpose and God, an unknown Reality, does not intervene actively in our world. The second part is a tendentiously selective account of the historical relationship between science and Christian theology. Christian theology is introduced not as a study of God's word addressed to us in Jesus Christ but as a collection of human beliefs. In the conclusion of the book, Samson's story is used to illustrate a God of the Jews who approves of suicide killers and does not offer viable solutions to the world problems. This leaves us, through the advance in science and technology, to find solutions to the world's problems and re-create ourselves and our world.

The book leaves the reader unsettled. From a scientific point of view we are permanently standing on moving ground. In the first part of the book we are presented with a mixture of objective scientific discoveries and subjective 'images'. The author misunderstands basic scientific phenomena, e.g., she understands entanglement in quantum theory as being transfer of information between two particles when in fact it is a counter-intuitive relation between two entities even when they are separated by huge distances. The account of Christian theology is not more than a series of bad experiences, myths and traditions and it is not given in accordance with God's word addressed to us in Jesus Christ. The author makes no attempt to clarify the role of the Scriptures in knowing God. The author rejects the fundamentalist movement that reads the Bible as a scientific book, arguing that although God initiated the Creation he was not actively involved in it. So, we were not special, created in God's image nor did God have from the beginning a good and well-defined purpose for humanity and the universe. The laws of morality are intrinsic to our universe and are based on evolutionary constraints. If there are specific genes for different kinds of behaviour, for example homosexual behaviour, then should the

church not rethink its attitude against sin? The author seem to say that the church should set at least some of its values according to social changes in ethics and to society's perceptions of what is sinful or good.

This book is confused science and confused religion; it therefore misunderstands the relation between the two. The author does not include in her discussion important contributions made in this subject by John Polkinghorne, Roger Penrose or Paul Davis, T. F. Torrance and Keith Ward, that would have helped the author to truly engage with the real issues. Therefore I cannot recommend this book.

*Amelia V. Taylor, Heriot-Watt University*

### **Luther and Calvin on Old Testament Narratives: Reformed Thought and Narrative Text**

Michael Parsons

Texts and Studies in Religion, Volume 106, The Edwin Mellen Press, Lampeter, 2004; 329 pp., hardback, £74.95; ISBN 07734 65251

Parsons writes with current interests in narrative theology's ability to address a postmodern audience in mind, seeking insights, confirmation, redress or otherwise from the exegetical works of the sixteenth-century Reformers, Luther and Calvin. In a series of chapters, Parsons examines the Reformers' interpretation of the stories of Abraham, David, Dinah, Bathsheba and Tamar, reflecting as he does so difficult issues with relation to both the doctrine of God and more practical issues in the lives of distressed souls. Readers interested in the writings of Luther and Calvin will find helpful and careful analysis of preaching (homiletical) material – a vein of research that has yielded particularly helpful insights into the theology of the Reformers.

Problems arise quickly: within a few pages, Parsons declares his view that Calvin is not an 'inerrantist', which he explains is equivalent to 'literalist' (p. 5). The meaning of a text is to be found

at a level that, at least, incorporates the importance of experience together with the importance of the centrality of the work of the Holy Spirit in applying the text in the believer's encounter with Scripture (p. 6).

Mid-twentieth century (and Barthian) as this sounds (others have made similar claims though one doubts if either Calvin or Luther would recognize himself in this sentence), it is a less than scrupulous analysis of either Reformer's doctrine of Scripture.

In sketching their treatment of narrative, Parsons makes an interesting and valuable point: that narrative enabled the Reformers to view themselves (their 'horizon') as being on the same 'overarching' meta-narrative (meta-narrative!) of biblical redemption from creation to final consummation. Hermeneutically, narrative provides a way of bridging the two horizons between 'then' and 'now' (pp. 15, 227-8). Given the nervousness over exemplary exegesis and the oft-repeated charge as to 'moralistic preaching', Parsons' work shows how these magisterial Reformers bridged the two horizons (see his employment of the idea of 'pattern' on p. 236).

Particularly helpful is the work Parsons has done in bringing together Luther and Calvin's portrayal of God (impassible, immutable, immense etc.) in a way that reveals God as both majestic and involved in the lives of his people. Narrative texts especially disclose aspects of God that otherwise would not be seen, a God who appears confrontational (e.g., with Jacob). Parsons shows how pastoral their theology was.

Ultimately Parsons' book, whilst immensely useful on several levels (preaching, hermeneutics, pastoral theology, to name but a few), it is guilty of putting too many eggs in this one basket. To say by way of conclusion, 'the Reformers were committed to narrative' is saying nothing and saying too much at the same time. Parsons has not proved that they were committed to narrative theology, merely that they were committed to the exposition of Scripture which contains as one of its genres, *narrative*! Although it is not that clear, one wonders what the ultimate goal of this work is. When others are clearly substituting 'narrative' for 'propositional', suggesting that we can have symbolism and substance without answering the more difficult issues of truth, albeit in the interests of communicating with postmodernism, it is not a time for ambivalence.

*Derek W. H. Thomas, Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson,  
Tennessee*

## **Evangelical Anglicans in a Revolutionary Age 1789-1901**

Nigel A. D. Scotland

Paternoster Press, Carlisle, 2004; 457 pp., £19.99; ISBN 1842272314

The days when students of the role of Evangelicalism within the Anglican Church had to rely heavily on G. R. Balleine's pioneering work are long past, and since the work of Michael Hennell and Kenneth Hylson-Smith, materials come more readily to hand. Building on his earlier studies of J. B. Sumner and the Palmerstonian bishops, Nigel Scotland of the

University of Gloucestershire, has helpfully added to this store with an extensive survey of Evangelicals in the Anglican Church during the nineteenth century. His contention is that Evangelicals, for all their acknowledged failings, made an overwhelmingly positive impact on society, and played a formative role in shaping their age. This he demonstrates through a series of fifteen thematic chapters and a conclusion covering the work of Evangelicals in areas such as politics and social concern, including the work of the Clapham Sect and Lord Shaftesbury: education; campaigns for Sunday Observance; attitudes to overseas mission; and responses to ritualism and revivalism. In times of theological flux and debate within evangelicalism, it is good to see chapters being devoted to theology and attitudes to the Bible: many issues of deep concern today were discussed with equal vigour in the nineteenth century. With the issue of 'spirituality' also a topic of much current interest, the chapter exploring how Evangelical Anglicans developed and worked out their relationship with God both in public and in private is a valuable resource.

Whilst being thorough, the study is not comprehensive. The focus of the book rests almost entirely upon Anglicanism within England. Readers of this bulletin will find little of the place of Evangelicalism within the Scottish Episcopal Church, or other churches within the Anglican communion. A chapter on Evangelical Anglicans and overseas mission is included, although the first black African bishop, Samuel Crowther, is dealt with in but two sentences. The author concentrates heavily on the work of the leading Evangelicals; the reader finds less about the values and the opinions of the vast majority of ordinary lay Anglicans, many of whom were working-class, who peopled the churches of the Evangelicals. The book is also a study of Evangelical Anglicans within Anglicanism itself. There is a chapter on the attitudes of Evangelical Anglicans to ritualism, but this reviewer would have liked to read of their role within the wider family of evangelicalism: what were Evangelical Anglican attitudes to the Evangelical Alliance; were they to be Evangelical Anglicans, or Anglican Evangelicals? Other areas not explored include the troubled and damaging relationships between Evangelical Anglicans and evangelical Nonconformists in the nineteenth century (both positively in terms of their pan-evangelical co-operation, and negatively in the hardening of attitudes as a result of the disestablishment movement), and the author does not choose to consider the dissatisfaction of Evangelicals who seceded from Anglicanism to join various Baptist groupings, or form the Brethren.

On the whole, the thematic approach used in the book is helpful, but it creates a rather repetitive style, particularly in the early chapters, where some material on the Clapham Sect is repeated almost verbatim. A few

factual slips include giving two different dates for Henry Thornton's birth (p. 13 and 28).

In sum, here is much that is valuable, but plenty of scope is left for filling in the areas of the canvas that remain as yet blank.

*Ian J. Shaw, International Christian College, Glasgow*

## **The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology**

Kevin J. Vanhoozer (ed.)

Cambridge University Press, 2003; xv+295 pp., paperback, £15.99, ISBN 0521793955; hardback, £42.50, ISBN 052179062X

This anthology begins with a penetrating theological analysis by the editor of the multi-faceted postmodern turn, which he sees more as a condition of history than a chronological period. For him the basic question is whether the postmodern condition sets requirements that must be met before theology can speak about God.

Vanhoozer highlights the emergence of post-secular thinking in Derrida's views of 'justice' and 'the gift' being 'beyond' deconstruction, and sees Tracy's 'return of the repressed' as opening a door for the return of theology as a metadiscourse. But his answer to the basic question is both negative and positive. On the one hand, he judges that some forms of postmodernity corrode the spiritual conditions which make faith commitment possible. On the other, he hopes that postmodernity's insistence that knowledge cannot be disembodied might make postmoderns responsive to gospel proclamations 'accompanied by performances that embody in new situations the wisdom and love of God embodied on the cross'.

The remaining chapters of part one present competently and informatively seven brands of postmodern theology, each written by *aficionados*: *communal praxis* (i.e. liberationist) by Nancey Murphy and Brad J. Kallenberg; *postliberal* by George Hunsinger; *postmetaphysical* by Thomas A. Carlson; *deconstructive* by Graham Ward; *reconstructive* by David Ray Griffin; *feminist* by Mary McClintock Fulkerson; and *radical orthodoxy* by D. Stephen Long.

Part two covers Christian doctrine in postmodern perspective and contains essays on Scripture and tradition (Vanhoozer); theological method (Dan R. Stiver); the Trinity (David S. Cunningham); God and world (Philip Clayton); the human person (John Webster); Christ and salvation (Walter Lowe); ecclesiology (Stanley J. Grenz); Holy Spirit and Christian spirituality (David F. Ford).

Vanhoozer contends that, while modernity demystified Scripture and tradition, postmodernity, by rehabilitating tradition and textualising the book, is questioning both the possibility of any biblical authority and the legitimacy of distinguishing 'text' and 'commentary'. He underlines the need to get beyond both modern and postmodern suspicion to view Scripture in terms of divine discourse and tradition in terms of divine deed.

Stiver argues that combining Ricoeur's hermeneutical arc and Gadamer's fusion of horizons provides a useful framework to recast creatively the theological truth of the Bible. Cunningham maintains that postmodernity and the doctrine of the Trinity are mutually enhancing. Postmoderns' emphasis on relationality, difference, and rhetoric enrich Christians' appreciation of the Trinity, while trinitarian insights of peace, personhood and practice provide a needed critique of postmodern thought.

Clayton contends that pantheism (the world is within God) offers 'theology in a postmodern key' the chance to regain the initiative from physics in determining the nature of reality. Webster proposes three characteristics of fruitful engagement between Christian theological anthropology and deconstructive postmodernity: First, deference to the intricacy of the past; second, guiding theology by the categories and practices of the Christian confession, avoiding passive accommodation to any postmodern condition; third, apologetics becoming subordinate to biblical and dogmatic description.

Lowe argues for an apocalyptic understanding of salvation which views the Christ event as divine invasion. Apocalyptic imagery, he claims, resonates with the popular alarm at unsustainable consumerism, and also puts into proportion views of individualistic salvation. Grenz affirms that the biblical story of God at work bringing his creation to its divinely intended goal is the church's constitutive narrative, empowering it to be a proclaiming, reconciling, sanctifying and unifying community. In the final chapter (one of the most stimulating) Ford draws on insights from Bonhoeffer, Rowan Williams and Borowitz (an American postmodern Jewish theologian) to describe spirituality as living and being transformed before the face of Jesus Christ.

The writers of this book have valiantly attempted to sail between Scylla and Charybdis. Some turn out to be surer navigators than others. Nevertheless, this book contains useful bearings for all theological seafarers battling their way through the straits between modernity and postmodernity.

*Fergus Macdonald, New College, Edinburgh*

## The Gospel-Driven Church

Ian Stackhouse

Paternoster Press, Carlisle, 2004; 291 pp., £12.99; ISBN 184227290X

*The Gospel-Driven Church* is the first in a series of books under the imprint of 'Deep Church'. The series is an attempt to 'retrieve and reconnect with the common Christian tradition once "everywhere and by everyone believed"... a renewal of the historic givens of the faith for today's Church'. The first book in the series attempts to do this with the charismatic renewal movement. Ian Stackhouse is the pastor of Guildford Baptist Church, having also been a leader of an independent new church, and now being one of the leaders of the Deep Church conversations.

The first part of this book is deeply critical of the charismatic renewal movement. In what the author sees as a drive for growth and success, his contention is that many of the leaders of charismatic churches are prepared to move from one fad to the next in order to make revival/success happen. (Revival and success are synonymous in his perception of the charismatic movement.) Stackhouse raises lots of concerns as a result of this perception: that the movement is theologically shallow; that 'technique absolves one from the rigours of Christian discipleship in the context of the local church'; that the movement is increasingly functional, prepared to do whatever it takes to make revival happen at the expense of theological reflection and understanding; that in worship there is a 'propensity to sacrifice theological and spiritual integrity on the altar of contemporaneity, expediency and revivalism'. This, he says, has led to a 'me-centred Christianity', and 'has the ability to foster a guilt neurosis' because 'God can only move close, in reviving power, once the community of faith has been purged and cleansed'.

The rest of the book counters this trend and tries to answer these concerns by what the author calls 'Mediated Grace: the practices of the Church'. He talks of revival by retrieval: 'the most pressing challenge – to have faith that the gospel is able to do its own work, create its own structures and fashion its own distinctive community'. To spell out what this means there are chapters on preaching, the sacraments, the work of the Spirit, prayer and the work of the pastor. He seeks to connect the charismatic-evangelical church with the classic past and traditions of the church.

For example, in the chapter on sacraments, he describes the sacraments in this way: 'In themselves, they are the power tools for Christian ministry.... Co-option into Christ through baptism and communion is the spiritual core that protects Christian faith from the angst of revival religion



and, conversely, the potential blandness of contemporary worship.’ Similar connections with the classic doctrines of the church and the Spirit, and with the classic prayer language of the church, are made in the rest of this fascinating book.

Some will disagree with Stackhouse’s basic premise, that all is not well in charismatic-evangelical churches. Yet, charismatic-evangelical Christians should read this book carefully and reflect on its criticisms. It might be painful; you might find yourself getting hot under the collar, but Ian Stackhouse might lead you to rediscover something precious that you have lost somewhere along the way!

This book is far more than that, however; there are deep challenges here to everyone who thinks about the future of church – how do we create a church for the future that is built on the historic givens of the faith? How do we keep church connected to the classic truths and prayer language of the past, without living in the past? In *The Gospel-Driven Church* there is a mountain of food for thought for every church leader; this book should be read by everyone who has the good of the church at heart!

*James S. Dewar, Juniper Green, Edinburgh*

## **Delighting in the Trinity: Just why are Father, Son and Spirit such good news?**

Tim Chester

Monarch Books, Oxford, 2005; 192 pp., £7.99; ISBN 1854246852

I suspect I am not alone among those who engage in Bible teaching, at whatever level, in dreading questions about the doctrine of the Trinity more than any others. After a brief stab at an answer, I usually find myself resorting to the unchallengeable ‘Well, it’s what the Bible teaches.’

Tim Chester recognizes my predicament, admitting that he too once found the doctrine ‘embarrassing’. But no longer, and this excellent book reveals why.

The book is appropriately divided into three parts with each chapter preceded by a useful synopsis. The first provides us with the biblical foundations, beginning by asserting the unity of God, then the plurality of God, and finally discussing the involvement of all three persons of the Trinity in salvation.

The second section is a historical survey of how the church’s understanding of the doctrine evolved over the centuries. Here we find reminders of our Systematics days, with concepts such as Monarchism, modalism, *persona*, *substantia* and *hypostatis* being explained. How I wish I had had Chester as my lecturer. A useful feature of this section is

little boxes-aside, where terminology can be dealt with apart from the main text, and vignettes of the main theologians (Tertullian, Origen, Athanasius) given.

Chester allows the Reformers a fair hearing and gives the Enlightenment philosophers, as well as modern theologians such as Barth and Moltmann, plenty of space.

What readers of this journal will find particularly helpful is the way Chester is constantly engaging with these heavyweights. This is why the book will be of great use to the theology student of evangelical convictions. Chester is not embarrassed to be critical in the light of Scripture.

I found the final section not only practical but inspiring. Here Chester spells out the practical implications of the doctrine of the Trinity.

He begins with 'The Trinity and revelation' where he refutes the postmodern tendency to deny the 'knowability' of God. That God is Trinity means that he is personal, which means he can be known. Quoting Tom Torrance, in Christ God 'has communicated not just something about himself but his very Self'.

In 'The Trinity and salvation' Chester traces some of the theories of the atonement, and in particular the rift between Anselm and Abelard (the 'satisfaction' theory and the 'exemplary' view). Chester shows that both approaches, while containing some merit, fall short of the primary biblical model, which is that of penal substitution. The atonement, he says, is an event 'within God. Salvation starts with God, is achieved by God and is applied by God.'

Steve Chalke's attack on penal substitution in *The Lost Message of Jesus* is given short shrift. Chalke assumes 'that the Father and Son are separate individuals. And it would indeed be unfair for one individual to punish another individual for crimes he has not committed. 'But the Son is not another individual. The divine Father and Son are one – sharing one will, sharing one love, sharing one being.'

The chapter with perhaps the most contemporary relevance is the chapter entitled 'The Trinity and humanity' where Chester demonstrates that the doctrine has implications for the human race. After all, we are made in the image of the triune God. Both totalitarianism and individualism are contrary to the common weal for they contradict our creation principle.

Chester ends his book with some thoughts on how the Trinity impacts on mission.

Ever the helpful teacher, Chester not only provides a comprehensive bibliography but makes some suggestions as to where to take one's reading further.

*Ian M. Watson, Kirkmuirhill*

## **Beyond the Bible: Moving from Scripture to Theology**

I. Howard Marshall

Paternoster, Carlisle, 2004; 136 pp., £9.99; ISBN 1842272780

Not only does this book give us Marshall's mind on some vital issues, but it has the added bonus of coming with its own reviews! Professor Marshall's three chapters are his Hayward Lectures, delivered at Acadia Divinity College, Wolfville, Nova Scotia. Then follow two responses, one by Kevin J. Vanhoozer of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and the other by Stanley E. Porter of McMaster Divinity College.

Chapter one, 'Evangelicals and Hermeneutics', notes the maturing confidence of evangelical biblical scholarship over recent decades (a success story which both respondents later avow owes much to Marshall himself). Marshall focuses on three levels of interpretation. The first is general hermeneutics, where he sees evangelicals as increasingly involved and significant. The second is exegesis, and it is here especially that evangelicals are active and productive. But at the third level, that of appropriating and applying the ancient text in the contemporary world, much remains to be done. Marshall insists we can no longer rest content with detaching principles from the historical and cultural frames in which they were first given and simply reapplying them today.

The next chapter, 'The Development of Doctrine', begins by outlining two ways of interpreting Scripture, the conservative and the progressive, and illustrates what this means in practice by looking at ethics, worship and doctrine. The boundary between the two approaches is admittedly fuzzy and I found myself flitting between these categories on different issues. Marshall's concern in what follows is to seek a principled way of moving from Scripture to theology, and especially to find in Scripture itself the guidelines which will ensure the project is biblical: scriptural principles for going beyond Scripture! He lays his foundation for this by noting how the New Testament itself witnesses to development, first in connection with the Old Testament, second in relation to the teaching of Jesus, and third in the progress of apostolic teaching.

The third chapter, 'The Search for Biblical Principles', explores these last three themes and asks whether they legitimate continuing development beyond Scripture and whether they provide criteria for its proper exercise.

First, a consideration of Leviticus in light of the New Testament seeks to show how the old/new covenant distinction is a significant interpretative tool. (What Marshall does here seems to me very careful, in comparison for example with the recent attempt of A. T. Lincoln to argue that if Hebrews can relativize and critique parts of the Old Testament in the light of what has happened in Christ then that provides justification for us to do the same with parts of the New Testament on issues like sexuality or Christian supersessionism in relation to Judaism, in his contribution to *Out of Egypt: Biblical Theology and Biblical Interpretation*, edited by Craig Bartholomew *et al.* [Paternoster, 2004]). Second, Marshall looks at the shift from Jesus to the early church, and the way in which some elements of the liminal period were clearly transitional and provisional. He includes in this Jesus' teaching about the horrors of divine punishment, in imagery which was appropriate to the times but which the modern mind cannot accept. Surely here he is smuggling in a principle not derived from Scripture? (Interestingly, both respondents pick up on this.) Third, he discusses the development of doctrine in the apostolic church and concludes that the key, both then and now, is to be found in the combination of the apostolic deposit and the spiritual mind. The former provides the core and the criterion, while the latter responds to new situations with thinking nurtured on the gospel and guided by the Spirit.

Vanhoozer's response, 'Into the Great "Beyond": A Theologian's Response to the Marshall Plan', is brief and brilliant, and really does interact with Marshall. He is especially helpful in drawing out different possible ways of understanding 'going beyond' Scripture. It might simply be conceptual clarification, making explicit in new vocabulary what is already implicit in Scripture. Or it might be a 'redemptive trajectory' approach which applies the transcultural spirit of the text in the direction of an ultimate ethic. Or it might be Nicholas Wolterstorff's 'divine discourse', where there may be discourse beyond that of the human author's intent. Or there is Vanhoozer's own preferred approach, where we learn how to make the same kind of judgements as those embedded in Scripture because we have a 'mind nurtured by Christ-centred canonical practices'.

Porter's chapter, 'Hermeneutics, Biblical Interpretation, and Theology: Hunch, Holy Spirit, or Hard Work?', is twice as long as Vanhoozer's but much less to do with Marshall. Porter examines five approaches to New Testament interpretation that claim to lead from Scripture to theology. He first exposes the limitations of the historical-critical method as a basis for the theological enterprise. He then subjects Thiselton's use of Wittgenstein's classes of utterance to devastating critique, before trying to do the same to speech-act theory. The fourth and shortest section is on

Marshall. Finally Porter outlines his own thinking, based both on Pauline practice and on modern translation. He proposes dynamic equivalence translation theory as the model for New Testament theological hermeneutics.

*Beyond the Bible* is a short, rich and provocative read, and Professor Marshall deserves our thanks. At several points though, I felt that the distinction between the revelatory uniqueness of the New Testament and what we do in theology was in danger of being blurred. I am neither an apostle nor the son of an apostle, and analogies between a period and process of revelation on the one hand and the practice of contemporary theologising on the other must have clear limits. I am also concerned that more theological safeguards be explicitly spelled out in a project such as this. Otherwise some of those who build on it, and who are not as well grounded as the author, may take us *beyond the pale*.

*Alasdair I. Macleod, St Andrews Free Church, St Andrews*

### **Discerning the Spirits: A Guide To Thinking About Christian Worship Today**

Cornelius Plantinga Jr and Sue A. Rozeboom

Eerdmans, Grand Rapids/Cambridge, 2003; xv+170 pp., £12.99; ISBN 0802839991

Not another book about worship, I hear you ask. Yes, it is, but one with a difference and one that should be in the hands of all those responsible for helping congregations think about worship in today's cultures – note the plural. It doesn't provide resources to use within worship but, rather, it provides a context within which reflection on worship can take place shaped by Christian love and theology. Although written up by Plantinga and Rozeboom, the material for the book emerged from collaborative research and discussion organised by the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship (based in Calvin College/Theological Seminary) under the leadership of John D. Witvliet and sponsored by the Lilly Endowment. The mission of the Institute is 'to promote scholarly study of the theology, history, and practice of Christian worship and the renewal of worship in local congregations' (p. vii).

My order 'love and theology' above is important, because the book begins by noting the need for discernment in the present discussions about worship (the Holy Spirit is not the only spirit around). Having a good argument among Christians is one of the ways in which that discernment can take place. However, 'argument' is not to be 'quarrel' and the behavioural tone for debate must be set by Christian love. It is sad, if not

blasphemous, that we can talk of ‘worship wars’ where love is notable by its absence. In these discussions, the authors insist that love must give birth to humility, candour, hospitality and forbearance. The ‘main project in this book is to set a context and recommend a tone in which healthy decisions about worship may be conducted’ (pp. 10f.). This it does admirably.

The succeeding four chapters give us a potted history of the rise of Contemporary Worship (the capitals identify a style of worship rather than a chronological reference point), reflections on the interface between church and culture, and theological explorations of the church (at worship) and worship (within the church). While the last two chapters are brimfull of sound theology and practice, wisely and elegantly expressed, perhaps the greatest value of the book is to be found in the central chapter on church and culture – the longest chapter by far.

As humans, we cannot detach ourselves from culture and, therefore, all Christian worship is offered through particular cultural practices that embody the worship of those who are present. Contemporary Worship is one such cultural expression of worship. It is the attempt by some to translate Christian worship for today’s generations. As cultures evolve, this cultural translation of worship is inevitable, desirable and risky, and thus the gift of discernment is needed to know what practices are fitting to embody our worship of God.

The incarnation is explored as a model for cultural translation, as this is a major concept put forward by proponents of Contemporary Worship. The authors, while accepting the basic validity of the model, show the inadequate way in which it can be used to justify engaging with some forms of popular culture that may not be able to carry the translation of the gospel: the incarnation was not only an accommodation to human culture, it was also a judgement of human culture. So, ‘when it comes to deciding what in culture is to be accepted and what is to be rejected, there is no neat, authoritarian answer, but only a “messy” one. Finding it requires humility’ (p. 90).

Included in this chapter is a very helpful sidelight of several pages from Frank Burch Brown called ‘Testing Christian Taste: Twelve Assumptions’, but if you want to know what they are, you will have to consult the book.

This book should be read, reread, digested and its good things disseminated to congregations at large. Not only will we then create possibilities for reforming the worship of the church for the culture(s) of our time and place, we will do so in the Spirit of the One who said, ‘Love one another as I have loved you.’

*Jared Hay, Balerno Parish Church*

## **John Calvin: His Life and Influence**

Robert Reymond

Christian Focus Publications, Fearn, 2004; 160pp., £7.99; ISBN 1857929667

Here is a book that achieves its aims admirably. It is the substance of four lectures given in February 2002 to a church audience in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. The author said he chose the life and influence of John Calvin as his subject 'because the average twenty-first-century Christian knows very little about him and all too often what they do know or have heard about him has been badly distorted' (p. 9). The lectures were given and the book written with the twofold purpose of helping to dispel the ignorance and correct the distortions.

To test how successful the first of these aims was likely to be, when I had completed an initial reading of the book, I asked someone to read it who had never read a biography of Calvin before. The reaction was positive and enthusiastic. This person found it not only very readable, but fascinating, and immediately expressed a desire to know more about such a formidable contender for the faith. This desire to know more is well served in the author's appendixes, which provide thoughtful lists of recommended Calvin biographies as well as opposing ones.

The work also effectively challenges the 'badly distorted' image that many have of the sixteenth-century Reformer. Reymond's point is very relevant. A few weeks before receiving the book I was listening to a radio programme, and around the same time read a totally unrelated newspaper article. They had one thing in common; the opinion that John Calvin's legacy – what we call Calvinism – has a very repressive influence on the development of human thought and society. No theologian has been more vilified and misrepresented than Calvin. The false impressions and misunderstandings of both the man and his work that have been created in the past are still being purveyed unthinkingly in the media, and sadly in many branches of the Christian church as well.

Reymond's book does much to redress this situation. The manner in which he brings out the spiritual stature of the man is impressive. It shows Calvin not only as a theologian of tremendous intellectual capacity (his literary output was amazing), but as a man humbly sensitive to the will of God for his life. The additional likely record of his conversion in the 'Reply to Sadoletto' (p. 39-40), his response to Farel's thunderous call to remain and minister in Geneva: 'I felt as if God from on high had stretched out his hand to arrest me' (p. 57-8), his renewed call to return to Geneva after the exile: 'I remember that I am not my own, I offer up my

heart, presented as a sacrifice to the Lord.... I submit my will and my affections, subdued and held fast, to the obedience of God' (p. 73), make the book well worth pondering. Reymond's efforts to show the warm, human side to Calvin's character are also well presented. Here we have a Calvin who is not the austere, stern, cold, calculating 'man who never smiled', as Harnack dubbed him, but rather a man who could laugh with those who laughed and weep with those who wept; a man who cared deeply for his fellowmen in their suffering, and passionately longed for the success of the gospel amongst them. His failings, however, are never glossed over, or excused. The 'head-on' treatment of the execution of Servetus in Geneva gives us a more realistic insight into the attitude of the Reformer on this issue than has formerly been the case.

The fact that much of the material for the book was originally taken from the author's lectures to his students on Calvin's *Institutes* at Knox Theological Seminary is reflected in the amount of space devoted to this masterpiece of theology. It perhaps tends to deflect from some of Calvin's other works, notably his commentaries, the importance of which merits more analysis. Calvin insisted that the *Institutes* should always be read alongside the commentaries, and Beza apparently regarded them as the primary work of the Reformer (*An Exhortation to the Reformation*, p. 35a-b). But having said that, Reymond's treatment of the *Institutes* is superb, dealing with its main topics, its development through the various editions without any change of substance, its general characteristics, and its major theological contributions. Of personal interest to me was his discussion of the question of Calvin's status as a 'covenant theologian'. Reymond rightly concludes that Calvin 'was seminally covenantal... in his theology' (p. 100). It was news, however, to read that Bullinger's *Decades* 'were structured entirely by the covenant idea' (p. 99).

This book will serve as an excellent introduction to the Genevan Reformer and his work. Ministers, divinity students, and 'lay' people alike will find it stimulating and full of interest. The unique place that Calvin holds in the unfolding of church history and Christian thought is something that arrests and holds you throughout. It is difficult to imagine anyone reading it thoughtfully without going on to explore further the life and influence of this remarkable man, whose crest motto was: 'I give you all, promptly and sincerely' (p. 73).

Andrew A. Woolsey, *Crumlin Evangelical Presbyterian Church*



## **Fixing the Idemnity. The Life and Work of George Adam Smith (1856-1942)**

Iain D. Campbell

Paternoster, Carlisle, 2004; xviii+255 pp., £19.99; ISBN 1842272284

When I was young, studying Semitics in graduate school and anticipating a life as professor in a seminary, I read George Adam Smith's two-volume commentary, *The Book of Isaiah* (1888 and 1892). I was absolutely bowled over by it: brilliant, theological, literate, compelling. This was scholarship transmuted into pastoral/prophetic care and preaching – the Hebrew verbs that I had been parsing so diligently, suddenly alive and moving, shaping holy lives, saving people. I followed it up by reading his *Historical Geography of the Holy Land* (1894). Again, I was totally captivated. I followed every movement of pilgrimage and battle and worship on the wonderful maps, lived vicariously in the mountains and towns and valleys of Palestine for months. Every story, every sentence, in Scripture grounded – in place, local. No free-floating ideas; no doctrinal abstractions. When I learned that Smith had written both the books as a young working pastor of a new congregation in Aberdeen, the vocational tectonic plates shifted ever so slightly beneath me. The effect was seismic. When the aftershocks had receded everything was the same; nothing was the same. I had become a pastor.

Forty-five years later, as I read this clearly written and carefully assessed life of George Adam Smith by Dr Iain Campbell, I find that not everyone has been as uncritically admiring as I was. All the same, there is much to admire and his biographer gives us the details in full measure – a truly magnificent life, rich in accomplishment in the Presbyterian churches in Scotland and in biblical scholarship worldwide. But the title of the biography is *Fixing the Indemnity*. Yes, 'indemnity'. It turns out that not everyone experienced George Adam Smith as unqualified good; there were damages along the way. Apart from the thorough appreciation of George Adam Smith's life and work that Dr Campbell provides, we are not likely to be able to fix the amount of the indemnity. But with appreciation in place, a sober assessment is possible without diminishing the splendour. Out of the several areas discussed by Dr Campbell in which indemnity needs to be assessed, I select two, one from his work, the other from his life.

Work: his advocacy of biblical criticism in the service of understanding and obeying the Scriptures. Smith was bold and confident in his conviction that without the tools of biblical criticism, much of it developed in the German universities, our preaching and teaching of the Bible is unable to

penetrate contemporary life. His own preaching, teaching, and writing provided impressive credentials for his conviction. Conservative elements in the Presbyterian Church were not convinced; they perceived a dissonance with creedal orthodoxy. Acrimony developed. The phrase that gives title to the book is Smith's: 'Modern Criticism has won its war against the traditional theories. It only remains to fix the amount of the indemnity.' It is to be regretted that Smith conceived the differences as a war. He did win the 'war' but his combativeness did not serve the church well.

Life: over the years he was gradually absorbed vocationally and socially into the middle and upper classes of society. In Smith's early life he was passionate about the poor working class and urban social conditions. He was an enthusiastic supporter of the Moody-Sankey evangelistic campaigns in Scotland, especially as they brought the gospel message among vagrants and the friendless. As a student in Edinburgh he worked among, in his words, 'some of the poorest but bravest people I have known, and learned more from them than they have learned from me' (p. 34). But as he moved from being pastor of the affluent Queen's Cross church in Aberdeen (ten years) to the post of professor in Glasgow (eighteen years) and then as principal of the University of Aberdeen (twenty-five years) there was a steady erosion of that bold, conscience-stirring, social/political passion that spilled from the pages of his early Isaiah commentary. By midlife he had been captured by the aristocracy. 'He had moved away from the ideals of the social gospel to full participation in the higher echelons of civic and social life' (p. 217). He had become one of society's elite.

'Fixing the indemnity', to be sure. The perfectly accurate title for what Dr Campbell has done in gathering the data and evaluating the effects of the life and work of George Adam Smith.

*Eugene H. Peterson*

## **Land of the Living: Christian Reflections on the Countryside**

Ivor MacDonald

Virtualbookworm.com Publishing Inc., College Station, Texas, USA, 2005; 249 pp. \$13.95; ISBN 1589397827

The aim of the book is to develop a biblical theology of the countryside and its implications for humanity in every aspect of our relationship to the land and to those who care for it. It tackles head on many of the issues that impact our daily lives. These include the constant drift from the land, the power of the supermarkets, globalisation, third world poverty, GM crops, the environment, organic farming and sustainability. The author shows

that God has provided a more foundational reason for caring for the countryside than much of the contemporary justification for environmentalism which is 'little more than earth worship dressed up'.

He deals with the biblical aspect of our relationship to the earth which is said to be 'imaged on God's' and is described as transcendent and immanent. Man is to rule over the animal kingdom and this distinguishes the Christian position from the animal rights view of transcendence as 'speciesism', and also from the New Age's pantheistic environmentalism. Both man and animals were created from the earth and thus share a connection with the land and with each other. Creation was the work of the Trinity and their interconnectedness is to be reflected in the relations between the animate and inanimate creation also. The visceral attachment that rural people have for the land derives from the manner of our creation. Any economic or social pressures that threaten this relationship must be questioned. Land ownership is to be as widely spread as possible and hypermobility is challenged by demonstrating that roots are important for the stability of individuals, families and societies.

Environmental issues can no longer be ignored as the ecosystems cannot cope with all the waste products; we have arrived at a 'full world'. Because of our stress on economic growth we have failed to adapt to this new situation. Increasing farm size and decreasing the cost of food is not the answer. Rather, family farms will best protect the local ecosystems so we should ensure they are adequately rewarded.

Globalisation, despite many benefits, is viewed as the enemy to best practice, as it can lead to lowered environmental regulations and safety standards and contribute to global warming. Profits go to the multinationals while small farmers are impoverished. A Christian ethic of restraint would counteract this. Technology, although a gift from God, has been idolised. Biblical principles for sustainable agriculture are adduced and an appraisal given of organic farming. Consumers are urged not to leave their consciences at the supermarket door and buy cheap food, which nevertheless has hidden costs and ignores our national food security, but to choose those foods that 'bless God's earth' and those involved in stewarding it.

The book is well written from a Reformed evangelical position, clearly argued and very readable. It is well referenced both biblically and technically with notes to each chapter easily accessible at the end of the book. The book presents a persuasive argument and is generally well balanced in its approach but, occasionally, there is a tendency to 'over-egg the pudding' which could be counter-productive. Reference was made to a

'full earth' in 2003 with a population of 6.5 billion but no solution was presented for feeding the predicted 'overfull earth' of 9 billion in 2050.

This book addresses a neglected but very relevant topical issue from a Christian perspective and can be strongly recommended to ministers, students, agriculturists, businessmen, politicians and the interested public. Why not present it as a gift to those who have influential positions in the food industry or government where it may act as 'bread cast upon the waters'?

*Allan MacPherson, Ayr Free Church*

## **The Holy Trinity – In Scripture, History, Theology and Worship**

Robert Letham

P&R Publishing, Phillipsburg, NJ, 2004; xv+546 pp., £14.35; ISBN 087552006

J. I. Packer commends this work as 'solid and judicious, comprehensive and thorough, abreast of past wisdom and present-day debate, and doxological in tone throughout; this is far and away the best big textbook on the Trinity that you can find, and it will surely remain so for many years to come'.

This commendation is no exaggeration. The work is sheer excellence from first to last and is in a league of its own. It is not a book for beginners but is a volume highly recommended to all pastors.

Part one (biblical foundations) compactly surveys the Old Testament background. The only missing part is the activity of theophany on Sinai and fellowship with Moses. Perhaps Letham followed Wainwright into a mistake when he suggests that there is little, if any, trace of dialogue within the Godhead in the OT? What about Psalm 110 which is quoted often in the NT? And what about Isaiah 49:1-9 and 50:4-11?

The survey of Trinity in the NT is thorough: Jesus and the Father (chapter 2), the Holy Spirit and Triadic Patterns (chapter 3). It is refreshing to reflect on Jesus' affirmation of binatarianism (John 5) and then his teaching on the coming of the Holy Spirit in John 14-16. With regard to the Holy Spirit, the author, by way of overview, comments as follows: 'Due to the invisibility and anonymity of the Spirit, his presence is not normally noted, even though he may be known by what he does. Even so, there is a vast increase in references to the Holy Spirit in the NT, compared with the OT. The NT, while never explicitly calling the Holy Spirit "God", ascribes to him divine characteristics. Among other things, fellowship with one another, and with the Father and the Son, is by the

Holy Spirit. The Spirit sanctifies, gives joy in sufferings, opens people's minds to believe, enables us to worship, and brings about union with Christ' (p. 56). A twelve-page excursus is devoted to Ternary Patterns in Ephesians.

Part two (historical developments) and part three (modern discussion) is historical theology at its very best, totally fascinating to a Trinity lover and hugely informative throughout.

The Arian controversy was overruled for good in the providence of God to attain theological clarity. It was complex. Letham corrects the common myth that Arius challenged the orthodox doctrine, leaving Athanasius as the sole defender, *Athanasius contra mundum*. There was no definitively settled orthodoxy before AD 381, and Athanasius was not alone in defending the truth (pp. 119, 127). Chapters are devoted to the Cappadocians, the Council of Constantinople, Augustine, the *Filioque* Controversy and to John Calvin.

From Calvin we jump several centuries into the modern era. There is a chapter devoted to Karl Barth, one to the Roman Catholic theologian Karl Rahner (1904-1984), Moltmann (1928- ) and Pannenberg (1928- ), followed by a fascinating and enlightening chapter describing Eastern Orthodox theologians Bulgakov (1871-1944), Lossky (1903-1958) and Staniloae (1903-1993). Finally a chapter is devoted to Thomas F. Torrance who on this subject is at the top of the climbing frame.

With regard to Barth, Letham observes: 'Then came Karl Barth (1886-1968), and it is from him that the recent revival of interest in the doctrine of the Trinity has its genesis. As R. W. Jenson puts it, '[It is] from Barth that twentieth-century theology has learned that the doctrine of the Trinity has explanatory and interpretive use for the whole of theology; it is by him that the current vigorous revival of Trinitarian reflection was enabled.' The translator of the first half-volume of Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics* suggests that his treatment of the Trinity in that volume is the most significant since Augustine. While this claim is exaggerated, there is little doubt that Barth's work has had a seminal effect' (p. 272).

A thorough and helpful analysis of the early and later Barth ensues. Did Barth succeed in his doctrine of the Trinity? According to Letham the answer is 'No': 'There is this persistent ambiguity at the heart of Barth's Trinitarianism that does not change. If he is not modalistic, he will escape from the charge of unipersonality only with the greatest difficulty.'

Having explored and analysed the theology of Rahner, Letham explains the theology of Moltmann and Pannenberg. Thomas Weinandy's refutation of Moltmann is assessed (see also Mostyn Roberts' article 'The Passion of the Impossible', RT 207). Letham then turns eastwards to 20th-century

orthodox theologians Sergius Bulgakov, Vladimir Lossky and Dumitru Staniloae, the latter having worked in Romania where he was imprisoned by the Communist regime for five years.

Letham suggests that Moltmann's Trinitarianism 'encourages a reversal of patriarchal structures and attitudes. His view of God as suffering love, co-suffering with the world, is that of a weak bystander who can do nothing to change the situation. He simply suffers. God is a feminized God, indeed a transsexual deity, a motherly Father and a fatherly Mother. In turn, Moltmann's Christian society is a feminized society of persons in relationship, devoid of authority. One might call it a castrated theology. It is a mixture of Christian teaching and paganism. Whatever else one might say, it is certainly "politically correct"' (p. 312).

In summary of Eastern Trinitarian theology this conclusion is made, 'The Eastern doctrine of the Trinity requires different Trinitarian levels, undermines our knowledge of God, and, in so doing, implicitly questions the faithfulness and reliability of God. Largely due to its isolation from the West, the East has had no medieval period, no Renaissance or Reformation, and no Enlightenment, and so has never had to grapple with the vital epistemological breakthrough achieved by Calvin' (p. 354).

Thomas F. Torrance's work is helpfully described with pithy, helpful insights. For instance, 'Torrance understands perichoresis (the mutual indwelling of the three persons of the Trinity in the one being of God), in a dynamic way as the mutual indwelling and interpenetration of the three persons in an ontological relational, spiritual and intensely personal way.'

Part four opens up four critical practical issues: 1. The Trinity and the Incarnation; 2. The Trinity, Worship and Prayer; 3. The Trinity, Creation and Missions; 4. The Trinity and Persons.

There is a stimulating section opening up the view that for the Reformed the whole of creation is an icon, 'The relationality of the cosmos points unmistakably to its relational Creator' (p. 436).

Analysis is made of postmodern culture: diversity without unity. 'Postmodernism's world is one of instability, diversity and fragmentation. Since postmodernism allows no objective truth, there can be no fixed point of reference to determine what we should believe or how we are to act. This lack of fixity entails a total lack of stability in everyday life. No basis exists for a commonly accepted morality' (p. 451). While diversity without unity is the mark of postmodernism unity without diversity is the character of Islam:

Its doctrine of God is the major weak point of Islam. It is the root of all other problems. It is here that the Christian apologete and evangelist can

probe, with sensitivity and wisdom. While the Trinity is one of the major stumbling blocks to Muslims turning to Christ, it must be presented with intelligence and skill. Here the love paradigm of Richard of St. Victor, rediscovered in modern Russian Orthodox theology and developed in differing ways by Moltmann and Staniloae, offers help. Only a God who is triune can be personal. Only the Holy Trinity can be love. Human love cannot possibly reflect the nature of God unless God is a trinity of persons in union and communion. A solitary monad cannot love and, since it cannot love, neither can it be a person. And if God is not personal neither can we be – and if we are not persons we cannot love. This marks a vast, immeasurable divide between those cultures that follow a monotheistic unitary deity and those that are permeated by the Christian teaching on the Trinity. Trinitarian theology asserts that love is ultimate since God is love, because he is three persons in undivided loving communion. Islam asserts that Allah is powerful and his will is ultimate, before which submission (*Islam*) is required' (p. 446).

There are two appendixes addressing modern attempts by those with a feminist agenda (Bilezikian) to deny order within the Trinity.

A six-page glossary explaining the meaning of a wide range of terms used in Trinitarian theology is most useful.

Throughout the writing is robustly reformed. Robert Letham is the minister of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Wilmington, Delaware, and adjunct professor of Systematic Theology, Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia. He is an Englishman who having settled in the USA still understands with enthusiasm the finer points of cricket.

*Errol Hulse, Leeds*

## **Review Editor's note on recent commentaries**

The *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible*, edited by James D. G. Dunn and John W. Rogerson (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 2003, xx+1629 pp., £37.15; ISBN 0802837115), is a massive and up-to-date introduction to biblical literature. It is a useful marker of current critical and liberal scholarship; the fact that the Apocrypha is included, and that few names from evangelical seminaries appear, is an indication that it is not pitched at the conservative end of biblical studies. The introductions to each book are useful; the commentary itself must be used with caution, however. A glance at the introduction to the Pentateuch, for example, shows that the documentary hypothesis is still alive and well. Not surprisingly, perhaps, the material on the New Testament writings is less liberalist in orientation, and Joel Green's essay on 'Hermeneutical Approaches to the

New Testament Tradition' certainly brought me up to speed on much that is taking place in the world of New Testament research and hermeneutics. This is a huge volume, which gathers together an international and ecumenical range of scholarly writings, and will be a useful tool, if used carefully, for anyone wishing an up-to-date introduction to biblical studies.

The latest edition in the Ancient Commentary on Scripture series is *Old Testament IX: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon*, edited by J. Robert Wright (IVP, Downers Grove, Illinois, 2005; xxix+434 pp., £19.81; ISBN 0830814795). This series brings together a selection of commentators spanning some seven centuries of biblical exegesis in the first millennium of the New Testament church. It was a period, of course, which saw a wide variety of abilities and styles among those who exegeted the biblical text, but for those who are interested in historical exegesis, this series will prove invaluable. The Song of Solomon, for example, was one of the most widely read and preached books of the Old Testament, yet the spiritual approach of the ancients is increasingly becoming too much for modern evangelicals. This refreshing volume grounds our exegesis in the full revelation of Scripture as well as in the wide sweep of the Bible.

Christian Focus publications have republished the short commentary on Lamentations by Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. *Grief and Pain in the Plan of God: Christian Assurance and the Message of Lamentations* (CFP, Fearn, 2004; 141 pp., £6.99; ISBN 18579299341) is a gem from an outstanding Old Testament scholar. Kaiser brings the message of Lamentations – surely one of the more neglected Old Testament writings – to life, arguing for Jeremian authorship (contra the Eerdmans volume, above!) and bringing out the relevance of the dirges as a statement about the place of suffering in God's sovereign plan. The concluding essay on 'Suffering in the Old Testament' is a fitting summary of an important theme.

W. Harold Mare's *New Testament Background Commentary: A New Dictionary of Words, Phrases and Situations in Bible Order* (Mentor, Fearn, 2004; 511 pp., £19.99; ISBN 1857929551) is also a useful reference tool. At the age of 85 Professor Mare was engaged in archaeological work in Jordan when he died as the result of a road accident just before the publication of this volume. It is, therefore, a fitting memorial to one of the founding trustees and former Professors of Covenant Seminary, whose expertise in New Testament background is evident throughout this book. More a commentary than a dictionary, this volume works through each New Testament book, giving an introduction and a contextual analysis of key verses in each chapter. It



will certainly prove a useful reference tool for background studies for New Testament interpretation and exegesis.

Grant R. Osborne, *Romans*, IVP New Testament Commentary series (IVP, Leicester/Downers Grove, 2004, 447 pp., £11.99; ISBN 0830818065), follows the style of the series and makes an important contribution to Romans studies. With Pauline studies now subject to the nuances of the so-called 'new perspectives' on Paul, any modern commentary on Paul's letters – particularly those which deal with justification and related matters – feeds into this particular discussion. Osborne is a reliable guide in this matter, nuancing justification in a declarative understanding of the term. One wonders whether it is time to call a moratorium on Romans commentaries; no doubt they will keep on coming. If one were to make a choice, Osborne's would not be a foolish one to make.

A latest addition to the Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament series is the volume on *1 Corinthians* by David Garland (Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, 2003; xxi+870 pp., £27.50; ISBN 080102630X). Several volumes have now appeared in this series, and all have been valuable. With exacting attention to the Greek text Garland is a good guide through the epistle. He highlights at the outset that Corinth was 'a religious melting pot' with these outside influences affecting the thinking and behaviour of the congregation. He also rightly identifies how Paul brings his eschatology to bear on many of the problems at Corinth; to those who believed they had arrived, Paul highlights the importance of the 'not yet'. An important contribution to an important series.

Finally, two recent commentaries on Revelation are worth highlighting. Ben Witherington III has written a volume in the New Cambridge Bible Commentary series: *Revelation* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003; xviii+307 pp., £10.40; ISBN 0521000688), worth purchasing if only for the 'brief tour of Revelation' which appears in the introduction. Witherington is spot on when he says that 'though this is mostly a visionary work, it has its aural and oracular dimensions, and the visionary material is set within the context of the interpreting oracles' (p. 41). He is correct to place Revelation within the stream of prophetic, apocalyptic material, which is neither purely earth-bound nor transcendent, but which sees the world as the theatre of the supernatural. Operating on the principle of a 'double eschatology', Witherington shows the primary concern of the book for Christians of the first century, and its permanent relevance for the church in every age. This is a very accessible commentary on a difficult book.

*The Apocalypse in the Light of the Temple. A new approach to the Book of Revelation* by John and Gloria Ben-Daniel (Beit Yochanan, Jerusalem, 2003; 266 pp., £14; ISBN 965551342), is an attempt to view Revelation in the light of the Temple background. It stresses the abundant Temple imagery of the last book of the canon, suggesting that the Temple is the unifying theme of the images, and the key to interpreting them. It is an interesting thesis, but hardly one that arises naturally out of the text. Used with care, however, this book does make sense of the many allusions to Temple liturgy in Revelation.

*Iain D. Campbell, Back Free Church, Isle of Lewis*

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