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EDITORIAL

'There is a time for everything.' (So we might paraphrase Ecclesiastes 3:1.) When I first browsed ('read' would, I think, be too strong a word!) a copy of the *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology*, probably sometime during my first year of undergraduate studies at New College, Edinburgh, it never entered my head that there would come a time when I would serve as editor of the journal. It was a huge honour to be asked to take on this responsibility (particularly as the request came from my esteemed teacher and friend, Alasdair I. Macleod, who then served as editor) and I feel privileged to have had the opportunity to serve both the church and the academy in this way. But now the time has come to pass on the baton and this will be the final number of *SBET* for which I take responsibility as editor. Before I introduce my successor, I hope readers will bear with me as I thank several people. Firstly, I wish to thank the members of the relevant committees of Rutherford House and the Scottish Evangelical Theology Society for entrusting me with this significant task and for their continued confidence in me even when I relocated to South Africa. Secondly, thanks are due to all those who have worked to support the production of *SBET*, and particularly to the new Director of Rutherford House, Dr Jason Curtis, who has provided such dedicated support since he took up his post. Thirdly, I would like to thank the numerous authors who have submitted articles for inclusion in *SBET* (even if not all submissions were finally published). It has been greatly encouraging to have a range of articles submitted from both established scholars and writers nearer the beginning of their careers; from men and women; from writers working in Scotland, England, France, Germany, the USA, Australia, South Africa. I hope that all readers have found something to stimulate, to educate, to challenge them in the articles which have been published. Finally, I would like to thank the readers of *SBET* for taking theological writing seriously and for demanding that theology has something significant to say for the good of the church.

Now, I am pleased to be able to tell you that the new editor of the *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* is Dr David Reimer, Senior Lecturer in Hebrew and Old Testament at New College, the University of Edinburgh. I am particularly pleased that David represents, firstly, the ongoing connection between *SBET* and the institution in which I first read it. Many readers of *SBET* will have strong memories of the late Professor David Wright's contribution to the journal, as editor, author and enthusiastic advocate and I am glad that another David from New College will carry the work on. I'm sure it will be a positive move to have an editor of *SBET* who is actually in Scotland! And secondly, I am pleased that the

new editor is again a specialist in biblical studies and I trust that this will continue to encourage a healthy mutual respect among biblical theologians, systematicians and historians for their various contributions to a common task of doing theology for the church.

Please continue to read, support and pray for the *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology.*

IN THIS ISSUE

I am grateful to the various contributors who have provided an interesting selection of papers for this issue.

The opening article is a theological-historical study of the notion of 'uniformity' in the church, jointly written by Rev. James Eglinton (currently completing his PhD on an aspect of the thought of Herman Bavinck at the University of Edinburgh) and my colleague here at Dumisani Theological Institute, Dr John Ross.

The second article is by Rev. Mark Batluck, currently a research student at the University of Edinburgh. His comparison of the writings of one ancient author (Irenaeus) and one modern author (Bart Ehrman) on the Ebionites, provides an interesting study of what we can learn about the author as well as the subject when we read a text.

In the following article, Rev Michael Braeutigam, a pastor in St Wendel, Germany, provides a Trinitarian perspective on the doctrine of adoption which, although doubtless a relatively neglected doctrine, has nonetheless received a more appropriate amount of attention in the pages of *SBET* in recent years.

Next, Michael Brown, a pastor in Santee, California, contributes a study of Samuel Petto, a little-known 'Puritan Pastor-Theologian', highlighting his theological contribution for the sake of the church.

Finally, Dr Fergus Macdonald, also of Edinburgh, builds on an earlier article published in the Autumn 2008 issue of *SBET* with a study of how a variety of different readers (many not participants in church life) engage with the Bible, and specifically with the Psalms. This is the published form of a lecture given in his capacity as a Fellow of the Spencer Center for Global Engagement at Taylor University, IN., in February 2009.

I express my thanks to all our contributors and I trust that readers will be spurred to thought and reflection – and indeed to prayer and worship – as they engage with these papers.

Alistair I. Wilson

Unity and Uniformity: Towards a Trinitarian Theology of Worship

James Eglinton
PhD candidate, New College, University of Edinburgh.

John S Ross
Dumisani Theological Institute, King William's Town.

INTRODUCTION

Locating this paper in one theological discipline is a somewhat difficult task. This is perhaps so as the paper attempts to use its co-authors' backgrounds in systematic theology and church history to probe what is, if anything, a niche within a sub-discipline: applied ecclesiology.

The immediate backdrop to this paper is the current debate on worship in the Free Church of Scotland, which focuses on whether all congregations within the denomination must observe strict uniformity of worship (in this case, inspired materials of praise without instrumental accompaniment). Central to this discussion is whether a Christian church should prize uniformity as its highest ideal.

The general position with which the authors engage is one typical of conservative Scottish Presbyterian ecclesiology: the claim that catholicity within a denomination necessitates a strict level of uniformity regarding the elements, content and style of cultic worship among its member congregations. Due to this, whether one attends a Free Church service in an Island village, a Glasgwegian council estate, central Edinburgh, the Doric North East or cosmopolitan London, it is expected that the service will, in terms of liturgical elements and style, be substantially the same.

Although this work is framed within the debate of a particular denomination, the issues raised are of the utmost relevance to all who with the Apostles' Creed believe in the catholicity of Christ's church and the Triune reality of God. Indeed, the principle of uniformity is not the unique creation of Scottish Presbyterians. It is also the norm within Roman Catholicism: whether one attends Mass in Rome, Brazil or India, the liturgical elements, aesthetic and until relatively recently language have

historically been uniform.[1] The same can be said of the Greek Orthodox Church: orthodox worship in Athens, Greece will be markedly similar to that in its Georgia namesake.[2] Indeed, this trait has also become a major feature within mainstream evangelicalism, where a bland, uniform Hillsongsesque style exerts an international dominance.

Thus, while this article finds its immediate context within the life of a small Scottish Presbyterian denomination, the issues it handles are of far wider significance.

From the vantage point of systematic theology, it will be argued that the ideal of uniformity (in this case as applied to contextualised ecclesiology) is wholly inconsistent for those who confess the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit as one God in eternal co-existence. If the church's God is the Trinity, it will be put forward, its highest ideal should be unity-in-diversity.

Moving then into the realm of church history three areas will be considered, the challenge of maintaining unity in diversity in the New Testament church, the ambivalence of the magisterial Reformers to the question of uniformity and the effects of the dream of 'uniformity of worship' on the life of Scottish Presbyterian churches will be examined.

I. UNITY OR UNIFORMITY: SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

Unity or Uniformity?
The theologian's calling is to be a wordsmith; this much is predetermined by the very nature of theology. His daily task is to handle words with care, conscious of their subtleties and nuances. In the absence of such a basic commitment to the specificity of truth, his contribution to theology will invariably muddy rather than clear the waters.

Such a need for lexical precision affects this discussion at the outset. Rudimentary questions must be posed: are 'unity' and 'uniformity' mere synonyms? Is a uniform church the ultimate expression or antithesis of Christian unity? In what sense, if any, do unity and uniformity differ?

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[1] It should be noted that the same debate over unity or uniformity exists within Roman Catholic theology. See, for example, Peter C. Phan, 'How much uniformity can we stand? How much unity do we want? Church and Worship in the Next Millennium' in *Worship*, 72 no. 3 (May 1998), 194-210.

[2] In the Orthodox world there is also a debate over uniformity of liturgy. Cf. In favour of uniformity: Bishop Demetri (Khoury), *The Need for Good Choirs and Good Music*, http://www.antiochian.org/1169507979; contra, Anon. *Orthodox Liturgical Renewal and Visible Unity*, at http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/who/vilemov-07-e.html. Both retrieved 9.10.09.

Interestingly, these questions formed a major focus of the Neo-Calvinist revival in the early 20th century Netherlands. Its outstanding dogmaticians Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) and Herman Bavinck (1854-1921) provide a relevant case study of ecclesiology in relation to the Trinity. Indeed, Bavinck acknowledges the need for terminological clarity in this area. 'Thoughtful people have always been troubled by the problem of unity and diversity, oneness and multiplicity.'[3] When one examines how Bavinck and Kuyper attempted to solve this problem, one quickly notes their total aversion to the ideal of uniformity. Nowhere is this clearer than in the former's speech 'Uniformity: The Curse of Modern Life'.[4] Kuyper begins with the assertion that sin is essentially uncreative. Its 'dynamic drive' is to parody God's action.

> Sin always acts so: it puts the stamp of God's image on its counterfeit currency and misuses its God-given powers to imitate God's activity. Itself powerless, without creative ideas of its own, sin lives solely by plagiarising the ideas of God.[5]

He then goes on to claim that God's 'kingdom model' is one of unity and diversity. Kuyper writes, 'In God's plan vital unity develops by internal strength precisely from the diversity of nations and races.'[6] This is parodied in the Europe-wide drive towards uniformity in the aftermath of the French Revolution[7]: 'but sin, by a reckless levelling and the elimination of all diversity, seeks a false, deceptive unity, the uniformity of death.'[8] Kuyper traces the ideal of uniformity from Eastern antiquity to modern Europe, focusing on the Europe-wide effects of the French Revolution.[9] Modern uniformity, he claims, is seen on various levels. Architecturally, Paris sets the trend, Brussels replicates and Amsterdam follows suit. Cit-

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[3]   Herman Bavinck, 'On Inequality' in *Essays on Religion, Science and Society*, ed. John Bolt, tr. Harry Boonstra and Gerrit Sheeres (Baker: Grand Rapids, 2008), p. 145.

[4]   Abraham Kuyper, 'Uniformity: The Curse of Modern Life' in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader* ed. James Bratt (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids: 1998), pp. 19-44.

[5]   Kuyper, op. cit., p. 22.

[6]   Kuyper, op. cit., p.22

[7]   Kuyper uses the terms 'true uniformity' and 'false uniformity', and 'uniformity' and 'unity' interchangeably. The pairs convey the same meaning.

[8]   Kuyper, op. cit., p.23

[9]   Contextually, this speech is pivotal in the development of Kuyper's Antirevolutionary Party, which identified itself against the French Revolution. In this instance, Kuyper confronts the Revolution's tendencies towards cultural uniformity within the French Republic.

ies everywhere were beginning to look the same. In terms of fashion, Kuyper saw distinctive regional and national clothing being replaced by generic, Continent-spanning styles. He also perceived age-related behaviour as subject to the same influence. Children were being dressed and expected to behave as mini-adults; and adults were, in turn, acting like children. Gone is the development from the rashness of youth to the settled assurance and *sagesse* of adulthood: child and adult alike share the same blend of half-baked maturity and immaturity. Speaking in 1864, Kuyper predicts the modern day metrosexual and notes the general blurring of gender distinctions on several levels. Lastly, he highlights the linguistic uniformity sweeping Europe in the 19th century as robbing the Continent of its deep diversity of language.[10]

> So here we are. Everything has to be equalised and levelled; all diversity must be whittled down. Differences in architectural style must go. Age differences must go. Gender differences must go. Differences in dress must go. Differences in language must go. Indeed, what doesn't have to go if this drive toward uniformity succeeds? For what I have said so far is barely a beginning of the indictment against uniformity.[11]

In short, Kuyper describes what David Wells has more recently called a 'world cliché culture'.[12] What is apparent in this speech is that Neo-Calvinist thought has a paradigmic dislike of uniformist reductionism. It prizes the unity of diverse parts, whilst maintaining their distinctives, rather than reducing them en route to uniformity. Kuyper describes the 'unity in diversity' paradigm as 'organic': 'there, in a word, lies the profound difference distinguishing the spurious unity of the world from the life-unity designed by God.'[13]

Bavinck maintains the same attitude towards the ideal of uniformity, particularly with application to the church. He considerably expands Kuyper's 'organic' view of the church,[14] whereby the body of Christ glorifies God by being neither uniform nor multiform. Rather, it is a unity-in-diversity.

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[10] Following the French Revolution, Parisian French was imposed across the French Republic. Regional languages were discriminated against and often replaced.

[11] Kuyper, op. cit. p.32.

[12] David Wells, *No Place For Truth: Or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993), pp. 53-92.

[13] Kuyper, op. cit. p. 24.

[14] Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Ada, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), vol. 4. pp. 329-332. Hereafter referred to as *RD*.

One asks however why Bavinck and Kuyper, rigorous intellectuals committed to Biblical, richly catholic Christian theology, expressed such an intentional disdain for the ideal of uniformity in relation to the church. In answering this question, one must begin with the bedrock of their theological system: the knowledge of God.

The Centrality of God

The centrality of God to a biblical systematic theology is no mere footnote. Indeed the doctrine of God, Bavinck claims, is 'the only dogma, the exclusive content of the entire field of dogmatics'.[15]

Expressed most simply, theology is the study of God and of all else in relation to God. The theologian is called to be an intentional thinker, one who grounds all other considerations in God's triune reality. 'All things are considered in the light of God, subsumed under him, traced back to him as their starting point.'[16] Indeed, in grappling with the universe, humanity and Christ, the theologian is 'pondering and describing God and God alone', as nothing has meaning unless it is defined in relation to God.

The realm of ecclesiology is not exempt from this rigorous commitment to theocentrism. If the church's highest ideals are fundamentally out of step with God's own most glorious norms, they must change. In short, if one cannot locate the ideal of reductionist uniformity within the God of the Bible, the church has no right to strive towards it.

When one explores the doctrine of God in the theology of Bavinck and Kuyper, one quickly understands their desire to pursue unity, rather than uniformity within the church.

God's Norms as the Church's Ideals: Neither Multiformity nor Uniformity

In its theology of God himself, what is distinctive about the God of the Bible? A rigorous rejection of poly- or pan-theism lies at the core of Biblical revelation (Gen. 1-2; Deut. 6:4; Exod. 20:1-3). With regards to the divine, Scripture makes no allowance for the multiformity of God or gods: it asserts that there is only one God, a single divine essence.

However, at the opposite extreme, one finds uniformity. Applied to God, it defines him as a monad; a simple (in the original, theological sense), undifferentiated being in whom there is no variety or diversity. Such a theology of God-as-monad is the default position of Islam and Judaism, both of which reject outright the concept of a triune God.

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[15] Bavinck, RD vol. 2. p.29.
[16] Idem.

In its presentation of the divine as neither a uniform monad nor a cacophonous pantheon of gods and demi-gods, Christianity presents the notion that God's own most glorious norm is his combination of unity and diversity: the shared life of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit is its highest standard of glory. This is clear from the facts of God's essential oneness, his unoriginated and eternal diversity, and (by virtue of his un-changeability) the teleological irreducibility of this diversity.

God's Unoriginated Diversity

In the flow of progressive revelation, Scripture gives early hints towards divine threeness (Gen. 1:26). However, it nonetheless first establishes God's oneness (Deut. 6:4). On this foundation, the New Testament re-veals that this one God is the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

That Scripture's first concrete assertion concerns divine oneness in no way implies that this oneness somehow predates God's threeness, as though God himself developed from undiverse to diverse. His diversity, like his oneness, is unoriginated. It is simply who and what he is.

This point was settled relatively early in the church's history. In its battle with Arianism's denial of Christ's eternal sonship, the church came to boldly assert that the Christ is, 'very God of very God, begotten not created'.[17] Bound up in the rationale of Alexander and Athanasius is that there never was a time when the Trinity's *ad intra* diversity was not.

Bavinck sheds much light on this, defining the divine oneness as nu-merically exclusive (thus the three persons are continually one in number) and internally qualitative (thus the manifold divine attributes are also in perfect harmony).[18] Most interesting in Bavinck's doctrine of God is that he first handles divine diversity and then, having established that God is non-uniform, explains the sense in which he is united.

The Divine Diversity of Persons

The Christian doctrine of God differs radically from its Islamic and Jew-ish counterparts not on the bare principle of monotheism, but rather on how it defines this *monotheos*. Unlike the God-as-monad theology of the aforementioned religions, the one God of Christian theology is eternally, simultaneously the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

In the Old Testament, one encounters various provocative suggestions that Yahweh is somehow internally diverse. God creates humankind, in its composite male and female diversity, in 'our image and likeness' (Gen. 1:26). Various theophanic revelations point to an unimaginable

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[17] Nicene Creed, Article 2.
[18] Bavinck, RD vol. 2. p. 170.

internal diversity within Israel's one true God (Judges 13:11-25). This astonishing development becomes full blown in the New Testament. At Jesus' baptism, three divine persons are evidently present. The Son is baptised, the Father speaks and the Spirit descends (Matt. 3:16-17). This trinitarian faith quickly becomes woven into the life of the early church. Indeed, its proclamation of the gospel becomes inextricably linked to the non-uniformity of God's personhood: on the cross, the Son offers himself to the Father with the Spirit's assistance (Heb. 9:14). The *euangelion*, considered in the light of the Triune God, is inherently characterised by unity-in-diversity.

The Divine Diversity of Attributes and Names

God's internal diversity is not limited to the threefold nature of the divine personhood. It also extends to the attributes and names eternally applied to the God of the Bible. This one God is described in many ways. He is immutable, eternal, holy, gracious, good, omnipresent, omnipotent, omniscient and so forth.

That God is the subject of these numerous predicates is also evident in the apostolic theology of the divine. Within the same breath, Paul exhorts the Romans to consider both the 'goodness and severity of God' (Rom. 11:22).

Furthermore, this one God reveals himself as the bearer of a variety of names. Is it wholly appropriate to refer to God via names of being (*el, elohim*) and personality (*Yahweh*). 'Although he reveals himself in his names, no name is adequate to the purpose. He is nameless; his name is a name of wonder.'[19]

What is apparent is that God's various attributes and names co-exist in perfect harmony. At no point does Scripture highlight one attribute or name at the expense of another, nor does it teach that God has or could acquire additional personal attributes. Indeed, such a claim, through its denial of divine immutability, would be scarcely less heretical than the modalist notion that God has not always been the three triune persons. The divine attributes, like the divine persons, are unoriginated and uncreated. They simply are God's attributes. They cannot and do not cancel each other out, neither is their net effect reductionism *en route* to uniformity.

In order to describe who God is (the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit) and what God is like (his manifold attributes), Scripture itself deems it necessary to describe this one God as a being of considerable and complex diversity.

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19   Bavinck, *RD* vol. 2. p. 34.

In the beginning, the word was (John 1). Not only did this word possess independent existence, it was also simultaneously with God and was God. In the beginning, then, there was abundant unity and little uniformity. The case for uniformity as the church's highest ideal thus stands feebly before the awesome majesty of its Triune God.

God's Essential Oneness

Equally central to Scripture's doctrine of God is its emphasis on his oneness. As has been previously noted, Scripture reveals God's triunity in stages. The Old Testament's overwhelming drive is towards monotheism. In the midst of Canaanite polytheism, the God of Israel made plain to his people not simply that he alone was their only God, but that he is the only God.

The *shema* of Deut. 6:4 ('Hear, O Israel, Yahweh, Yahweh your God is one'), written to be the constant refrain of the believer's life, ingrains a default commitment to divine oneness and the aversion to polytheism which follows.[20]

At its core, this emphasis points to a God perfectly at one with himself. Within the Godhead, a profound unity exists. Indeed, it permeates every aspect of the shared life between the Father, the Son and the Spirit. There is no division, although as has been seen, there is much diversity.

Bavinck handles this divine oneness under two headings: the unity of singularity and the unity of simplicity.[21] The former combats polytheism and distinguishes trinitarianism from tritheism. There is only one divine essence. The latter explains that God is not a composite of various individual elements. Unlike the human body, which is made up of various finite organs, God is infinite in every sense. Thus each of the many divine attributes (truth, righteousness, life, wisdom and so forth) is identical with his essence. Everything Scripture predicates of God, it does so infinitely and perfectly: God is love, not in part but in full.

What must be stressed is that a concatenation exists between the oneness and threeness of God: each factor is essential to the other. The Tri-

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[20] Interestingly, the word translated 'one' is *echad* (literally 'united', cf. Gen. 2:24, 'the two shall become *echad*'). This stands in distinction to *yachid* ('one' in absolute uniform isolation, cf. Judges 11:24, 'she was his *yachid* daughter'). *Echad* denotes a oneness open to internal diversity, whereas *yachid* requires strict uniformity. The Old Testament never uses *yachid* with reference to God. The consistent sense with which it uses *echad*, however, is to denote either one of many (Exod. 9:6; Lev. 5:7) or a unity-in-diversity (Gen. 2:24; Josh. 9:2; Ezra 3:1). That Deut. 6:4 chooses *echad* over *yachid* to describe the divine oneness is telling.

[21] Bavinck, *RD* vol. 2. pp.170-7.

une God cannot be one if he is not three, and he cannot be three if he is not one. In short God's unity depends on his diversity, and his diversity depends on his unity. Even in the divine oneness, it is hard to support the notion of uniformity as a theocentric ideal.

Triune Unchangeability

However, the bare fact that God possesses much diversity neither proves nor disproves that the church should commit itself to the paradigm of unity-in-diversity. While Scripture speaks of God as a unity-in-diversity, if it can also be shown that he either was not originally so, or will eventually cease to be so, the argument falls down.

The question of whether God was always characterised by unity-in-diversity has already been answered. Both divine oneness and diversity are unoriginated. Indeed, any suggestion to the contrary is logically heretical on two fronts: first, it denies divine immutability; and second, it fundamentally misapprehends the concatenous nature of God's unity and diversity. Each presupposes the co-existence of the other, thus they can only exist in a state of uncreated harmony.

The same argument stretches forward to resolve whether God will always be a unity-in-diversity. Simply, if God is inherently triune, he must be united to be diverse and vice versa. If this changes, God cannot be God and the cosmos, created as his general self-revelation, cannot be the cosmos. In short, this is an unthinkable, impossible outcome which is never countenanced by Scripture. Biblical eschatology is characterised not by a mass reduction into eternal uniformity, but rather by the glorious eternal maintenance of unity-in-diversity in God and his redeemed bride. In the eschaton, the Father continues to be the Father; incorporeally omnipresent throughout the new creation, the Son continues to reign as the new cosmic kingdom's centrepiece, and the Spirit continues to indwell Christ's church, which is still evidently drawn from a wide diversity of ethnic, sociological and linguistic origins (Rev. 7:9).

What is Wrong with Uniformist Reductionism?

Having briefly explored the doctrine of God according to Bavinck and Kuyper, it is not hard to see why their aversion to uniformity was so strong. To return to Kuyper's aforementioned speech, uniformity is nothing less than a sinful parody of God's own glorious unity. Those committed to dogmatics as the study of God and the conforming of all else to his perfect being, it seems, must strive towards unity because uniformity is ungodly. Its logical drive is to strip the cosmos and the church of their God-glorifying diversity, which must be reduced to the point of extinction. Within the church, a uniform paradigm sees diversity as inherently

undesirable. Christ's body, it maintains, must be homogenised. The norms of the church's dominant cultural group are imposed on its minority sub-cultures with the goal that everyone look and sound the same.[22]

Applying Unity-in-Diversity to the Church

The notion that God's glory is found in unity-in-diversity rather than uni-formity highlights the radical nature of Christianity in the marketplace of world religions. In comparison to its non-Trinitarian monotheistic coun-terparts and its non-monotheistic Eastern neighbours, Christian thought moves on a different plane.

One may thus highlight three paradigms for ecclesiastical life: uni-formity, multiformity and unity-in-diversity. Anecdotally at least, it would seem that the church struggles to rest in the final triniform option. Within Protestantism, the effective multiformity of highly mixed denominations often seems unworkable to committed conservatives and liberals alike, who in turn seek solace in uniformity. However, few self-styled uniform denominations pursue an absolute uniformity, dividing themselves over disagreement on the minutiae of doctrinal non-essentials. Even the most conservative Scottish Presbyterian denominations, for example, currently see no warrant for schism due to the presence of both infralapsarian and supralapsarian ministers.

Within the Scottish context at least, unity-in-diversity is therefore not an unknown practice. The questions at hand thus concern the extent to which one is willing to pursue unity-in-diversity, and the motivation to do so. Taking the Free Church of Scotland as an example, uniformity is assumed to be the default paradigm for denominational life. However, it is not a paradigm currently followed with utter consistency, particularly concerning baptismal theology.[23] Perhaps the most pressing issue within the said debate is which paradigm – unity-in-diversity or uniformity – stands up in the light of the Holy Trinity. If God's triunity requires the

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[22] Phan, a Vietnamese advocate for unity-in-diversity within the Roman Catho-lic Church, hints at the fascinating point that uniformity in a cross-cultural denomination is never a neutral cultural homogeneity. Rather, it is the im-position of norms belonging to the denomination's dominant culture on its minority groups – in his case, culturally inappropriate Roman norms being forced on rural Asian villagers. Peter C. Phan, 'How much uniformity can we stand? How much unity do we want? Church and Worship in the Next Millennium' in *Worship*, 72 no. 3 (May 1998), p. 198.

[23] Within the Free Church of Scotland, the Western Isles Presbytery allows the baptism of adherents' children. The mainland Presbyteries generally inter-pret the Westminster Confession of Faith to require at least one parent to be a professing Christian.

church to pursue unity-in-diversity, this must be done in a principled, rather than haphazard fashion.

An Objection?

The most obvious objection to the application of this triniform unity-in-diversity paradigm to the *ecclesia* is surely that within the Trinity there is no disagreement in the diversity. While the Triune persons take different roles in the economy of salvation, for example, these roles are complementary. They do not contradict each other. In addition, Paul's application of the unity-in-diversity principle to the church as one body with many distinct members (Rom. 12:4-8) demonstrates the same principle of accord in diversity. Can one legitimately apply the unity-in-diversity paradigm to contexts where diversity is the product of disagreement?

Bavinck answers this question in the affirmative:

> Undoubtedly the divisions of the church of Christ are caused by sin; in heaven there will no longer be any room for them. But this is far from being the whole story. In unity God loves the diversity. Among all creatures there was diversity even when as yet there was no sin. As a result of sin that diversity has been perverted and corrupted, but diversity as such is good and important also for the church. Difference in sex and age, in character and disposition, in mind and heart, in gifts and goods, in time and place is to the advantage also of the truth that is in Christ. He takes all these differences into his service and adorns the church with them. Indeed, though the division of humanity into peoples and languages was occasioned by sin, it has something good in it, which is brought into the church and thus preserved for eternity. From many races and languages and peoples and nations Christ gathers his church on earth.[24]

He is clear to distinguish this from the chaos of a multiform church where all disagreement is relativised.[25] In appropriating Bavinck's idea, one does well to recall Calvin's dictum, 'All the heads of doctrine are not in the same position.'[26] By allowing diversity proportionate to a doctrine's place in the hierarchy of truths, the church works for the redemption of its Edenic, pre-fall ideal diversity.[27] Indeed, this is the means by which it strides towards its *telos*; the sinless, heavenly unity-in-diversity wherein Christ's high priestly prayer for the church's oneness (John 17:21) will be

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[24] Bavinck, *RD* vol. 4. p. 318.
[25] Idem.
[26] John Calvin, *Institutes*, IV.i.12.
[27] For a thorough and helpful discussion of this hierarchy of truths, see Donald Macleod, *Priorities For The Church* (Fearn: Christian Focus, 2003), pp.100-16.

positively and eternally answered.[28] Schism in the name of uniformity, sin's parody of God's unity, accomplishes none of these things.

II. UNITY OR UNIFORMITY: CHURCH HISTORY

During the course of a General Assembly debate a speaker once admitted to being perplexed as to the origins of the practice of uniformity of worship and his seeking enlightenment from a highly respected father of the Church. The snap answer he received was one word, 'Sinai!' Although the authority cited was highly respected, the answer fails to satisfy. Undoubtedly, Sinai did impose upon the covenant community, during the days of its minority, a uniform doctrine of worship, which, as Calvin has argued is, as to its fundamentals, still in force, but with which the Christian church has, from its earliest years, grappled, seeking to maintain its essential unity whilst permitting diversity of worship appropriate to the cultural and situational differences endemic in its international membership.[29]

The Apostolic Church

If uniformity of worship for the Jewish people was commanded at Sinai, for the first gentile believers, freedom from Sinai and its forms of worship was axiomatic. The Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15), both established the right of Jewish Christians to maintain their liturgical traditions and also decreed the right of gentile Christians not to submit to circumcision, nor to conform to the ceremonial law, including Jewish practices of a liturgical nature, summarized by the expression the 'law of Moses.' It is evident that Paul was comfortable with the freedom afforded to both communities: he took the gentile Titus with him to a meeting of the Jerusalem leaders to demonstrate what the Gospel could do without the addition of Mosaic tradition and despite the application of considerable pressure refused to have him circumcised (Gal. 2:3), but later he insisted that Timothy, as one born of a Jewish mother, should be circumcised (Acts 16:3). Paul at the same time upheld gentile rights to be free of the Law of Moses and happily affirmed his own Jewishness both by explicit statement (Acts 21:39) and by his actions such as continuing to minister in synagogues

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[28] The Salkinson-Ginsburg Hebrew New Testament translates *eis* (Greek: 'one') with *echad*. 'The Salkinson-Ginsburg Hebrew New Testament', Bible Works (Norfolk, VA: *BibleWorks* 7.0.018x.14, 2007), ad. loc.

[29] For a discussion of Calvin's understanding of the Decalogue in relation to worship see Hughes Oliphant Old, 'Calvin's Theology of Worship' in G. Ryken, D H W Thomas and J L Duncan (eds), *Give Praise to God: A Vision for Reforming Worship* (Philipsburg: P & R Publishing, 2003), p.416.

(Acts 17:10; 18:4, 19), taking part in Jewish Sabbath prayers (Acts 16:13), going up to Jerusalem for the feast of Shavuot (Acts 20:16) and participating in the rituals of temple purification (Acts 21:26).

What in fact the Jerusalem Council had sanctioned was freedom to be different within the body of Christ. Had they imposed on new converts a uniform ceremonial expedient it would have strangled the gentile mission at birth. The abrogation of the principle of uniformity of worship, therefore, marks the turning point in the story of the international, multicultural advance of the gospel. As Köstenberger and O'Brien rightly point out, 'Once the decision has been made there is no further mention of the Jerusalem apostles (apart from 16:4), and the focus of the book is on the irresistible progress of the gospel to "the ends of the earth".' [30]

With the first Jewish Christians being devoted to the synagogue Christian liturgical practice came to be modelled on its services, which included prayer (*tefillah*), the singing of psalms, the reading and exposition of Scripture (*torah* and *derashah*), the affirmation of a creedal statement (*shema*) and an offering (*tzedekah*).[31] To these to these were added the sacrament of initiation, Christian baptism, and the sacrament of Christian nurture, the breaking of bread or the Lord's Supper (Acts 2:42, 46; 20:7). Yet even within this simple tradition, a degree of diversity is to be found. Matthew records Jesus' Trinitarian baptismal formula (Matt 28:19), but Luke speaks of baptism in the 'name of Jesus' (Acts 2:38; 10:48). The ceremonial aspects of baptism are handled in such general terms, with what Culmann calls a 'rudimentary liturgy,' that two thousand years of debate have ensued regarding its legitimate subjects and mode.[32] Likewise, New Testament scholars note plural traditions regarding the institution of the Lord's Supper, one considered attributable to Mark/Matthew and the other to Luke/Paul, the latter presumably recording the practice of the Pauline churches. Fee identifies seven differences between these traditions, although their common features are 'very similar'.[33] The point here

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[30]   Andreas J. Köstenberger and Peter T. O'Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission* (Leicester: Apollos, 2001), p.150.

[31]   Cf. C.W. Dugmore, *The Influence of the Synagogue on the Divine Office* (The Faith Press, 1964), p. 8; William D. Maxwell, *An Outline of Christian Worship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936), p. 2. Robert W. Weller, *Worship Old and New* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), p. 38; ed. E. Jones, *The Study of Liturgy* (London: S.P.C.K., 1992), p. 69ff; ed. D. A. Carson, *Worship: Adoration and Action.* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House 1993), p. 118.

[32]   Oscar Cullmann, *Early Christian Worship* (London: SCM Press, 1953), p. 25.

[33]   Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians.* NICNT. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1987), p. 546ff.

is that had liturgical uniformity been an Apostolic concern acquiescence in such diversity is not what we might expect. Paul's primary concern in dealing with issues of worship, such as the abuse at Corinth of the Lord's Supper (I Cor 11:20-34), is spiritual and ethical, drawing from him little instruction on the use of correct liturgical formulae.

Prayer at this early period is likewise pluriform and seems to have been largely extempore. It is *Didache* 8, rather than the New Testament, that provides evidence for the early liturgical use of the Lord's Prayer. Cullmann argues, on the grounds of the use of the imperative mood in Revelation 22:22, that the *Maranatha* prayer was used in some congregations as a eucharistic prayer.[34] There were different forms of Apostolic greetings too, of a certain 'stereotyped and solemn character' which attained early use as *vota* and benedictions, spoken at the commencement and end of the service.[35] To these greetings may be added a variety of doxologies as well as the liturgical use of the Jewish *Amen*.

Paul wrote at a time when three distinct liturgical traditions lived side-by-side in the church; first, there was the adaption of ancient Jewish traditions, secondly, a charismatic and spontaneous form of worship deriving from the direct influence of the Holy Spirit, and thirdly, there was the growth of a more stereotyped but distinctly Christian form of worship. It is not surprising, therefore to find his references to worship are mainly descriptive or by way of allusion, rather than prescriptive.[36] Rather than calling for uniformity, Paul, intent on 'building up' the church, valued diversity, insisting only that 'all things should be done decently and in order' (I Cor. 14:40).

The Reformation

As compared to the large degree of uniformity of worship imposed by the Latin rites of the mediaeval Catholic Church, the Reformation generally introduced diversity. The Reformers made little attempt to create uniformity between their disparate traditions. Luther saw no benefit in working with other Protestants to secure standardisation in liturgy and was opposed to calling a general synod for the purpose.[37] Where essential

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[34] Cullman, op. cit. p. 13f
[35] Ibid. p. 23.
[36] This in no way detracts from their authority, Apostolic example has long been considered as authoritative as Apostolic precept. Cf. William Cunningham, *Historical Theology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1863), p. 64ff.
[37] M. W. Hetherington (Ed.), *The Works of Mr. George Gillespie* (Edinburgh: Robert Ogle and Oliver and Boyd, 1846), vol. 2, pp. 82-85.

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doctrinal agreement existed, the *Formula of Concord* (1577) advocated liturgical tolerance rather than the imposition of uniformity.[38]

D'Aubigne's account of Zwingli's reforms at Zurich recounts that although uniformity of worship seemed unattainable the reformer was little perturbed, because he said, 'Peace dwells in our city...among us there is no fraud, no dissension, no envying, no strife. Whence can proceed such harmony except from the Lord, and that the doctrine we preach inclines us to innocence and peace?' As D'Aubigne remarks, 'Charity and unity then prevailed, although there was no uniformity.'[39]

Calvin, famously prepared to cross 'ten seas' to bring about harmony among Christians, was indifferent to standardisation of worship, once writing that: 'trifling difference in ceremony ought not to mean so much to us that we split the Church because of it...there is no call for us to be too particular about things that are not so necessary, provided that adventitious ceremonials do not contaminate the simple institution of Christ.'[40] As William J. Bouwsma has observed, Calvin 'was usually content...to recommend general principles of worship that individual churches might apply in accordance with their various and changing needs'.[41]

Uniformity, however, existed within the spheres of influence of particular churches. In Britain, Protestant uniformity of worship dates from the passing of Edward VI's 1549 and 1552 Acts of Uniformity commanding and enforcing the use of Cranmer's Book of Common Prayer. All this, however, was overthrown by the imposition of a different uniformity when Mary (r.1553-1558), reverting to Roman Catholicism, repealed the previous Acts. The Elizabethan settlement produced the 1559 Act of Uniformity, entrenching the Anglican *via media* and marginalising both Puritan Presbyterianism and Roman Catholicism.

'Covenanted Uniformity of Religion.'

During the English Civil War, Scottish Presbyterians offered their swords to the beleaguered English Parliamentary army in exchange for 'covenanted uniformity of religion betwixt the churches of Christ in the kingdoms of Scotland, England and Ireland.' This was the *raison d'être* which the Solemn League and Covenant (1643), the Westminster Assembly and

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[38]   Cf. Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom with a History and Critical Notes* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1877), vol. 3, p. 163.

[39]   J. H. Merle D'Aubigne, *History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century* (London: Religious Tract Society, n.d.), vol. 2, p. 407.

[40]   John Calvin, *The Acts of the Apostles*, ed. D.W. & T.F. Torrance (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1965), p. 245.

[41]   Cited by William J. Bouwsma, *John Calvin: A Sixteenth Century Portrait* (London: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 224.

its publications, including the *Directory of Public Worship*, were designed to effect. The Solemn League and Covenant was passed by both Houses of Parliament and the Scottish commissioners on 25 September 1643. As a military league its aim was to assist England against Charles I, then in a position of some strength. As a religious covenant its goal was clearly defined in its first article:

> the preservation of reformed religion in the Church of Scotland... the reforma-
> tion of religion in the kingdoms of England and Ireland, in doctrine, worship,
> discipline, and government, according to the word of GOD, and example
> of the best reformed Churches; and shall endeavour to bring the Churches
> of God in the three kingdoms to the nearest conjunction and uniformity in
> ...confession of faith, ... church-government, ... worship and catechising.

Not all were convinced, however, of the benefits of uniformity. Sensitive to the possibility of religious uniformity being tyranny masquerading as reformation, John Milton in the last line of his poem *On the Forcers of Conscience under the Long Parliament*, satirised Samuel Rutherford's *The Due Right of Presbyteries* (1644) with the jibe: 'New *Presbyter* is but old Priest writ large.' [42] Conversely, the advocates of uniformity, such as George Gillespie, one of the Scottish commissioners, saw much more than a semantic difference between 'prelatical conformity' and 'presby-terial uniformity.'[43] Gillespie frankly admitted than in the early church uniformity did not extend to 'all particulars' of worship, and cites with approval the Formula of Concord's use of the tolerant adage of Irenaeus *'Dissonantia jejunii non dissolvit consonantiam fide'* [44] For Gillespie the benefits of Presbyterian uniformity should not dictate minutia; only bind-ing the conscience so far 'as [its provisions] are grounded upon and war-rantable by the word of God.'[45]

Gillespie's arguments in favour of uniformity —'the dream of Scot-tish ecclesiastics'[46]—were twofold. First, he argued that uniformity re-

[42] John Milton, *Complete Poems*. Vol. IV. The Harvard Classics. (New York: P.F. Collier & Son, 1909–14); Bartleby.com, 2001. www.bartleby.com/4/. Re-trieved 7.10. 2009.

[43] George Gillespie, *Works* (Edinburgh: Robert Ogle and Oliver and Boyd.1846), vol. 2, pp. 82-85.

[44] 'Dissimilarity of fasting does not destroy similarity of faith.' Cf. Eusebius, *Church History* V. xxiv.13. *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*. Ed. Philip Schaff, Series 2, Vol. 1. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986), p. 243.

[45] Gillespie, op. cit.

[46] William Beveridge, *A Short History of the Westminster Assembly*, ed. J. Ligon Duncan (Greenville: Reformed Academic Press, 1993), p. 36.

flects natural laws, for example, 'the heavens do not move sometime more slowly, sometime more swiftly, but ever uniformly'. Yet he conceded that within the harmony of the natural laws there is also diversity, 'such as the waxing and waning of the moon, the ebbing and flowing of the sea, and the like'.[47] He also argued from Scripture: in the Old Testament he saw, 'a marvellously great uniformity both in the substantials and rituals of the worship and service of God'.[48] This uniformity was based, he held, on the essential unity of God.[49] Coming to the New Testament, Gillespie argued that Paul required the Corinthians to conform to the best practice of the other churches: there was to be orderliness in the ministry of the prophets; modesty among the women as they comply with prevailing norms of decency by covering their heads in worship; the taking up a collection each Lord's Day and, in the Pastoral Epistles, the regulation of 'the ordination and admission of elders and deacons, ... widows, ... accusations, admonitions, censures, and other things belonging to church policy.'[50]

Gillespie was, however, generous, pragmatic and realistic. Admitting that there is no absolute principle of uniformity required by Scripture, he saw religious homogeneity as an expedient to effect the establishment of Presbyterianism in the three nations. Likewise he found little fault in principle with Luther's lukewarmness to uniformity, but argued that things might have been rather different, 'if Luther had found as good opportunity and as much possibility of attaining a right uniformity in church government and worship as God vouchsafeth us in this age'.[51]

Not that the Scottish commissioners advocated any attempt to coerce England, both Henderson and Gillespie realised this was totally out of the question. Indeed, to forestall the possibility of being backed into a corner, the English commissioners had contrived the use of the term 'league' as being in their eyes less binding than 'covenant,' thus 'providing a way of escape ... should they need it.'[52] Nor did Henderson 'presume to propose the government of the Church of Scotland as a pattern for the Church of England.'[53] Similarly, Gillespie presented his case for uniformity tactically and with caution, but there were few enough ministers north of the border with such level-headedness, most saw the Solemn League and Covenant as less an expedient political treaty and more a test of godli-

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47 Gillespie, op. cit.
48 Idem.
49 Idem.
50 Idem.
51 Idem.
52 Beveridge, op. cit., p. 37
53 Robert L. Orr, *Alexander Henderson, Churchman and Statesman* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1919), p. 287.

ness to be applied rigorously and pursued uncompromisingly. For example Henderson's and Gillespie's fellow commissioner at the Westminster Assembly, Robert Baillie, made no bones about the nature of his commission from the General Assembly, it was 'for the propagation of our Church Discipline to England and Ireland'.[54] As John Buchan pertinently observes, 'Civil statesmanship disappears in such a mood, and all that remains is a frantic theocracy.'[55]

Such was the climate in which the *Westminster Directory of Public Worship* was produced. Whilst the Scottish commissioners were committed in the production of the *Directory*, being frequently consulted on its details, and with Rutherford impatiently pressing for its 'speeding', the *Directory* did not enjoy so smooth and unchallenged a passage into the Scottish Church as its originators might have desired. The Scottish commissioners had unsuccessfully sought the retention in Scotland of well established Reformation practices, including the use of the Lord's Prayer, the recitation of the Apostles' Creed and the *Gloria Patri*. Henderson, who was deeply committed to Knox's *Book of Common Order*, did not see how he could possibly 'take upon me ... to set down other forms of prayer than we have in our Psalm Book [the popular name for the *Book of Common Order*], penned by our great and divine reformers'. Baillie deprecated the abandonment of the use of Creed, Doxology and Lord's Prayer. David Calderwood was deeply hurt by the *Directory*'s rejection of the Doxology, comforting himself with the thought he might yet sing it in heaven.[56] The General Assembly, reluctant to have *The Book of Common Order* totally eclipsed, forbade 'all condemning ... such lawful things as have been ... practised since the first beginning of reformation' and 'took in very ill part' the disuse of the Lord's Prayer and the Doxology.[57] Had not Scotland been forced to revise its public worship by the political exigencies arising from the dominance of its southern neighbour, it might have retained Knox's *Book of Common Order* and the richness of its worship, thus sparing the church much arid controversy.

With the Restoration of Charles II, the Cavalier Parliament passed the 1662 Act of Uniformity repressing Presbyterianism and establishing Episcopacy, this led in England to the ejection from their livings of ap-

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[54] Beveridge, op. cit., p. 37.

[55] John Buchan, *Montrose* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1928), p. 125. It is worth observing the approximate chronological coincidence of covenantal fervour with the last outbreaks of witch-persecution in Scotland and that both were predominantly Lowland phenomena.

[56] Duncan Forrester & Douglas Murray, (ed) *Studies in the History of Worship in Scotland* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1996), p. 62

[57] Ibid.

proximately 2,000 Presbyterian, Independent and Baptist ministers and, in Scotland, to the cruel persecution of the Covenanters, who were now considered seditious. As Martin Lloyd-Jones has shrewdly observed, now the shoe was on the other foot it ill became Presbyterians to complain, though they did so most vociferously, for in 1644 had they not themselves enforced Presbytery by Act of Parliament, with all the sanctions of the State applied?[58]

After the overthrow of the Stuarts, the Revolution Settlement granted tolerance to Nonconformists in England, but not to Catholics or non-Trinitarians. It ratified Presbyterian Church government in Scotland, but made no provision for regulating worship. In 1712 Parliament curtailed the power of the Kirk by passing the Toleration Act, recognising in Scotland both Presbyterian and Episcopalian churches and granting all Episcopalian ministers willing to take the oath of allegiance to Queen Anne and the oath of abjuration of the Stuart dynasty the right to baptise and conduct marriages, thus bringing to an end centuries of legally enforced uniformity of worship, though, as the history of subsequent centuries reveals, the Kirk was well able to police its own policies.

The Degenerate Period [59]

Scottish Presbyterian worship during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was gripped by a rigid and unimaginative uniformity and is infamous for the verbosity of its pulpit and monotony of its worship, with 'much energy invested in resisting innovations'.[60] Yet with the rise of Moderatism sermons declined, not only significantly in length, but also in fervour and Biblical content. According to Thomas Chalmers the preaching of his erstwhile colleagues was 'like a winter's day, short, clear and cold. The brevity is good; the clarity is better; the coldness is fatal. Moonlight preaching ripens no harvests'.[61]

The musical element of worship also reached a deplorable nadir. In her *Memoirs of a Highland Lady*, Elizabeth Grant of Rothiemurchus, describes a not untypical service in her parish church. After the minister

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58 Martin Lloyd-Jones, *The Puritans* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1986), p.65.

59 Cf. Millar Patrick, *Four Centuries of Scottish Psalmody* (Edinburgh: The Scottish Churches Joint Committee on Youth, 1927), p.142.

60 D. B. Forrester, 'Worship' in ed. Nigel M. de S. Cameron, *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993), p. 896.

61 G. N. M. Collins, *The Heritage of our Fathers* (Edinburgh: Knox Press, 1974), p. 37.

gave out the psalm, he read in a drawling singsong as many verses as were to be sung. Then

> he stooped over the pulpit to hand his book to the precentor, who ... began to himself a recitative of the first line of the keynote. [The tune was] taken up by the congregation ... [being sung with] serious severe screaming quite beyond the natural pitch of the voice ... and [with] plenty of *tremolo* lately come into fashion. The dogs seized the occasion to bark (for they always came to the Kirk with the family), and the babies to cry. When the old minister could bear the din no longer he popped up again, and leaned over, touched the precentor's head, and instantly all sound ceased. The long prayer began ...

Lest we think Elizabeth Grant was unsympathetic to country ways and country spirituality, let Hugh Miller corroborate her evaluation. Writing in *The Witness* in May 1852, he described the effect of Free Church rural psalmody: 'The combined screams of a whole congregation, all driving at the air, formed a compound of villainous sound, and scientifically a breach of every law of harmony.'[62]

What caused this stagnation and decline was extreme and intransigent resistance to all change. As no tunes were specified for the 1650 Psalter, tradition soon supplied them in the form of COMMON TUNE, KING'S TUNE, DUKE'S TUNE, ENGLISH TUNE, FRENCH, LONDON NEW, YORK (STILT), DUNFERM-LINE, DUNDEE, ABBEY, MARTYRS, and ELGIN. These twelve common metre tunes so dominated the praise of Scotland that those wishing to introduce other tunes met an insurmountable obstacle. Few ministers or precentors were bold enough to disturb the monopoly of the Twelve Tunes. One precentor who did, felt the wrath of his minister who leaned over the pulpit and smashed him over the head with the pulpit Bible![63]

The Second Disruption and its Aftermath

Attention has often been drawn to the fact that the *Directory of Public Worship* was a guide, not a manual prescribing the minutiae of the church's worship.[64] Such an observation although technically correct overlooks what mischief can be achieved when a desire for uniformity, coupled to a firm adherence to the *Directory* gives birth to an authoritarian interpretation of Presbyterian worship which calls for total compliance, brooks no

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[62] Millar Patrick, op. cit., p. 198
[63] Ibid. p. 133.
[64] Cf. e.g. D. W. H. Thomas 'The Regulative Principle: Responding to Recent Criticism' in G. Ryken, D. H. W. Thomas and J. L. Duncan (eds), *Give Praise to God: A Vision for Reforming Worship* (Philipsburg: P & R Publishing, 2003), p. 83.

dissent and permits no latitude. Such intolerant uniformitarianism raised its head in the late-nineteenth century and contributed to the formation of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland.[65]

During the nineteenth century, through the work of its poets, such as Robert M'Cheyne, Andrew and Horatius Bonar, Walter Chalmers Smith, Elizabeth Cecilia Clephane and Jane and Sarah Borthwick, the Free Church contributed substantially to the corpus of evangelical hymnody, but it was the erudite and evangelical David Brown (1803-97), Principal of the Aberdeen Free Church College, who provided the theological rationale for the introduction of hymn-singing into the public worship of the Free Church. He argued that at the very heart of traditional Scottish Presbyterian worship lay an unresolved anomaly; while every other part of worship had undergone a radical New Testament reorientation, in which the name of Christ had been made explicit, the musical praise of the church alone remained firmly entrenched in the era of inference and shadow. Brown argued that the Christocentric orientation of New Testament worship not only justified, but demanded the use of Christian hymns. The psalms should retain their honoured place, but hymns were a valuable adjunct, 'especially those which extolled the Redeemer and made use of His incarnation, death, resurrection and future coming, to exalt the spirit of love, trust, and obedience'.[66] Such innovations were not accepted without resistance, strong opposition was voiced by the formidable Dr John Kennedy of Dingwall, who 'disapproved very strongly of the ... singing of hymns in public worship, though he used them in private'.[67] Brown's arguments, however, carried and in 1872 the General Assembly sanctioned the *Free Church Hymnbook*, in 1883 it passed legislation permitting the use of organs, and in 1898 authorised of the use in public worship of the *Church Hymnary*, in the production of which it had cooperated with both the Church of Scotland and the United Presbyterians.[68]

With the exploration of union between the United Presbyterians and the Free Church of Scotland under way it became clear that doctrinal latitude similar to that provided by the 1879 United Presbyterian Church Declaratory Act would be necessary in the constitution of any projected

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[65] A helpful modern account of the history of the Free Presbyterians is James Lachlan MacLeod, *The Second Disruption: The Free Church in Victorian Scotland and the Origins of the Free Presbyterian Church* (Edinburgh: Tuckwell Press, 2000).

[66] William Garden Blaikie, *David Brown: A Memoir* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1898), p. 188.

[67] 'Memoir of Dr Kennedy' *Inverness Courier* (1893) http://www.johnkennedy-ofdingwall.com/articles-in-inverness-courier.php Retrieved 7.10.2009.

[68] *The Church Hymnary*, (Edinburgh: Henry Froude, 1898).

new church. In 1892 the Free Church passed its own Declaratory Act and as a result two ministers, Donald MacFarlane and Donald MacDonald, and a number of theological students seceded and gathered around them a significant number of disgruntled Free Church members and adherents to form the Free Presbyterian Church. As well as discontent with the Declaratory Act, the Free Presbyterians also strongly objected to the departure from uniformity of worship caused by the introduction of hymns and organs.

The union of the Free Church with the United Presbyterians took place in 1900, forming the United Free Church of Scotland. Twenty-seven ministers plus a good number of elders, members and adherents choose not to enter the 1900 union and continued as the Free Church of Scotland, claiming to be the legitimate heir of the church of 1843 and entitled to the temporalities of that church. In 1905 the Free Church overturned the 1892 Declaratory Act and the following year repealed the legislation permitting the use hymns and organs.[69] Uniformity of worship was maintained and unaccompanied Psalmody was practised *de rigueur* throughout the Free Church. So assiduous was the church in maintaining this policy that in South Africa the Xhosa congregations which had adhered to the Free Church in 1900 were required to adopt an exclusive Psalmody policy even though there were only a limited number of Psalms translated into isiXhosa at the time, 'in the meantime the people happily sang the hymns with enthusiasm and harmony.'[70] Free Church elders and deacons at their ordination were, and still are, required to promise 'to observe uniformity of worship and of the administration of all public ordinances within this Church, as the same are at present performed and allowed?'[71]

It is sometimes alleged that it was high principle alone that led the post-1900 Free Church to re-embrace uniformity in worship.[72] It is difficult, however, to avoid seeing some evidence of pragmatism in this decision. With the Declaratory Act discountenanced, all that seemed to stand

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[69] The Principal Acts of the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland. Act anent Public Worship (No. 5 of Class II.). Edinburgh, 25th May 1905. Sess. 5. http://www.freechurch.org/images/uploads/Acts1900-1909.pdf Retrieved 7.10.2009

[70] Bill and Elizabeth Graham, *The Ochre and the Blue: The Story of the Free Church of Scotland in South Africa in the Twentieth Century* (Edinburgh: Free Church of Scotland Publications, 2009), p. 31.

[71] *The Practice of the Free Church of Scotland*, 8th edition (Edinburgh: Knox Press, 1995), p. 151.

[72] For a recent advocacy of this opinion, see Jeffrey Stephen, *The Free Church of Scotland and Instrumental Music: A Warning from History.* (Elgin: Privately circulated paper, 2009).

between reunion with the Free Presbyterians was the permissive legisla-
tion regarding instrumental worship and hymn singing. The Free Church's
attempts at reunion were, however, rebuffed, but by enforcing uniform
worship it had opened the door for individual ministers and members to
return to the Free Church. Those who did included, Revs. John Macleod,
John R. Mackay, Alexander Stewart and Alexander MacRae and Mr. John
MacNeilage and Mr W. R. T. Sinclair.[73] At the very least, commitment
to uniformity might serve to deter Free Church defections to the Free
Presbyterians.

With the passage of time the attractiveness of uniformity has waned
and its enforcement by the Free Church may prove to have been a sig-
nificant contributory factor leading to the very considerable decline in its
membership over the past five decades. There is anecdotal evidence that
it may also prove to be a serious impediment to a possible realignment of
confessional Scottish Presbyterians.

Conclusion
The conclusions derived from a systematic theological study of this is-
sue, especially in relation to the doctrine of God, have been set out at
the end of the first section of this article. It remains only to note the les-
sons of church history. By surveying the period of the Apostles it can
be demonstrated that within the doctrinal unity of the early church there
existed a considerable diversity of worship. The Jerusalem Council (Acts
15) recognised diversity both as desirable and as reflecting God's plan to
extend the covenant community to all nations and decided accordingly.
Likewise, St. Paul dealt with problems related to worship not by imposing
uniform liturgical regulations but rather carefully inculcating principles
of decency and order. As a Jewish Christian ministering to gentiles, his
own personal willingness to contextualise his ministry (e.g. I Cor. 19.23)
demonstrates a great flexibility both in participating in different forms of
worship and permitting diversity, as Cullmann helpfully puts it:

> he is able to allow speaking with tongues, under certain conditions, and at the
> same time to repeat liturgical formulae, without giving rise to anarchy with
> the one or lifelessness with the other. It is precisely in this harmonious com-
> bination of freedom and restriction that lies the greatness and uniqueness of
> the early Christian service of worship ... Had it been possible to maintain this
> harmony in the service of worship the formation of sects and groups would
> have been most effectively choked.[74]

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[73] G. N. M. Collins, *The Heritage of our Fathers* (Edinburgh: Knox Press,
1976), p. 130f.
[74] Cullmann, op. cit. p. 32f. Emphasis original.

At the Reformation, Luther, Zwingli and Calvin saw little value in liturgical uniformity. English attempts to impose it by Acts of Parliament achieved little that was good and much that was evil, by way of recriminations, bitterness of spirit and a recalcitrant sectarianism that has dogged ecclesiastical life for centuries. Both in the hands of Anglicans or Presbyterians, uniformity of worship was a blunt instrument used to coerce a minority. In eighteenth and early nineteenth century Scotland, far from there being a 'harmonious combination of freedom and restriction' in worship, uniformity was so totalitarian that it extended to psalm tunes, permitting only a small traditional repertoire. By the early twentieth century, the pursuit of what Beveridge called 'the dream of Scottish ecclesiastics,' resulted both in numerous divisions, a proliferation of sects and denominations and a continuing tendency to schism as a result of the elevation of opinion into principle.

In responding to any vestigial desire for uniformity of worship today, church history, both biblical and subsequently, discourages a simplistic 'one size fits all' approach, rather it exhorts the exercise of congregational responsibility, on the basis that *in God's Spirit resides is his people* and in their hands he has placed his all-sufficient Word.

To be sure, there is comfort in conforming to regulations imposed by a hierarchy, but this reflects a fundamental immaturity that has in sight little more than personal liturgical reassurance, the hope that nothing might be found in other congregations of the same denomination that might jar one's sensibilities. Such an attitude denigrates the essential unity of God's people, it shows lack of respect for legitimate differences arrived at by diligent Bible study and theological reflection and subordinates to personal preferences Christ's longing that despite their diversity his people maintain a clear and visible unity 'so that the world may believe' that he was sent by the Father (John 17:21). Indeed, only a unity that, within reasonable confessional boundaries, tolerates differences and sublimates personal preferences to the common good is a meaningful witness to the world. Enforced uniformity stands testimony only to compliance to authority.

In a word, both systematic theology demands and church history demonstrates that while the church is not required to sing in unison, it is required to maintain harmony.

Ehrman and Irenaeus: A Comparison of their Views on the Ebionities

Mark Batluck
PhD candidate, New College, University of Edinburgh

Bart Ehrman and Irenaeus of Lyon both have interesting similarities. In each, one is hard-pressed not to find a likeable author. With classic style and lucidity, Ehrman presents readers of *Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew*[1] with an insightful picture of the diversity of 'Christianities' in the second and third centuries. Throughout this work, Ehrman persistently raises questions about the nature of our understanding of Christianity in the early church that are difficult to ignore. Indeed, Ehrman may even be hesitant to use the term 'early church' at all. Given the plethora of Christological perspectives among early writers who would claim Christ, how can one honestly refer to Christianity as a unified whole prior to the Council of Nicaea?

Irenaeus of Lyon is a convivial author as well who writes at the end of the second century. Iranaeus holds a unique place among the Christian apologists as being the first to endorse the four-fold gospel, and his work *Against Heresies* polemically confronts many of the aberrant Christian groups that had sprung up by the time of its writing. In this way, Irenaeus himself was not simply a supporter of the truth but also a foremost Christian apologist, defending the faith against upstart sects that threatened the purity of *The Way*. He says in his preface to Books one and two in *Against Heresies*,

> Some persons reject the truth and introduce false statements...They combine plausibility with fraud and lead the mind of the inexperienced astray and force them into captivity. They falsify the words of the Lord and make themselves bad interpreters of what was well said...Therefore...I consider it necessary to show you, beloved, their...unreason and blasphemy against God.[2]

Irenaeus portrays the Christian church rather differently than Ehrman. Irenaeus sees aberrant sects of Christianity not as adding positively to the diversity of the Faith, but as those who 'reject the truth and introduce false

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[1]   Bart Ehrman, *Lost Christianities* (New York: Oxford, 2005).
[2]   R. M. Grant, *Irenaeus of Lyons* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 57–8.

statements'. For Irenaeus, the whole concept of 'christianities' would certainly have been objectionable.

The question is: who can we trust more—Ehrman or Irenaeus? Whose perspective is more honest and objective? Do we indeed see a diversity of genuinely Christian movements in the second century or are these sectarian groups that existed outside of a 'mainstream'? Ehrman has the unique advantage of seeing the second century from a broadly historical perspective, whereas Irenaeus is privileged to have a first hand account of the subjects he writes about. In this paper, we will examine each author's treatment of one faction called the Ebionities. Drawing upon the above two works (*Against Heresies* and *Lost Christianities*), the following paper will analyze Irenaeus' and Ehrman's views of the Ebionites, combined with their rhetorical style, as a case study in an attempt to reveal how reliable each author is when writing about Christianity in the second century.

BACKGROUND ON THE EBIONITES

The Ebionities are second century believers that have been called 'Jewish Christians' because they maintained that Christians must retain/adopt Jewish distinctives (i.e. circumcision) in order to be truly Christian. While Irenaeus represents the first 'undisputed' use of the term *Ebionites*, it does have an earlier history, 'having evolved into a sectarian name from the generic biblical Hebrew word...meaning "the poor"'.[3] While much debate has centered on the origin of the name, Qumran manuscript 4QpPs37 attests to the possibility that the term 'Ebionite' may well have been a technical designation prior to its clear use late in the second century.[4] Others wonder if Paul's reference to 'the poor' in Jerusalem (Rom. 15:26; Gal. 2:10) may not be a reference to the sect as well.[5]

The Ebionites are attested to in other works of the fathers, such as Tertullian, Origen, Epiphanus, Eusebius, and Jerome. Epiphanus, for one, assigns sections of the pseudo-Clementine literature to the Ebionites. A man named Symmachus, a Bible translator, is also known by the church fathers as having been a member of the Ebionities. However, because this group disappears after Jerome's account of them and we have no extant primary sources, very little is ultimately known. With the above in mind,

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[3]   D. N. Freedman, G. A. Herion, et al. eds, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 2 (London: Doubleday, 1992), p. 261.

[4]   Ibid.

[5]   J. A. Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1993).

we now will begin our discussion on specifically how Ehrman and Irenaeus talk about the Ebionites and the second century church.

BART EHRMAN AND THE EBIONITIES

Ehrman spends the first couple of paragraphs of his treatment of the Ebionites discussing where the name came from. Citing Tertullian's and Origen's ideas about the provenance of the group, Ehrman wonders about how the Ebionites were first called such. Interestingly enough, when discussing how difficult it is to determine the origin of the name, Ehrman does not make any mention of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

He goes on to note correctly the fact that there are no extant writings of the Ebionites, a fact that forces the modern historian to develop opinions of the group from the writings of the group's enemies. Ehrman observes that the accounts of these opponents are inconsistent in their description of the Ebionites. However, Ehrman does not follow by providing more detail to substantiate the claim. Rather, he simply concludes that there may have been several different groups of Ebionites that these authors were interacting with. While this conclusion certainly supports the thesis of his book (i.e. because there were multiple sects of Christianity, one cannot speak of 'Christianity' but should instead refer to 'christianities'), I am not persuaded that it is the first conclusion one should make from the given data. Inconsistency among authors more readily points to the following possibilities: (1) that one or more of these authors may be incorrect in their recounting of the facts or (2) that the informants of these authors were not adequately representing the given religious community (that is, that the informant(s) themselves differed on points of doctrine with the group, and yet represented themselves as being characteristic of the whole). (3) Related to point (2), as with any large group, smaller sects[6] existed that represented an aberration of the mainstream view of the parent group. Neither of the above possibilities allows us to conclude that there existed many equally-influential expressions of Ebionism or Christianity in the second and third centuries. Furthermore, one can only assume that—from the relative paucity of writing of or about the Ebionities and the scant secondary quotations of the group in the writings of opponents—the group was moderate-to-small in size relative to the proto-orthodox Christian movement. As a mere product of their size, smaller communities would naturally be more unified in doctrine and teaching. In this case, Ehrman uses the given evidence to draw highly-speculative conclusions about the diversity of Ebionite groups.

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[6] What Ehrman calls 'christianities'.

Unfortunately, tentative conclusions and value-laiden language riddle Ehrman's treatment of the Ebionites. Immediately in the opening paragraph of his section on this sect, Ehrman conjectures, offering little justification for his ideas. Selected phrases from the following quotation demonstrate how speculative Ehrman's writing on this point truly is: 'This seems like...probably based on...Possibly...It may...Maybe these people... Surely some of these people...It may be that there were...' This leaves the reader wondering how much of this treatment is simply guesswork to begin with.[7]

Ehrman goes on to discuss two of the Ebionites' doctrinal distinctives: he notes that the group neither held to Jesus' preexistence nor his virgin birth. Ehrman also observes that New Testament books assert *either* the virgin birth *or* the preexistence of Christ. He aims to give the reader an idea about how groups like this may have emerged in the second century––their doctrine often depended on the books they had. The application of this principle, however, cannot be maintained with the Ebionites because the Gospel of Matthew (which espouses the virgin birth) was revered by the Matthean community and yet this belief was not adopted by the Ebionites. Regrettably, Ehrman does not recognize this fact objectively, nearly resorting to 'straw man' argumentation when he says, 'Ebionite Christians, however, did not have our New Testament and understood Jesus differently'. The point he makes is neither fair nor helpful. Of course, *no* Christians in the second century had 'our New Testament', yet Ehrman here implies that *because of this* they held different beliefs—a principle already shown above to be untrue of Ebionities. On the contrary, a vast majority of Christians throughout the history of the Christian church did not have 'our New Testament' and yet still held many of the same tenets (i.e. the virgin birth and the preexistence of Christ) that later Christians came to believe as well. Beyond this, Matthew was the most read gospel of early Christianity. The Ebionities refusal to accept the majority view on the virgin birth is a major dissention by the group, not simply a matter of being literarily unprivileged.

A more objective treatment of the Ebionites by Ehrman seems to fall in line with what we know historically about the group. 'The Ebionite Christians...believed that Jesus was the Jewish Messiah sent from the

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[7] *Lost Christianities* (New York: Oxford, 2005), pp. 99–100. The paragraph above centres on the unknown origin of the group's name, one wonders why Ehrman uses his opening two paragraphs to handle this insignificant and dubious point (i.e. that we do not know where the name comes from or what it means). Might he be acting rhetorically, centering discussion at times on issues that are, by nature, conjectural simply to raise doubt in the reader's mind about how much one *can* know about these groups in this time period?

Jewish God to the Jewish people in fulfillment of the Jewish Scriptures.'[8] He mentions Irenaeus as a reliable early source that corroborates his data, to whom we now turn to analyze his second century perspective on the Ebionites.

IRENAEUS AND THE EBIONITES

Like Ehrman, Irenaeus is far from a dispassionate purveyor of the facts. He strongly holds his views and intends to persuade his readers to do the same. It does seem, however, that Irenaeus is much less skillful at hiding his biases than Ehrman. To put it another way, Irenaeus' writing more obviously reveals the distinction between his own views and the history he recounts. Time and again, Irenaeus' rhetorical style rather easily allows the reader to separate his own views from the history to which he makes reference.

For example, in 1.26.2 Irenaeus writies, 'Those who are called Ebionites would agree that the world was made by the real God but as to the Lord they profess the same opinions as Cerinthus and Carpocrates [i.e. denying the virgin birth].'[9] The above statement portrays two principles of Ebionite theology: belief in a supreme creator-god and denial of the supernatural conception of Jesus. He goes on to write in the same passage:

> [The Ebionities] use the Gospel according to Matthew only and reject the Apostle Paul, whom they call an apostate from the law. They strive with excessive pedantry to expound the prophecies. They practice circumcision and persevere in legal customs and the Jewish way of life, so that they pray toward Jerusalem as if it were the house of God.[10]

In the above quote, Irenaeus recounts the doctrine of the Ebionites, yet uses occasional value-laden terms to cast Ebionite doctrine in a negative light. His description of this group using 'excessive pedantry' in expounding prophesies or praying toward Jerusalem 'as if it were the house of God' are adequate examples of this. Nevertheless, in the above one is easily able to separate Irenaeus' own opinion with the what he believed the Ebionites actually held as doctrine.

Irenaeus gets more aggressive with Ebionite doctrine in book three of *Against Heresies* as he calls for the repentance of the Ebionites trying to dissuade them from their current beliefs,

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[8] Ibid.
[9] Grant, *Irenaeus*, p. 95.
[10] Ibid.

But again, we allege the same against those who do not recognize Paul as an apostle: that they should either reject the other words of the Gospel [Luke/Acts] and not make sure of them; or else, if they do receive all these [i.e. the testimony of Acts] they must necessarily admit also that testimony concerning Paul, when he [Luke] tells us that the Lord spoke at first to him from heaven(3.15.1).[11]

Here Irenaeus accuses the Ebionites of inconsistency in doctrine as it relates to their accepted Scriptures. He charges them to either abandon Luke/Acts (which attests to the apostleship of Paul) or accept Paul as an apostle. Irenaeus thus maintains that the Ebionites cannot accept Luke/Acts and still reject the apostleship of Paul.

The above may denote an inconsistency in Irenaeus' report about the group. Chapter 3.11.7 can be added to the quotation from 1.26.2 as clearly affirming the Ebionites' Matthew-only stance, 'The authority of the gospels is so great that the heretics themselves bear witness to them and each of them tries to confirm his own teaching out of them. Thus the Ebionites who use only the Gospel according to Matthew are proved by it not to think correctly about the Lord [i.e. by denying the virgin birth].'[12] However, 3.15.1 seems to indicate that they also held Luke/Acts as holy, which is the basis of Irenaeus' accusation of inconsistency. The one difficulty with the above apparent inconsistency is that Irenaeus does not explain what he means by 'and not make use of them [Luke/Acts]; or else, if they do receive all these'. That is, do *making use* and *receiving* both refer to the ascription of biblical authority? Could the Ebionites have 'received' Luke/Acts as a resource but not as a sacred text? It seems unlikely because Irenaeus mentions the authority of Luke/Acts side-by-side with the authority they *should* ascribe to Paul. Nevertheless, some of these questions remain unanswered.

Later in 3.21.1, Irenaeus takes on the Ebionites' rejection of the virgin birth. In this section, Irenaeus quotes Isaiah 7:14 in the following, 'Some allege, among those now presuming to expound the Scripture, [thus:] "Behold, a young woman shall conceive, and bring forth a son."'[13] Notice that he quotes the passage as an *exposition* of the text, rather than the text itself. The Masoretic Text contains exactly what Irenaeus has written above. It is more likely that he would have used the Septuagint to read the Old Testament, which records the following at Isaiah 7:14, 'Behold, a

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[11] See also Philip Schaff, *Against Heresies*, in Church Story Collection (Garland: Galaxie Software, electronic resource).

[12] Grant, *Irenaeus*, pp. 130–131.

[13] Schaff, electronic resource.

virgin shall conceive in the womb and shall bring forth a son.' Later in the paragraph, he recognizes this:

> But [the Old Testament] was interpreted into Greek by the Jews themselves, much before the period of our Lord's advent, that there might remain no suspicion that perchance the Jews...did put this interpretation upon these words... had they been cognizant of our future existence, and that we should use these proofs from the Scriptures, would themselves never have hesitated to burn their own Scriptures.

Irenaeus, then, admitting that the translation of the Septuagint was in itself an interpretation of Scriptures, describes the Ebionite preference of 'young woman' (from the Masoretic Text) as a *re*interpretation of the text. That is, what Irenaeus describes as reinterpretation is actually just the maintenance of the text in the original Hebrew and the rejection the decision of the translators of the Septuagint. Irenaeus sees this action by the Ebionites as a 'setting aside' of the testimony of the prophets as they argue that Jesus was begotten naturally by Joseph (3.21.1). Irenaeus' words above also show how given he can be to overstatement as he asserts that the Jews would have burned their own Scriptures had they ever thought it could be used by the Christians to validate their belief in Jesus as the Jewish Messiah. This example further illustrates for the reader that it can be relatively easy to distinguish fact from rhetoric in Irenaeus' writing. There is little doubt what of the above is a criticism from Irenaeus himself and what is the data on which this criticism is based.

Irenaeus briefly mentions the Ebionites again in 4.33.4, calling into question their belief that Jesus is not fully God. He writes, 'He will judge also the Ebionites; [for] how can they be saved unless it was God who wrought out their salvation upon the earth? Or how shall man pass into God, unless God has [first] passed into man?'[14] Here he makes the point that Jesus would have been unable to save humanity had he not been himself God. Or, with hymnic parallelism, he states that mankind cannot become like God unless God first had entered the world to become like a man. Irenaeus affirms that the Ebionites did not believe Jesus was divine, but they still believe that he came to save.

Later in 5.1.3, Irenaeus follows with a combined attack on the Ebionites' rejection of the virgin birth and the deity of Christ. He calls the Ebionites 'vain' for not receiving 'by faith into their soul the union of God and man, but who remain in the old leaven of [the natural] birth, and who do not choose to understand that the Holy Ghost came upon Mary.'[15]

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[14]   Ibid.
[15]   Ibid.

Again we see Irenaeus lashing out against certain doctrine upheld by the Ebionites. Yet, as in all other illustrations, we have in stark contrast the doctrines Irenaeus believed the Ebionites upheld and the conclusions Irenaeus himself makes about such beliefs. As with any ancient author, reconstructing the history behind the text is most difficult and is entirely dependent on extant evidence. The above examples, however, adequately show the reader some of the tenets of Ebionite Christianity and the Irenaean reaction that followed.

CONCLUSION

Researching prolific authors like these can be a challenging task. Yet both Irenaeus and Ehrman provide many clear examples by which we can judge the character and quality of their work. Ehrman continues to present the public with provocative ideas that test the foundations of Christianity. As we have seen, however, for all his strengths, Ehrman has the dangerous tendency to be a *maximalist* in the way he uses data to support his hypotheses. By this I mean that Ehrman may be guilty of using limited data to sustain highly improbable propositions introduced in his book. First, we looked at how Ehrman begins this section in his book by speculating about the origin of the name 'Ebionites'. I noted how he fails to mention one of the earliest sources on the topic, found in a document at Qumran. Then I discussed an instance in which Ehrman fails to substantiate a claim that early descriptions of the Ebionites were inconsistent, before using this conclusion to bolster his thesis that there may be more than one group which called themselves 'Ebionites'. I then covered Ehrman's discussion of doctrinal distinctives of the Ebionites: a denial of the virgin birth and the preexistence of Christ. His treatment of these issues is commendable, and yet I noted Ehrman's 'straw man' argument, which confuses the issues and further weakens any claim to objectivity he might have.

Still, while Ehrman's delivery of the historical facts surrounding the group seem to line up with what early Christian authors have to say, he nevertheless also takes on a polemical tone that sounded more like the rhetoric of an apologist than a historian. Contrary to what he set out to prove, I am not persuaded that the Ebionites were simply 'lost to posterity, destroyed or forgotten by the proto-orthodox victors in the struggle to decide what Christians would believe and read.'[16] Rather, it seems more historically plausible that this group was marginalized due to their overall

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[16]   *Lost Christianities*, p. 103.

obscurity and the lack of their doctrine being adopted by a critical mass in the Christian movement.

The study of Irenaeus was illuminating as well. The apologist does not hesitate to show his true colors in *Against Heresies*. His treatment of the Ebionites is neither dispassionate nor objective. However, our research has shown that, for all of Irenaeus' rhetoric, identifying where he is stating the beliefs of the Ebionites and where he lashes out against them is not difficult. He begins in 1.26.2 by squarely stating their denial of the virgin birth and goes on to detail other views they hold (i.e. accept Matthew only, deny Paul, practice circumcision, etc). He follows this in book three by attempting to argue particulars with them. However, we saw a possible inconsistency in his recounting of the group's belief. Having already stated that the Ebionites held only to Matthew, Irenaeus seems also to imply that they hold Luke/Acts as Scripture. From this point we examined the apologist's handling of Hebrew prophecy, noting another area of bias where he describes the Jewish understanding of Isaiah 7:14 as an *exposition* (i.e. reinterpretation) of what the text was originally meant to communicate. Lastly, we covered Irenaeus' own views of the mutual-dependence of the virgin birth and the deity of Christ, one indication as to why he so vehemently defended both doctrines against assailants.

In summary, the work of both Irenaeus and Ehrman should be taken (in Ehrman's words) with 'a pound of salt'.[17] One may expect as much from Irenaeus, a self-reputed Christian apologist whose sole purpose in writing the above work is to defend the Christian movement from purported heresies that arose in the second century. Such an *apologia* is not expected from Ehrman, whose work is marketed as a historical survey of the Christian movement in the first few centuries. The polemical tone he takes and the way he crafts his argument makes one wonder if *Lost Christianities* is not an apologetic work in itself. Whatever the case, the above example reminds the reader to be wary, regardless of the author's stated intention, of taking any author simply 'at his word', without a critical examination both the claims of and the ideas behind the work.

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[17] Ibid., p. 100.

ADOPTED BY THE TRIUNE GOD
THE DOCTRINE OF ADOPTION FROM A
TRINITARIAN PERSPECTIVE[1]

MICHAEL BRAEUTIGAM
MINISTER, FREE EVANGELICAL CHURCH, ST. WENDEL,
GERMANY

ADOPTION: TOWARDS A RESURGENCE OF THE DOCTRINE

What is the doctrine of adoption? In adoption, God takes sinners like you and me, grants us a new birth as his children, translates us from darkness into his family and bestows new rights and privileges on us. That is an important and glorious doctrine. Theologians generally agree to that. German Theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg writes in his *Systematic Theology*: 'Being God's children is thus the essence of the Christian life.'[2] J. I. Packer adds that adoption is truly 'the highest privilege that the gospel offers: higher even than justification'.[3] According to John Owen, adoption is the Christian's 'fountain privilege'.[4]

However, the doctrine has received relatively little attention until now.[5] A glance at the theological history of adoption shows an apparent disregard for the topic.[6] The authors of systematic theologies generally tend to view adoption as an appendix of justification (with adoption being the 'positive side' of justification). The doctrine is also very rarely expressed in historic creeds and confessions (with the exception of its treatment in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*). Clearly, the doctrine is

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[1] Originally presented as a Lecture at the *Seminario Biblico de Colombia* (Medellin, Colombia), 7th May 2009.

[2] W. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology* (Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. Vol. 3. Edinburgh: T&T Clark Ltd, 1993), p. 212.

[3] J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2004) p. 232.

[4] J. Owen, quoted in Packer, *Knowing God*, p. 241.

[5] Compare for an overview: D. F. Kelly, 'Adoption: An Underdeveloped Heritage of the Westminster Standards' *Reformed Theological Review* 52.3 (1993).

[6] See T. J. R. Trumper, 'The Theological History of Adoption I: An Account' *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 20.1 (2002) and 'The Theological History of Adoption II: A Rationale' *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 20.2 (2002).

a neglected doctrine that needs urgent recovery. My aim in this paper is to draw attention to the doctrine of adoption and perhaps to spread a passion for its proclamation in academia as well as in the pulpit.

ADOPTION: A TRINITARIAN PERSPECTIVE

The doctrine of adoption is extremely wide-ranging, touching many different levels of the *ordo salutis*. Redemptive adoption originates in the eternal decree of God, whereas its actual fulfilment was realised with the first coming of Christ, who procured sonship for everyone who believes, and it extends until the *parousia*, when the children of God will be glorified. In this brief presentation, I intend to focus on one important aspect, namely, how the triune God acts in adoption. Donald Macleod states that we can understand adoption 'properly only in the light of the Trinity'.[7] In order to grasp the full meaning and implications of adoption we need a Trinitarian viewpoint.

The one God who is 'simultaneously one and three'[8] adopts us. The revelation of the Trinity is closely related to our experience of adoption. Redemptive adoption is accomplished by the one God, but within that, we find the three persons of the Trinity fulfilling roles that correspond to the order within the divine being. The Triuneness of God in his eternal being (ontological Trinity), is mirrored by the dispensation of adoption (the economic Trinity). That is, the three persons act in a way that reflects their eternal, ontological distinctives; the Father as the *principium*, the Son, who is eternally begotten, and the Spirit as eternally proceeding. God, the Father, adopts through his Son Jesus Christ and sends his Holy Spirit of adoption into the adoptee. Always keeping the unity of God in adoption in mind, how do the persons of the Godhead work distinctively?

Regarding adoption, the Apostle Paul describes God, the Father, as electing (Eph. 1:3-6), Jesus Christ as redeeming (Eph. 1:7-12) and the Holy Spirit as sealing (Eph. 1:13-14). Sinclair Ferguson writes in this context, 'The Father destines us to be his children; the Son comes to make us his brothers and sisters; the Spirit is sent as the Spirit of adoption to make us fully aware of our privileges.'[9] Each person of the Trinity has therefore

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7 D. Macleod, *Shared Life - The Trinity and the Fellowship of God's People* (Fearn: Christian Focus Publications, 1994) p. 86.

8 P. D. Molnar, *Divine Freedom and the Doctrine of the Immanent Trinity: In Dialogue with Karl Barth and Contemporary Theology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2002) p. 232.

9 S. B. Ferguson, *Children of the Living God* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1989) pp. 4-5. A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theology* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1972), p. 519 notes: 'This adoption proceeds according

a special role in the concerted process of adoption: The Father elects human beings unto adoption, the Son mediates the adoption and the Spirit communicates it. I will examine each role in the following paragraphs.

1. The Father elects

We start with the Father. He is pre-eminent in the process of redemptive adoption, as Murray notes: 'It is specifically God the Father who is the agent of this act of grace'.[10] Why does the Father predestine sinners unto adoption? The ultimate reason is his love. Sovereign love is God's motive in electing sinful people to become beloved adoptive children. In 1 John, God's love is identified as the main cause of redemptive adoption (3:1). God is by no means compelled to love and adopt sinful people. He is not at all obliged to adopt sinners into his household. Yet, out of his sovereign love, a love that is only bound to his own name, he freely and graciously adopts us. Martyn Lloyd-Jones notes that 'our adoption is the highest expression even of God's love'.[11]

The sovereign love of God manifests itself in his will. Because God is love, he wills adoption. Paul the apostle writes: 'he predestined us for adoption [huiothesian] through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will' (Eph. 1:5).[12] God's eternal will is the effective cause of adoption. It is not the human subject that generates adoption but the sovereign God who predestines unto adoption according to his will. 'No other cause makes us God's children but only his choice of us in himself,'[13] writes John Calvin. Consequently the adoptive child remains passive. As orphans do not have any influence on their adoption, so does our spiritual adoption depend exclusively on God, the Father. Adoption is through predestination. This close connection between adoption and election led Calvin almost to equate the two doctrines.[14]

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to the eternal purpose of the Father, upon the merits of the Son, and by the efficient agency of the Holy Ghost.'

[10] J. Murray, *Redemption - accomplished and applied* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1955) p. 136.

[11] D. M. Lloyd-Jones, *God's Ultimate Purpose - An Exposition of Ephesians 1:1 to 23* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2004 [1978]) p. 112.

[12] Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from: *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version.* Crossway Bibles, Good News Publishers, 2001.

[13] J. Calvin, *John Calvin's Sermons on Ephesians*, 4.

[14] Compare H. Griffith, '"The First Title of the Spirit": Adoption in Calvin's Soteriology', *Evangelical Quarterly* 73.2 (2001) p. 138.

2. The Son mediates

It is important to note that the Father's predestination unto adoption is made in Christ. The children of God are adopted through Christ (*dia Iesou Christou* in Eph. 1:5). He is the mediator who enables the adoptive act. Without Christ's mediation, adoption would be unthinkable and impossible. Redemptive adoption is therefore essentially christocentric: only through, by, and in Christ adoption is conceivable and accomplishable.[15]

Jesus Christ came into the world to fulfil his Father's will to transform a fallen people into sons and daughters of God, as we read in Galatians 4:4-5: 'But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.' The only-begotten Son was sent by the Father in order to break the curse of the law and to offer life and sonship through his death and resurrection. Through substitutionary atonement, Christ mediates adoption for everyone who believes. J. I. Packer speaks thus of 'adoption through propitiation'.[16]

What kind of sonship does Jesus Christ mediate? Sonship through redemptive adoption is not a mere re-establishment of pre-fall sonship. The new sonship through Christ entails much more, as James Orr notes: 'Christ does not merely bring us back to the creation standing. He introduces us into the far higher, nobler, diviner relation to the Father.'[17] Jesus therefore does not only restore (pre-fall) sonship but establishes a glorious new-covenantal standing for redeemed sinners as the blessed children of God. Redemptive adoption mediated by Christ leads to an unequalled sonship.

As we noted earlier, adoption is possible only in Christ. That is, adoption works only in union with Christ. The adoptee must have communion with Christ in order to receive full spiritual and legal sonship. The adoptive child is united with Christ is in a threefold way: through a natural union (due to Christ's incarnation and his consequent community of nature with his human brothers and sisters), a spiritual union (by grace through faith in Christ who indwells the adoptive child), and a federal union (with Christ as the head).[18] The unifying element on the individual's side is faith

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[15]   Calvin notes in his commentary on Second Corinthians 1.20 that 'the cause and root of adoption is Christ', see his *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, trans., J. Pringle, vol. 2, (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1849), pp. 137-8.

[16]   Packer, *Knowing God*, p. 241.

[17]   J. Orr, *Sidelights on Christian Doctrine*, (London: Marshall Brothers, n.d.) p. 158.

[18]   In orthodox Reformed and Lutheran circles, this union is also sometimes referred to as a *unio mystica*. Thus, the adoptee has to be in the *Christussphäre*

(as a gift from God, Eph 2:8), issuing from election. It is faith *in* Jesus Christ (John 1:12-13; Gal. 3:26) that unites the believer with Christ and elicits adoption (Gal 3:25). Faith in Christ can be illustrated as the canal through which union with Christ and consequently adoption flows. Of course, this faith is not a self-evoked, psychological exertion, but rather a supernatural faith, attributable only to God as the initiator.

Having been united with Christ by faith in him, we enjoy the blessed state of God's adoptive children. We possess special privileges already and in the age to come. We share, for instance, Christ's position and eminence (Gen. 1:26; John 14:3; 2 Tim. 2:11-12; Heb. 2:6-9). As children of God we are called into the community of the Son. We have, like Jesus, the right to call God '*Abba*', as the ultimate expression of intimacy and love. Moreover, adopted children of God are also partakers of the same love that God has for his Son Christ (John 17.26).[19] Donald Macleod clarifies: 'In adoption, believers become sons and daughters of God, which means that they come to share in the very relationship with God enjoyed by Jesus.'[20] Though we were sinful individuals, through adoption, we may enjoy the same relationship with God that Christ has.[21] Macleod even goes so far as to say that 'the relationship itself is essentially the same.'[22] God's children are heirs of God, co-heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:17) and they share

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in order to receive adoption. This union is mystical because it rests on God's unsearchable riches of grace and the mystery of grace itself.

[19] J. Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 1 (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 2003), p. 689 writes: 'By your being united to Christ, you will have a more glorious union with and enjoyment of God the Father, than otherwise could be. For hereby the saints' relation to God becomes much nearer; they are the children of God in a higher manner than otherwise could be. For, being members of God's own Son, they are in a sort partakers of his relation to the Father: they are not only sons of God by regeneration, but by a kind of communion in the sonship of the eternal Son...[s]o we being members of the Son, are partakers in our measure of the Father's love to the Son, and complacence in him.'

[20] Macleod, *Shared Life*, pp. 86-7.

[21] Nevertheless, there is a difference in the way we become children and Jesus is Son. An individual becomes a child of God through regeneration whereas Jesus was eternally God's only begotten Son. Writes Smail, T. A. Smail, *The Forgotten Father* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1980), p. 144: 'It is he who in the uniqueness of his resurrection is designated the Son of God in power (Romans 1:4) while we are sons through an act of huiothesia (adoption, son-making) which Paul always relates to the...finished work of Christ...Thus the distinction between Jesus and us needs to be carefully observed. The language of incarnation belongs to him, and the language of adoption to us.'

[22] Macleod, *Shared Life*, pp. 86-7.

their destiny with Jesus (John 14:3; 17:24, 22). Concerning the *eschaton*, adoptive children are promised an inheritance (Rom. 8:17), a new name (Rev. 3:12), and a crown of gold (Rev. 4:4; 14:14). They will receive bodies identical with the resurrection body of Christ (Phil. 3:21), and God will one day completely transform their characters and personalities into Christ's image (Rom. 8:29).[23]

3. The Spirit communicates

The Father elects, the Son mediates, and finally, the Holy Spirit communicates. The Holy Spirit is a principal agent in redemptive adoption. He is also called the 'Spirit of adoption', which emphasises his distinct involvement in the adoptive process. A clear understanding of the Spirit's work in adoption is imperative, as Packer notes: 'a recognition that the Spirit comes to us as the Spirit of adoption is the key thought for unlocking, and the focal thought for integrating all that the New Testament tells us about his ministry to Christians.'[24] Paul the apostle describes the role of the Holy Spirit in Romans 8.15-16: 'For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.' What did Paul intend to convey with the title 'Spirit of adoption as sons' (*pneuma huiothesias*)?

Theologians come up with different answers. Some say that the Spirit anticipates adoption in an eschatological sense ('the Spirit who anticipates adoption').[25] Others assume that the Spirit is the causer of adoption.[26] That is, however, unlikely in the light of our discussion above, for we showed that God, the Father initiates the adoption process. Most likely, the title

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[23] As the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* declares (answer 87): 'The bodies of the just, by the Spirit of Christ, and by virtue of his resurrection as their head, shall be raised in power, spiritual, incorruptible, and made like to his glorious body', see, *The Westminster Confession and Catechisms in Modern English*, ed., R. S. Ward (Melbourne: New Melbourne Press, 2000), pp. 84-5.

[24] Packer, *Knowing God*, p. 249.

[25] C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (London: A. & C. Black, 1962), p. 163.

[26] P. Von der Osten-Sacken suggests that it is about 'a Spirit that causes sonship', see his *Römer 8 als Beispiel paulinischer Soteriologie*, vol. 112, Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1975), p. 135, author's translation. A similar view is provided by Cranfield who speaks of 'the Spirit who brings about adoption', see his *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, ed., J.A. Emerton and C.E.B. Cranfield, vol. 1, ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark 1975), p. 397.

'Spirit of adoption' emphasises the communicative role of the Holy Spirit in adoption. That is, as the context suggests ('the Spirit bears witness'), the Holy Spirit is the one who communicates to the adopted child that he is really adopted.[27] 'The Spirit himself assures our spirit that we are children of God,'[28] notes Hendriksen. This rendering is probably very close to what Paul intended to say. Similarly, Martin Luther interprets in terms of an official recognition when he notes that the Spirit 'certifieth our spirits that we are the children of God'.[29] Therefore, we would conceive of the Spirit's witnessing work as imprinting his testimony on the adoptive child's heart and mind. The Spirit testifies, that is, shows to be true, gives evidence in support of, informs, educates, and teaches the believer's spirit in regard to adoption.[30]

As the Holy Spirit makes us aware of our adoption, we are prompted to cry *'Abba*, Father'. Enabled by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:15), through Christ's Spirit (Gal. 4:6), we are encouraged to approach God as *abba*, the beloved and trustworthy Father. That we may address God as *abba* is a remarkable privilege. Only in New Testament times was the Aramaic word abba introduced as an address to God, as Joachim Jeremias observes: 'Jesus dared to use *'ABBä* as a form of address to God. This *'ABBä* is the *ipsissima vox Jesu*.'[31] When Paul writes to the Galatians, 'And because you

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[27] Instead of communication, H. Bavinck in *Our Reasonable Faith* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1956), p. 465, prefers to speak of awareness: 'By means of this Spirit we are made aware of our adoption.'

[28] W. Hendriksen, *Romans*, NTC, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), p. 260.

[29] M. Luther, *A Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians* (London: James Clarke & Co. Ltd., 1953), p. 366. D. Moo and Calvin use a similar terminology. Writes Moo: 'Paul involves our own spirit in the very process of testifying to us that we are "children of God"', see his *The Epistle to the Romans*, ed., G. Fee, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), p. 504. Calvin notes that 'the Spirit of God affords us such a testimony that our spirit is assured of the adoption of God, when He is our Guide and Teacher. Our mind would not of its own accord convey this assurance to us, unless the testimony of the Spirit preceded it...[w]hile the Spirit testifies to us that we are the children of God, He at the same time pours this confidence into our hearts so that we dare invoke God as our Father', Calvin, quoted in Griffith, '"The First Title of the Spirit"', p. 148.

[30] Habermas writes accordingly: 'Romans 8:16 characterizes the Holy Spirit's testimony as a personal, firsthand communication with the believer's spirit, informing the Christian of his familial relationship to God', see his 'The Personal Testimony Of The Holy Spirit To The Believer And Christian Apologetics' *Journal of Christian Apologetics* 1.1 [1997], p. 54.

[31] J. Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, Vol. 1, 66.

are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, *"Abba!* Father!"' (Gal. 4:6), it becomes clear that the adopted child may cry *Abba* as Jesus himself did.[32] In recent decades, there has been considerable discussion about the invocation, *'Abba,* Father'. The question was whether *abba* relates to today's 'daddy' or not. This sparked a keen disagreement between James Barr and Joachim Jeremias. Barr doubted that *abba* could signify 'daddy', arguing that *abba* was rarely used,[33] and that it was by no means a children's form of address[34] but was rather used by adults.[35] Jeremias, in contrast, holds that *abba* was used more frequently by the Jews.[36] He points out that *abba* was a well-known expression and therefore often used, especially by little children as a babbling sound (*Lallwort*)[37], comparable with daddy, but also by adults[38] (though not in relation to God[39]).[40]

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[32]   J. M. Scott is right when he notes that believers 'participate in the sonship of the messianic Son of God to such an extent that they address God with the *ipsissima verba* of the Son', see his *Adoption as Sons of God - An exegetical investigation into the background of huiothesia in the Pauline corpus,* WUNT 2.Reihe (Tübingen: Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1992) pp. 182-3.

[33]   Writes Barr: 'It is not clear that all cases of "Abba" in the New Testament came from Jesus' speech, or that Jesus in addressing his Father always used "Abba"', see his "'Abba, Father" and the Familiarity of Jesus' Speech' *Theology* 91 [1988]: pp. 173-9.

[34]   "'Abba, Father"', p. 175. Barr further notes: 'The Greek word used in the New Testament is always the adult word *patēr* and never a diminutive or a word that particularly belongs to the speech of children' (p. 176). He concludes: 'But in any case it was not a childish expression comparable with "Daddy": it was more a solemn responsible, adult address to a Father', see his "Abba isn't 'Daddy'", *Journal of Theological Studies* 39 [1988], pp. 28-47.

[35]   "'Abba, Father"', p. 175.

[36]   Jeremias sees an underlying *abba* in other verses. Moreover, he points out that *abba ho pater* was widespread in the early church – as an echo of Jesus' prayer. Therefore, Jeremias suggests that *'abba* underlies every instance of *pater (mou)* or *ho pater* in his words of prayer' (p. 65).

[37]   Writes Jeremias: 'In origin, *abba* is a babbling sound...When a child experiences the taste of wheat (i.e. when it is weaned), it learns to say *abba*' (p. 66). Hendriksen agrees here with Jeremias: 'A form of the word Abba, meaning "father", was originally used by small children...In this word filial tenderness, trust, and love find their combined expression' (Hendriksen, p. 259).

[38]   Notes Jeremias: 'By the time of Jesus, *abba* had long had a wider use than in the talk of small children. Even grown-up children, sons as well as daughters, now addressed their father as *abba*' (p. 66).

[39]   Writes Jeremias: 'As we can learn from the Targum, Jews deliberately avoided applying the word *abba* to God even outside prayers' (p. 65).

[40]   'Palestinian Judaism does not use *abba* as a form of address to God. It was a children's word, used in everyday talk, an expression of courtesy. It would

Therefore, Jeremias argues for the connotation of *abba* as 'daddy' (and Stein[41], Lloyd-Jones[42], as well as Morris[43] support Jeremias). However, Jeremias does not understand *abba* in a superficial, degrading sense, but rather in a reverent and respectful manner.[44] *Abba* denotes intimacy as well as respect.[45] I agree with Jeremias, as his analysis seems more convincing and more balanced than Barr's 'all-or-nothing' approach. If we, as God's children, approach God with reverence and respect, we are free to address him as *Abba*, our beloved and trustworthy Father.

We not only address God formally as *Abba*, Father, but we cry *'Abba*, Father' (Gal. 4.6). In this sense, the Holy Spirit awakens emotions in us regarding the quality of the fatherhood of God. *'Abba*, Father' is not a stoical statement, but rather an emotional cry expressed by the adopted child. 'The acknowledgment that God is our Father surely involved the emotions, for the experience of the Spirit in the earliest Christian communities was dynamic and vital. Acknowledgment of the Father was full of gladness and joy inexpressible,'[46] notes Schreiner. This is an important aspect of the work of the Spirit of adoption in our hearts. The *'Abba*, Father' cry is an intense cry from our heart, that is made aware of the glorious implications of adoption. Our 'awareness of God as Father comes not from rational consideration nor from external testimony alone but from a truth deeply felt and intensely experienced',[47] argues Douglas Moo. We must guard ourselves therefore from addressing God, our Father in a dispassionate manner. The emotions are meant to be involved; the *'Abba*, Father' address is both cognitive and emotional.[48]

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have seemed disrespectful, indeed unthinkable, to the sensibilities of Jesus' contemporaries to address God with this familiar word' (p. 66).

[41] R. H. Stein, *The Method and Message of Jesus' Teaching* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978), p. 82: 'It is evident...that *abba* was the word of a toddler whose first words were "Daddy" (*abba*) and "Mommy" (*imma*)'.

[42] Compare Lloyd-Jones, *The Sons of God*, p. 240.

[43] 'The word is from the babbling of a little child (like "papa") and is the familiar term used in the home', L. Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), p. 316.

[44] Jeremias, p. 68.

[45] 'Jesus' use of *abba* expresses a special relationship with God...an expression of obedient trust but also at the same time a word of authority', see J. Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978) p. 62.

[46] T. R. Schreiner, *Romans*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998) p. 426.

[47] *Romans*, p. 502.

[48] Thomas Chalmers writes: 'I fear, that there are many...who could never allege of themselves at any time, that they had the spirit of adoption – with whom the sense of God as their reconciled Father, is as entirely a stranger to

From a Trinitarian viewpoint we now see clearly the involvement of all three persons of the Godhead in adoption. God, the Father, elects, the Son mediates, and the Holy Spirit communicates adoption.

ADOPTION: SHARING IN THE TRINITY TO THE GLORY OF GOD

As we understand how the triune God works in adoption we could finally ask: Why? Why does the triune God adopt sinners like us at all? God adopts for his own God's glory. *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (2.1) reads: 'There is but one only living and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection...working all things according to the counsel of his own immutable and most righteous will, for his own glory.'[49] Consequently, adoption serves to honor and glorify God.[50] In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul makes the purpose of God's gracious dealings with us crystal clear: the praise of God's glorious grace: 'In love he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, *to the praise of his glorious grace*, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved' (Eph. 1:4-6, emphasis added).

Adoption glorifies the gracious God who receives sinners and transforms them into beloved children. Adoption is therefore entirely God-centred and God-exalting. God glorifies himself in adoption as he invites and incorporates his children into his own, into his life. T. F. Torrance writes: 'The eternal communion of love in God overflows through Jesus Christ into our union with Christ and gathers us up to dwell with God and in God...[God] gives himself to us and adopts us into the communion of his divine life and love through Jesus Christ and in his one Spirit, yet in such a way that we are not made divine but are preserved in our humanity.'[51] God 'called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through

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their heart as is any mystic inspiration – who have a kind of decent, and in some sort an earnest religiousness, but have never been visited by any feeling bald so sanguine or ecstatic as this', see his *Lectures on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans* (Glasgow: William Collins, 1848), p. 55.

[49] Westminster Assembly. *The Westminster Confession and Catechisms in Modern English*, p. 14.

[50] E. Sauer notes that 'the fact of the redeemed's being sons of God within the framework of creation, is completely beyond all that contemporary thought can comprehend. For all that, it is clearly taught in Scripture and it presents the highest unfolding of God's determination to glorify himself in love', see his *The King of the Earth - The Nobility of Man according to the Bible and Science* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1962), p. 147.

[51] T. F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1982), p. 64.

them you may become partakers of the divine nature', explains the Apostle Peter (2 Pet. 1:3-4). Adopted children are therefore called to partake of who God is. John Calvin calls it 'a kind of deification' (quasi deificari).[52] Adopted children, are 'admitted into the society of the blessed Trinity', as Edwards notes,[53] yet remain human. We belong to God by a 'kinship of being', as Barth writes.[54] Our incorporation into the life of God will result in joy beyond comparison.[55] Jenson puts it this way: 'our enjoyment of God is that we are taken into the triune singing'.[56] God is beauty, God is 'a great fugue',[57] and by enjoying our glorious God, we honour him.

CONCLUSION

I have tried to demonstrate that redemptive adoption is no isolated work of one person of the Godhead. Rather, adoption involves the whole Trinity: the Father, in electing and predestining children in love; the Son, as Mediator, in procuring sonship through propitiation, and inviting believers into unity with him through faith; the Spirit, as Spirit of adoption, who communicates the adoption and enables us to cry 'Abba, Father'. The ultimate goal of adoption is the integration of justified sinners into God's holy life. God glorifies himself as he invites us to share in his being, as

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[52]   C. Mosser, 'The Greatest Possible Blessing: Calvin and Deification', Scottish Journal of Theology 55 (2002) p. 41.

[53]   'Christ has brought it to pass, that those whom the Father has given him should be brought into the household of God; that he and his Father, and his people, should be as one society, one family; that the church should be as it were admitted into the society of the blessed Trinity', Works of Jonathan Edwards, vol. 1, p. 689.

[54]   'The divine sonship of man is not his divinity. It is only ascribed to him, imparted to him, given to him. He is only received and adopted by God as his child. He is only instituted as such. But in it he belongs to God by a kinship of being', see his Church Dogmatics, IV.1, edited by G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1956), p. 600.

[55]   Writes Edwards: 'Christ, who is a divine person, by taking on him our nature, descends from the infinite distance and height above us, and is brought nigh to us; whereby we have advantage for the full enjoyment of him. And, on the other hand, we, by being in Christ a divine person, do as it were ascend up to God, through the infinite distance, and have hereby advantage for the full enjoyment of him also. This was the design of Christ, that he, and his Father, and his people, might all be united in one', Works of Jonathan Edwards, vol. 1, p. 689.

[56]   R. W. Jenson, The Triune God, Systematic Theology (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 235.

[57]   Ibid., p. 236.

he is everything for us in Christ and through his Spirit. This is a glorious doctrine. Let us teach about it and preach about it. Let us develop a passion for the proclamation of redemptive adoption.

SAMUEL PETTO (C.1624–1711): A PORTRAIT OF A PURITAN PASTOR-THEOLOGIAN

MICHAEL G. BROWN

There are probably few students of English Puritanism and Reformed or-
thodoxy who recognize the name of Samuel Petto. Very little is known
about this obscure Puritan. While in recent years various historical studies
have referred to him in connection with his nonconformist ecclesiology,[1]
as well as his works on eschatology,[2] pneumatology,[3] witchcraft (a subject
of growing interest in both Old and New England during the seventeenth
century),[4] and covenant theology,[5] secondary literature devoted to Petto is
practically non-existent. Although he was not as prolific a writer as some
of his contemporaries, he nevertheless wrote on a vast number of theo-
logical subjects and may have had a more substantial role in the develop-
ment of British covenant theology than his present obscurity suggests.
For example, his 1674 work, *The Difference Between the Old and New
Covenant Stated and Explained*, was endorsed by the preeminent Puritan

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[1] See F. J. Bremer, *Congregational Communion: Clerical Friendship in the
Anglo-American Puritan Community* (Northeastern University Press, 1994),
pp. 191-248; and R. P. Gildrie, *The Profane, the Civil, and the Godly* (Penn
State Press, 2004), p. 191.

[2] See D. Brady, *The Contribution of British Writers Between 1560 and 1830 to
the Interpretation of Revelation 13.16-18 (the Number of the Beast): A Study
in the History of Exegesis* (Tuebingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1983), pp. 17, 119, 215-
16; and K. G. C. Newport, *Apocalypse and Millenium: Studies in Biblical
Eisegesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 5, 57.

[3] See D. Bruce Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative: Spiritual
Autobiography in Early Modern England* (Oxford: OUP, 2008); C. Gribben,
God's Irishmen: Theological Debates in Cromwellian England (Oxford:
OUP, 2007); I. Harris, *The Mind of John Locke: A Study of Political Theory in
Its Intellectual Setting* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); and
esp. G.F. Nuttall, *The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience* (Chicago:
University of Chicago Press, 1992).

[4] See N. Johnstone, *The Devil and Demonism in Early Modern England* (Cam-
bridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 122-3; and G. Geis, I. Bunn, *A
Trial of Witches: A Seventeenth-century Witchcraft Prosecution* (New York:
Routledge, 1997), pp. 140-1, 206-7.

[5] There is a brief reference to Petto's covenant theology and understanding of
the nature of conditionality in the covenant of grace in R. Greaves, *Glimpses
of Glory: John Bunyan and English Dissent* (Palo Alto: Stanford University
Press, 2002), pp. 106-7.

John Owen (1616–83), who wrote the forward to this book and called Petto a 'Worthy Author' who laboured 'with good success'. [6] Moreover, in 1820, twenty-nine Scottish ministers and theologians called for Petto's book to be republished, 'entirely approving and recommending it, as a judicious and enlightened performance'.[7] The purpose of this essay is to give a biographical sketch of Samuel Petto. It pursues the questions of who he was and what he accomplished in his time.

Samuel Petto lived and ministered during the turbulent era of England's seventeenth century. Born in 1624, his upbringing and education paralleled the controversial reign of Charles I (1600–49), who, from his coronation in 1625 until his Parliament-ordered execution in 1649, remained openly opposed to the Puritan plea for further reformation in the Church of England.[8] Though his parentage is unknown, Petto may have

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[6]   J. Owen, preface to Samuel Petto, *The Difference Between the Old and New Covenant* (London, 1674), no page number given. Owen also wrote a preface to Patrick Gillespie's work *The Ark of the Covenant Opened* (1677), which was one of five volumes Gillespie wrote on covenant theology.

[7]   A list of the names, as provided by the publisher of the 1820 reprint, included Dr. M'Crie of Edinburgh, Professor Paxton of Edinburgh, Rev. George Moir of Edinburgh, Dr. Pringle of Perth, Rev. James Aird of Rattray, Rev. Matthew Fraser of Dundee, Rev. Adam Blair of South Ferry, Rev. W. Ramage of Kirriemuir, Rev. James Hay of Alyth, Rev. Alexander Balfour of Lethendy, Rev. David Waddell of Shiels, Rev. Patrick Robertson of Craigdam, Rev. J. Ronaldson of Auchmacoy, Rev. John Bunyan of Whitehall, Rev. James Millar of Huntly, Dr. Kidd of Aberdeen, Rev. A. Gunn of Wattan, Rev. Niel Kennedy of Logie Elgin, Rev. Hector Bethune of Alness, Rev. Hugh Ross of Fearn, Rev. Thos. Monro of Kiltearn, Rev. John M'Donald of Thurso, Rev. A. Stewart of Wick, Rev. John Monro of Nigg, Rev. Isaac Kitchin of Nairn, Rev. David Anderson of Boghole, Rev. Thomas Stark of Forres, Rev. Simon Somerville of Elgin, Rev. Robert Crawford of Elgin. *The Difference Between the Old and New Covenant Stated and Explained* (Aberdeen: Alexander Thompson, 1820).

[8]   As C. Trueman points out, "The literature on Puritanism is vast and contains no real consensus on what exactly is the defining feature of a Puritan." See Trueman, *John Owen*, 2. According to C.V. Wedgwood, the term 'Puritan,' originally, "had no definite and no official meaning: it was a term of abuse merely." See Wedgwood, *The King's Peace* (New York: Macmillan, 1955), p. 95. Prominent figures in England often used the term pejoratively. See, for example, William Shakespeare's derogatory treatment of the term in his 1602 play, *Twelfth Night* (New York: Bantam, 1988), 2.3.139-52. Likewise, King James I, in a letter to his son Charles, explicitly called Puritans "pests of the Church" possessed by "a fanatic spirit." See Anonymous, *A Puritane Set Forth in His Lively Colours* (London: n.p., 1642), pp. 2-3. Both of these quotes are found in K. M. Kapic and R. C. Gleason [eds.], *The Devoted Life:*

descended from the Peyto family of Warwickshire and been related to the English Cardinal William Peyto (d.1558/9), who once served as confessor to Princess Mary (1516–58).[9] Some have suggested that he was possibly the son of Sir Edward Peto (d.1658), whose family were staunch supporters of Parliament during Charles's rule.[10]

While the identity of his birthplace and parents remains uncertain, and no information is available on his childhood and adolescence, one

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An Invitation to the Puritan Classics (Downers Grove: IVP, 2004), p. 15. For more on the sometimes difficult task of defining the terms "Puritan" and "Puritanism," see B. Hall, "Puritanism: The Problem of Definition," in G.J. Cuming, ed., *Studies in Church History*, vol.2, *Papers Read at the Second Winter and Summer Meetings of the Ecclesiastical History Society* (London: Nelson, 1965), pp. 283-96; and M. Watts, *The Dissenters* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978, repr.1985); D. M. Lloyd-Jones, "Henry Jacob and the First Congregational Church" in *Puritan Papers*, vol.4, pp. 173-97. For the purposes of this essay, I will use the terms 'Puritan' and 'Puritanism' to refer to those Calvinistic Protestants in England (whether Episcopalian, Presbyterian, or Independent) who desired further reformation in the Church of England in the areas of liturgy, preaching, and polity. For more helpful studies on Puritanism in general, see C. Burrage, *The Early English Dissenters in the Light of Recent Research (1550-1641)*, 2 vols. (New York: Russell & Russell, 1967); C. Hill, *Puritanism and Revolution: Studies in Interpretation of the English Revolution of the 17ᵗʰ Century* (New York: Shocken Books, 1964); G. Nuttall, *The Beginnings of Nonconformity* (London: J. Clarke, 1964); idem, *Visible Saints: The Congregational Way, 1640-1660* (Weston Rhyn: Quinta Press, 2001); J.I. Packer [ed.], *Puritan Papers*, idem, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1990); P. Toon, *God's Statesman: The Life and Work of John Owen* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1971); A. Woolsey, "Unity and Continuity in Covenantal Thought: A Study in Reformed Tradition to the Westminster Assembly," 2 vols., Ph.D. dissertation (University of Glasgow, 1988); M. Dever, *Richard Sibbes: Puritanism and Calvinism in Late Elizabethan and Early Stuart England* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2000).

9 Writing in 1893, W. W. Hodson points out that one Mr. George Unwin, "of the well-known London Publishing Firm," who was a lineal descendent of Petto, believed that Petto "was the son of Sir Wm. Petto, or Peyto, of Cesterton, Warwickshire, and states that the family was an old Norman one." See W.W. Hodson, *The Meeting House and the Manse; or, The Story of the Independents of Sudbury* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1893), p. 53.

10 See W.A. Shaw's entry on Petto in Sidney Lee [ed.], *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 45 (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1896). On Sir Edward Peto, see T. Mowl and B. Ernshaw, *Architecture Without Kings: The Rise of Puritan Classicism under Cromwell* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), p. 125.

thing is clear about Petto's early years: he grew up amid a series of events that undoubtedly helped shape his nonconformist convictions as a young man.[11] In 1625, Charles married the Roman Catholic Henrietta Maria. Three years later, the King appointed his advisor, the Arminian William Laud, as bishop of London, and in 1633, to the highest ecclesiastical position in England (save the crown itself), the Archbishop of Canterbury.[12] Showing little tolerance for those with Puritan or Calvinistic convictions, Laud reverted, albeit more aggressively, to a more anti-Puritan policy like that of Archbishops Richard Bancroft (1604–11) and John Whitgift (1583–1604). He banned preaching on the doctrine of predestination, demanded that ministers wear the surplice, required the *Book of Sports* to be read from every pulpit on Sundays, and oversaw the violent treatment of nonconformists such as William Pryne (1600–69), whose ears were cut off and face was branded with the letters 'SL' (for seditious libeler).[13] In 1638, the Scottish Presbyterians adopted the National Covenant in defiance to the King. In 1642, with its Long Parliament in resolute rejection of Charles's claim to rule by *iure divino*, England erupted into Civil War. The following year, Parliament called the Westminster Assembly.

PETTO'S TRAINING AND SOURCES

Those were difficult years for anyone with Puritan convictions, particularly a young Englishman entering university to prepare for the ministry. It is unclear when Petto came to hold such convictions for himself, but his education at Cambridge during the 1640s must have played a role in this. Records indicate that he entered St. Catharine's College (or Katherine Hall) as a sizar, a term used for Cambridge students who were granted a 'size' or ration of food and lodging free of charge due to financial hardship.[14] His education at the bachelor's level would have centered on the *trivium*, namely, grammar, rhetoric, and logic, as well as immersion in the

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[11] In this study, I refer to the terms 'nonconformist' and 'nonconformity' as pertaining to the act of refusing to conform to the prescribed liturgy of the Book of Common Prayer and practices and polity of the Established Church.

[12] On Laud's life see H. Trevor-Roper, *Archbishop Laud*, Second Edition (London: MacMillan, 1940; reprint London: Phoenix Press, 2001).

[13] Prynne himself said the letters more appropriately stood for *stigmata Laudis*, "the marks of Laud." Other celebrated Puritan victims of Laud's persecution include John Bastwick (1593–1654), Henry Burton (1578–1648), and John Lilburne (d.1657).

[14] This fact raises the question about his lineage. Would a member of a prominent family such as the Peytos of Warwickshire or the son of Sir Edward Peto be admitted to Cambridge as a sizar? The circumstances are unknown.

Latin and Greek classics, participation in academic debates, and thorough training in philosophy.[15] To complete an MA, his schooling would have included the subjects of the *quadrivium*, that is, arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy, as well as public disputing and lecturing. Petto matriculated on March 19, 1645 and graduated BA in 1647, although some records indicate, albeit without a date, that he also obtained his MA.[16]

An advanced education that included astronomy may help explain Petto's interest and proficiency in this field later in life. Theology, however, was clearly his chief focus as a student. John Twigg points out that, since the late fifteenth century, St. Catharine's, along with Queens' College and Jesus College, was intended to encourage theological studies and became a centre for the subject.[17] During the Elizabethan and Jacobean eras, St. Catharine's became associated with Puritanism. In 1626, Richard Sibbes (1577–1635) was appointed Master of the school, and served in that capacity until his death.[18] Sibbes was superseded by Ralph Brownrigg (1592–1659), who, though a Calvinist in theology and nominated to the Westminster Assembly, was ejected in the Parliamentary purge of Cambridge in 1645 on account of his royalist commitments. Brownrigg was replaced by William Spurstowe (c.1606–66), a Westminster divine and one of the five men who wrote Puritan tracts against Episcopalian polity in 1641 under the pseudo-name and acronym 'Smectymnus'.[19] It was during the eras of Brownrigg and Spurstowe that Petto obtained his theological education at St. Catharine's.

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[15] For more on the typical course of studies for an undergraduate student at Cambridge, see J. Twigg, *A History of Queen's College, Cambridge 1448-1986* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 98-103.

[16] See the entry on Petto in A.G. Matthews, *Calamy Revised: Being a Revision of Edmund Calamy's Account of the Ministers and Others Ejected and Silenced, 1660-2* (1934, Oxford: Clarendon Press, repr.1988), 388 in which he is listed as graduating BA in 1647. Stephen Wright, however, in his entry on Petto, states he 'was admitted as a sizar at St Catharine's College, Cambridge, on 15 June 1644, matriculated on 19 March 1645, and graduated MA'. Wright does not list a date for Petto's BA or MA. See S. Wright, 'Petto, Samuel (c.1624-1711)' in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004). Moreover, Hodson also referred to Petto as holding an MA, but, like Wright, did not give a date. See the dedication page in Hodson, *The Meeting House.*

[17] Twigg, *A History of Queen's College*, p. 104.

[18] See Dever, *Richard Sibbes*, pp. 34-48.

[19] Smectymnuus stood for the initials of five Puritans: "SM" for Stephen Marshall (c.1594–1655), "EC" for Edmund Calamy (1600–66), "TY" for Thomas Young (1587-1655), "MN" for Matthew Newcomen (1610–69), and "VVS" for William Spurstowe.

Given his Protestant and Calvinistic education at Cambridge in the 1640s, it is not surprising that in his writing he referred approvingly to the works of John Calvin (1509-64), Richard Sibbes (1577-1635), William Bridge (1600-70), Samuel Bolton (1606-54), John Owen, the *Heidelberg Catechism*,[20] and, as was common among the Reformed orthodox, cited patristic and medieval writers in support of his arguments.[21]

PASTOR AND AUTHOR

Petto was ordained to the ministry in 1648 and installed as rector of Sand-croft (or St. Cross) in the deanery of South Elmham, Suffolk. Probably shortly after his ordination, he was married to a woman known only as Mary. Together they had five children, whom they supported on Petto's salary of £36 per year.

In 1654 Petto published his first book, a work on pneumatology titled *The Voice of the Spirit, or An Essay Toward the Discoverie of the witnessing of the Spirit by opening and answering these following weighty Queries.* With this was an appended piece, *Roses from Sharon or Sweet Experiences reached out by Christ to some of his beloved ones in this wilderness.*[22] These works dealt with the doctrine of assurance as related to the Spirit's sealing of the believer, a topic of particular interest to many English Puritans. Like William Perkins (1558-1602),[23] Richard Sibbes

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20 See *DBONC*. He refered to Calvin on pages 176 and 228, Sibbes ('Dr. Sibs') on 44, Bridge on 232, Bolton on 113, Cameron on 185, and Owen on 49, 177, and 281. The references to Owen are under 'Dr. O', but this is undoubt-edly Owen given the context in each citation, especially the one on page 177, which is to Owen's Hebrews commentary. He also cited John Arrowsmith (1602-59) on page 224, and one 'Dr. C' on page 92, which may be a reference to Edmund Calamy, although it is not clear. For a reference to the *Heidelberg Catechism*, see *A Large Scriptural Catechism* (London, 1672), p. 20.

21 See *Infant Baptism of Christ's Appointment* (London, 1687), pp. 29-30 where he refers to Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, and Cyprian in support of his case for infant baptism, and *Old and New Covenant*, p. 223 where he cites Augustine in support of his argument for sovereign grace, as well as the medieval theo-logian Thomas Aquinas.

22 The title page of *The Voice of the Spirit* describes the author as 'Samuel Petto, Preacher of the Gospell at Sandcroft in Suffolke'.

23 "When God by his spirit is said to seale the promise in the heart of every particular believer, it signifieth that hee gives unto them evident assurance that the promise of life belongs to them." *A Discourse of Conscience* (1596) in *William Perkins 1558-1602, English Puritanist*, ed. T.F. Merrill (Nieukoop, 1966), pp. 50-51.

(1577-1635),[24] John Preston (1587-1628),[25] Thomas Goodwin (1600-80)[26] and Richard Baxter (1615-91),[27] Petto argued that the sealing of the Spirit was an activity *in addition* to the Spirit's indwelling of the believer. It was given for the purpose of assurance, 'a perswasion from the Spirit of Adoption that God is your Father'.[28] Like Owen, however, Petto subsequently seemed to have shifted in his position on the doctrine of assurance, as evidenced by his later work.[29]

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[24] Sibbes called the sealing of the Spirit God's 'superadded work' to the believer's faith. *A Fountain Sealed* (1637) as found in *The Works of Richard Sibbes*, vol. 3 (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, repr. 1981), p. 455. Joel Beeke makes the point that 'Sibbes turned the doctrine of the sealing of the Spirit in a direction that would gain prominence among the Puritans for several decades'. Beeke, *Quest*, p. 203

[25] Preston went one step further than Perkins and Sibbes by teaching that the sealing of the Spirit was not only a second blessing given for one's assurance, but that it was given to those who overcome. Preston said that this sealing was so extraordinary to the Christian life that it was beyond definition: 'You will say, what is the seale or witnesse of the Spirit? My beloved, it is a thing that we cannot expresse, it is a certain divine expression of light, a certain unexpressable assurance that we are the sonnes of *God*, a certain secret manifestation, that *God* hath received us, and put away sinnes: I say, it is such a thing, that no man knows, but they that have it.' J. Preston, *The New Covenant: or the Saints' Portion* (London, 1634), p. 416, in Sinclair Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1987), p. 120.

[26] Goodwin called the sealing of the Spirit a 'light beyond the light of ordinary faith'. T. Goodwin, *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, eleven volumes (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1855), 1:236

[27] Baxter said, 'Here it is evident that it is such a gift of the spirit...that is given to men, after they believe...there is to be an eminent gift of the Holy Spirit to be expected after our first believing'. Richard Baxter, *Practical Works*, vol. 4 (London, repr.1847), p. 308.

[28] Samuel Petto, *The Voice of the Spirit* (London, 1654), A2 in the preface.

[29] Owen was not in step with Perkins, Sibbes, Preston, Goodwin and Baxter in his doctrine of the sealing of the Spirit. This became more evident toward the end of his life. As late as 1667, Owen made statements about the sealing that seem at least somewhat inclined toward the second blessing view. In *Of Communion with God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost* (1657), Owen said, 'We are sealed to the day of redemption, when, from the stamp, image, and character of the Spirit upon our souls, we have a fresh sense of the love of God given to us, with a comfortable persuasion of our acceptance with him.' Yet, in the same work Owen said, 'I am not very clear in the certain peculiar intendment of this metaphor.' See Owen's *Works*, 2:242-43. Some years later, however, he became very clear on the meaning of the seal. In *Pneumatologia*, published posthumously in 1693, Owen wrote a whole chapter on the 'The Spirit a seal,

In December of 1655, Petto's wife Mary died. A widower, Petto continued actively in his vocation, supporting his five children as a minister. In addition to his duties at Sandcroft, he also oversaw the neighboring parish of Homersfield and frequently delivered sermons there. In October 1657, Petto was selected to be an assistant to the Suffolk commission of Triers and Ejectors, a body appointed by Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658) to examine ministers and their credentials.[30] On 4 May 1658, the Council of State recommended that his salary be increased to £50 per year.

INDEPENDENT CONVICTIONS

Like Owen and the 'Five Dissenting Brethren' of the Westminster Assembly, Thomas Goodwin (1600-79), Philip Nye (c.1596-1672), Sidrach Simpson (c.1600-55), William Bridge (1600-71) and Jeremiah Burroughs (c.1599-1646), Petto belonged to that ecclesiastical tradition which emerged rapidly in the 1640s known as Independency or, more narrowly, non-Separatist Congregationalism.[31] For the Independents, the notion of

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and how', in which he made an exegetical case from Ephesians 1.13-14 to show why he had became convinced that 'the common exposition' of the sealing among Puritans of his time was incorrect. For Owen, the sealing of the Spirit was a salvific norm granted to every Christian at the time he or she embraced the gospel with true faith. See *Works*, 4:399-405. On Petto's apparent shift, compare *The Voice of the Spirit* with *DBONC*, especially chapters 5, 12, 13, and 14.

30   See entry by E. Vernon in F. J. Bremer and T. Webster [eds.], *Puritans and Puritanism in Europe and America: A Comprehensive Encyclopedia* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2006), pp. 200-1.

31   Bryan Spinks is correct when he states, 'while it is generally agreed among historians that the English Independent, or Congregational tradition did not emerge as a distinct ecclesiastical movement until the tumultuous years of the 1640s, it has long been a matter of controversy as to the movement's precise origin.' See B. D. Spinks, *Freedom or Order? The Eucharistic Liturgy in English Congregationalism 1645-1980* (Allison Park: Pickwick, 1984), 1. As B.R. White and S. Brachlow have shown, the separatists Robert Browne (c.1550-1633) and Henry Barrow (c.1550-93), and the semi-separatist Henry Jacob (1563-1624) were forerunners of the English Congregationalism which emerged in the 1640s. Jacob in particular was a major figure in this lineage, having founded in 1616 the first known Congregation of English Independents, that is, a Congregationalist church that, unlike the Separatists, did not view the Church of England as a false church and desire to cut off all communion with her. See B.R. White, *The English Separatist Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971) and S. Brachlow, *The Communion of Saints: Radical Puritan and Separatist Ecclesiology 1570-1625* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988). Drawing upon the study of White, Michael Watts

a regional church, whether Episcopal or Presbyterian, was rejected on the grounds that a true church is a local, gathered congregation of willing believers and their children, governed by a body of elders within that local congregation.[32] As is evident from the Congregationalist confession *The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order* (1658), which is essentially the Westminster Confession of Faith modified to conform to Congregationalist ecclesiology, the Independents were at one with the Reformed churches of their day in nearly all matters of faith except church government.

Although Petto was an appointed assistant to the Suffolk commission of Triers and Ejectors and not a Separatist, his ecclesiological convictions led him to adopt a view of preaching which allowed for gifted laymen to preach in local congregations. In 1657 he joined with Independent ministers John Martin of Edgfield in Norfolk and Fredrick Woodal of Woodbridge in Suffolk to produce a work defending this view. Titled *The Preacher Sent, or a Vindication of the Liberty of Public Preaching by some men not Ordained,* this work was a response to two books, *Jus Divinum Ministerii Evangelici* by the Provincial Assembly of London and *Vindiciae Ministerii Evangelici* by John Collings of Norwich (1623-90), both of which defended the practice common to the Reformed churches of requiring ministers to receive an outward call from a true, ecclesiasti-

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shows that English Nonconformity springs from two different theological sources and flows in two distinct currents. The first, which he calls 'radical,' finds its roots in the Lollards of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and the Anabaptists of the sixteenth century. The second, which he calls 'Calvinistic', comes from the sixteenth and seventeenth century Puritans within the Established Church. Watts makes the case that the Independents find their roots in the second source, not the first, having descended from Henry Jacob and later formed into two main camps: the Non-separating Congregationalists and the Separatist Independents. See M. Watts, *The Dissenters: From the Reformation to the French Revolution* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978).

[32] This was in distinction from the separating "Brownists," who placed the power of church government with the hands of the congregation rather than the ministers and elders. For more on Independent ecclesiology, see H. Jacob, *Reasons Taken out of God's Word and the Best Humane Testimonies Proving a Necessitie of Reforming Our Churches in England* (1604); idem, *The Divine Beginning and Institution of Christ's True Visible and Ministeriall Church* (1610); J. Cotton, *The Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, and the Power Thereof* (1644); T. Goodwin, et al, *An Apologeticall Narration* (1643); idem, *A Copy of a Remonstrance Lately Delivered to the Assembly* (1645); J. Owen, *An Inquiry into the Original, Nature, Power, Order and Communion of Evangelical Churches* (1681) in *Works*, vol.15; and *The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order Owned and Practised in the Congregational Churches of England* (1658).

cal body and limiting the pulpit to ordained clergy. *In The Preacher Sent*, Petto and his coauthors challenged this practice by arguing that, in some cases, a gifted layman in a congregation could lawfully preach without approbation from an ecclesiastical body, since it is the duty of every gifted man to use his gifts in the congregation (whether or not he is ordained), and that gifts for public preaching should be used publicly.[33]

The Preacher Sent encountered immediate and fierce opposition from Presbyterians, who argued for the necessity of a presbytery's role in ordaining qualified men and restricting the pulpit to duly ordained clergy. In 1658, Collings responded with *Vindiciae Ministrii Evangelici Revindicate, or the Preacher (pretendly) Sent, sent back again*, and Matthew Poole (1624-79), by appointment of the Provincial Assembly of London, wrote *Quo Warranto; or, A Moderate Enquiry into the Warrantablenesse of the Preaching of Gifted and Unordained Persons*. The following year, Petto and Woodal responded to Poole and Collings in a subsequent work, *A Vindication of the Preacher Sent, or A Warrant for publick Preaching without Ordination* (1659).

With the restoration of the English monarchy in 1660, yet sometime before the enforcement of the Clarendon Code, Petto was ejected from Sandcroft.[34]

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[33]   J. Martin, S. Petto, and F. Woodal, *The Preacher Sent: or, A Vindication of the Liberty of Publick Preaching, By some men not Ordained* (London, 1657), pp. 20, 32, 47, etc.

[34]   The 'Clarendon Code' was the name for a series of four legal statutes drafted by Edward Hyde, the Earl of Clarendon, and passed by an overwhelmingly Anglican Parliament. The first was the Corporation Act (1661), which excluded Non-Conformists from holding public office by requiring all municipal officials to be communicants in an Anglican church, subscribe a declaration that it was unlawful under any circumstances to take up arms against the king, and formally reject the Solemn League and Covenant. The second statute was the Act of Uniformity (1662), which required all ministers, under penalty of fines, imprisonment, and the forfeiture of their livings, to subscribe to everything in the *Book of Common Prayer*, renounce the Solemn League and Covenant, and be re-ordained if they had not received Episcopal ordination in the first place. All ministers were to fulfill these requirements by St. Bartholomew's Day on August 24, 1662. The result was 'The Great Ejection' with nearly 2000 ministers forced to resign their vocations and livings. The third statute was the Conventicle Act (1664), which made it illegal for five or more persons to gather at any religious assembly, conventicle, or meeting conducted in any other manner than what was prescribed by the *Book of Common Prayer*. The final statute was the Five-Mile Act (1665), which forbade all ministers who had not taken the oaths in the Act of Uniformity to come within five miles of the corporate town or parish where they had previ-

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Records indicate that the manse was vacant by January 1661.[35] According to W. W. Hodson, Petto was replaced in Sandcroft by one Thomas Pye later that year.[36] He moved to nearby Wortwell-cum-Alburgh, Norfolk, and continued to labour in gospel ministry there throughout the 1660s.

Petto appears to have had some connection with the Fifth Monarchy men, a group who believed that the establishment of Christ's kingdom, a fifth kingdom following the four great empires represented in Nebuchadnezzar's dream from the book of Daniel (Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome), would be inaugurated around the year 1666 through political measures. During the Interregnum and especially the Cromwell years, these desired measures amounted to 'the dissolution of the Rump [Parliament], the establishment of the rule of the saints, and the reform of the country's institutions in accordance with the precepts of the old and New Testaments.'[37] While it is unclear how committed Petto was to the views of the Fifth Monarchists, it is undeniable that he ran in their circles. His co-author Fredrick Woodal was a committed Fifth Monarchist, and in 1663, probably in preparation for the year 1666, he joined with Independent minister John Manning (d.1694) in publishing *Six Several Treatises of John Tillinghast*, one of the foremost members of the Fifth Monarchy Men. What is interesting, however, is that Petto's affiliation with this party did not seem to hinder his friendship with and support by one of the most prominent opponents of the Fifth Monarchists and England's leading Independent, John Owen.[38]

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ously served. For the background on the period of the Restoration see D. Ogg, *England in the Reign of Charles II* (Oxford: OUP, 1967).

[35] Quoted from *State Papers*, Interregnum, Council Book I, 78, 589, in W.A. Shaw's entry on Petto in S. Lee [ed.], *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 45 (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1896), p. 111.

[36] Hodson, *The Meeting House*, p. 53.

[37] Watts, *The Dissenters*, p. 135.

[38] While Owen, like most of his English Reformed contemporaries, believed that Christ's kingdom would be inaugurated triumphantly on earth before the consummation, a view that we might to tempted to label anachronistically 'postmillennial', he believed that the kingdom would come by spiritual and not political means. See, for example, his many Parliamentary sermons in volume VIII of the Banner of Truth reprint edition of his *Works*. Watts is correct to point out that 'While Owen was content to wait on God to act in his own good time to bring in the kingdom of Christ, the Fifth Monarchists wanted to give God and history a shove. Owen and the conservative Independents were the Mensheviks of the English revolution; the Fifth Monarchy men were the Bolsheviks.' Watts, *The Dissenters*, p. 135. Other Independent opponents of the Fifth Monarchists included Westminster Assembly divines Thomas Goodwin, Philip Nye, and Sidrach Simpson, who united with Pres-

By 1669, Petto was preaching regularly in Norfolk and also to a crowd in Gillingham reported to be over 300 in attendance. In 1672, under the Act of Indulgence issued by Charles II, he was licensed as a congregational teacher at his own house at Wortwell, as well as the house of John Wesgate at Redenhall. His time in Norfolk must have allowed him the opportunity to write, for in that same year he published two catechisms: *A Short Scriptural Catechism for Little Children* and *A Large Scriptural Catechism*. Both of these catechisms were unique in that the answers were essentially quotes from the Bible, encouraging the catechumen to memorize Scripture. The corresponding questions, however, do not indicate any sort of Biblicism, but reveal a theology in harmony with the Westminster Shorter and Larger Catechisms. They are Calvinistic and Reformed in doctrine, with an emphasis upon the covenant of grace.

PREACHER IN THE BARN

Petto's lengthiest charge as a pastor was to a congregation in the town of Sudbury, Suffolk, a borough long known for its staunch Puritanism. Nonconformist ministers such as William Jenkyn (d.1616), father of the zealous Presbyterian William Jenkyn the younger (1613-85), and John Wilson (1588-1667), the renowned preacher and later immigrant to New England with John Winthrop (1587-1649), had served Sudbury in the early seventeenth century. In 1645, Suffolk County was constituted an Ecclesiastical Province and divided into fourteen Precincts for Presbyteries, though the plan was never carried out. According to W.W. Hodson, 'It was not so easy a thing to rear a new Church Establishment on the ruins of the old one. Besides, the power of Presbyterianism was soon crippled by the progress of War, and other events marching on in strides.'[39] Consequently, seven Congregationalist churches were formed in Suffolk between 1640 and 1660, of which Sudbury was one.

After the Restoration and upon the enforcement of the Clarendon Code, the residents of Sudbury had for some time sought a minister. They protested in a town corporation document dated October 5, 1669 that 'there is no settled minister' in Sudbury and services depended 'upon the goodwill and benevolence of the people' of whom the majority 'meet in conventicles and absent themselves'.[40] They resolved to seek an act of par-

byterians in opposition to the radical movement. See T. Liu, *Discord in Zion: The Puritan Divines and the Puritan Revolution 1640-1660* (Springer, 1973), pp. 127, 100; and Barker, *Puritan Profiles*, pp. 90, 232.

[39] Hodson, *The Meeting House*, p. 14.
[40] C. Sperling [ed.], *A short history of the borough of Sudbury ... compiled from materials collected by W. W. Hodson* (Sudbury, 1896), pp. 152-3.

liament to provide proper maintenance for a minister. In 1672, however, when the King issued his Act of Indulgence, Sudbury dissenters applied for a license for Congregational worship to be held in a barn belonging to one Robert Sewell. The remnant of Friars' Street Church of Sudbury met in this barn for worship. Over the years, many notable Nonconformist ministers preached in 'the Barn', including the prolific writer Giles Firmin (1615-97) and the ejected principal of Magdalene Hall, Oxford, John Wilkinson (1616-90). The members of Friars' Street called Petto, however, to serve as their pastor.

Petto lived with his family in the vacant manse of All Saints' Church in Sudbury. Sometime after Mary's death 1655 he remarried, this time to a woman named Martha, who gave him seven children in addition to his previous five. Apparently, there was no settled minister at All Saints' for a number of years prior to Petto's call, and the church was essentially closed.[41] Since at least 1670, the manse was used to house visiting Nonconformist ministers, but later became the permanent residence of Petto. Local Tories, however, were not pleased with this arrangement. In 1681 and 1682, the Grand Jury made a case against Petto at Quarter Sessions for absenting himself from 'Common Prayer' at his parish church. In 1684, Tories complained to Parliament and accused John Catesby, the former mayor of Sudbury, of so favoring Nonconformists that 'Mr. Petto the Nonconformist preacher in the barn' had been allowed to minister there without any punishment and 'constantly lived within the said Corporation for ten years last past, in no more private place than in the Vicarage House belonging to All Saints Church'. [42] Complaint was also made that 'meetings were held once or twice a week in a Barn, or in private houses', and that these gatherings were 'unlawful, seditious assemblies, conventicles, or meetings, under colour or excuse of exercise of religion, unto which very great numbers of His Majesty's subjects did resort, both inhabitants and strangers'.[43] No punishment, however, resulted from these complaints; Petto continued to preach, teach, and write at Sudbury for the rest of his life.

COVENANT THEOLOGIAN

Though he became known as 'the preacher in the barn', Petto remained a competent theologian. In 1674, shortly after arriving in Sudbury, he

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[41] Town records indicate, for example, that, in 1666, the building of All Saints' was used to confine Dutch prisoners captured in a battle in the sea port town of Harwich. See Hodson, *The Meeting House*, pp. 54-5.

[42] Hodson, *The Meeting House*, p. 54.

[43] *Ibid.*, p. 55.

wrote, as noted above, his sophisticated work on covenant theology, *The Difference Between the Old and New Covenant Stated and Explained.* This work demonstrated Petto's firm grasp of this complex subject as well as the hot debates surrounding it in his day. As the Reformed orthodox defended, clarified, and codified the doctrines and practices of the early Reformation and responded to challenges from Socinianism, Arminianism, and Roman Catholicism, as well as internal disputes concerning antinomianism and neo-nomianism, they wrestled with the question of how the old and new covenants relate within the *historia salutis.* Petto contributed to the dialogue by positing a nuanced view of the Mosaic covenant that upheld and defended the Reformation's doctrine of justification *sola fide.*

He argued that the Mosaic covenant was a republication of the covenant of works for Christ to fulfill as the condition of the covenant of grace. He held to a radical distinction between the covenants of works and grace, the former made with Adam and his seed, the latter with Christ and his seed. The Mosaic covenant, however, was not only an historical administration of the covenant of grace, but also the condition Christ had to fulfill to accomplish redemption for the elect. What the original covenant of works was to the first Adam, the Mosaic covenant was to the second Adam; it provided the temporal setting for the Federal Head to obtain eternal life for those whom he represented:

> The Covenant of Works being broken by us in the first Adam, it was of great concernment to us, that satisfaction should be given to it, for unless its righteousness were performed for us, the Promised Life was unattainable; and unless its penalty were undergone for us, the threatened Death (Gen. 2.17.) was unavoidable.[44]

In other words, Sinai gave the Son the opportunity to perform, through his active and passive obedience, the righteousness which the original covenant of works required.

His interpretation of the Mosaic covenant as a covenant of works for Christ and the condition he had to fulfill in the covenant of grace safeguarded the Reformed orthodox doctrine of the active obedience of Christ. That Sinai commanded of Christ 'Do this and live' as a covenant condition, and because Christ fulfilled that command for justification and life on behalf of the elect, the gospel is not merely that believers are forgiven, but that they also are reckoned as law keepers themselves by virtue of Christ's obedience imputed to them.

Secondly, Petto's covenant theology informed how he applied justification *sola fide* to the believer's assurance. It highlighted the new covenant

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[44]   Petto, *The Difference Between the Old and New Covenant*, p. 125.

promise that sinners are saved by God's grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. It set forth Christ as the object of faith and the one in whom all the absolute promises of the new covenant are 'yes' and 'amen'.

LATER WORKS

In 1687, Petto published a work defending the Reformed doctrine of infant baptism, *Infant Baptism of Christ's Appointment, or A Discovery of Infants Interest in the Covenant with Abraham, shewing who are the Spiritual Seed and who the fleshly Seed*. This was an exegetical case for the inclusion of the children of believers into the covenant of grace. He revealed his commitment to the continuity of the Abrahamic covenant with the new covenant, as well as the Reformed distinction of the visible-invisible church. He followed this in 1691 by *Infant-Baptism Vindicated from the Exceptions of Mr. Thomas Grantham*, a short reply to certain objections made by the Baptist apologist Thomas Grantham.

In 1693, Petto published a book on eschatology, *Fulfilling of the Prophecies or Revelation Unveiled*. This displayed a historicist interpretation of the book of Revelation fairly typical among seventeenth-century English Puritans. One difference from many divines his day, however, was his argument that Papal Rome should not be interpreted as Babylon.

This same year he also published a work on witchcraft, a subject of growing interest in both New and Old England during the seventeenth century. Titled *A Faithful Narrative of the Wonderful and Extraordinary Fits which Mr. Tho. Spatchet (Late of Dunwich and Cookly) was under by Witchcraft or, A Mysterious Providence in his Unparallel'd Fits*, this work described the widely believed report that one Thomas Spatchet and a neighboring ejected Puritan minister, S. Manning, had been bewitched by a woman in Sudbury.[45]

Despite the demands of his ministry at Sudbury, Petto found time to reflect on subjects other than theology. He took a keen interest in science and, in 1699, published an article in the Royal Society journal *Philosophical Transactions* concerning parhelia, the phenomenon of mock suns or 'sundogs' visible at certain times on either side of the sun.[46]

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[45] This work of Petto's is unquestionably his most frequently referenced work in modern secondary literature, typically by writers commenting on witchcraft in the seventeenth century.

[46] See *Philosophical Transactions*, 21, 1699, 107.

LAST DAYS

Evidence indicates that Petto remained highly esteemed by his own and other dissenting churches.[47] Even in to his late years, he was frequently in demand as a preacher at ordinations, funerals, and other occasions. In 1700, he preached the funeral sermon of Squire Baker of Wattisfield, a person of notable influence. In 1707, then over the age of 80, Petto was assisted by his son-in-law, Josais Maultby, who was installed as co-pastor. Maultby continued to serve the Independent congregation until 1719 when he emigrated to Rotterdam. Petto, however, died in 1711 and was buried in the churchyard of All Saints, Sudbury on September 21.

CONCLUSIONS

From this biographical sketch, we make two observations: First, Petto was a Puritan. He was part of that broad ecclesiastical movement in England, particularly during the seventeenth century, that sought further reformation in the areas of liturgy and polity. More narrowly defined, he was a dissenting Puritan of Independent and non-separating Congregationalist convictions, believing that a true Christian church is not a national or regional body (contra the Episcopalians and Presbyterians) but a local and gathered congregation of willing believers and their children. Yet, from his connection to the Fifth Monarchists and his clashes with Matthew Poole over the matter of ordination, we can conclude that Petto was an Independent of a more radical stripe then, say, John Owen. This may help explain why he is largely unknown today, for after the Restoration, Dissenting parties were largely written out of the intellectual history of England.[48]

Second, Petto was, like so many of his Puritan contemporaries, both a pastor and theologian. That is to say, he not only laboured in the weekly duties of preaching, teaching and visitation as a shepherd of a local flock, but also in the work of writing and publishing theological material for the broader church. He was a Cambridge-trained specialist and a sophisticated covenant theologian. As such, his works contributed to the development of post-Westminster Assembly British Reformed theology in the era known as high orthodoxy (c.1640-1725).

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[47]   See, for example, E. Calamy and S. Palmer, *The Nonconformist's Memorial: Being an Account of the Ministers, who Were Ejected Or Silenced After the Restoration, Particularly by the Act of Uniformity, which Took Place on Bartholomew-day, Aug. 24, 1662* (London: W. Harris, 1775), pp. 435-6; Hodson, *The Meeting House*, pp. 61-2.

[48]   See Trueman, *John Owen*, 1; Watts, *Dissenters*, pp. 208-62; H. Davies, *The English Free Churches* (London: OUP, 1952) pp. 91-118.

ENGAGING THE SCRIPTURES:
THE CHALLENGE TO RECOVER BIBLICAL LITERACY

FERGUS MACDONALD, PHD

The Bible claims that God's Word is powerful. The Lord declared to
Jeremiah: 'Is not my word like fire, and like a hammer that breaks a rock
in pieces?' (Jer. 23.29, TNIV). The Lord assures Isaiah that the word he
speaks 'will not fail to do what I plan for it; it will do everything I send
it to do.' (Is. 55.11, GNB). Jesus teaches us that the word of God, when
heard and retained by the human heart, is like a seed that produces a
bountiful harvest of lives transformed (Luke 8.15; cf Mk. 4.20; Mt. 13.23).
The apostle Paul tells us that 'faith comes from hearing the message, and
the message is heard through the word about Christ' (Rom 10.17, TNIV).
According to the writer to the Hebrews 'the word of God is alive and ac-
tive' (Heb. 4.12).

Many Christians in the younger churches of the southern hemisphere
speak in similar terms today. A blind proof reader of braille Scriptures in
Tanzania tells us that she feels the power of God's word travelling from
her fingers to her heart. On my first visit to Zimbabwe three years after it
gained its independence, the Anglican bishop of Harare told me: 'In Af-
rica we have a crocodile appetite for Bibles!' Listen also to the testimony
of Baburam Chhetri, who pastors a small church in the Himalayan coun-
try of Nepal: 'I have been in difficult situations where I felt hopeless and
betrayed by my friends. But during those times I reached for my Bible
and felt that God was speaking directly to me, saying, "I am with you. I
will never leave you." The Bible is life to me.'[1]

The contemporary situation in most western countries is different. It
contrasts markedly with both the Bible's self-portrait and the experience
of Christians in the younger churches. Just over one quarter (27%) of
English churchgoers read the Bible weekly outside of church attendance.[2]
In the United States the situation is more positive with 37% of the popula-
tion being frequent readers, that is, those who read the Bible at least once
a week. However, some surveys indicate that the vast majority of these
frequent readers only read it during the one hour they attend church on

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[1]   *UBS World Report* 422, June 2008, p 57
[2]   *Pulling out of Nosedive: A Contemporary Picture of Churchgoing – What the
      2005 English Church Census Reveals,* 2006.

Sunday morning. In addition, a recent poll indicates that 35% of American Christians who profess to be born-again do not read the Bible at all.[3]

The Word of God, which for the writer to the Hebrews and today's Christians in the younger churches of the South is 'alive and active,' appears to be comatose and silent in the churches of the Western world. What has gone wrong? How might western Christians rediscover the power and the attractiveness of God's Word? In this paper I will attempt to offer an answer to these questions by exploring the nature of Scripture engagement and the conditions under which this interaction between us and the sacred text may become a life-transforming encounter with Almighty God.

I will begin by briefly presenting four scenarios which are by no means untypical in western churches. All four will illustrate ways in which the current crisis expresses itself in concrete situations.

Scenario 1

Marge is 30 years of age and has been a Christian for two years. For the first eighteen months she faithfully read and meditated on her Bible every day. Doing so greatly helped her spiritual growth. But now the Bible is not as alive as it was and Marge's reading has become much less regular. Her workload at the office has recently increased and become more exacting. As a result she finds it difficult to concentrate when she opens her Bible. She now feels that she is getting so little from her Bible reading that she is tempted to give up reading the Bible in any systematic fashion and to opt instead for popular devotional books during her quiet time.

Scenario 2

My second scenario concerns John and Jean, a Christian married couple in their mid-thirties. They host in their home a weekly Bible study group which is organised by their church. About ten people attend. Leadership of the study circulates from week to week among the more experienced members. Recently Jean and John have become concerned that discussion in the group about the Bible text is so impersonal. The others seem to be more concerned about finding what the passage means in the abstract than about what impact it might make on their lives. Hardly ever does a member of the group feel able to testify how the Bible has come alive and helped them during the previous week. John and Jean suspect that their house-group has become a talking shop, but are unsure what to do to make the discussion more experience-focused and more life-applied.

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[3]   News Assist Service Rhodes

Scenario 3

Scenario 3 concerns Bob, a 24 year-old university graduate. He attends a large church well known for its Bible expository ministry. Bob deeply appreciates the pastor's verse-by-verse preaching through Scripture passages. But he is uncomfortable that the pastor spends so much time describing the text's cultural background and explaining the meaning of its theological terms. He is disappointed there is so little time spent on applying the message of the biblical text to personal experience and to the lifestyle dilemmas Christians are facing in their everyday lives. At times Bob wonders whether he should seek another church.

Scenario 4

The fourth scenario focuses on another married couple. Steve and Mary are both in their early fifties. They attended Bob's church for years, but three years ago found it difficult to get accustomed to the cerebral preaching of the new pastor. They tried, but after eighteen months decided together that they needed something different. So they joined a smaller church situated a few miles away. They felt strongly attracted by its celebratory style of worship. The long periods of praise and frequent testimonies mean that most Sundays they are able to achieve a sense of involvement in the worship. But deep down they are uneasy. There is no public reading of the Bible during the service apart from the few verses the pastor quotes at the beginning of his message. They are, of course, relieved they no longer have to face the mentally demanding ordeal of listening to 40 minute sermons couched in abstract theological jargon. On the other hand, they are slowly becoming uneasy that the Bible-teaching component in the services is so minmal. But, having moved church so recently, they hesitate to do so again. And yet a nagging doubt persists.

In these scenarios the engagement with Scripture becomes problematical in four different contexts. In an *individual* context, Marge is unable to sustain an exciting enagement with the biblical text during her daily quiet time. For John and Jean the problems occur in a *group* context - their home Bible study. Steve and Mary are concerned that their church appears to ignore Paul's command to 'give time and effort to the public reading of the Scriptures' (1 Timothy 4.13, GNB). In their case, Scripture engagement is excluded from the more formal context of *church liturgy*. Bob, along with Steve and Mary, finds that Scripture engagement has become problematical also in a church context, more specifically, in the *pulpit*. For Bob the pastor's preaching is too academic; for Steve and Mary the preaching is minimally Bible-based.

Although these four contexts are imaginary, nevertheless, all can be replicated in much of western church life today. They illustrate why the negative statistics quoted earlier about Bible use.

These four contexts of Scripture engagement illustrated by the scenarios may be re-classified into two categories – the informal and the formal. The informal covers personal and small group interaction with the biblical text, while the formal category includes the public reading of the Bible and the public proclamation of its message. For the purpose of this paper I intend to unite the two informal practices calling them *radical Scripture engagement*. I use the adjective *radical* in the light of its etymology which is in the Latin term *radix*, meaning 'roots.' I think the adjective *radical* is appropriate since both personal and group interaction with biblical texts occurs at the 'grassroots' of the churches.

Having united these two informal practices, I now wish to retain the distinction between the two formal customs, and will refer to the public recital of Scripture as *liturgical Scripture engagement*[4] and to preaching from Scripture as *rhetorical Scripture engagement*[5]. My motive in retaining the distinction is that the dynamic of congregational hearing may operate differently in each case. The reference in 1 Timothy 4.13 to the public reading of Scripture is made in a way that implies it to be a standard feature of early church worship and, therefore, liturgical. Phil Towner, Director of the Nida Institute at the American Bible Society, suggests that the importance of such liturgical reading is that it 'would remind the congregation of their identity in Christ and in covenant relation with God'[6]. In other words, hearing Scripture publicly recited when we worship together as Christians, is an affirmation by us that God's Story is our story and that we are the pilgrim people of God. On the other hand, preaching – which, along with teaching, is distinguished in 1 Timothy 4.13 from public Scripture reading – is an act not of recitation, but of proclamation. According to the German biblical scholar, Lothar Coenen, the goal of this proclamation is 'not simply the imparting of information or a formal allegiance, but a faith which involves self-surrender and trust (cf 1 Cor. 15:11).' Coenen points out that the Greek verb to preach

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[4]   The term 'liturgy', which reflects the Greek *leiturgia* (lit. 'work of the people'), refers to the rituals of public corporate worship (*A Handbook of Christian Theology: Essential information for every Christian*, M. Halverson and A. Cohen, eds., Fontana, London and Glasgow 1958).

[5]   'Rhetoric' is the art of persuasive public speaking (*Compact Oxford Dictionary, Third Edition*, C. Soanes and S. Hawker, eds., Oxford, Oxford UK, 2005).

[6]   'Public Reading of Scripture in 1 Tim 4:13 and in the Biblical Tradition,' an unpublished UBS paper.

(*kēryssō*) is one of several verbs of telling and communication used by the New Testament to describe the proclamatory activity of the early church.[7] Preaching plays a key role in stimulating hearers to engage with Scripture because it explains the meaning of a biblical passage and demonstrates its relevance for today. Normally congregations accord, implicitly if not explicitly, their preachers the right to expound Scripture authoritatively, and generally preachers do so within the perspective of the interpretive tradition to which they and their congregation belong. However, preaching as described in the New Testament is more than expository, it is also persuasive. Paul tells us that those called to fulfil the ministry of reconciliation are Christ's ambassadors through whom God makes his appeal to humanity. As ambassador Paul communicates this appeal with these words: 'We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.' (2 Cor. 5.20, TNIV). It is because the basic meaning of 'rhetoric' is 'the art of persuasive speaking'[8] that I have chosen this adjective to describe the type of Scripture engagement that good preaching aims to effect. Strictly speaking, the dictionary definition of rhetoric is 'the art of persuasive *and effective* speaking' which, in fact, neatly summarises Paul's understanding of Christian preaching. 'When I came to you,' he reminds the Corinthians, 'I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. …. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power' (1 Cor. 2.1-5, TNIV). According to Paul, for preaching to be effective, more than rhetoric is required. It must be accompanied by 'a demonstration of the Spirit's power' or, as the GNB translates, 'convincing proof of the power of God's Spirit.' It is important to recognise that this convincing activity of the Holy Spirit is also essential in making effective liturgical and radical Scripture engagement. All that will follow in this paper concerning the human role in Scripture engagement, assumes that ultimately it is the Holy Spirit who makes the engagement powerful and effective.

Having affirmed the apostolic reminder that the ultimate effectiveness of Scripture engagement is beyond human management and control, I now wish to narrow the focus by looking in greater detail at what I am calling *radical* Scripture engagement. I do this for two reasons. First,

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[7]   The other verbs include the following: to teach, to report, to say, to confess, to bear witness, to announce good news and to make known. Art. on *kēryssō, Dictionary of New Testament Theology Vol. 3*, C. Brown, ed., Paternoster and Zondervan, Exeter UK and Grand Rapids MI, 1978.

[8]   *Compact Oxford Dictionary.*

because the human-divine relationship is fundamentally personal and individual. The Wisdom literature of the OT makes this clear. Job protests to his 'friends': 'If it is true that I have gone astray, my error remains my concern alone' (Job 19.4, TNIV). The Book of Proverbs is given the setting, not of a king advising his people as a community, but of a father counselling his son as an individual (1.8, etc.). Secondly, I am zooming in on radical Scripture engagement because a recent research program (the 'Psalm Journey') which I directed in 2003-4 enables me to call upon empirical evidence concerning how individuals and small groups interact with Scripture. In this paper I intend to explore the dynamics of personal and group Scripture engagement in the hope of gaining a more complete understanding that may equip churches, Bible agencies, Christian educationalists and others to offer meaningful support to Christians like Marge, Jean and John who are struggling in their encounter with Scripture. I entitled the project the 'Psalm Journey.'

At this point I need to point out that the international audience of young adults (aged 18-30) which was the focus of my research was in some ways very different from the imaginary people who figure in the four scenarios with which I began. Only one quarter of my respondents attended church 1-4 times a month. The others were roughly evenly divided between those who attend church once or twice a year and those who do not attend at all. All except one non-attender belonged to other faiths: Saul is Jewish, Norah is Buddhist, Ashok is Hindu and Flora is Ba'hai. The exception in this last category is Kate who described herself as a Protestant, while professing to be superstitious, and testified that as a child she had baptised herself in the sink. Connie, Joan, John, Liz, and Tom, are nominally Christian, attending church once or twice a year. Edith, Elsie and Luke are regular church attenders. In all there were thirteen respondents representing a total of nine countries.[9] Although they may seem a disparate bunch, all adopted the values and expressed the felt needs that wider research has revealed to be common among young western adults, including many within our churches. In this sense my respondents were representative of their peers and may be considered to be fairly typical GenXers. Significantly all expressed an interest in contemporary spirituality and regarded themselves as being engaged in a spiritual quest for meaning and enlightenment. The majority pursued 'a spirituality of seeking' while the people who figure in my four scenarios

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[9] The international mix, which was not deliberate, reflects the high proportion of overseas postgraduate students at the University of Edinburgh.

would probably be classified as adopting 'a spirituality of belonging.'[10] Nevertheless, one would expect sufficient commonality in the way both types of seekers engage with the psalms to justify exploring the data from the Psalm Journey for clues that might help individuals like Marge and Bob and couples like Jean and John and Steve and Mary.

All thirteen of my respondents had a deep interest in spirituality and were students at the University of Edinburgh. The specific Scriptures employed in the project were six psalms selected from the biblical Book of Psalms. These psalms were chosen in the light of their perceived potential to resonate with key values and felt needs of the audience which I had ascertained during a pilot project. The felt needs / values and corresponding psalms were as follows:

	Psalm
Having a good time	126
Being well thought of	55
Desire to resolve suffering	22
High value placed on experience	30
Willingness to engage with ambiguity	73
Suspicion of religious institutions	74

The method of engagement was meditative being an adaptation of the ancient practice of Lectio Divina, I gave the project the title of 'Psalm Journey,' and worked with two focus groups of 6 and 7 members respectively. Participants made a commitment to meditate on a single psalm for one week, devoting at least ten minutes daily to this task, and to repeat the process with different psalms for the following two weeks. They also agreed to keep a journal for recording their meditative interaction with the psalmic texts. At the end of each week members of the group met together for a Lectio Divina during which they meditated again on the psalm they had interacted with over the previous seven days and shared excerpts from their journals. At the conclusion of each Psalm Journey I carried out a one-to-one interview with each respondent in order to ascertain how they evaluated the Psalm Journey experience.

The data that emerged from these three sources – the individual journals , the transcripts of the small group meditation, and the one-to-one interviews – enabled me to put together a picture of both what my respondents had heard the psalms saying to them and how they had responded. The data revealed that a 'connect' had occurred between psalms and participants. In other words it indicated that an engagement had, indeed,

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[10]   *After Heaven: Spirituality in America Since the 1950s*, by R. Wuthnow, Los Angeles / London, 1998, pp 1-9.

taken place between readers and text. After reviewing and evaluating the data I was able to identify six key components of Scripture engagement. The first of these is that a *correlation* occurs between audience and text.

CORRELATION

Correlation is sometimes described as a meaningful conversation.[11] Throughout the Psalm Journey a mental and emotional dialogue took place between the readers and the six psalms selected. Elsie, an American masters student told me: 'When I felt emotional about the psalms, it felt like I identified with what the psalmist was saying' (I-8: 7). Ashok, an Indian doctoral student, described the Psalm Journey as 'a communication between God and me' (L: 7). Edith, a doctoral student researching music in the American novel, indicated that she found she really could relate to Psalm 73 (I-11: 4). Liz, a Scandinavian masters student, said : 'I could now return to these three psalms and I know I have a relationship with them' (I-1: 4). Sometimes the conversation was calm and serene; at others it became excited, even agitated. Some respondents were less aware than others of being in conversation with the psalms. For John, a Canadian postgraduate student and a nominal Catholic, the conversation became more difficult as the Psalm Journey proceeded.

Probably conversation between text and respondents was made easier by the choice of a meditative mode of interaction. The periods of silence created space for respondents to sense the psalms resonating with their felt needs and ideals. I will now share some examples of this resonance, taking felt needs first. Luke, a British undergraduate studying Politics and Arabic, discovered that Psalm 22 fulfilled for him a therapeutic role when he found himself stressed out by overwork (Ps 22-D4). Norah, also an undergraduate, found that meditating on Psalm 126 brought relief from a state of depression (Ps 55-D2; 5). Meditating on Psalm 55 moved Liz, from Scandinavia, to share with the group the pain and devastation she had felt when her boyfriend left her (Ps 55-D1). Ashok found Psalm 73 affirming for him the importance of self-esteem. 'To me,' he wrote in his journal, 'self-realisation and fulfilment are the key aspects of finding strength in times of adversity' (Ps 73-D4). The strong emotional content of the psalms seems to have made it relatively easy for respondents to find in them an echo of their own felt needs.

Psalm Journey participants discovered the psalms resonating also with their ideals. John, a Canadian masters student, found that his high view

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[11] *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals* by D. S. Browning, Minneapolis, 1991, p 15.

of equal regard was inversely reinforced by the plea in Psalm 55 that God would wreak vengeance on the friend who had shamelessly betrayed the psalmist. 'I honestly cannot think of a time in my life,' he wrote, 'when I have felt a strong desire for vengeance, at least not nearly as strong as the poet' (Ps 55-D2-3). Meditating on this same psalm awakened in Tom, a masters student, a desire to return to Zimbabwe to 'continue the struggle to make it a better country to live in' (D7). The psalmist's rhetorical question in Psalm 30.9: 'Will the dust praise you?' challenged Edith to ponder the purpose of human life (Ps 30-D1 and 5). These examples of resonance are typical of respondents as a whole. Sometimes they responded in terms of felt needs and ideals at the same time. An interplay seemed to develop between needs, values and text creating a triadic dynamic. Respondents were able to to organise their felt needs in terms of their ideals and relate both to what they heard the texts saying to them.

In passing it is important to be aware that some distinguished theologians have argued strongly against the possibility of any correlation taking place between the Bible and a sinful humanity. For example, in his book entitled *Unleashing Scripture*, Stanley Hauerwas of Duke Divinity School, says: 'The Bible is not and should not be made accessible to merely anyone, but rather it should only be made available to those who have undergone the hard discipline of existing as part of God's people.' Hauerwas appears to imply that the long established practice of random Scripture distribution by Bible agencies and others is misguided. He quotes approvingly the nineteenth century Danish philosopher-theologian, Søren Kierkegaard's contention that 'the Bible Societies have done immeasurable harm.'[12] However, Catholic theologican David Tracy argues strongly that there can be a meaningful correlation between theology and culture.[13] And Kevin Vanhoozer, who also teaches in Chicago but from an evangelical perspective, contends that biblical authority is located in the linguistic practices of the canon of Scripture rather than in those of the church.[14] Investigation in greater depth of this divergence of opinion on the viability of correlation would be fascinating, but is beyond the limits of this paper. For the moment it suffices to report that during the Psalm Journey my non-Christian respondents correlated readily with

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[12] *Unleashing Scripture: Freeing the Bible from the Captivity of America*, by S. Hauerwas, Nashville, 1993, p 17.

[13] *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology*, by D. Tracy, New York, 1975.

[14] 'The Voice and the Actor: A Dramatic Proposal about the Ministry and Minstrelsy of Theology' in *Evangelical Futures: A Conversation on Theological Method*, J.G. Stackhouse, Jr., ed., Grand Rapids / Vancouver / Leicester, 2000, p 100.

the psalmic texts. This is clear from the following comments from three different respondents:

- 'It seems as if it [Ps 30] is reaching out to you.'[15]

- 'They [the psalms] made me think in the particular context – I'm living in this world – there's lots of stuff going on. And I never thought about religious psalms or religious texts in that context.'[16]

- 'I really liked Psalm 73. I really did relate to it.'[17]

- 'This psalm has cut through the mere context in which it was written and became modernized for me.'[18]

Similar comments could be cited from the others, illustrating the rapport that was readily established between respondent and text. Such a 'connect' between reader and text is, I suggest, a vital component of Scripture engagement because without it there can be no engagement. However, the Psalm Journey revealed that this 'connect' is a two-way street. The text, as we have seen, claims the attention of the reader. But readers also were active in a movement that was both cerebral and intuitive. This observation suggests two more components of Scripture engagement: imagination and interrogation.

IMAGINATION

I shall first explore the imaginative activity in readers' experience, because my respondents on the whole explored the text intuitively before reflecting on it more logically. A meditative reading encourages an intuitive response. Readers sit in front of the text and engage in an imaginative appreciation of it. In the mind of Joan, the bravado of 'the wicked' portrayed in Psalm 73 triggered an imaginative association with prisoners. 'The psalm makes me think,' she wrote, 'of a movie I saw recently about prison inmates. In such an environment,' she goes on, 'it is important to put up a tough image of security and pretending to be cool about things, yet underneath the surface there are many regrets and worries' (D1). Mention of 'refuge' in Psalm 73.28 prompted Edith to write: 'I'm not really sure why, but it made me think about my room. It really is the centre of the world here in Edinburgh' (D4).

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[15]   Joan, Scandinavian female masters student (L: 6)
[16]   Ashok, Indian doctoral student, (I-9: 2).
[17]   Edith, doctoral student from New Zealand (I-11: 4).
[18]   Norah, undergraduate student from Scotland (Ps 55-D5)

A great advantage of the Lectio Divina approach is that it creates space and time for biblical words and images to catch the imagination of participants enabling them 'to hear and feel the text as well as see it.'[19]   Lectio Divina is structured around several questions designed to stimulate the imagination while the meditation progresses. My adaptation of Lectio Divina for the Psalm Journey included the following questions:

- 'As the psalm is read twice, listen for the word or phrase that strikes you?'

- 'How is my life impacted by this word or phrase?'

- 'Am I being invited to respond?'

Two-thirds of the words or phrases identified by way of response to the first of these questions were figurative expressions, confirming that metaphor possesses considerable power to stimulate the human imagination. In the Psalm Journey the popular metaphors were 'We were like those who dream' (Ps 126.1); 'I am poured out like water' (Ps 22.14); 'You hid your face' (Ps 30.7); and 'Rise up, O God, and plead your cause' (Ps 74.22).

I also sought to encourage imaginative reflection during the personal meditations by providing respondents with a small number of questions to mull over as they interacted with the psalm. Here are some examples:

- Psalm 30: *What profit is there in my death ...?* (v.8). For the poet spiritual fulfilment had to be experienced now, not postponed to an afterlife. Reflect on the extent to which this insistence on immediacy resonates with you.

- Psalm 55: We all like to be well-thought of by others. Take time to allow yourself to sense the poet's abject horror when, in the midst of near-anarchy in the community and with his enemies clamouring for his head, his best friend turns against him. Have you been let down by a friend? What was your gut reaction?

- Psalm 74: The psalmist rather irreverently pictures God standing back with his hands in his pockets (v. 11) while his people's world falls apart. Verse 22 has been paraphrased: "On your feet, O God – stand up for yourself!" Reflect on whether today's believers are too polite in their prayers.

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[19]   *Analyzing the Psalms: Second Edition*, by Ernst R. Wendland, Dallas, 2002, p 205.

• Psalm 126: Allow the images of this song – dreams and streams, sowing and reaping – to run in your imagination, and see where they lead!

These questions formed part of a 'Minimal Hermeneutic' which I prepared for each psalm. The Minimal Hermeneutic was given to respondents prior to each week's meditation. It was never longer than two sides of A4 size paper and contained background information on the psalm relating to culture, linguistic expressions, and history. It avoided attempting to explain the meaning of the text. Instead it posed three to six open questions which were called 'prompts.' Some of these prompts, like those just cited above, sought to kindle respondents' imagination.

In a very real sense the psalms tease our imagination without any external help. Pronounced reliance on figurative language is one of the formal resources of Hebrew poetry which Jewish literary scholar, Robert Alter, regards as 'a particular way of imagining the world.'[20] According to John Goldingay of Fuller Seminary, this focus on metaphorical and symbolic terms in the psalms makes it easier for readers to find themselves in the texts and contributes to the universal appeal of these ancient songs.[21] Psalmic metaphors tickle the imagination, thus facilitating our capacity to engage with the text intuitively as well as logically. In the words of UBS translation consultant Ernst Wendland, expressions of verbal imagery 'encourge listeners (or readers) to mentally conceive and emotionally experience for themselves a particular situation or event by supplying them with a vivid picture or even an entire scene into which they can enter by way of their imagination.'[22]

Walter Brueggemann makes the additional point that metaphors are 'enormously elastic, giving full play to imagination in stretching and extending far beyond the concrete referent to touch all kinds of experience.'[23] If, as Richard Niebuhr claims, the human person is 'a being who grasps and shapes reality, including the actuality of his own existence, with the aid of great images, metaphors and analogies,' we ought not to be surprised that the psalms proved to be a rich resource for those who are seeking meaning and enlightenment for themselves and for life in general.[24] It is now time to move on and note that the data emerging from the Psalm Journey indicates the expressive metaphors of the Psalms offering more

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[20] *The Art of Biblical Poetry*, by Robert Alter, Edinburgh, 1985, pp 151, 160-1.

[21] *Praying the Psalms*, by J. Goldingay, Nottingham, 1993, p 14.

[22] 'A Literary Approach to Biblical Text Analysis' in *Bible Translation: Frames of Reference*, T. Wilt (ed.), Manchester UK / Northampton MA, 2003, p 218.

[23] *Praying the Psalms*, by W. Brueggemann, Winona, MN, 1982, p 30.

[24] *The Responsible Self*, by H.R. Niebuhr, New York, 1963, p 161.

than a trigger for giving vent to joy or catastrophe. A hermeneutic of imagination has, indeed, the potential to open the psalms to contemporary audiences.[25] But so also does a hermeneutic of interrogation which is the third element of Scripture engagement attested by the Psalm Journey.

INTERROGATION

A hermeneutic of interrogation involves a more analytical reading of the text. So, in addition to providing prompts to the imagination, I included in the Minimal Hermeneutic some additional prompts designed to evoke interrogative readings. I will now quote four of these prompts that were offered with the objective of inspiring respondents to interrogate the text and allow the text to interrogate them:

- Psalm 22: *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?* (v. 1). Imagine a situation in which you might have felt / might feel in the depths of despair. Then slowly and reflectively go through the text of the psalm exploring how it impacts the way you feel.

- Psalm 30: In verses 4 and 5 the poet interrupts his prayer to invite others to join him in thankfulness. Reflect on the ways in which other people contribute to your spirituality.

- Psalm 55: *The battle that I wage* (v. 18). Ask yourself how do I react to life's conflicts? (a) Opt out (vv. 6-8)? (b) Curse those who attack me (vv. 9, 15)? (c) Ask God (or some higher power) to lighten the load (v. 22)? (d) If not these, what?

- Psalm 73: The mood of the poet changes from self-pity in the face of the arrogance and violence of the powerful in his society (vv. 13-14) to a deep sense of self-fulfilment in worship (vv. 23-28). Reflect on ways in which you might become self-fulfilled without being self-centred.

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[25] Cf K. J. Vanhoozer's observation: 'The imagination is not merely the faculty of fantasy – the ability to see things not here – but rather a means for seeing what is there (e.g., the meaning of the whole) that the senses alone are unable to observe (and that the propositional alone is unable to state). The imagination is our port of entry into other modes of experience, into other modes of seeing and thinking, and as such is the unique and indispensable condition of participating in the communicative action of others' ('The Voice and the Actor: a Dramatic Proposal about the Ministry and Minstrelsy of Theology' in *Evangelical Futures: A Conversation on Theological Method*, J.G. Stackhouse, Jr., ed., Grand Rapids / Vancouver / Leicester, 2000, p 84.

Respondents, as I hoped, treated such prompts as incentives to bring their own queries to the text. Liz, for example, finds herself reflecting on her doubts about God:

> I used to think that believing in God meant giving him responsibility and then sitting back waiting to see what tricks he would pull. Now it dawns on me that it is more about accepting his help to take the full responsibility and to fuller integration and happiness (Ps. 22-D5).

The reference to the Lord restoring the fortunes of Zion (Ps. 126.1) motivated Connie to ask: 'Why, if the Lord has the power to restore the fortunes of Zion, is he allowing such suffering and sorrow in Iraq?' (D3). Psalm 73 moved Kate to asks a similar question (D5) – the first of ten she fires at Psalms 73 and 74! Here are two of them: 'Will God punish street gangs who've never had a chance in life?' (Ps 73-D5). 'How can you still believe God takes care of you when he leaves you in your darkest hours?' (Ps 74-D2). This last question arose during her meditation on the poignant lament of Psalm 74: why had God failed to intervene on behalf of his people when the Jerusalem temple was destroyed and desecrated? For Ashok, the discovery that God can be questioned was one of the high points of the Psalm Journey (I-9: 3). Respondents not only put questions to the psalmic texts; they also heard some answers. After expressing her frustration that those who flout rules and disrespect others, so often come out on top, Edith writes in her journal: 'What I receive from this psalm is the assurance that if I'm being true (to God or to myself) then things will work out as they ought' (Ps 73-D1).

We have already noted that such an interrogative approach to the biblical text does not necessarily inhibit imaginative readings. In fact, British hermeneutical scholar, Antony Thiselton, contends that asking hard questions of the biblical text complements Lectio Divina readings by saving readers from unwittingly succumbing to self-deception and from promoting self-interest. Thiselton emphasises that an interrogative safeguard is particularly important for those who come to Lectio Divina from outside given interpretive traditions.[26] Here Thiselton is adopting French literary critic Paul Ricoeur's oft-quoted idea of a 'hermeneutic of suspicion.' It should be borne in mind that, although the phrase 'hermeneutic of suspicion' is often popularly employed to denote a sceptical reading of the biblical text, this may be a misuse of Ricoeur's terminology. The key point made by Thiselton is that in attempting to internalise a biblical text, meditative and interrogative readings enrich one another. Paul Ricoeur's con-

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[26] *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading*, by A.C. Thiselton, Grand Rapids, 1992, pp 575-582.

cept of a 'second naïvete' calls on us to return to an intuitive appreciation of the text before ending our engagement with it. Ricoeur's paradigm, when loosely related to popular psychology's division of the human brain into two hemispheres, offers a helpful dynamic for Scripture engagement. The right hemisphere of the brain stimulates our intuition, imagination, etc., while the left hemisphere coordinates our analytical and logical processes. Ricoeur's paradigm encourages us to begin appreciation of a text by using the right hemisphere, then to move to the left, and finally to return to the right. On this understanding the marching call for the church militant to advance in Scripture engagement would be 'right-left-right!' In other words, begin with imagination, continue with interrogation, end by returning to imagination. So far, I have identified three components of Scripture engagement: correlation, imagination and interrogation. It is now time to move to a fourth, which is contextualisation.

CONTEXTUALISATION

My Psalm Journey respondents did more than internalise the biblical text in human experience via exercising their faculties of imagination and examination. They also sought to contextualise the text in the external world. It was fascinating to note that they had little difficulty in discovering the relevance of the psalms for today. Their meditation was informed by knowledge of contemporary events gleaned from newspapers, radio or television. Again and again they used the psalms as a lens for evaluating the week's news. The war in Iraq, the politcal crisis in Zimbabwe, the conflict between Palestinians and Israelis, and the economic exploitation of consumers by business corporations, all featured in individual journals and were shared in the Lectio Divina. So also did consideration of powerful political leaders of the time like George W. Bush, Tony Blair, Ariel Sharon and Saddam Hussein.[27]

John records in his journal that he found Psalm 126 'a good symbolic tool' for capturing the daily 'cycle of celebrations and tribulations' (D5). As the Psalm Journey proceeded, Ashok from India found himself progressively empathising with psalmic spirituality, discovering to his surprise that the psalms relate to everyday life (I-9: 2). Edith told the weekly group meditation that the rhetorical question of Psalm 30.9 – 'Will the dust praise you?' – brought home to her the futility of a suicide bombing that had taken place the previous day in the Iraqian city of Basra (L3).

Such reflections by Psalm Journey participants belies the popular notion that the Bible is no longer relevant in the modern world. These

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[27]   The Psalm Journey took place in the first half of 2004.

young adults, most of whom had only a very tentative link or no link at all with the Christian church, readily brought together the ancient horizon of the Old Testament psalms with the contemporary horizon of the modern world. They demonstrated 16th century Genevan reformer John Calvin's famous dictum about the Scriptures being spectacles that enable human beings to view life from a divine perspective.[28] Evidence from the Psalm Journey suggests that the current disposition of young adults pursuing an interest in spirituality would be receptive to appropriate promotions of the Bible as a handbook for everyday living. It is this ability on the part of these contemporary seekers to contextualise biblical texts in modern everyday events as a means to evaluate such events, that prompts me to propose the fourth feature of Scripture engagement to be the contextualisation in the contemporary world of the message of whatever passage is in view. Once again, it's time to pause for breath and then to move on. The four elements of Scripture engagement noted so far are: correlation, imagination, interrogation and contextualisation. The Psalm Journey project highlighted two more, the first of which is actualisation.

ACTUALISATION

The Psalm Journey not only indicates that meditating on the psalms enabled respondents to view the world from a new perspective. Meditation also inspired them to action. The action respondents were prompted to take might be broadly described in terms of the traditional terminology of faith and works. Participants in the meditation were challenged to make a faith commitment and also to do something to make the world a better place.

We have already noted that most respondents became aware of the text making a claim upon them. In some cases this took the form of a claim on personal allegiance.

Joan told the others during the weekly Lectio Divina that she sensed Psalm 30 'reaching out' to her. 'For me,' she said, 'the psalmist was inviting, wanting me to believe in God' (Ps 30-L: 6). However, Joan declined the invitation because she remained unconvinced about the message of the psalm. Liz also acknowledged that a psalm (in her case Psalm 126) had challenged her to renew her faith. But she indicates in her journal that she dare not expose herself to the risk of believing in God (Ps 126-D6). However, in her follow-up interview Liz told me she was 'hanging on' to the possibility of exploring God further. Epiphanies may have been in

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[28]   'Commentaries on the First Book of Moses called Genesis' in *Calvin's Commentaries Vol I*, J. King (tr.), Grand Rapids, 1979, p 62.

short supply, but the data indicates that although the Psalm Journey experience fell short of effecting a definite faith commitment, it succeeded in motivating some respondents into action. John tells us in his journal how he repeated Psalm 22 on behalf of a friend who was passing through a difficult time and 'feeling especially alienated and alone' (Ps 22-D6). Tom, who wrote in his journal: 'I sometimes get tired of being a Zimbabwean,' was reminded by Psalms 55 and 126 of his duty to return to his homeland and share in the suffering of his people (Pss 55-D7; 126-D2). Meditating on Psalm 126 also induced Tom to clean up the university apartment he shared with two other students after they had repeatedly left the kitchen in a mess. He told us that he did so thinking: 'Maybe if I sow in tears I will reap with shouts of joy' (Ps 126-D4). Edith told how the Psalm Journey had helped her find an 'even keel' in bringing closure to a broken relationship: 'I deleted all the emails of the correspondence that took place, so that there was no way I could go back and dwell on it' (I-11: 11). Liz, who earlier said she didn't dare expose herself to the risk of believing in God, attended church on the Sunday immediately after completing the Psalm Journey (I-1:6). Tom and Ashok also reported that independently of each other they had gone to church following their three week meditation on the psalms. It was the first time Ashok had ever been in a church.

In addition to comparing the Bible to spectacles, John Calvin stressed the importance of putting the Scriptures into practice. Commentating on the command to be 'doers of the word, and not merely hearers' (James 1.22), he writes: 'We ought to labour that the word of the Lord should strike roots in us, so that it may afterwards fructify.'[29] The sixteenth century Genevan reformer reminds us that the ultimate objective of Scripture engagement is for the text to become actualised in our everyday lives, effecting transformation of personality and lifestyle. This desired outcome of Scripture engagement reminds us that the writer to the Hebrews declares the word of God to be 'alive and active, sharper than any two-edged sword' (4.12). It is, he says, like a sword that 'cuts all the way through, to where soul and spirit meet, to where joints and marrow come together' (GNB). It judges our most inaccessible thoughts and secret intentions with devastating effect: 'Everything in all creation is exposed and lies open' before God's eyes. The Greek verb translated by the GNB as 'exposed' and by the TNIV as 'uncovered' is an uncommon word which was sometimes used in the ancient world of a wrestler siezing his opponent and pinning him down, rendering him unable to move.

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29   'Commentaries on the Epistle of James' in *Calvin's Commentaries Vol XXII*, J. Owen (tr), Grand Rapids, 1979, p 297.

At first sight it is difficult to recognise in the data flowing from the Psalm Journey such dynamic critical power confronting respondents and obtaining a wrestler's submission. While there may have been no submissions, there is, as we have seen, evidence of a degree of actualisation of the Psalm texts in the everyday life of respondents. All indicated that they were now more likely to return to the psalms and the Bible. When asked 'What is different as a result of the Psalm Journey?' Saul's answer was: 'I now have a Bible on my desk.' Who knows, the Psalm Journey may yet turn out to be the beginning of a new spiritual odyssy into the wider Bible story. In the light of the positive impact of the Scriptures on human lives in many languages and cultures, the degree of actualisation the daily meditation effected over the three-week period of the Psalm Journey may reasonably be attributed to the self-authenticating faculty of the psalmic texts.[30] Such authentication of the psalms in the lived experience of respondents is the sixth element of Scripture engagement that was highlighted by the Psalm Journey.

AUTHENTICATION

My respondents without exception engaged with the text – they all listened to it, many wrestled with it, some affirmed it and some contradicted it. They did so because they became aware that the psalms were making a claim on their lives. They may not have responded to this claim by making a life-commitment, but all engaged with the text according it an initial upper case 'T'. The psalm texts did more than resonate with the needs and ideals of respondents. By providing a context in which participants in the Psalm Journey were able to seek a greater understanding of their spiritual identity and place in the world, they also evoked a sense of respect. Walter Brueggemann suggests that the prophetic writings of the Old Testament, originally uttered by people inspired with alternative visions of the future of the world, became what he describes as 'lingering texts,' preserved and revered by generations of faithful people. Brueggemann observes that from time to time during later generations these ancient texts suddenly burst into new life, exploding with unexpected relevance in new situations.[31] This explosion of unexpected relevance enables such texts to authenticate themselves in the experience of new generations.

Participants in the Psalm Journey recognised that the ancient psalms, are, indeed, lingering texts. They would probably hesitate to describe the

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[30] Anecdotal evidence of the life impacting power of the Scriptures abounds in the publications of Bible agencies. See, for example, issues of the *UBS World Report.*

[31] *Texts that Linger, Words that Explode*, by W. Brueggemann, ref

impact in their case as explosive, but most would agree that the effect was enlightening and uplifting. Their reaction suggests that they discovered the Book of Psalms to be no ordinary text. I doubt if most would be ready to ascribe to the six psalms the status of 'Holy Scripture,' but they freely acknowledged that these ancient songs resonated with their personal spiritual quest to find meaning and fulfilment in life.

This response suggests that the psalms fulfilled for respondents a role that German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer accords to a 'religious classic.' Catholic theologian David Tracy of Chicago has given visibility to Gadamer's concept in American theology. According to Tracy, classic texts 'so disclose a compelling truth about our lives that we cannot deny them some kind of normative status.'[32] Tracy's words aptly describe the Psalm Journey experience of my respondents. It is for this reason I would contend that human interaction with biblical texts may be classified as 'Scripture engagement,' without a requirement that readers attribute divine inspiration to these texts. But, on the other hand, it is unlikely that Psalm Journey respondents would have interacted with the psalms in the ways they did, had these psalms not earned in the eyes of respondents a status equivalent to that of religious classics.

The capacity of psalms and other biblical passages to authenticate themselves in the lived experience of readers and hearers is attributed by Christians to the Holy Spirit. Whatever our role may be in Scripture engagement – be it as readers, facilitators, encouragers, or teachers – it is not our expertise that endows the sacred text with authority. The Westminster Confession of Faith, which serves as the doctrinal standard of my own confessional family, recognises that while a high view of Scripture can be argued for and defended, ultimately human assurance of the Bible's divine authority comes 'from the work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the word in our hearts.'[33] For this reason genuine Scripture engagement will in the end always be art rather than science.

However, being an art does not exclude Scripture engagement from empirical analysis. As has been, I hope, demonstrated, Scripture engagement in its radical or grassroots dimension, can be analysed into the following six inter-related and active components: correlation, imagina-

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[32] *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism*, by D. Tracy, New York, 1981, p 108. For Tracy classic texts are cultural or religious texts that communities have come to regard as normative (pp 248-49).

[33] *Confession of Faith*, 1955, Edinburgh, Section I.V. Kevin Vanhoozer argues that the relation between Word and Spirit is helpfully accounted for by viewing Scripture as being composed of divine-human speech acts. (*Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, Grand Rapids / Leicester, 1998, p. 426).

tion, interrogation, contextualisation, actualisation and authentication. If we convert these six elements into a narrative, the following definition emerges:

> Scripture engagement is personal, group or community interaction with the biblical text which creates sufficient opportunity for that text to speak for itself. Scripture engagement is essentially discovery learning that activates both hemispheres of the human brain (right as well as left) and enables readers (or listeners) to discover for themselves the unique claim the text is making upon them.

This is, of course, an empirical rather than a theological definition. It is one that I think all of my respondents – less than one third of whom, let me remind you, are active churchgoers – would agree with. Because of this I suggest that it offers a common basis of understanding on which churches, Bible agencies and Christian educationalists might invite non-Christians to explore Scripture texts despite prevailing suspicions of the church and popular wariness of the Bible. Acting on such a common basis of understanding would, I believe, open up the Bible to the current generation of westernised young adults who see themselves as spiritual seekers who are allergic to the churches.

In conclusion, I wish to highlight two ways of utilising the six elements of Scripture engagement identified in this paper in attempts to communicate the Bible to our postmodern culture,. Each of these two ways focuses on a distinct audience. The first concerns spiritual seekers who resolutely remain outside churches of all manifestations from traditional to emergent. For such an audience the components of Scripture engagement could be translated into the following user-friendly six steps to be followed in the exploration of any Scripture text.

SIX STEPS OF SCRIPTURE ENGAGEMENT

1. Making contact

Be still and silent for a few moments. Get quiet inside. Then read the text several times. Spend time pondering over it. Ignore for now any extra-textual helps. Listen to what the Scripture text is saying. Let it sink in. Discover where it 'clicks' with you. Find points of contact with your lived experience that will serve as bridges between you and the text.

2. Getting out of the box

Enter the Scripture text in your imagination. If it is a story, picture the scene, using all your senses: hear the sounds, smell the smells. Imagine you are one of the characters. Or an onlooker. If the Scripture is a poem, or a bunch of proverbs, play with the metaphors, stretching them to their limits. If the Scripture is from an epistle, imagine it being read for the first time in the church to which it was orginally sent. Imagine the body language of the reader, and of the congregation. Imagine the discussion afterwards.

3. Cross-examining

Bring to the Scripture text any questions that may have arisen in your mind during the previous two steps. Direct these questions to the text. Does the text offer any answers? Identify any questions the text may be putting to you. Try to give honest answers. Make a note of these questions and answers. Now consult any available extra-textual 'helps' (commentary, background notes) on the passage. Reflect again on the questions and answers, making a note of any helpful clarifcation the helps have provided.

4. Wearing the spectacles

Re-read the passage. Take time to allow it to capture your imagination again. Then reflect on some of the items in this week's news. View them through the lens of the passage, again taking your time. Imagine you're a TV news journalist reporting one of these events on Channel NSP ('News in Scriptural Perspective'). What would you tell viewers?

5. Making it happen

Identify one thing you think the text is asking you to do to help others? If you're game, do it!

6. Knowing the score

Weigh up how you have responded to any claims the text is making on you?

The second audience I have in mind who might benefit from this type of 'open' Scripture engagement program is composed of people within our churches who are finding engaging with the Bible difficult and even boring. The six steps, expressed slightly more theologically, might rekindle the waning enthusiasm for the Bible of individuals like Marge and Bob, and family couples like John and Jean and Steve and Mary, all of whom we met in my opening four scenarios. The six steps in this case would be

set in a theological context that explicitly acknowledges the work of the Holy Spirit in animating the Scriptures so that we come to hear the voice of God speaking in and through them and to encounter Jesus Christ as he steps out of the sacred page into our lives.

These two audiences respectively illustrate the challenge the churches today face in mounting successful programs of evangelism and discipleship. The key to success in the case of both audiences is a life-challenging and a life-transforming encounter with the Word of God.

As a postscript these two quotations may be appropriate:

'Meditation moves from looking at the words of the text to entering the world of the text.'[34]

'You can't hear God speak to someone else, you can hear him only if you are being addressed.'[35]

[Delivered on February 12, 2009 at Taylor University]

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[34] *Eat This Book: A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading*, by E.H. Peterson, London / Sydney / Auckland, 2006, p 99.
[35] In Peterson, 2006, p 79

REVIEWS

The Recalcitrant Imago Dei: Human Persons and the Failure of Naturalism
J. P. Moreland
London: SCM Press, 2009. ISBN: 978-0-334-04215-0. xiii + 210pp.
£40.00

Moreland's latest consolidates the criticisms of naturalism that he's de-
veloped over the last fifteen years, offering a sustained case against the
prevailing philosophical worldview. His argument, in short, is this: Many
naturalists acknowledge that *the* challenge for their view of the cosmos is
to explain how we fit into it. But naturalism does not have room for us; it
cannot account for obvious facts about persons. So, either we must deny
the obvious – that we are conscious, free, rational, and inherently valuable
entities – or we must abandon the theory according to which we lack these
qualities. But if we abandon naturalism, and if our having these proper-
ties is more consonant with a theistic framework than any other, then we
have good reason to be theists.

   The book moves at fast clip. Moreland begins by describing the diffi-
culties that face naturalistic accounts of the emergence of the mental from
the non-mental, appealing primarily to Jaegwon Kim's exclusion argu-
ment and conceivability arguments. He then turns to the shortcomings of
naturalistic theories of free will, rationality, teleology, and normativity,
devoting considerable attention to John Searle's biological naturalism. He
goes on to defend substance dualism and criticize constitution and hylo-
morphic alternatives. Moreland also challenges evolutionary accounts of
human moral behavior and champions J. L. Mackie's famous queerness
argument to the effect that naturalism is incompatible with *sui generis*
moral properties. The book ends with an appendix that takes on Thomas
Nagel's recent attempt to legitimate the failure of naturalism to provide
any explanation for our rationality and ability to understand the world.

   The Recalcitrant Imago Dei systematically presents a series of impor-
tant objections against naturalism, the joint force of which make it plain
that the reigning philosophical orthodoxy cannot accommodate a host of
facts that seem to be constitutive of what and who we are. Moreover, it is
one the few books that correctly identifies the *imago dei* as the locus of
those facts and develops a broadly biblical anthropology that makes sense
of them.

   Nevertheless, I can offer only a qualified recommendation of this book
to the readership of *SBET.* There are two main problems. The first is that,

for those not already familiar with the debates on which Moreland is com-
menting, the text will be unnecessarily difficult to follow: Moreland tries
to cover an enormous amount of material in 180 pages; consequently, he
is unable to provide the reader much by way of introduction to the rather
technical points at issue, and even less to orient the reader to the larger
philosophical issues at stake. The second problem is that Moreland gives
the reader the false impression that driving home the conflict between an
appealing view of persons and naturalism is itself sufficient to make the
case against naturalism. Although it's true that naturalism cannot accom-
modate the view of persons to which he's committed, that fact is not news
(as Moreland himself repeatedly illustrates with quotes from prominent
naturalists). The most challenging recent work in philosophical anthro-
pology *questions* our justification for the appealing view of persons, and
that is where the debate now lies. It is this conversation to which Chris-
tians must contribute if they are to fend off successfully the scientism that
Moreland rightly decries.

In Moreland's defence, he was not out to write a tome containing all
the requisite background material, and he undoubtedly thinks the com-
monsense view of persons has more warrant than do any of the arguments
against it. Still, the above shortcomings are bound to limit the audience
and the usefulness of this volume.

R. W. Fischer, University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, IL USA

The Open Secret: A New Vision for Natural Theology
Alister E. McGrath
Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008. ISBN: 978-1-4051-2691-5. 384pp.
£23.99.

There resides a tension in Western Christianity that can be traced back at
least as far as the Reformation. The tension concerns revelation. To de-
scribe this tension using the language faculty psychology, it amounts to the
question of whether revelation's conduit is the intellect or the will. While
the story is much more complicated, the models of revelation formed on
these two approaches can be described, respectively, as the positions of
grace and justification. The first necessitates a certain elevation of human
intellect to the mystery *that* there is a God; the second presupposes only
that God confronts and turns the human will.

To no small degree, Alister McGrath's book *The Open Secret* could at
first very well be interpreted as an attempt to mediate these historical ap-
proaches to revelation. That is, McGrath claims to interpret nature in light
of the Christ event. Accordingly, he seems fully to admit that the conduit
of revelation is God's justifying work on human will. He claims this, how-

ever, while simultaneously admitting that this event provides a new way to read, even the best rational way to read, 'the book of nature': as reflective of—as saying something about—the Christian God. The syntheses promised in this book are both potent and needed.

These ideas are expanded through three skillfully developed sections, each containing a well developed argument. In the first section, McGrath shows the relationship between nature and mind, arguing forcefully that human mental categories are at least partially constitutive of 'nature', and that just such a position is itself 'natural'. Using this critical realist epistemology, McGrath rejects in the second section certain strands of Enlightenment naturalistic thought, strands that emphasize some *single* rational reading of the book of nature impressed, as it were, upon humanity's passive mind. Rather, nature's text is 'ambiguous', dependent on the value-structures and categories of the human reader. There is accordingly a penumbra of possible *readings* of nature, and McGrath argues in incarnational terms that the very best reading is that opened in the Christ event. The implications of this re-envisioned natural theology are drawn out in the third section where McGrath gives renewed meaning to the transcendentals. He argues that the concepts of truth, beauty, and goodness are reanimated in the Christian read of nature, thereby reestablishing, respectively, a sense of meaning, value, and goodness in and to the natural order. To his credit, McGrath also openly confronts difficult questions in these sections such as the question of natural evil in evolutionary developments.

Alas, at the end of the book, the question that remains for this reader is whether or not McGrath properly understood the nature of the mediation that he promised when he spoke originally of interpreting nature in light of the Christ event. As the point of revelation, such a promise must unfold within a robust christology. The christology McGrath develops, while dynamic, vibrant, and teeming with life, teems with the life of a transcendental Thomist and the intellectualist stance toward revelation such takes. In other words, Christ is not an event for McGrath in the sense intended by the likes of Jüngel—an act of justifying grace whereby the will is unexpectedly turned toward right relationship with God. Instead, like Rahner, Christ is more akin to the ontological meeting point of humanity, nature, and God in and through God's incarnate creation. This meeting point is first known through intellect, meaning McGrath falls squarely within the tradition of grace. Broken promises or false expectations aside, the book is both a good and valuable read.

Eric Hall, Claremont Graduate University, Claremont, CA USA

Evangelicals and Empire: Christian Alternatives to the Political Status Quo
Bruce Ellis Benson and Peter Goodwin Heltzel (eds)
Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2008. ISBN: 978-1-58743-235-4. 326pp.
£14.99

Many of today's self-identifying evangelicals realise a desperate need to re-evaluate their support of the political status quo. *Evangelicals and Empire (EE)* represents one attempt to do just that; though with its diverse collection of authors the volume is perhaps best described as 'conversation-starter' rather than sustained argument. In fact, the title-word 'empire' is itself responding to conversations sparked by recent bestsellers *Empire* (Harvard, 2000) and *Multitude* (Penguin, 2004), where political theorists Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri identify modern imperialism as (in the words of our editors) 'the global economic empire [that] belongs to everyone and no one' (p. 12). For Hardt and Negri, this signifies a shift *away* from emphasising nation-based imperial projects and toward confronting today's 'ever-strengthening power of free-market capitalism' (p. 12), the sheer quasi-personal force of which exacerbates economic inequalities and promotes elitist politics worldwide. *EE* is thus conceived in the stream of this provocative and controversial thesis. Its multiple contributors employ Hardt/Negri (non-evangelicals and non-Christians themselves) as a point of departure for examining ways in which evangelicalism may meet or fail the demand to resist oppressive politics and economics worldwide. Several points arise which merit our attention. In this review we shall limit ourselves to two general observations.

The first centres on the problematic term *evangelical*. Some authors object to the word, and not a few find its common association with white/conservative/American/Protestant as historically naïve and theologically pretentious. What troubles them most, however, is how few evangelicals (and the media that represent them) recognise the complexities implicit to it. So what is evangelicalism? It is not conservatism or orthodoxy, decries one interlocutor (p. 187). It is neither historically white (chs. 12, 14, 17), nor exclusively American (ch. 11), contend several others. And it should not be viewed as the only conceivable future for Christianity (chs. 13, 17). Confused over again by journalist and theologian alike – the renowned J.I. Packer is accused of 'pompously' defining evangelicalism by a strange sort of myopic historiography (p. 111) – the label 'evangelical' sustains as much pressure from these authors as the imperialism they seek to confront by it. Their reason is much more than semantics, too. Indeed for many scholars, the overtly facile definition of the word lies at the heart of evangelical collusion with power that they aim to protest.

Somewhat separate from these ventures, another group of scholars argues that Christian political witness which is truly *evangelical* cannot rest upon the a-teleological, non-transcendent principles underwriting Hardt/Negri's thesis. For these scholars the question is not simply 'how to subvert empire' but rather 'what is true politics,' and particularly what is true *evangelical* politics. Is Hardt/Negri's 'will to be against' theologically permissible (ch. 6)? Should immanence replace transcendence in our Christian response to empire (chs. 15, 18)? Not surprisingly, a direct challenge to Hardt/Negri issues from the corner of the Radical Orthodoxy crowd. John Milbank's essay sustains an unyielding criticism of the late-modern liberalism that dominates contemporary Western politics (ch. 7). What matters to Milbank is that Christian theology receives its due as the source and sustenance of the West's many cherished political institutions – what Hardt/Negri would just as well do without. To what extent that debt needs be recognised is debated (pp. 253-4); yet it is clear that for Milbank and sympathisers, evangelicals are called not to spontaneous *ad hoc* subversiveness but true political thinking. Which requires, argues Michael Horton, not the radical deconstruction of the evangelical witness, not the 'pilgrimage without a destination' of Hardt/Negri (p. 257), but the right kind of *theological* dynamic articulated between what St. Augustine famously described as the heavenly city and the earthly city; the supreme good, and the common good for which every Christian must labour to preserve.

What *EE* imparts to evangelicals is not so much a single programme for reform but a multifaceted assault on Christian complacency in the days of modern empire. No doubt many articles will frustrate those for whom 'evangelical' denotes something definite and absolute, but this is to be welcomed rather than pre-empted. Indeed it is a virtue of this volume that its contributors disagree so much, that the mutual point of departure is the work of non-evangelical scholars, rather than the representative of any one tradition in Christianity. This allows for a whole range of important voices to emerge. Recommended reading.

Ian Clausen, University of Edinburgh

The Infinite Merit of Christ: The Glory of Christ's Obedience in the Theology of Jonathan Edwards

Craig Biehl
Reformed Academic Press, 2009, ISBN: 978-0-9800370-3-6. xvii + 271pp. $22.95

Biehl's dissertation-turned-book attempts to fill the christological lacuna in Edwards studies by focusing on Christ as the centrepiece of Edwards'

trinitarian theology. Dissertations and articles addressing christology and the various doctrines of redemption are on the rise. Nonetheless, this work is the first focused entirely on Christ's work of meriting salvation for the elect. Biehl contrasts his thesis to what he sees as revisionist interpretations which abstract Edwards from his Reformed Orthodox moorings; Sang Hyun Lee, Gerald McDermott, Anri Morimoto receive the most attention, but neo-orthodox interpreters like Niebuhr, Elwood and Robert Jenson are also discussed.

Biehl's analysis begins with the trinitarian nature of God's glory as it is communicated to his elect creatures as the ultimate purpose of God's work in the world. The focal point of this work is Christ's perfect obedience to God's rule of righteousness. Concentrating his attention on God's economic movement, chapter 2 attends to Edwards' understanding of the pre-temporal covenant of redemption and its trinitarian origin. Chapters 3-5 examine Christ's role as the second Adam, where God the Father, invoking the covenant of redemption made with Christ, demands perfect obedience to his law. The only basis of salvation for man under Adam is Christ's perfect obedience providing pardon from sin as well as, necessarily, perfect positive righteousness imputed to the elect. Through Christ's work believers partake in God's ultimate purpose of displaying and communicating his glory, as well as providing union and communion of believers with the Trinity.

Biehl takes a polemical posture at the outset of the volume, seeking to 'let Edwards speak for himself' rather than having the secondary material set the interpretive agenda; he believes the latter has mostly clouded the clarity Edwards himself brought to these issues. He is rightly concerned that modern sensibilities are frustrated by Edwards' exclusivist and scripture-centric accounts and therefore offer interpretive grids to read Edwards that reorient his thought.

While this means Biehl does an excellent job of addressing the various topics in a way true to Edwards and his theology, it unfortunately gives rise to some curious features, features which restrict the usefulness and reliability of his work.

First, one wonders if 'letting Edwards speak for himself' necessarily entails dismissing whole schools of thought without engagement. One can respect Biehl's concern for purity of interpretation. But when interpretive options are suppressed by ignoring alternative readings altogether, it begins to seem as though 'letting Edwards speak for himself' is more of an excuse to neglect critical scholarship than a legitimate goal. One begins to worry that Biehl believes his interpretive decisions are beyond question, and that he does not need to address the major debates in Edwards studies.

Not only does Biehl rid himself of scholarly decisions, he also surprisingly ignores the interpretive issues of genre, dating and development. Edwards wrote in a variety of forms – sermons, notebooks, Bible notes, letters, biographies, narratives, theological treatises, apologies, among others – for a variety of reasons and at different stages in his life. Surely one wishing to let Edwards be himself would be careful to discuss the complexity of Edwards' writing and purposes. And yet Biehl is as free from Edwards on these important details as he is from Edwards' modern students.

Moreover, the work is so dominated by block quotations of Edwards that it may be more accurate to call Biehl the compiler rather than the author of this work. One endorser lauds that there are eight-hundred quotes from Edwards in the volume and suggests that this is what it means to 'let Edwards speak for himself'. Again, one can appreciate Biehl's concern to let Edwards be Edwards, but not when it means Biehl leaves the reader to simply read Edwards without guidance.

Biehl does take up a lacuna in the field, and his book helpfully collects important passages from Edwards' corpus. But his failure to engage with broader theological and historical issues coupled with his cavalier dismissal of Edwards scholarship make this volume unfortunately anemic.

Kyle Strobel, University of Aberdeen

Old Testament Theology: A Thematic Approach
Robin Routledge
Nottingham: InterVarsity Press, 2008. ISBN: 978-1-8447-4286-8. 384pp., £16.99.

Routledge's stated goal in *Old Testament Theology* is to provide a textbook on the title topic that would be suitable 'for the ordinary student or pastor' (p. 9). To this end the book is divided into ten chapters, each dealing with major themes in OT theology. Routledge begins with a rather long introductory chapter on the nature and interpretation of the OT. This chapter also contains an historical overview of the discipline of OT theology which the first time reader should probably skip as it is somewhat laborious and primarily of interest to OT scholars. This is followed by chapters on the nature and attributes of God and the Spirit and on creation in the OT. Five chapters discuss the various ways that God relates to his people: through covenant, through the giving of instruction and the law, and through the mediatory roles of priest and kings. These chapters also discuss the appropriate response of the people to God: sacrifices, keeping of religious festivals, worship, and right living. The final two chapters describe the OT views on the future, including messianic hopes, death

and the possibility of the after life, and on God's providential relationship to foreign nations.

In general Routledge has succeeded in discussing his topics at a level that would be appropriate for pastors or advanced undergraduates, who make up his intended audience. As such, this book is an excellent starting point for the investigation of various areas of OT theology. This starting point is especially suitable as Routledge begins each section by carefully cross-referencing relevant monographs, articles, and passages in other major OT theologies. In addition, there is an extensive bibliography as well as scripture, author, and subject indices allowing the reader to quickly locate pertinent passages. Routledge generally provides concise explication of the major positions on each issue, by drawing from a broad range of secondary sources, before his own view, generally in step with the standard evangelical positions, is argued for. A careful reading of Routledge's sections on difficult questions in the OT will be especially rewarding. In this section, which is exemplary of the scholarship of the book as a whole, Routledge exposits OT passages that wrestle with difficult questions such as 'why do the wicked prosper?' and 'why do the wicked suffer?' (e.g. Gen 18.25; Jer 12.1; and Job).

Unfortunately, especially in the first chapter, Routledge is perhaps less than charitable when, for example, associating 'the broad sweep of the new literary criticism' with postmodern pluralism (p. 64) or claiming that systematic theology 'necessarily involves imposing an alien order and structure on [the OT]' (p. 28). This second claim is especially ironic as many of Routledge's section headings, such as 'God is personal' (p. 102) or 'God's Transcendence' and 'God's immanence' (p. 132), could have been plucked directly from a systematic theology. Furthermore, this reader is frequently disappointed that Routledge does not follow the various themes which he addresses through to their culmination in Christ Jesus. For example, the discussion of the priesthood (pp. 180-185) has no reference to the great high priest (Heb 4.14) nor does the discussion of Adam and the Fall refer to the one of whom Adam was a type (Rom 5.14). Despite these drawbacks, *Old Testament Theology* is a welcome answer to a felt need for a textbook length overview of the major theological topics of the OT.

Nathan Chambers, Langley, Washington USA

Jesus through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels

Kenneth Bailey
London: SPCK, 2008. ISBN 978-0281059751. 400pp. £12.99.

Kenneth Bailey combines personal experience with academic acumen in his investigation of the cultural milieu of the Gospels. In order to understand particular Gospel stories in light of Middle Eastern culture, he reflects upon his sixty years as a resident in the Middle East and incorporates material that English-speaking academics have frequently neglected—Arabic translations of the New Testament, ancient Syriac and Arabic Christian literature, and the insights of medieval and modern Middle Eastern New Testament scholars. Any comparison of twentieth- and first-century Middle Eastern culture is bound to be anachronistic, yet Bailey's biographical excerpts are entertaining and provide texture to Gospel stories that address political, social, and economical injustice.

The monograph is divided into six parts: The Birth of Jesus (Chs 1-4), The Beatitudes (5-6), The Lord's Prayer (7-10), Dramatic Actions of Jesus (11-13), Jesus and Women (14-20), and Parables of Jesus (21-32). Particular attention is given to the synoptic gospels; only two chapters are devoted to the Fourth Gospel and both deal with Jesus' interactions with women—'The Woman at the Well' (Jn 4.1-42) and 'The Lady is not for Stoning' (Jn 7.53-8.11). Although Bailey provides novel hypotheses for the exclusion of this latter pericope from our earliest manuscripts (it may have promoted adultery) and the identification of Jesus' script in the dust ('death' or 'kill her' or 'stone her with stones'), they are not entirely convincing (p. 235).

Most chapters follow a common form: a chart that clarifies the rhetorical structure of the pericope, followed by the interpretation and exegesis of the passage, concluding with a list of key points. Bailey frequently draws attention to the 'ring composition' of a pericope—a rhetorical tool that emphasizes the main point of the passage. However, the numerous cross-references to other canonical and extra-canonical literature, while interesting and thought-provoking, tend to saturate the main point with extraneous material, which is eventually diluted when immersed with other key points in the chapter summary. (Which of the fifteen key points from 'The Woman at the Well' is the main point? (pp. 215-216))

Despite these quibbles, Bailey provides valuable insight into the cultural peculiarities of the Middle East that help us read the Gospels 'through Middle Eastern eyes' and see things we may have missed. Mary's anxiety about Martha's behavior may be that she simply wanted someone to help peel the potatoes, but Bailey draws attention to the odd-

ity of female disciples and suggests that Mary's anxiety is related to the cultural shame she would have felt because her little sister is 'seated with the men and has become a disciple of Rabbi Jesus' (p. 193). Bailey also elucidates how shameful it was for Zacchaeus to run and climb a tree on the outskirts of town, yet this demonstrated his sincere zeal for Jesus that later materialized in his exaggerated (yet culturally acceptable) promise to repay those he had wronged (pp. 176-182). Yet the best chapter is the first. After numerous penetrating questions that undermine the traditional setting of Jesus' birth in a stable, Bailey concludes, 'The child was born in the normal surroundings of a peasant sometime after they arrived in Bethlehem, and there was no heartless innkeeper with whom to deal' (p. 36). It is somewhat unfortunate that I will never be able to attend a traditional Christmas pageant without feeling a sense of scepticism, yet this feeling is welcome in that it makes us question our traditional Western interpretations of familiar gospel stories, which is Bailey's intention throughout the monograph.

Lorne R. Zelyck, University of Cambridge

A Bird's Eye-View of Paul: The Man, His Mission and His Message
Michael F. Bird
Nottingham: InterVarsity Press, 2008. ISBN 978-1844742554. 192pp. £8.99.

Michael Bird, Lecturer in New Testament at Highland Theological College, intends to provide a guide to Paul and his letters for undergraduate students, lay persons, and pastors.

The first chapter focuses on answering the question, 'Who is Paul?' Bird organises his response to this question by discussing Paul as a persecutor, missionary, theologian, pastor and martyr. In chapter two, Bird deals with the material in the New Testament related to Paul's conversion. Issues covered in this chapter include the chronology of Paul's life, the grounds for his persecution of Christians, and how his theology shifted post-conversion. The third chapter begins the treatment of Paul's theology by focusing on the 'narratives' which underlie his thought. Here, Bird draws upon recent research which argues for the presence of six fundamental stories – God and creation; Adam and Christ; Abraham; Israel; Jesus; the Church – which directly impact Paul's beliefs. In his fourth chapter, Bird provides a concise summary of each of the Pauline epistles. This chapter addresses such important interpretive issues as the authorship, purpose and structure of each letter. The next chapter addresses the nature of the Pauline gospel. Here, Bird primarily attempts to provide

the reader with a more comprehensive understanding of the gospel. The chief goal within this chapter is to demonstrate the gospel is best understood as 'the story of Jesus the Messiah, his death and resurrection, and faith and repentance towards him', rather than a set of logical inferences based upon God's holiness and humanity's sinful condition (pp. 74–75). Chapter six comprises a discussion of the various theological means by which Paul explicates the nature of salvation. Accordingly, Bird examines the concepts of righteousness, sacrifice, reconciliation, redemption, adoption, renewal, and victory. The seventh chapter focuses on the important subject of Pauline eschatology. Bird appropriately engages such subjects as the nature of Paul's 'now and not-yet' eschatology, the Parousia, and the future of Israel. In chapter eight, Bird reflects on the relationship between the Pauline epistles and Jewish monotheism. Bird's handling of this issue seeks to show by means of such texts as 1 Cor 8.6; Phil 2.5–11; and Rom 9.5 that Paul is an advocate of what could be labeled 'messianic monotheism', the notion that 'God is known through Jesus the Messiah, or Jesus is the one who reveals and manifests the person and work of God' (p. 125). Chapter nine focuses on Pauline ethics. A variety of issues are analyzed in this chapter including the role of the Mosaic Law, the relationship between law and liberty, and Paul's attitude towards sexuality. The final chapter considers Paul's spirituality. Bird tackles this issue under two primary headings: 1) cruciformity, the process of conforming oneself to a life patterned after Jesus' death; and 2) what he labels 'anastasisity', the reality of being made alive in Christ.

This work succeeds in its aim of providing a basic introduction to Paul. Importantly, it is current on the state of the questions in Pauline scholarship, assessing such issues as the 'New Perspective' of Paul and Paul's relationship to the Roman Empire. At the same time, this strength gives rise to a significant weakness: in attempting to tackle technical issues such as the meaning of the phrase 'faith/faithfulness of Jesus Christ' in an introductory text, Bird occasionally bypasses some significant criticisms of the readings he advocates. Nevertheless, Bird's book is a helpful resource for anyone wishing to begin the often arduous journey of engaging with the writings of Paul.

Mark Owens, University of Aberdeen

Paul: Missionary of Jesus

Paul Barnett

Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008. ISBN 978-0-8028-4891-8. xvi + 240pp. £8.99.

Paul, the most powerful figure in earliest Christianity, is often seen to have hijacked the religion of Jesus and made it into something that was never intended. The central thesis addressed in twelve chapters maybe stated thus: 'Was [Paul's] mission and message Jesus' mission and message?' or 'Was Paul a true missionary of Jesus?'

Barnett paints a broad picture of Paul and his impact on earliest Christianity and then tests the 'wall of discontinuity' between Jesus and Paul constructed by some scholars, which distances Paul's ministry from the ministry of Jesus. The author argues against such a 'wall' showing that Paul actually knew Jesus as a contemporary in Jerusalem. In building a case for the close relationship between Paul and Jesus, Barnett holds that Paul was both converted and called - the Damascus event represents a complete relational and moral turnabout (conversion) that was accompanied by a radical new vocation to preach the Gentiles and bring them into the covenant (call).

The core question is addressed in chapter 7: 'Was Paul's mission to the Gentiles according to the mind of Jesus and an authentic extension to his own ministry in Israel? Was Paul a true missionary of Jesus?' Surveying the Gospels he shows a 'two-stage' outlook in Jesus' ministry—a pre-resurrection one that was first restricted to Israel and a post-resurrection one that was then aimed at the [Gentile] nations. Paul's call included this commission to take the Gospel to the Gentiles. The fact that leading apostles affirmed this mission in an acknowledgement that such a task was indeed in accordance with the mind of the historical Jesus (Gal 2.2, 7-9).

Barnett argues that the opposition that Paul encountered (during c. 47-57) from the 'circumcisers' was a determined counter-mission against his mission to win Gentiles on a circumcision-free basis. Similarly, Barnett uses the letter to Romans to show that it addressed specifically this Jewish-Christian countermission. By opposing this, Paul was in fact emulating Jesus' opposition of the Pharisees who insisted on ritual observance for sinners, thus bringing Paul's thinking and ministry in line with Jesus'. 2 Corinthians too shows that Paul's own life and ministry was based on Jesus' life and ministry. This 'replication' validated his apostleship and ministry, thus making him a 'true' missionary of Jesus, unlike the 'false' apostles. Barnett remarks: 'so close is this identification with Christ that Paul actually describes his ministry in terms almost identical with those

he applies to Christ' (p. 177). Thus, yet again, Paul modeled his ministry on Jesus' own, thereby confirming him to be a true missionary of Jesus.

While the lucid language engages the reader, unfortunately, the book has no real conclusion. It might be argued that the twelfth chapter ('Paul's Achievement') serves this function, but it could quite well stand as an independent article. It would have been helpful if there was a proper conclusion pulling together the case that was being built up in the preceding chapters. Further, the five appendices, while informative in a general way, do not really contribute to the overall purpose of the book; In fact nothing would be lost even if these appendices were omitted.

Notwithstanding, *Paul: Missionary of Jesus* is an insightful study into a contentious issue (i.e. that Paul set out in his own direction, and not on a trajectory that Jesus envisaged for the church). Scriptural evidence and helpful tables lend strength to Barnett's arguments, which are well documented. The book's 'reader friendly' approach makes it accessible to scholar and lay person alike. The overall thesis is well developed and clearly expressed. Undoubtedly, this will be a helpful resource for scholars, church leaders and all those interested in the life and ministry of Paul.

Rev Dr Mark Jason, The Methodist Church, The Gambia

Greed as Idolatry: The Origin and Meaning of a Pauline Metaphor
Brian S. Rosner
Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007. ISBN: 978-0-8028-3374-7. 214pp. £14.99.

In his analysis of the two phrases 'greed...is idolatry' and 'a greedy person...is an idolater' (Col 3.5; Eph 5.5, NIV), Rosner concludes that together they communicate that 'to have a strong desire to acquire and keep for oneself more and more money and material things is an attack on God's exclusive rights to human love and devotion, trust and confidence, and service and obedience' (p. 173). Part I sets forth the phrases' history of interpretation with extensive description (cf. summary on p. 11; his excellent treatments of Luther, pp. 32ff; David Clarkson, pp. 43ff) and brief evaluation; it then concludes with methodology: historically, Jewish (vs. Greco-Roman, e.g., Stoic) literature best illumines the phrases' origin and meaning; literarily, the phrases are best understood as metaphors (he cites the work of Janet Soskice *et al.*), a hypothesis whose methodological implications he then clarifies.

Part II attempts to locate the 'origin' of the notion 'greed is idolatry' beginning with the Hebrew Bible, exploring the Shema, the golden

calf incident, Ps 10, Prov 30.7-9; regarding Job 31.24-28 (cf. 22.23-30), he states 'what the greedy offer gold..., namely, their trust, confidence, and joy, is considered both in Job and in the Old Testament generally as due God' (p. 78). He combs Qumran, examines *Testament of Judah* (19.1), the rabbinic literature (noting in the Targumim forms of the Shema that render 'with all your *strength*' as 'with all your *possessions*'), and Philo (whose metaphorical use of idolatry is contemporary to Col/Eph). After exploring the NT, he concludes: while no evidence of 'literary depend-ence' exists, the way for the Pauline phrases was '...paved by the com-prehensive scope of the first commandment, by the characterization of idolatry in terms of evil desire, and above all by the association of wealth with apostasy' (p. 99).

In Part III the two phrases' philology and syntax are explored: e.g., just what does *pleonexia* mean (sexual *and/or* material insatiability)? Does the clause '...which is idolatry' modify only *pleonexia* or all the vices in Col 3.5 (and, *mutatis mutandis*, in Eph 5.5)? On both, Rosner admits, commentators are divided; his discussion brings little resolution. The late introduction and modest analysis of these (and other—cf. p. 105) important matters introduce a measure of exegetical instability to the work. Strangely absent is a consideration of *pleonexia* in Eph 4.19 and indeed of 4.17-24, with its numerous affinities with Col 3.5-10 and Rom 1.21ff. (Throughout the book Rosner, though convinced of the Pauline au-thorship of Col/Eph [p. 5], consults the apostle infrequently.) Also, a brief treatment of (1) the phrases' immediate literary contexts and (2) their let-ters' theological emphases and general historical settings (e.g., *vis-à-vis* idolatry), along with greater philological/syntactical rigor, would have strengthened conclusions and provided greater precision to both the aim and method of Parts I and II.

Rosner excels in his discussion of idolatry—particularly in his por-trayal of the revulsion it provoked within Second Temple Judaism; his biblical overview and theological conception of idolatry captures well its defining feature—namely, exclusivity (idolatry is 'an attack on God's ex-clusive right to our love and trust'; p. 148). Also, his excellent descriptions of the early church's attitudes/praxis regarding wealth and hospitality, his skill at making the reader 'feel' the weighty/unsettling rhetorical force of the metaphor 'greed is idolatry', and his excursus on 'implicit religion' (stimulating both academically and pastorally) all make for an excellent discussion of a neglected but most relevant subject.

Bruce Clark, University of Cambridge

Justification: God's Plan and Paul's Vision
N. T. Wright
Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009. ISBN: 978-0-8308-3863-9.
279pp. $25.00.

Readers of this journal are well aware of the controversy surrounding N.
T. Wright's reading of Paul's theology. Since the publication of his 1997
book, *What St. Paul Really Said* (Eerdmans), Wright has been associated
with what has been called 'the new perspective on Paul' and has endured
withering criticism. Wright here responds to John Piper's critique, *The
Future of Justification: A Response to N. T. Wright* (Crossway, 2007); his
aims are to set forth definitively his exegesis of Paul on justification, to
defend his evangelical credentials and to demonstrate his loyalty to the
Reformation spirit.

First, Piper criticises Wright for situating Paul within the context
of first-century Judaism rather than the heritage of Reformed theology.
Wright responds that Piper's move is a 'disturbing' departure from evan-
gelical interpretive method (p. 51). Evangelicals, in faithfulness to the
Reformed vision of 'always reforming', have strived always to hold their
tradition more lightly than their Bibles, allowing the latter constantly
to purify and transform the former. Piper, secondly, attempts to situate
Wright as a scholar pursuing what is fashionable whereas Piper is a pastor
who recognises that the pressing need of the day is for a faithful articu-
lation of justification. This is unfair. Wright also writes with a pastoral
concern, and he, too, is attempting to interpret Scripture faithfully.

A third preliminary point by Piper to which Wright responds is that
the crying need of the day is for individuals to be assured of their standing
before God. This is indeed important, but in Wright's view, Paul's theo-
logical vision is more robust and comprehensive, involving God reclaim-
ing humanity for his name and restoring his broken creation. This inevi-
tably involves, of course, other important issues, such as the salvation of
individuals and the assurance of salvation, but Wright's main burden is to
understand *Paul's* concerns, taking in the whole of his theology.

The orienting point for Wright is the Scriptural narrative, the account
of the Creator God's call of Israel to be the people through whom God re-
deems creation. This mission of God helps to inform Paul's use of 'right-
eousness' language, and Wright contends that the best way to understand
Paul's use of this word, along with related terms, is to relate it to God's
own 'covenant faithfulness'—God's faithfulness to his own creation (p.
63) and his faithfulness to his promises to Israel (p. 65). When applied to
humans, 'righteousness' and 'justification' language have the law court
for an interpretive context. When God justifies a person, then, God de-

clares that one to be in the right. He vindicates him, finding him to have the status of 'righteous' in the eyes of the court (p. 69).

Much more, of course, must be said about Christian salvation than this, but Wright's contention is that for Paul, justification functioned very narrowly. In later Christian theological development, however, it became loaded with far more freight than it was supposed to bear. In one sense, this is to be expected in the course of the development of Christian doctrine. But when we expect Paul to be addressing later concerns when he talks about justification, we will be confused and disappointed. There are other theological tools at Paul's disposal, such as believers' incorporation into Christ, the work of the Holy Spirit and the death and resurrection of Christ. Each of these radiates significance and the manner in which they all inter-relate must be grasped rightly in order to understand how Paul's thought works. This is largely Wright's point in chapter 4.

Some may remember the Edinburgh Dogmatics Conference in 2003 in which Wright had a lively, direct and charitable exchange with Simon Gathercole over this topic. Many had come with suspicions heightened, prepared to disagree strongly with Wright. After intense theological dialogue and a wonderful time of fellowship, however, there was a clear recognition that many criticisms were wide of the mark and that Wright's work was in direct continuity with the spirit of the reformers. Most of the attendees left having embraced a brother and ally in the pursuit of faithfulness to God. In the same way, this book is a vigorous exercise in Scripture interpretation, and a charitable reading ought to help eliminate confusion and misunderstanding.

Dr Timothy G. Gombis, Cedarville University, Cedarville, OH USA

Recent NT Introductions and Theologies

NT introductions and theologies abound these days. I hope this notice assists those making decisions about which ones are worthwhile. Only evangelicals, on account of their belief in the divine unity of the canon, continue the project of NT theology largely abandoned by academics whose commitment to historicism has by definition denied its possibility. Thus, from evangelical presses, we have: I. Howard Marshall's (IVP, 2004); Frank Thielman's (Zondervan, 2005); Frank Matera's (WJK, 2007); Tom Schreiner's (Apollos, 2008); James Julius Scott Jr's, (Mentor, 2008); James Dunn's (Abingdon, 2009); Ben Witherington III's (IVP, 2009); and translated into English from the 2007 German, Udo Schnelle's (Baker, 2009). Of these, Marshall's is the best, but Thielman's and Schnelle's are both strong and we await a verdict on Dunn's in a future issue of SBET. I remain unconvinced that any of the above surpass G. B. Caird's (Clarendon, 1995) or George Ladd's (Eerdmans, 1993). Schreiner's has been

found by scholars to be a bit forced in terms of its overall theme, but those who share his American Calvinism will surely find it illuminating.

If one were to choose Schreiner, it might be beneficial to have alongside it volume one of Witherington's *The Indelible Image*. Witherington believes that God's salvation is creational as it concerns the restoration of humanity into the image of God which, he further believes, is moral. The first volume in the two-volume set moves through the NT book-by-book. It hopes to show how in the NT theology and ethics are inseparable and thus belief in Christ includes imitation of Christ. It is a bit uneven and superficial, more like a wandering survey than a microscopic investigation. But again, pastors might find useful to put the divergent perspectives of Schreiner and Witherington into dialogue, for, at risk of appearing dialectical, sometimes clarity and insight emerge from difference.

NT introductions from the last five years are: David deSilva's (IVP, 2004); D. A. Carson and Douglas Moo's (Zondervan, 2005); Carl Holladay's (Abingdon, 2005); D. C. Parker's (CUP, 2008); *The Cradle, the Cross and the Crown* by Andreas Köstenberger, Scott Kellum and Charles Quarles (Broadman and Holman, 2009); *The New Testament in Antiquity* by Gary Burge, Lynn Cohick and Gene Green (Zondervan, 2009); and Mark Powell's (Baker, 2009). Here decisions are much more difficult. Carson, Moo and Morris has been the evangelical standard for some time, and the latest edition sans Morris exhibits nothing that would decrease its status as such. No student of the NT can afford to be without it and no one should be tempted to get the forthcoming abridgment instead. As with Dunn above, we await to hear about Köstenberger *et al* in a future *SBET.*

The most needed book is Burge *et al.* After a brief introduction to the study of the NT, the authors over the next three chapters explore the historical, social and cultural background of the NT. While Everett Ferguson's *Background of Early Christianity*, now in its third edition (Eerdmans, 2003) is more detailed, the treatment of this content in *New Testament in Antiquity* is good for those not immersed in NT studies or for beginning students. The remaining chapters survey the NT book-by-book, commenting upon authorship, date, setting and themes. While I was initially excited about this book, as we lack a good exploration of the NT books in terms of their ancient setting, I was disappointed for two reasons: First, Carson and Moo treat the authorship, dating, setting and interpretive issues much more informatively. Second, when it came right down to it, there was very little integration of the discussion of the setting into the discussion of the books' distinctive content. I do think, however, that *New Testament in Antiquity* could be used with profit in churches wishing to promote more NT understanding amongst congregants.

REVIEWS

This brings us to Powell's new introduction. The book itself is dazzlingly beautiful, using Christian art throughout the centuries along with pictures with rich effect. And Powell's literary liveliness is a nice complement to the book's design. In terms of content, Powell excels at laying out all the scholarly options for interpretive issues, though without giving the details of where those arguments can be found. He leaves the decisions to the readers, which, depending on one's needs, could be an advantage over Carson and Moo which regularly argues for the evangelical position. There is little doubt that Powell's volume is appealing for those just beginning to study the NT formally. But I continue to think that Carson and Moo is the most comprehensive, detailed and informative NT introduction.

Rev James R. A. Merrick, Review Editor

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