SCOTTISH BULLETIN OF EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY

The scope of the *Bulletin* is broadly defined as theology, especially Scottish and Reformed, whether biblical, systematic-dogmatic, historical or practical, and Scottish church history. Articles submitted for publication should be sent to the Editor, books for review to the review editor (see below).
Contributors are free to express their own views within the broad parameters of historic evangelicalism. The opinions of contributors may not be assumed to be those of Rutherford House or the Scottish Evangelical Theology Society.
Instructions for contributors may be be found online at: www.s-e-t-s.org.uk/bulletin/

**EDITOR:** DR DAVID J REIMER, School of Divinity, The University of Edinburgh, New College, Mound Place, Edinburgh EH1 2LX. Email: scobethe@gmail.com

**ASSOCIATE EDITOR:** DR JASON M CURTIS, Rutherford House, 1 Hill Street, Edinburgh EH2 3JP. Email: info@rutherfordhouse.org.uk

**REVIEW EDITOR:** REVD JAMES R A MERRICK, School of Divinity, History and Philosophy King's College, University of Aberdeen, Aberdeen AB24 3UB. Email: james.merrick@abdn.ac.uk

The *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* is published twice annually by Rutherford House in association with the Scottish Evangelical Theology Society, whose officers are:

*President:* The Revd Professor Andrew McGowan, Inverness East Church of Scotland

*Chairman:* The Revd Dr Fergus Macdonald, 113 St Alban's Road, Edinburgh, EH9 2PQ

*Secretary:* Mrs Rosemary Dowsett, 4 Borden Road, Glasgow G13 1QX

The *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* is indexed in *Elenchus, Cerdic, IZBG, ATLA and Relig. Theol. Abstr.*

---

**Subscriptions** should be addressed to: Rutherford House, 1 Hill Street, Edinburgh, EDINBURGH, EH2 3JP. e-mail: info@rutherfordhouse.org.uk.
**Rates from 2009:** £14.00; Students £7.00.
Overseas Surface Mail £16.00; Airmail £19.00.
ISSN 0265-4539 Single issue £8.00

# Guest Editorial: Thirty Years On

With this issue the *Bulletin* enters its the thirtieth year. This milestone provides an opportunity to reflect on the history of the *Bulletin* and on its ongoing mission in the world of theological publishing. Before casting an eye over its contents throughout the past three decades, it might be helpful to recall that the *Bulletin*'s roots go back to the late 1950s when its direct predecessor the *Scottish Tyndale Bulletin* made its appearance. The Scottish Tyndale Fellowship (STF) was initiated in 1958 under the inspiration of R. A. Finlayson and G. W. Grogan and, as the name of the new body suggests, it was associated with the Tyndale Fellowship south of the border. The activities of STF were focused on an annual conference where theological teachers and researchers met with practising church ministers interested in theology. Speakers at the conference frequently included one of the prominent members of the Tyndale Fellowship, but the majority of papers were given by people ministering in Scotland, either in academia or in the pastorate. The *Scottish Tyndale Bulletin* was launched to make the conference papers accessible to a wider audience.

While relations with the Tyndale Fellowship have always been friendly and helpful, by the late 1970s our colleagues south of the Tweed-Solway line became concerned that the disparity between the two bodies sharing a common brand was confusing. They suggested that the STF should either become a body for evangelical academics teaching or doing theological research, or reconstitute itself under a different name that would facilitate its desire to provide an interface where evangelical academics and church leaders could interact on theological issues. So in 1981 the Scottish Tyndale Fellowship became the Scottish Evangelical Theology Society (SETS). At the same time the *Scottish Tyndale Bulletin* metamorphosed into the *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* (*SBET*) in partnership with Rutherford House which was founded that year by William Still and Sinclair Ferguson. The link with Rutherford House provided a much needed administrative base for the new journal which enabled it to become a professional, highly respected publication that would build up a readership furth of Scotland, particularly in the rest of the UK and the USA. The first editor of *SBET* was Nigel Cameron, Warden of Rutherford House. Nigel and his immediate successor—David F. Wright—between them edited the journal for half its life span. There have been seven editors in all.

SETS has always been aware of its origins in the STF; in fact its 1988 conference was promoted as a celebration of SETS' thirtieth anniversary.

And it continued to invite members of the Tyndale Fellowship as speakers, including Gerald Bray, F.F. Bruce, David Cook, Dewi Hughes, Howard Marshall, Gordon McConville, Bruce Winter, Chris Wright, and D.F. Wright. The papers given by most of these were published in *SBET*, which from the beginning has honoured the core commitment of SETS to bridge academia and church by also publishing contributions from ministers, like Howard Taylor and Gordon Palmer, actively working at the ecclesial coal face. SETS was founded with the primary aim 'to promote within Scotland the advance of evangelical theology in the biblical, doctrinal, historical and practical fields'. *SBET* has interpreted somewhat broadly the geographical reference, for articles from Scotland, England and Wales have been supplemented by contributions from Australia, Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, Holland, India, Ireland, Nigeria, and—easily more than any of these—the USA. Not surprisingly many of the articles have focused on the discipline of dogmatics with perhaps the most popular topics being the Trinity, Christology, atonement and adoption. In addition, articles on historical theology have explored the early church fathers and the reformers, especially Calvin and Luther. But Owen, Edwards, Bavinck, and Barth have by no means been overlooked. In addition, the Bulletin has frequently dipped into Scotland's own Christian heritage. Celtic Christianity and Scottish revivalism have been scrutinized by Donald Meek, while other writers, including Donald Macleod and T. F. Torrance, have highlighted aspects of the theology of Duns Scotus, Robert Leighton, Thomas Halyburton, the Marrow Men, Edward Irving, J. McLeod Campbell, George Adam Smith, James Denney, and H.R. McIntosh.

Although there has been a strong emphasis on dogmatics, the theology articulated in *SBET* has been light years away from abstract scholasticism. The journal has sought to honour the objective of SETS 'to promote theology in the service of the church', with articles on preaching, the pastor, the church as a witnessing community, deacons and elders, women's ministry, and discipleship, as well as others on baptism and the eucharist. On reflection, more could have been done on eschatology, and perhaps the ministry of women required more in-depth treatment, given the sea change taking place in evangelical practice. Another SETS goal manifested by *SBET* is 'to promote theology faithful to Scripture'; the journal has featured pieces on commitment to Christ and the doctrine of Scripture, the Holy Spirit and the Holy Scriptures, engaging the Scriptures, and biblical hermeneutics, as well as numerous articles on specific facets of biblical theology. *SBET* has also sought to fulfil a third SETS aim, *viz.*, 'to promote theology grounded in scholarship, informed by worship, sharpened in debate, catholic in scope, with a care for Scotland and its people'. There have been articles on the theology of worship and of prayer;

catholicity has been evident in the broad denominational and global pool of contributors. A contemporary Scottish focus has been evident in articles like those on Scottish nationhood and on the practising of theology in a Scottish housing scheme.

*SBET* has had a family feel to it. This may be because many of the articles originated as papers given at SETS conferences where participants find a forum in which thought can be sharpened in debate and earthed in the lived experience of the group. In a sense, today SETS fulfils a role somewhat similar to that of the 'Schools of the Prophets' in the books of Samuel and Kings. In these ancient prophetic companies theological reflection and proclamation was a matter of urgency, for in the time of Samuel the prophetic companies were called to reconstitute national life in the wake of the religious disintegration of the Judges period. Later, in the time of Elijah and Elisha, the prophetic communities had the divinely given responsibility to resist and repulse the most determined political attempt in the history of Israel to supplant the worship of Yahweh. The 'death of Christian Britain' on the one hand,[1] and the blitzkrieg by the new atheists on the other,[2] suggest that parallel challenges exist today for SETS and other similar bodies.

Because many of *SBET* articles are written in the church and outside the academy their potential to serve 'as a catalyst for theological reflection and evangelical action' (another SETS' aspiration) has been enhanced. The subjects of some of the contributions cited above highlight their focus on praxis, and in addition a cluster of articles on the interface between gospel and culture written by theological practitioners has offered valuable insights on contextualising the gospel in the culture while at the same time confronting the culture with the gospel. All in all, the almost 290 articles that have been published—not to mention the 960 plus book reviews—constitute a veritable theological encyclopaedia that is well worth consulting. Alas! probably only relatively few individuals have a complete set of issues, but thankfully some theological libraries in the UK and the USA do. Hopefully soon it may be possible to extend the availability and accessibility of the journal by posting back numbers

---

1 Callum G. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation, 1800-2000*, London / New York, 2001. In a letter to Scotsman Newspapers, 2 January 2011, Brown claims that the Scottish Household Survey indicates that in 2008 40 per cent of Scots self-identified as 'no religion', up from 28 per cent in 2001,

2 'So religion appears to be a vulnerable target waiting to be demolished by a few well-aimed tank shells. What the atheist militia have actually unleashed in the past couple of years has been a blitzkrieg.' (*In God we Doubt: Confessions of a failed atheist*, by John Humphrys, London, 2007.

online. An index of article titles is in preparation to facilitate searches for particular themes.

In the year that the Scottish Tyndale Fellowship began, Collins Fontana published a popular *Handbook of Christian Theology* for which Ronald Gregor Smith of Glasgow wrote the preface. The handbook identified and expounded in alpha order 103 theological themes authored by as many Protestant theologians of the time. The STF and SETS between them may not have covered all of these topics, but they have come close. And, of course, the breadth of coverage can only expand as, in its fourth decade, *SBET* tackles issues thrown up by postmodernism in the West and dramatic church growth in the global South. Surely *SBET* will wish to encourage theology to recapture its symbiotic relationship with spirituality which sadly it lost under the dominance of Enlightenment thinking, while affirming persuasively and with conviction the unique and exclusive truth claims of Christianity in a prevailing climate of religious pluralism and *laissez faire* tolerance. Additionally, by widening the net of contributors, *SBET* could support the growing number of theologians from the global South, as they borrow from the conceptual vocabulary of their distinctive cultures in order to create expressions of Christian theology that will be new, yet will cohere with the theological DNA of the early ecumenical creeds, the reformed confessions, and twentieth-century formulations such as the Lausanne Covenant.

Furthermore, as *SBET* travels further into the twenty-first century it will require to foster a new apologetics that will facilitate and strengthen Christian witness in the face of increasingly strident secularist attacks. Of course, *SBET* will do all of these things most effectively as it fosters a genuine evangelical ecumenicity that will boldly affirm what is primary and humbly acknowledge what is secondary. *SBET* and SETS are pledged to meet these challenges by articulating and practising the evangel in terms of biblical conviction rather than simply reflecting popular consensus, always heeding the apostolic advice to speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15). Hopefully, by publishing the papers given at the 2011 SETS conference, this issue helps to set the tone of theological discourse in the foreseeable future.

*Fergus Macdonald*
*SETS Chairman*

## CONTRIBUTORS IN THIS NUMBER

*The first five articles originated as SETS 2011 Conference papers — 'Evangelical Ecumenism'.*

| | |
|---|---|
| Dr David Reimer | Senior Lecturer in Biblical Studies, School of Divinity, University of Edinburgh |
| Professor Larry Hurtado | Emeritus Professor of New Testament Language, Literature & Theology, School of Divinity, University of Edinburgh |
| Dr Martin Spence | Assistant Professor of History, Cornerstone University, Grand Rapids MI |
| Revd Dr Stephen Holmes | Senior Lecturer in Systematic Theology, School of Divinity, University of St Andrews |
| Rosemary Dowsett | Council member of the Mission Commission of World Evangelical Alliance |
| Dr David Wenkel | Independent scholar, Chicago IL |

# The Old Testament and the Unity of the People of God
## Finlayson Memorial Lecture, 2011

David J. Reimer

The University of Edinburgh, New College, Mound Place, Edinburgh EH1 2LX
david.reimer@ed.ac.uk

## INTRODUCTION[1]

Now there arose a new lecturer which knew not Finlayson (cf. Exod. 1:8)! It is a privilege to have been invited to deliver this year's Finlayson Memorial Lecture, but unlike last year's lecturer, I cannot speak from personal experience of his life and ministry. However, with Tom Houston's fond recollections still ringing in my ears, I set about finding out what I could. As it happens, David Wright authored the entry on Roderick Alexander Finlayson in the Oxford *DNB*.[2] Beyond giving biographical facts and details of his career, he goes on to describe him as a man in whom 'a richly devotional theology enlisted the services of a mastery of language, a wit that was variously mischievous and mordant, shrewd insight into characters and events, and a gift for the one-liner. (Examples are still traded freely on the mention of his name.)' Sadly, David declined to give any particular example in that formal article. Donald Macleod was not so reticent in his reflections on the Finlayson years in the Free Church College.[3]

> He had a reputation for merciless wit. I well remember his approaching me after one of my own more passionate pulpit performances and remarking, 'There's a lady over there asking if it was Gaelic or English you were preaching!' (p. 235)

---

1 In addition to the discussion this paper received at the Finlayson Lecture, I'm grateful for the stimulus received during its early gestation from the postgraduate OT reading group in Edinburgh, and later reflection at the OT Research Seminar at the University of Durham.

2 D. F. Wright, 'Finlayson, Roderick Alexander (1895–1989)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/66408> [accessed 3 May 2011].

3 Donald Macleod, 'The Free Church College 1900-1970', in *Disruption to Diversity: Edinburgh Divinity 1846-1996*, ed. by David F. Wright and Gary D. Badcock (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), pp. 221-37; Finlayson features on pp. 234-7.

Macleod also discussed Finlayson's considerable intellectual achievement, and used as a parade example Finlayson's fine piece on inspiration.[4] That in turn prompted a reflection on Finlayson's later publishing history, or more precisely, its lack. He poses the question as to why—with nearly thirty more years of productive life ahead—Finlayson 'never again produced anything of the quality of this essay'. Macleod's brief, speculative ruminations in an attempt to solve the riddle turn on the very issue to which this SETS conference is dedicated: the difficulties of internecine strife within the camp.[5] Perhaps, then, Finlayson would have reason to be pleased that SETS is tacking the topic in this conference.

In fact, the Old Testament has been at the centre of some of the most bitter controversies within the church in the past two hundred years. A lecture with my title could easily be shaped around this observation, as the OT in particular has proved contentious for Christian interpreters. More than research on the synoptic gospels, it was pentateuchal studies that most deeply marked out the territory of 'critical' biblical scholarship between 'liberals' and 'conservatives'. In Scotland the name of William Robertson Smith (1846-94) is indelibly linked with the trauma this conflict brought, the year 1881 marking his dismissal from his Aberdeen chair.[6] That OT studies continues to occupy this potentially fractious role up to our own day is demonstrated by the sad case (no matter which 'side' one is on) of the 'discontinuation' of Peter Enns as Professor of Old Testament and Biblical Hermeneutics at Westminster Theological Seminary in 2008, only three years after expressing thanks for the privilege of being 'part of such a solidly faithful group that does not shy away from some difficult yet basic questions' in the very publication that occasioned the

---

4 R. A. Finlayson, 'Contemporary Ideas of Inspiration', in *Revelation and the Bible: Contemporary Evangelical Thought*, ed. by C. F.H. Henry (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1958), pp. 221-34.

5 Ibid., p. 237. There is a small conundrum here: the publication which Macleod cites as 'wounding' Finlayson appeared in 1954, while his article on inspiration appeared in 1959.

6 For a sympathetic account, see J. Rogerson, *Old Testament Criticism in the Nineteenth Century: England and Germany* (London: SPCK, 1984), pp. 275-81. Note in particular Rogerson's characterization of Robertson Smith's *The Old Testament in the Jewish Church*, 2nd edn (London and Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1892), first published in 1881: 'It is difficult to think of a book that has so profoundly combined critical insights with a *type* of Evangelical belief...' (p. 276; italics added). For the wider context, see A. C. Cheyne, 'The Bible and Change in the Nineteenth Century', in *The Bible in Scottish Life and Literature*, ed. by David F. Wright (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1988), pp. 192-207.

breach.[7] The dangerous activity in which both Robertson Smith and Enns indulged, it seems, was that of trying to let the Old Testament 'speak for itself'.[8]

Rather than follow the theme of the Old Testament as a battle ground for believers, however, we will ourselves run the risk that Robertson Smith, Enns, and many others have taken and ask: what does the OT ('itself!') have to say about the nature of the unity of God's people? In order to do this, I explore on first, and briefly, at the language of 'unity' in biblical Hebrew. What does it mean by the term? Second, two key texts in which the language of 'unity' and 'oneness' comes to the fore provide the vehicle for reflecting on our theme. These also shed some light on a question that might at first blush appear to be self-evident: what in the OT corresponds to the 'people of God' element in my title? This aspect continues to grow in importance for a third aspect of my theme. What is the nature of communal boundaries in the OT, within which any 'unity' might be found and expressed? At best we can only hope to trace a thread through the Hebrew Bible, and lightly sketch the chief features of the theme. This does not even have the character of 'survey'—it is much more a matter of noticing only a few signposts. I hope this will nonetheless allow for some concluding reflections that will be suggestive for the believing community today.

## I. LANGUAGE

Very briefly, I want to make some potentially jarring observations on the language the Hebrew Bible uses for 'unity'. The key term is *yaḥad* which bears a superficial resemblance to the Hebrew for 'one', *ʾeḥād*. The connection (as with the English 'unity' and 'one') inclines our thinking fairly quickly towards 'one-ness' or 'singularity', and that is of course a natural connection to make. It comes as a bit of a surprise, then, to discover that the intuitive link one could make in Biblical Hebrew from *ʾeḥād* ('one') to *yaḥad* ('unity') is in fact contested and widely rejected as an *etymological* connection.[9] This is not to say that there is no relation of any kind

---

[7] Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: BakerAcademic, 2005), p. 9.

[8] For this phrase, or one like it, see e.g. Robertson Smith, *The Old Testament*, p. 18; Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation*, p. 15.

[9] For the following, cf. H.-J. Fabry, 'יָחַד *yāḥaḏ*', in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. by G.J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren, 15 vols (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 6, pp. 40-48; concurring for the most part with J. C. de Moor, 'Lexical Remarks Concerning yaḥad and yaḥdaw', VT 7 (1957), 350-5; G. Sauer, 'אֶחָד *ʾeḥād* one', in *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testa-*

between them, only that there are more complexities here than we might first suspect.

And, of course, semantics is not simply a matter of etymology. However, translations of *yaḥad* are sometimes constrained by the notion of 'singleness', 'unit-ness'. In Biblical Hebrew, our most central term appears to be more accurately rendered by notions of 'togetherness'. For example, Deut 33:5:

> Thus the LORD became king in Jeshurun, when the heads of the people were gathered, all the tribes of Israel together [*yaḥad šibṭê yiśrāʾel*].

Here, it is not a matter of being gathered 'as one' (as it is glossed in the NLT)—Biblical Hebrew can state that very clearly, as we will see in a moment—but simply of being 'brought together', expressing a 'totality' (cf. *HALOT, q.v.*). Indeed, I can only find one occasion in the Hebrew Bible when the related term, *yaḥdāw*, and *ʾeḥād* appear together, and in that case the latter is expressly used to further qualify the former.[10] Anyone with even passing familiarity with the Dead Sea Scrolls will be aware that the term is frequently used for the 'community' in those writings—and it is given thus as the initial headword of the *HALOT* entry (for the two substantive = nominal uses in the HB: Deut 33:5 and 1 Chr 12:18).[11] Even if this usage is unattested (or only very weakly) in the Hebrew Bible, one can see Shlomo Morag's account of its attractiveness to the Qumran community 'since it echoed the sociologically most significant semantic features that they aspired to achieve in their community life'.[12]

Terminology, then, is a useful way into the wider problem of what is meant by 'unity' in the Hebrew Bible: it very quickly nuances the discussion from simply thinking in terms of 'one-ness' and moves towards

---

*ment*, ed. by E. Jenni and C. Westermann, 3 vols (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), 1, pp. 78-80 takes a contrasting position.

10 Cf. Joshua 9:2, where the kings come 'together' to fight against Israel 'with one accord' (*peh ʾeḥād*, literally 'a single mouth').

11 It is widely noted, however, that nowhere in the Hebrew Bible does the term bear the meaning found so distinctively within the DSS; cf. Shlomo Morag, 'On Some Concepts in the in the World of Qumran: Polysemy and Semantic Development', in *Diggers at the Well: Proceedings of a Third International Symposium on the Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Ben Sira*, ed. by T. Muraoka and J. F. Elwolde, STJD, 36 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2000), pp. 178-92 (see p. 180); unless, that is, the usage in 1 Chron. 12:17 [Heb. v. 18] should be admitted as the solitary example.

12 Ibid., p. 180. Morag enumerates these aspirations as: 'togetherness', separateness, uniqueness, and excellence.

'togetherness' and ultimately community—however, both terms feature in the 'key texts' which follow. There is, of course, a further question that has gone begging so far: what do we mean by 'the people of God'? To whom are we referring? The descendents of Abraham? Israel? Israel *and* Judah? The 'assembly' (Heb. *qāhāl*)? every member of the 'community', however defined? (Cf., e.g., the language of 'native and sojourner' under one law: Ex. 12:19; Lev. 16:29; Num. 15:29-30; cf. Josh. 8:33.) We shall touch on this question at a number of points in the discussion which follows.

## II. KEY TEXTS

***Psalm 133.*** When considering texts in which 'unity' features prominently, then Psalm 133 (the next-to-last of the Psalms of Ascent) must have pride of place. It reads:

> [1] Behold, how good and pleasant it is
> when brothers dwell in unity [*gam yaḥad*]!
> [2] It is like the precious oil on the head,
> running down on the beard,
> on the beard of Aaron,
> running down on the collar of his robes!
> [3] It is like the dew of Hermon,
> which falls on the mountains of Zion!
> For there the LORD has commanded the blessing,
> life forevermore [*'ad hā'ôlām*].

This well-known psalm seems to compare the surpassing goodness of 'unity' among brothers with oil and dew, culminating in the divine promise of life 'for evermore'. What contours does this key text give to the concept of 'unity'? Clearly this is a brief poem, but rich and suggestive place to elucidate our theme.[13]

How good and pleasant it is when meanings are not contested, one might add! What is intended by the 'unity of brothers' here? is it the peaceful family hearth, so domestic harmony? my neighbour, so commu-

[13] In addition to the commentaries, see the helpful studies by: A. Berlin, 'On the Interpretation of Psalm 133', in *Directions in Biblical Hebrew Poetry*, ed. by E. R. Follis, JSOTSS, 40 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987), pp. 141-7; T. Booij, 'Psalm 133: "Behold, How Good and How Pleasant"', *Biblica*, 83 (2002), 258-67; F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp, 'Psalm 133: A (Close) Reading', *JHS*, 8/20 (2008), 2-30; James Luther Mays, 'There the Blessing: An Exposition of Psalm 133', in *A God So Near: Essays on Old Testament Theology in Honor of Patrick D. Miller*, ed. by B. A. Strawn and N. R. Bowen (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2003), pp. 79-90.

nity concord? or is something much larger in mind—kingdoms? perhaps political alliances, as some suggest? The language of the psalm works at each of those levels, and as Dobbs-Allsopp notes, how we understand the kinship term here 'will depend on the specific context' from which we hear the psalm.[14] The very lack of specificity on this level gives this evocative psalm an even greater expansiveness of vision than we might first have seen.

How do the metaphors of 'oil' and 'dew' illuminate the nature of 'unity'—getting along like 'oil and water'? Once again, given a moment's reflection these seemingly unrelated (and unmixable!) terms we can see how they both resonate with and complement each other. Anointing oil which drenches, and dew which cascades: astonishing abundance! And while the former refreshes the person, the latter 'anoints' nature itself. The structure of the metaphors should also be noted, a feature highlighted by Adele Berlin.[15] It is not simply that (or, not at all that) fraternal unity is itself like fine oil on the one hand, and abundant dew on the other. Rather, the two metaphors are reciprocally reinforcing. Berlin argued that, in conjunction with the use of 'Hermon' and 'Zion', the dual metaphors promoted the political 'unification of the country' (p. 145)—but this does note easily follow. A more compelling conjunction can be seen. This oil and dew are like each other (we could translate: 'as with precious oil ... so to with the dew of Hermon...'), and between them they bind together human society and the natural order. What takes place in the realm on the level of personal relationships is integrally related to the proper functioning of the created order itself.[16]

We can see now how the poem's opening line in praise of 'unity', and the closing line—the LORD's 'commanded blessing'—correspond to each other, and hold together these effusive reciprocal metaphors for the cosmic effect of unity in creation and community alike. Should we need an indication of what significance the 'unity of the people of God' might hold, we need look no farther than this. However, if Psalm 133 displays the cosmic/communal significance of 'unity', it tells us little about how it is achieved, or what it looks like in practical terms.

---

[14] Dobbs-Allsopp, 'Psalm 133', p. 7 and n. 21.

[15] Berlin, 'On the interpretation', p. 144. On the syntax, cf. GKC § 161c; Joüon-Muraoka, § 174i. The shared 'which runs down upon' (*šeyyōrēd ʿal-*, vv. 2, 3), obscured in many translations, further contributes to this effect.

[16] As for the questions: Why Aaron? Why (Mount) Hermon and Zion? I pass over these except to note the significance of each for representing a point of 'meeting' for God and people in person and place.

***Ezekiel 37:15-28.*** One of the confusing aspects of Old Testament terminology for those embarking on historically-orientated study is the conundrum of how to refer to 'Israel'. 'Israel' is, of course, the name given to the patriarch Jacob (Gen. 32:28 [Heb. v. 29]), and subsequently borne by the nation of which he was the ancestor. After the division of the kingdoms following the reign of Solomon, however, 'Israel proper' is the northern kingdom, and 'Judah' is the southern kingdom, and the period of the 'united monarchy' under Saul, David, and Solomon looks very much like a blip. Still, the notion that 'ideal Israel' comprises both north and south tends to dominant popular usage and obscures the scenario found in vast swathes of the biblical text.[17] The biblical writers themselves were, of course, quite alive to the issue, and the question of the nature of the relationship between these politically, socially, even linguistically distinct entities arises repeatedly.

It did not cease to be a problem after the fall of the northern kingdom to the Assyrians, for 'ideal Israel' still was considered to be comprised of the twelve tribes, not just the remaining two (Judah and Benjamin). Berlin's reading of Psalm 133 noted above, although rejected, clearly inhabits and attempts to address this particular problem. Even if that particular example was found wanting, there are many that are quite explicit. So, for example, the prophet Jeremiah looks forward to the day when 'the house of Judah shall join the house of Israel, and together they shall come from the land of the north to the land that I gave your fathers for a heritage' (Jer. 3:18).[18]

One of the most pointed statements of this aspiration is found in the work of Jeremiah's younger contemporary, Ezekiel. Ezekiel 37 is well known for its vision of the valley of dry bones, but it is the record of Ezekiel's symbolic action with the 'two sticks' which is of interest to us. It appears at one of the major 'seams' in the book of Ezekiel—preparing the way for the substantial concluding vision of chapters 40-48—and forges a strong link between unity and 'oneness'.

The 'action' which Ezekiel is required to perform is much simpler than those in the earlier part of the book. Two sticks are to be inscribed

---

[17] Of course, usage of the term 'Israel' is yet more variegated than this. See, conveniently, P. R. Davies, *In Search of 'Ancient Israel'*, JSOTS, 148 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), pp. 49-51, who lists ten ('at least') distinct senses. On the broader theme, see still Part Two on 'The Concept of Israel' in H.G.M. Williamson, *Israel in the Books of Chronicles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

[18] Cf. also Jer. 50:4-5; and the further elaboration of the broad theme of restoration for both Israel ('Ephraim') and Judah in Jeremiah 30-31. This one of the points of contact between Jeremiah and Hosea; see Hosea 1:11 (Heb. 2:2).

with the names of Judah and 'Joseph', identified further as 'Ephraim', and then to be clutched in one fist, 'that they may become one in your hand' (37:17b). In response to the (inevitable) question from his audience as to what he is doing, he is to announce the divine intent to rejoin the tribes of the north to Judah, and so to gather the northern exiles back to their land and 'make them one nation in the land', with one king over them. This oracular promise is further elaborated in terms of David as shepherd-king (v. 24) ruling them on their ancestral land. (Recall that Ezekiel is among the Babylonians exiles as this sign-act and explanation are delivered.) They shall now live faithfully with 'my sanctuary in their midst forevermore' (v. 26). The concluding insistently repeated refrain that God will be in their midst anticipates the import of the concluding vision sequence (chs. 40-48) as well as the last words of the book which assign as Jerusalem's new name, 'The LORD is there' (48:35b).

The pericope begins with a political orientation, but transcends such a categorization rapidly as it proceeds.[19] Daniel Block accounts for the various 'tensions' present in the text (notably its shifting perspective repetitions) by noting the phases through which it moves. It begins with the literal joining of sticks in Ezekiel's hand (vv. 15-17), the metaphorical (but real!) union of nations by God's hand (vv. 18-22), their further moral and political union (vv. 23-25), culminating an a (re-)new(-ed) covenantal relationship with himself (vv. 26-28).

This passage offers (at least) three ways of carrying forward our considerations launched in Ps 133. (1) The Hebrew for 'one' is used insistently in this passage (*ʾeḥād*, 'one', not *yaḥad*, 'unity'). It is used eight times in the initial cluster of verses, reaching a crescendo in v. 17; the Hebrew can be only awkwardly translated to display all four occurrences: 'join them *one* to *one* into *one* stick, that they may become *ones* in your hand').[20] *ʾeḥād* appears at each 'level' of the passage: in Ezekiel's literal actions (vv. 16-17), in the announcement of divine intent (v. 19), in the political explanation (v. 22), and in the moral explanation (v. 24). If we look for a rationale for this within the passage, the most fundamental reason for this reunification is found in the 'covenant formula' of v. 23, 'they shall be my people, and I will be their God'.[21] In some way, the presence of 'two nations ... two

[19] Cf. Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 25-48*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 394-5.

[20] For 'ones', Heb. *ʾăḥādîm*, cf. Block, Ezekiel 25-48: 'The form reflects simultaneously the unity and composite nature of the wood' (p. 396).

[21] Cf. For a thorough exploration of this formula in the Hebrew Bible, see Rolf Rendtorff, *The Covenant Formula: An Exegetical and Theological Investigation*, trans. by M. Kohl (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998).

kingdoms' (v. 22) constitutes an anomaly at least, more likely an offense. This God has one people.

(2) This reunification is a *divine* initiative—fitting for the consistent and insistent 'theocentricity' of the book of Ezekiel. Of course, the constituting of this people of promise was itself a divine initiative. Its rupture, post-Solomon, was again a human spoiling of God's intent (1 Kings 12—although even that separation is claimed by God as God's own responsibility, 1 Kings 12:24). The divide between them had lasted centuries, had been marked by a fair share of hostility and military conflict. And now Ezekiel announces God's intention to bring back the missing northerners (v. 21). I wonder if we can sense how astonishing this must have seemed: the division of the kingdoms lay almost four hundred years in the past, the destruction and deportation at the hands of the Assyrians about 150 years earlier. Perhaps the hints of resurrection that conclude the 'dry bones' vision provide a further clue for seeing here a re-creative work possible for no one but God alone.

(3) This in turn prompts the observation that re-unification of the two houses (Israel and Judah) is achieved in spite of obstacles. Such factors—the 'opposite' of 'unity', one could say—merit reflection as well. Ezekiel is more concerned with the nature of the future hope than an analysis of the problems that led to the division. But the characteristic (in Ezekiel) call for rejection of idolatry and commitment to purity (v. 23) signal the decisive factor which split the people of God in two. Failure to maintain the appropriate regard for Israel's God led to the cataclysm that ruptured the community. No wonder the healing of that breach must be a work of God's own hand.

We noted a moment ago the passage's covenantal conclusion, but there is something more to observe here. V. 26 links the 'covenant of peace' found in Ezekiel 24:25 with the 'everlasting covenant' found earlier in Ezekiel 16:60. The latter gave prominence to the restored political order before God, the former a utopian and beatific natural order. Just as with Psalm 133, then, the effects of the unity of the people of God have an impact within both the social and the cosmic realms.

Two key texts, then, one highlighting 'unity', the other 'one-ness', but with deep resonances between them. The Ezekiel text in particular in its healing trajectory tacitly assumed unity's opposite: division. For a community to be 'unified' implies some boundary formation within which that unity is expressed, but outside of which membership is not possible. There are insiders; there must be outsiders.

## III. BOUNDARIES: INSIDERS AND OUTSIDERS

***Joshua 22.*** One sometimes gets the impression that there are those abroad in the church today who might think that the OT is more or less irrelevant. I can think of few more timely and topical narratives to illuminate the issues that confront us and suggestive of prospects for dealing with them than Joshua 22.[22] It might not, however, be the most familiar of OT stories to many of us. That is unfortunate, for this story concerns manner in which the bonds of community are tested, threatened, and come precipitously near breaking point—but repaired. It thus offers another vantage point from which to see a biblical reflection on 'the unity of the people of God'. It is, moreover, a narrative of nuance: it affirms that the 'unity of the people of God' is a fragile thing. Indeed, those very 'obstacles' discerned in the 'theocentric' prophetic oracle of Ezekiel may be found in this story of the potential fragmentation of the community as well. But it further affirms (does it?) that being a unified community is not a reductive concept, but that it has space (literally) for going different directions.

We need, first, briefly to set the scene. In the closing stages of the book of Joshua, the hard work of winning the land of promise has come to fruition (21:43-45). The tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the 'half-tribe' of Manasseh had negotiated a settlement on the far side of the Jordan, on the condition that their fighting men continued with the rest of the tribes to carry out the campaigns in the land of promise itself (Josh. 1:12-18). Now that there is 'rest on every side' (21:44), they are free to return, and they do. However, on their return they build 'an altar of great size' (22:10), and word of it gets back to the rest of the Israelites gathered at Shiloh (v. 12). The report immediately draws a response of anger and overt hostility for this steep descent into rebellion against the LORD. A deputation goes to confront them with their open and gross disobedience (vv. 13-20); although no threats are uttered, the examples of apostasy given point to the catastrophic results that are sure to follow. In turn, the people of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh are horrified that their actions have been so misconstrued (vv. 22-23):

> The Mighty One, God, the LORD! The Mighty One, God, the LORD! He knows; and let Israel itself know! If it was in rebellion or in breach of faith against the LORD, do not spare us today for building an altar to turn away from following

[22] In addition to the commentaries, cf. E. Assis, '"For it shall be a witness between us": A Literary Reading of Josh 22', *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 18 (2004), 208-31; idem, 'The Position and Function of Jos 22 in the Book of Joshua', *ZAW* 116 (2004), 528-41; B. E. Organ, 'Pursuing Phineas: A Synchronic Reading', *CBQ* 63 (2001), 203-18.

> the LORD. Or if we did so to offer burnt offerings or grain offerings or peace offerings on it, may the LORD himself take vengeance.

Clearly they understand what has been implicit in the speech of their comrades! But it has very much been a misunderstanding. The altar was built (vv. 26-27)

> 'not for burnt offering, nor for sacrifice, but to be a witness between us and you, and between our generations after us, that we do perform the service of the LORD in his presence with our burnt offerings and sacrifices and peace offerings, so your children will not say to our children in time to come, "You have no portion in the LORD."'

No less a personage than Phineas (more of him in a moment) speaks on behalf of the rest of the community, accepting the explanation and declaring, 'Today we know that the LORD is in the midst of us...' (v. 31). And peace prevails.

The apparent 'openness' hinted at above is, then, formed within the crucible of danger, and against a backdrop of death. Even so, there is much more going on here than meets the eye, and we must pause to take note of some inner-biblical resonances of which this story serves as the nexus, as both sides appeal both explicitly and implicitly to what we might call scriptural tradition.[23] On the side of the Israelites as a whole, the tragic and violent escapade involving Moabite women and Baal of Peor leading to a plague stopped only by the zeal of Phineas in pinning an Israelite man and Moabite woman to the ground with his spear (Numbers 25) is the parade example of the trauma they are desperate to avoid. Less overt is the statement that Achan (Joshua 7) 'did not perish alone for his iniquity' (22:20). Auld points out the surprising fact that in only one other place in the Hebrew Bible does this precise language occur, that in Numbers 16:22, where the spectre of the destruction of the whole community for the sin of 'one man' imperils the nation. In the counter-speech by the trans-Jordanian tribes, distinct illusions are embedded (again surprisingly), to Psalms 50 and 44. The former speaks to the common place of those whether to the east or the west before God, and which further calls for an obedience beyond sacrifice. Psalm 44 (esp. vv. 20-21 [Heb. 21-22]), on the other hand, call on the God who sees the secrets of the heart to recognize pure worship in his people.

The presence of Phineas (vv. 13, 30-31) is only the leading cue that maintenance of 'unity' is not the primary mission or *desideratum*: rather,

[23] Here following the compelling and perceptive analysis of Graeme Auld, 'Pluralism Where Least Expected? Joshua 22 in Biblical Context', *ExpT*, 122 (2011), 374-79.

whatever precise shape the 'unity' of God's people takes, it is intended to ensure the continuity of community between God and people, rather than people and people. The final conclusion to the story portrays something much more than equilibrium restored. A resolution is achieved which is more life-affirming and God-centered (!) than merely arriving at an 'understanding'.[24] 'Unity' is seen to have a deadly enemy—and that 'enemy' is not fragmentation, or difference. It is idolatry, rebellion against the God of Israel. More important than the relationship of the tribal groupings with each other is their common standing before God.

***Permeable boundaries?*** Implicit in the trajectory sketched above is the notion—a rather obvious one—that if there is to be 'unity' in 'community' there will be those inside ... and those outside. The demarcation of boundaries is one of the huge issues raised poignantly in the narrative of Joshua 22. It is not, of course, the only text in the OT to do so.

Once one begins to register directly this aspect of the question (who is 'in'? who is 'out'? why? and how do we know?), the texts can proliferate. The difficulty at this point is working out how to delimit them, and then relate the various texts to each other in meaningful ways. Here is the briefest beginnings of such a list:

- Leviticus 19:18 with its command to 'love your neighbour' is one of the two 'great' commandments; but how should it be related to 19:33-34 on the 'strangers' among God's people? and how does that relationship bear on our theme?

- Similarly, Deuteronomy 23:1-9 (the boundaries of the very pericope here strike me as a bit fluid) sets down legislation for maintenance of the boundaries of the community; yet these find a prophetic counterpart—and counterbalance—in Isaiah 56. Again, how is this canonical 'tension' to be understood? How permeable are the boundaries which define God's people?

- The roots of the 'two houses united' theme in Ezekiel 37 (above) can be traced back into earlier prophetic texts: e.g., Hosea 2:2 (EVV 1:11); Micah 2:12-13; Jeremiah 32:36-41 (cf. 50:4-5). Moving 'forward' through these texts, the '*future* hope' orientation of the theme stands out with increasing clarity, as does the ever-broadening scope for

[24] It seems to me this resolution takes place in terms of a (re-)affirmation of shared focus, rather than in terms of 'compromise' as Auld depicts it ('Pluralism', p. 379).

the inclusiveness of the new community: Zephaniah 3:9; Zechariah 2:10-17 (EVV 2:6-13; cf. 8:9-13, 20-23).

- The last-mentioned text (Zechariah 8) raises quite directly (8:12) the related concept of 'shalom'. At what level does this closely related notion need to be integrated into my more focussed reflections on 'unity' *per se*?

## TRAJECTORIES FOR THE 'PEOPLE OF GOD'

How do these reflections on the 'OT people of God', i.e. Israel, inform the nature of the unity of the 'NT people of God', i.e., the Church? It is important at the outset to note that we should not simply equate OT 'Israel' with NT 'church'. At the same time, having explored the *praise* of unity via Psalm 133, the *imperative* of unity via Ezekiel 37, and the *peril* to unity via Joshua 22, we are in a position to observe certain aspects of an OT perspective on the unity of 'God's people'.

First, it is abundantly clear that 'unity' in the Hebrew Bible is not 'uniformity' or numeric oneness (although that registers at a certain level). 'Unity' rather consists in a common orientation and access to the God of Israel. A few relevant sentences from O'Donovan's *The Desire of the Nations* bear on this theme: [25]:

> To speak of a 'gathering' church ... is to speak of a community which, for all the permeability of its skin, has a sharply defined core. To gather is to make a centripetal movement; it is altogether different from merely milling around or associating. The church that gathers must have defined the central point to which it gathers. The apostolic confession of Jesus ... is the confession that defines the church as such ([Matt.] 16:16-19)....
>
> We should never allow ourselves to speak of a 'contrast' or 'tension' between unity and diversity. Diversity is the historical content of unity, the material in which the unity becomes concrete. ... Were it not diverse [the church] could never represent the world; did it not represent the world, it could not embody catholic unity but only sectarian division.

When parts of the community differ, let it be clear what is at stake: not the 'unity' of God's people, but the joint *focus of their attention*. What imperils that attentive relationship is a deadly peril. We can be grateful that the latter day Phineas does not carry a literal spear—and that there was

[25] *The Desire of the Nations* (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), pp. 176-7, drawn from ch. 5, 'The Church', which O'Donovan treats initially in terms of being a 'gathered community'.

one was pierced by the spear, else we would all deserve to be at the sharp end of business with Phineas. Meanwhile, the vision of the reconstituted, ideal Israel at the end of Ezekiel does not obliterate 'tribal' divisions, but rather sets out a programme *both* for their right relationship *and* for their mutual access to the presence of God.

Second, this unity is not a human achievement. Rather the people of God are constituted by God, and so too their unity resides in him. This comes out especially from our reading of Ezekiel 37, but that text is joined by many others in the OT. One passage which could well repay further reflection for our theme is found in Malachi 2, but verse 10 will suffice for the moment: 'Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us? Why then are we faithless to one another, profaning the covenant of our fathers?' Here the creative action of the one God is the basis for a repudiation of communal failure. A broken and fragmented community is anathema given the unity of the God who made it.

A third aspect arguably arises in all three of our key texts: the status of the society of God's people has a direct bearing on the natural order. Again, this is a theme which is woven throughout the Hebrew Bible, but all too readily passed over. 'Unity' is expressed not just in person-to-person relations, nor yet in God-to-people relations, but in the triadic connection of God-people-world ('world' here as 'natural order'). The Bible begins with fragmented human society spoiling the world God made; the Christian Bible ends with a new city, a new heaven, and a new earth. This may not provide a basis for a superficial dash towards 'green theology', but it might suggest that the interest shown in the environment by an organization like TEARfund, for example, is not simply a modern 'politically correct' fashion accessory. When the people of God live rightly, the world God created flourishes.

Finally, for this paper, we can also see that 'unity' is aspirational. It is, in the evocative Psalm 133, a matter not only of appreciation, but also of yearning. Ezekiel continues to look forward to a reality and the fulfillment of a promise which did not arrive in his day. Which inclines us to ask again in light of this study, how does the OT regard the unity of the people of God? Is it credal? confessional? Is it, perhaps, tribal? And could it be—at least in this still fallen and broken world—more like 'solidarity' than 'singularity'? So that Jesus' prayer (for *our* 'unity', that 'just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us', John 17:21) is only partially realized here and now? But someday. . . .

Paul Hanson, in one of the few substantive works devoted to the question of the nature of the 'people of God', sums up our theme well. He writes in terms of 'community' simply put rather than 'unity', but the two come together:

> [F]orms of community arise as a people, peering into the heart of life and seeking to align itself with God, who is ceaselessly active to create fellowship where there is alienation, to reconcile where there is enmity, to redeem where there is bondage, adopt those structures of community that best equip it to incarnate God's purpose in its own life.[26]

[26] Paul D. Hanson, *The People Called: The Growth of Community in the Bible* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), p. 3.

# YOU'VE GOT TO 'ACCENTUATE THE POSITIVE'[1]: THINKING ABOUT DIFFERENCES BIBLICALLY

L. W. HURTADO

THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH, NEW COLLEGE, MOUND PLACE, EDINBURGH EH1 2LX
L.Hurtado@ed.ac.uk

Throughout the history of Christianity there have been differences among Christians, as is reflected even in our earliest texts. Although Walter Bauer's 1934 book on heresy and orthodoxy in early Christianity is today often credited with making scholars aware of the varied nature of early Christianity, in fact it was always clear in the primary texts.[2] We know, for example, that there were differences between Paul and some other believers, because Paul did not hesitate to say so. Indeed, he was at times rather forthright in characterizing negatively those who criticized him and his gentile mission. In 2 Corinthians 11, for example, he refers derisively to certain 'superlative apostles' (v. 5), whom he then denounces as 'boasters, false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ' (v. 13). A bit later in this same passage and in Galatians 2 also, he refers to 'false brothers' (2 Cor. 11:26; Gal. 2:4), in the latter passage accusing them of trying to 'spy out the freedom which we have in Christ Jesus'. Paul even gives an account of his direct confrontation of Kephas in Antioch, accusing him (and also Barnabas) of hypocrisy in withdrawing from meal-fellowship with Gentile believers out of fear of criticism from 'certain men from James' (Gal. 2:11–14). In a number of other NT texts as well, we have complaints about false teachers, and others who are accused of working against what the authors of the texts regard as the truth and/or right Christian behaviour. So, differences among believers, sometimes quite sharp ones, there certainly have been from our earliest evidence.

But we should not presume that the alternative to these sharp differences and polemical denunciations is simply a uniformity of doctrine and practice. It is also possible to focus on unifying matters and accommodate diversity. The same Paul who denounced those Jewish Christians who

---

1 I beg indulgence in alluding to the popular song 'Accentuate the Positive' (music by Harold Arlen, lyrics by Johnny Mercer, 1944). This is the text of my invited address to the Scottish Evangelical Theology Society annual meeting, May 2011 (Glasgow).

2 Walter Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, ed. by Robert Kraft and Gerhard Krodel (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971; German 1934).

opposed his Gentile mission and denied the validity of his converts as full co-religionists also sought and made agreement and compromise with other Jewish Christians, as reflected in his account of his agreement with the Jerusalem leadership in Galatians 2:1–10. Jerusalem seems to have favoured concentrating first on a mission to Jews (probably inspired by OT prophecies of a renewal of the people of Israel, to be followed then by the conversion of the nations to the God of Israel, as in Isa. 59:1–16). Paul, however, on the basis of what he took as God's special revelations to him, apparently believed that the Gentile mission was to be conducted now, alongside a mission to Jews, and that he was called to be a special instrument to accomplish the eschatological project of bringing the nations to the God of Israel.[3] His strenuous programme for the Jerusalem collection represents a still larger effort to maintain fellowship, and to demonstrate it tangibly.

Indeed, I have contended that in the earliest expressions of what has been called 'proto-orthodoxy' (especially in the late first century and second century), one of its principal features is a readiness to accept certain differences among believers, to recognize a deeper commonality beneath those differences; and I have emphasized that those in that time who came to be called 'heretics' were more often exclusivist and sectarian, demanding assent to their own standpoint as a basis for fellowship.[4] That is, 'proto-orthodoxy' was not a single Christian group or teaching but seems to represent a variety of emphases, the crucial factor being a readiness to accept one another as fellow-believers and treat their common ground as more important than the things that distinguished them from one another.

We have an early instance of this in 2 Peter 3:15–16, where it is highly significant that the Petrine voice of this text refers approvingly to the letters of Paul, appearing to include them among texts treated as 'scriptures'. Also, of course, Acts of the Apostles is well known for its portrayal of a relatively positive relationship between Paul and the Jerusalem church-leadership. Though scholars argue over the historical reliability of Acts,

---

[3] E.g., in Galatians 1:15–17, Paul refers to God's calling of him as including the purpose of his mission to the Gentiles. Likewise, in Romans 11:25–32, Paul refers to the scenario of salvation-history that he lays out as a *mysterion* (v. 25), which here as in other NT uses seems to designate a heavenly secret of God's plan now revealed. See H. Krämer, 'μυστήριον', in *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. by H. Balz and G. Schneider, 3 vols (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 2, pp. 446–8.

[4] See further my discussion of 'Radical Diversity' in my book, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), pp. 519–61.

it serves my purpose to note simply that this author was keen to assert a mutual recognition of these differing kinds of early Christianity.

In Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho*, we have another example of this feature of 'proto-orthodox' Christianity. In *Dialogue* 47, Trypho (the lead Jewish interlocutor) asks Justin about whether there are Christian believers who also wish to observe the Jewish Law. Justin (who in the text has been arguing strenuously that the Law is no longer required and has been superannuated in Christ) responds to Trypho's question by acknowledging that there are indeed Torah-observant believers. Moreover, he accepts them and has no great problem with their observing Torah, *so long as they do not require Torah-observance of Gentile believers* (*Dial.* 47.1). Indeed, Justin distinguishes himself from certain other Gentile Christians who refuse to have fellowship with Jewish believers who continue to observe Torah (47.2), and then he re-affirms his own view that, those Jewish believers who associate themselves with Gentile believers and do not require Torah-observance of them should be treated as siblings in faith (*hōs homosplanchnois kai adelphois*, *Dial.* 47.2). Justin expresses disapproval, however, of those Jewish believers who refuse to accept Gentile Christians and try to pressure them to observe Torah. Nevertheless, he expresses belief that, even those Gentiles who do Judaize and take up Torah-observance in addition to their faith in Christ 'shall probably be saved' (*Dial.* 47.4).

One of the most enduring expressions of this readiness to accommodate diversity is the affirmation of the four-fold Gospel. It is increasingly likely that our familiar four Gospels were already acquiring a regard as comprising the circle of authentic Jesus-narratives sometime between 100 and 150 CE.[5] It seems that they circulated as separate texts and that codices adequate to contain all four began appearing perhaps sometime around or not long after 200 CE. From the remains of early Christian manuscripts, it appears that in the earliest period Matthew and John were far more frequently copied and read than Luke and Mark.[6] Nevertheless,

[5] See, e.g., G. N. Stanton, 'The Fourfold Gospel', *NTS*, 43 (1997), 317–46; Theo K. Heckel, *Vom Evangelium des Markus zum viergestaltigen Evangelium*, WUNT, 120 (Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck), 1999); Martin Hengel, *The Four Gospels and the One Gospel of Jesus Christ* (London: SCM, 2000); James A. Kelhoffer, '"How Soon a Book" Revisited: ΕΥΑΓΓΕΛΙΟΝ as a Reference to "Gospel" Materials in the First Half of the Second Century', *ZNW*, 95 (2004), 1–34.

[6] See L. W. Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts: Manuscripts and Christian Origins* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), esp. 15–41.

we know from figures such as Irenaeus that in at least many circles of second-century Christians all four Gospels were regarded highly.

We also know that the differences among the Gospels were noted by ancient Christians, and were for some deeply troubling.[7] Tatian's anxiety about the differences among the four Gospels led him to produce a harmonized text (the *'Diatessaron'*), urging that it be used liturgically in place of the separate Gospels. But proto-orthodox circles retained the four Gospels as discrete accounts, prizing and preserving their literary integrity, and seeing their differences of emphasis as a richness of testimony to Christ.

Likewise, over against Marcion's insistence that there can be only one true Gospel account of Jesus (in his case, an edited text of Luke), 'proto-orthodox' Christians affirmed the familiar four Gospels as all valid and scripture. Moreover, despite Marcion's anxiety about the differences among the apostolic traditions, and against his insistence that there can be only one true apostle, for him Paul, the emerging NT canon of 'proto-orthodox' Christians included texts linked to various apostolic figures: Peter, James, John, and Jude. In short, as I have observed in a recent article, the shape and contents of the NT with multiple Gospels and texts ascribed to a diversity of apostolic figures, its architecture so to speak, represent an affirmation of early Christian diversity.[8] Given the paradigmatic significance of the NT, we could say that this affirmation of diversity is written into the scriptural DNA of Christianity.

But, perhaps especially in the West, and particularly since the Reformation, Christians have tended to treat diversity as a problem, a threat, and an obstacle to unity. Indeed, the common notion has been that Christian unity depends on *agreement*, especially in doctrine and church polity. So the question for us is whether this anxiety about diversity is justified, and whether it may bring the danger of a narrowness that makes us unfaithful to the NT and the 'proto-orthodox' circles from which we would like to trace our religious derivation. We might, then, ask whether there are biblical resources for handling diversity positively. In the following discussion, I focus on a key NT passage, proposing that it provides us

---

7 Oscar Cullmann, 'The Plurality of the Gospels As a Theological Problem in Antiquity', in *The Early Church: Studies in Early Christian History and Theology*, ed. by A. J. B. Higgins (London/Philadelphia: SCM/Westminster, 1956), pp. 39–54; Helmut Merkel, *Die Widersprüche zwischen den Evangelien. Ihre polemische und apologetische Behandlung in der Alten Kirche bis zu Augustin*, WUNT, 13 (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1971).

8 L. W. Hurtado, 'The Formation of the Christian Bible', *Modern Reformation*, 19/6 (Nov/Dec 2010), 33–6.

with instruction in the matter of unity and diversity. Indeed, I propose that this text challenges the traditional fixation with doctrinal agreement as the key basis for Christian unity, and lays out an approach that is very much worth considering.

## EPHESIANS 4:1–16 AND CHRISTIAN UNITY

The Epistle to the Ephesians is traditionally considered one of the most impressive presentations of Christian faith in the NT. One of the themes of the epistle seems to be unification. In 1:9–10, the author says that God's revealed purpose is 'to unite all things' in Christ. In 2:11–22, the author celebrates the work of Christ in uniting Gentiles and Jews, having 'broken down the dividing wall of hostility', reconciling both 'to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing hostility to an end' (vv. 14–16). In the passage I focus on here, 4:1–24, we have more direct teaching about Christian unity in diversity. It is teaching that seems, however, not to have had its due impact in Christian history.

Let us begin by noting the exhortations that commence the passage. These are introduced with wording intended to secure the most respectful regard for them. The voice of the apostle Paul speaks here, portrayed as 'a prisoner for the Lord', who begs [*parakalō*] readers to 'walk worthily of the calling to which you were called' (v. 1). More specifically, this is to involve acting 'with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace' (vv. 2–3).

My first observation is that such exhortations are hardly necessary if the pre-condition for fellowship is complete agreement. It is scarcely necessary for me to exercise 'forbearance' with anyone intelligent enough to agree with my views. Forbearance is called for only with those who are (from my viewpoint) perverse enough to take another view of the matter! So immediately these exhortations seem clearly intended for situations of Christian diversity. Indeed, they are only applicable in these situations.

I observe further that the point of the behaviour exhorted here is to 'maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace' (v. 3). I emphasize that it is 'the bond of peace', not a bond of doctrinal agreement. Moreover, the unity (*henotēta*) called for is 'unity of the Spirit'. The Spirit is divine gift, God's own empowerment, not a force of human devising or effort. As the following verses indicate, the bases of Christian unity lie in the unity of God and God's actions. Believers are one (whether they act accordingly or not) because 'there is one body, one Spirit... one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and father of us all' (vv. 4–6). In short, the expression of Christian unity means to live out,

to actualize, the unity that is based in God. Believers are one in God and Christ; the question is whether we can find the readiness to reflect that in our engagement with one another.

Next, the author celebrates the richness and diversity of the grace that has been given to believers: 'Grace given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift' (v. 7). Appropriating a statement from Psalm 68:19, the author portrays the ascended Christ as bestowing gifts, including apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers, these intended to equip the larger body of believers ('the saints') 'for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ' (vv. 11–12). Neither here nor in other NT passages do we have a complete list of Christ's gifts, and those mentioned here should be taken as illustrative and selected to fit the focus here on the formation and equipment of the body of believers for ministry.

In v. 13, we come to the statement of the eschatological goal in light of which Christian life and the work of all those varied gifted individuals are to be conducted. It is pretty clear that v. 13 looks ahead to the future consummation of God's plan, which is characterized here grandly as attaining 'the unity of the faith and knowledge [*henotēta tēs pisteōs kai tēs epignōseōs*] of the Son of God, to maturity, the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ'. I want to underscore the observation that 'unity of the faith' is part of the eschatological consummation, something to hope for and expect, as a corollary of the fullness of God's eschatological revelation, when we 'shall understand fully even as we have been fully understood' (adapting slightly the wording of 1 Cor. 13:12). That is, 'unity of the faith' is not presented here as something that can be devised by councils and doctrinal committees, but is instead a component of the eschatological resolution of all ambiguities in the bright light of God's full revelation and final victory. If unity of the faith were something that we could achieve, it is difficult to see why the text here portrays it as an eschatological condition.

Also, note the comparison of this 'unity of the faith' with 'the unity of the Spirit' mentioned in v. 3. 'Unity of the Spirit' (i.e., a unity that flows from the Spirit's enablement and that reflects the essential oneness of God) is to be maintained 'in the bond of peace', and is a present responsibility to which readers are exhorted. We are urged to *maintain* 'unity of the Spirit', but we can only *await* 'unity of the faith'. The latter is posed as a condition that may be attained at some indefinite future point (as connoted by the subjunctive verb, *mechri katantēsōmen*, v. 13).

I highlight the sequence of these two kinds of unity. 'Unity of the Spirit' is for the present; it is not conditional upon and does not presuppose 'unity of the faith'. 'Unity of the Spirit' is to be expressed now, *in the*

*absence of 'unity of the faith'*! In the history of Christianity, however, unity of doctrine has typically been seen as the requisite condition for ecclesial unity, for worshipping together, for truly recognizing one another fully as fellow Christians. That is, Christian unity has tended to be seen as 'unity of the faith', agreement in Christian teaching. And differences of doctrine have tended to be treated a justification for refusing in various ways to treat those with whom we differ as full siblings in God.

We have, quite simply, tended to reverse the clear sequence of this passage. We have made agreement in doctrine a requirement for Christian unity, and we have used differences as a justification for disunity, an excuse to ignore the clear exhortation to 'maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace'. But 'unity of the Spirit' is to be maintained 'in the bond of peace', which means choosing not to go to war over differences, not to attack and inflict the harm of denying Christian fellowship upon those with whom we differ.

We have invested enormous efforts and resources in polemics, defending our views and attacking those of other Christians. In kinder moments, we have established commissions and task forces to promote serious discussion of our differences, all with the aim of seeing whether we can come to agreement in matters of difference, and in the assumption that such agreement is a necessary pre-condition for full Christian fellowship. I propose that in polemics and such kinder deliberations we have ignored the thrust of passages such as the one I have focused on here. We have ignored the clear eschatological framework of salvation and revelation, in which the fullness of both are awaited from God and are not ours to construct. We have ignored the clear exhortations to engage our differences 'in the bond of peace' and with an eagerness to 'maintain the unity of the Spirit', groundlessly using our differences as justification for our disobedience to Scripture.

To be sure, the text before us also reflects a concern about believers being 'tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by human cunning and craftiness in deceitful wiles' (v. 14). There is such a thing as heresy. But, as I have stated, the heresies and heretics mentioned in the NT and subsequent early Christian literature tend to be instances of exclusivist claims and a refusal to accommodate Christians who will not accept them. For example, this seems to be so in the case of the 'secessionists' mentioned in 1 John. It is also true of Marcion. We should remember, after all, that the Greek word from which our word 'heresy' derives (*hairesis*) refers to a 'party' or 'sect'. The term acquired a pejorative connotation as 'heresy' as a result of being applied to versions of Christian teaching that asserted a unique validity for themselves, refusing to treat other Christians as fully brothers and sisters.

The passage concludes by urging readers to 'increase' or 'grow up' (*auxēsōmen*) 'into him in all things, he who is the head, Christ' (v. 15). It is important to note that readers are to do this by 'speaking the truth in love' (*alētheuontes de en agapē(i)*). This interesting expression combines a concern for truthfulness and honesty with an equal concern for the exercise of Christian love (for one another). The one concern means that we should not treat the quest for truth with indifference, or become apathetic about it. Toleration based on apathy is hardly anything to brag about! But living in truth and acting out truth (which seems to be connoted in this interesting verb, *alētheuō*) means more than a concern to formulate right doctrine; it means exhibiting the truth that we profess in our actions.

Moreover, this 'truthing' (to translate the term rather woodenly) is to be done 'in love' (which must mean love for others). A concern for truth is not an excuse for unkindness, much less for hatred! To seek the truth 'in love' is likely very different from the ways that Christians all too often have treated doctrinal differences and those with whom they differ. We know very well from 1 Corinthians 13 what Christian love is to involve: 'love is patient and kind, not jealous or boastful, not arrogant or rude; love does not insist on its own way, is not irritable or resentful... bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things' (1 Cor. 13:4–7). This is not sentimentality, but instead involves a demanding effort.

It is right to strive to articulate Christian faith in clarity. It is understandable and justifiable for Christians to be concerned about differences in faith, polity and practice, and right for Christians to engage one another over their differences, seeking to find why they differ and whether these differences may be reduced, or may even lead to mutual clarification and a greater appreciation of the truth as a result of considering them. But I conclude by reiterating two main points.

First, the responsibility to 'maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace' does not await 'unity of the faith', and this responsibility is not lessened because of differences in faith. The 'unity of the Spirit' that requires 'forbearing one another in love' is obligatory precisely because there are differences among Christians, and is to be maintained precisely in the midst of these differences. 'Unity of the Spirit' is a present obligation. 'Unity of the faith' is an eschatological condition dependent upon God's final consummation and revelation.

Second, our concern to articulate truth in words and practice must be exercised in Christian love. And this *agape*-love is not sentimental but a robust commitment to concern and care for others, including especially those with whom we differ. *Agape* does not mean approving the views of others or consenting to them, and it certainly does not involve an indifference to the concern for Christian truth. We are summoned to love

those with whom we differ, and Christian *agape* is most fully expressed precisely by believers who care deeply about the matters over which they differ, but are also committed to finding what unites them as well as identifying their differences.

# UNRAVELLING SCOTTISH EVANGELICALISM (PART ONE)

MARTIN SPENCE

CORNERSTONE UNIVERSITY, 1001 E BELTLINE AVE NE, GRAND RAPIDS, MI 49525-5897
martin.spence@cornerstone.edu

## INTRODUCTION

Is Scottish Evangelicalism unravelling? This fear was one reason for choosing 'Evangelical Ecumenicity' as the theme for the 2011 Scottish Evangelical Theological Society conference. Underlying the conference agenda was a perception that perhaps irreparable fissures threaten the Scottish Evangelical future.[1] Can Evangelicals overcome their apparent divergences and work together? The conference conveners invited the current author to open proceedings by unravelling the roots of what they identified as contemporary Scottish Evangelical 'polarization'.

There are indeed many knotted tangles of theological and ecclesiological yarns for an historian to unravel if the complex debates which rack contemporary Scottish Evangelical movement are to be understood in their proper historical context.[2] Charismatic and conservative, emergent and traditionalist, socially alert and separatist: when and where did these labels and the ideas which they represent begin to have purchase and power within the movement? The second instalment of this article will address this issue by surveying the issue of unity and fracture within the context of the historical development of Scottish Evangelicalism.

---

1 The feeling is not, of course, new nor unique to Scottish Evangelicalism. The fear of Evangelical fragmentation has been looming over the movement for several decades across Britain, with repeated references to the 'tribes' into which the movement is alleged to have split. For an analysis of some of the more recent fracture lines within *English* Evangelicalism, see R. Warner, *Reinventing English Evangelicalism, 1966-2001: A Theological and Sociological Study* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2007). For a broader consideration of British Evangelical identity from a variety of perspectives, see M. Smith, ed., *British Evangelical Identities Past and Present: Aspects of the History and Sociology of Evangelicalism in Britain and Ireland* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2008).

2 For a summary of some of these debates, see G. Grogan, *The Faith Once Delivered to the Saints* (Leicester: IVP, 2010).

Before embarking on this survey it is necessary to pursue a somewhat different historical task; namely, to unravel the very ontology of Evangelicalism itself. If we are to understand why Evangelicalism today is a house divided it is important not only to look at the cracks in the edifice that have emerged over time but also to enquire about the original building materials. In particular, this article will contest that Evangelicalism has not declined from a pristine unity, but that it is in fact a movement that has always been in perpetual creative tension with itself. Explanations for Evangelical division therefore need to be sought not only in the specific historical divisions of the movement, but also in the very genetic code of the Evangelical coalition.

## EVANGELICAL ESSENTIALS

American historian Douglas A. Sweeney has described Evangelicalism as 'Reformation Christianity with an eighteenth-century twist'.[3] The twist was Pietism, to which we will return later in this article. First, it is necessary to focus on the opening part of his definition. This reminds us that on central issues of salvation and scripture the Evangelical movement that emerged in the wake of the religious revivals of the eighteenth century added little to the axioms of the sixteenth-century Reformers.[4] Indeed the Protestant Reformers were themselves styled as 'evangelicals'.[5] The events of the eighteenth century associated with John Wesley (1703-1791) in England and Ireland, Howell Harris (1714-1773) in Wales, Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) in Massachusetts, William M'Culloch (1691-1771) and James Robe (1688-1753) in Scotland, and George Whitefield (1714-1770), whose ministry was international, were an *evangelical* revival because they

---

3 D.A. Sweeney, *The American Evangelical Story: A History of the Movement* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), p. 24.

4 For a brief introduction to the eighteenth-century Evangelical revival in Britain, see: G.M. Ditchfield, *The Evangelical Revival* (London: UCL Press, 1998). The Scottish dimension to the revival is covered in J. Crawford, *Seasons of Grace: Colonial New England's Revival Tradition in Its British Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991) and A. Fawcett, *The Cambuslang Revival* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1971). We lack a comprehensive history of Scottish Evangelicalism, although aspects of the movement are covered in the standard account of the movement in Britain: D.W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain* (London: Routledge, 2000).

5 Mark A. Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield and the Wesleys* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 2004), pp. 13ff.; A. Ryrie, *The Gospel and Henry VIII: Evangelicals in the Early English Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. xvi.

were a *Protestant* revival. These events were a revitalization of Protestant Reformers' central insights about the nature of salvation and the locus of Christian authority.

The sixteenth-century evangelicals of course believed that they were propounding nothing less than authentic Gospel Christianity. Their appeal to *evangelical* doctrine implied an attempt to recover the essence of the 'good news' about salvation as announced by the authors of the New Testament.[6] The Evangelicals of the eighteenth century continued and extended this quest for essential, biblical Christianity.[7] In pursuing this quest, they and their successors were blessed (or cursed) to live in an era of western history marked by the breakdown of traditional hierarchies and thus conducive to the establishment of new, experimental religious communities. The desire to embody evangelical essentials thus created not one but multiple expressions of evangelical Christianity.

This plurality may sometimes be resisted by Evangelicals because of their intuitive sense, due in part to the influence of eighteenth-century Common Sense philosophy over the movement, that evangelical truth is easily ascertained and that division is thus caused by an obstreperous refusal to agree upon what is self-evident.[8] There is, after all, only one Bible: should there not also be one version of biblical Christianity? This,

---

6 Alec Ryrie therefore calls the Protestant Reformers 'Gospellers' (ibid.). The argument that the eighteenth-century revival needs to be contextualized as part of the broader history of evangelical Protestantism is a point made forcefully by many of the contributors to M. Haykin and K. J. Stewart, eds., *The Emergence of Evangelicalism: Exploring Historical Continuities* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2008) = *The Advent of Evangelicalism: Exploring Historical Continuities* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2008).

7 'Evangelical' is being used from this point forward as a proper noun, referring to the network of Christians that emerged in the eighteenth-century and continue to this day. The lower-case 'evangelical' will refer to a broader, non-specific commitment to discovering and acting upon the gospel. Thus we can agree with Douglas Sweeney when he notes that 'Evangelicals... are [not] the only ones to whom the term evangelical applies' (Sweeney, *The American Evangelical Story*, p. 24). This point is elucidated further as the argument of this article unfolds.

8 This was the eighteenth-century school of thought associated with a number of influential Scottish philosophers that asserted all humans have an inherent capacity to grasp ideas about natural and moral reality because the universe is intelligible: the way things appear to be to individuals are, in fact, the way they really are. Evangelicals were not common-sense realists in the sense of being explicitly part of a philosophical school, but such common-sense ideas have been commonly seen to undergirded elements of their worldview. On this, see: H. A. Harris, *Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Oxford: Oxford

of course, misses the fact that faulty human interpretation refracts biblical truth into multiple strands as a prism refracts light. More fundamentally, it fails to recognise that it is impossible for Evangelicals to break away from an environment in which pluralism reigns because this is the social-cultural context in which Evangelicalism was born and thrives. Pluralism is integral to Evangelicalism. Although Evangelicals might frequently lament the erosion of Christian values and mourn the rise of a type of religious relativism in modern society, these trends are actually symptoms of the same underlying culture that has given Evangelicalism its health and vitality. Evangelicalism was born as Christendom, with its totalising claims to be able to define and coerce subscription to a uniform body of Christian truth, lay dying. Evangelicalism's inherent theological insistence that individuals must decide *personally* for Christ is perfectly matched to the characteristically modern insistence on religious non-compulsion.

Evangelicalism is thus a culturally-conditioned (and thus culturally successful) version of Christianity that by very definition resists hegemonic confessionalism, and insists every bit as strongly as the rest of western society that the only proper religious choices are one made freely by individuals without coercion from outside forces. However, *unlike* much of modern western society, Evangelicals have continued to insist that the search for definitive truth is vital and urgent, and to believe that such truth can be discovered. The combination of this urgent quest for evangelical authenticity with the congenital voluntarism of the movement produces a multifarious range of evangelicalisms, co-equal claimants to the title of genuine evangelical.

This tendency to ecclesiastical fracture in the quest for authentic and authoritative expressions of Christianity is often noted in regard to the Evangelical movement in the United States where, as Nathan Hatch has documented, an insatiable appetite for democratic, voluntaristic religious primitivism swept across the nation in the generations after the Revolution.[9] The looming presence of the national Anglican and Presbyterian churches of Great Britain has obscured the fact that nineteenth-century British Evangelicalism was, in fact, as restlessly democratic as new as its more widely-studied American counterpart. This was particularly so in

University Press, 2008), esp. pp. 96-100; Mark A. Noll, *America's God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 93-113.

[9] N.O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (London: Yale University Press, 1998).

Scotland,[10] a fact should perhaps come of little surprise to those who have seen in Scottish political culture a more advanced 'Enlightenment' view of the rights of the individual to choose her or his own destiny, but which may shock those used to pursuing their Scottish ecclesiastical history through the somewhat labyrinthine maze of Presbyterian hegemony. In the second part of this article it shall be shown how this splintering of the movement crystalized around a series of 'disruptions' in Scotland in the 1840s.

The desire for evangelical authenticity has led to the formation of many groups with the totalising aspiration to institutionalize 'evangelical' truth once for all. The names chosen for such groups—Brethren, Apostolic Church, Disciples of Christ, Church of the Nazarene, Faith Mission, Pentecostal, Gospel Hall, Bible Church, Evangelical Union—have often suggested that these are not really denominations so much as they are elemental, unadorned New Testament (that is, evangelical) Christianity. These groups have aimed for primitive evangelical simplicity but in reality merely added a further layer of complexity to the Evangelical landscape, a landscape already populated with individuals belonging to older denominations—Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Congregationalists and Baptists—who felt the search for evangelical truth was better pursued from with their own confessional tradition.

New evangelical groups eventually turn into the establishment and thus prompt another round of renewal and reconfiguration. Because the Evangelical movement has always stressed the need for authentic of belief—that is, for 'real' or 'vital' Christianity over and against 'nominal' or 'dead' faith—older generations of Evangelicals have, often unfairly, themselves become examples to younger Evangelicals of the ossification of tradition. Evangelicalism has always encouraged its young to break through this fossilization with a new vision of evangelical truth. Sometimes the children have broken rank completely, but often they rattle the cage just enough to prompt fears of crisis before themselves settling down to inherit the mainstream.[11] We lack a detailed study of this phenomenon, but its most well-studied occurrence was in the 1820s when younger Scottish and English Evangelicals launched a searing critique on the religious complacency of their parents' generation. A similar generational shift was

[10] This is one of the underlying themes of N.T.R. Dickson, *Brethren in Scotland 1838-2000: A Social Study of an Evangelical Movement* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2002), esp. pp. 25-7.

[11] For the phenomenon of Evangelical disillusionment, see D. Hempton, *Evangelical Disenchantment: Nine Portraits of Faith and Doubt* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

clearly evident in the 1960s Charismatic renewal movement and is perhaps again occurring in the theological and ecclesiological innovations of the emergent church. Such processes are disturbing, but they have also allowed the movement great flexibility and inventiveness. Evangelicalism has a self-regenerating gene. Evangelicalism is forever young. This is perhaps one reason that the movement has poured lot of time and energy into youth work, and also why some individuals who have grown up within the movement criticize it for its juvenility.[12]

## THE IMAGINED COMMUNITY

Living as part of such a restless, multi-faceted movement has always led Evangelicals to the same question that prompted the conference to which the content of this article was originally addressed: can we stay together? Is the Evangelical movement dissolute? Victorian social reformer and Evangelical leader Lord Shaftesbury famously lamented in his old age: 'I know what constituted an Evangelical in former times ... I have no clear notion what constitutes one now.'[13] The temptation in such moments of uncertainty is to try to shore up the boundaries of the movement. What is authentic Evangelical belief? What is an Evangelical? Do new trends and fashions really count as being Evangelical? Such questioning tends to lead to the proffering of definitions reveal more about what the current interlocutor *desires* Evangelicalism to be rather than what it has actually been.[14]

Of course, if its definitions we want then there is no shortage.[15] The purpose of this current essay is not, however, to establish a working definition against which all subsequent deviations can be measured but rather to problematize the attitude of those who interrogate Evangelical history for explanations of its current polarizations. The fact that Evangelicals and observers of Evangelicals are troubled and perplexed by the question of Evangelical disunity in fact reveals as much about the nature of the movement as the actual study of its particular divisions. This is because the question, 'why are Evangelicals divided', actually speaks volumes about the *success* of Evangelicalism, rather than its failure. It reveals that Evangelicalism has been so good at projecting a coherent self-identity that the cracks in its edifice demand serious explanation. And yet the question really should be not 'why are Evangelicals divided' but rather 'why are

[12] For example, see P. Ward, *Growing Up Evangelical* (London: SPCK, 1996).
[13] Quoted in Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, p. 3.
[14] Smith, *British Evangelical Identities*, p. 5.
[15] Ibid., pp. 2-5.

Evangelicals united?', or perhaps even more fundamentally: 'Why are we convinced that there actually *is* a thing called Evangelicalism at all?'

As we have already outlined, *evangelical* (with a lower-case initial) describes a common disposition to establish religious faith and practice based solely on the content of the gospel of Jesus Christ. But it does not itself define precisely what those beliefs and practices should be beyond a basic affirmation that what Jesus said and did is vital to understand and act upon. Now, if we accept this to be the meaning of evangelical then we need to say nothing further about disunity, because clearly the particular bits of the New Testament that are thought to be of essence of the Gospel can and do vary between individual evangelicals. For example, thirteenth-century Franciscans pursued 'evangelical poverty' in fidelity to their understanding gospel priorities, but few would call this priority *evangelical* today.[16] But we mean more than this basic attitude towards scripture when we speak of Evangelicalism, with an upper-case initial. We feel it is concrete and defined; we expect a certain steadiness and consistency; we even feel it should have doctrinal unity and are alarmed when it appears to bristle with disunion. Why?

Here we can follow the lead of American historians Frank Lambert and Susan O'Brien, who, in seeking to explain what was new and distinctive about the Evangelical movement in the eighteenth century have each drawn attention not so much to innovative beliefs, but to rather to the rise of an Evangelical imagination.[17] From their work, we can conclude that Evangelicalism can be said to have been 'invented' in the eighteenth-century.[18] It was (and remains) an 'imagined community'.

---

16 In fact, many Franciscans objected to the claim even at the time and a deep rupture in the movement emerged: but we have enough to worry about without exploring *this* evangelical polarization as well!

17 F. Lambert, *Inventing the Great Awakening* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001). This section also draws on S. D. O'Brien, 'A Transatlantic Community of Saints', *American Historical Review*, 91 (1986), 811-32.

18 We must also note in passing the argument of D. G. Hart who, talking mainly about the American scene, claims that Evangelicalism was actually invented in the twentieth century by scholars (including historians such as George Marsden and Mark Noll) and Protestant leaders (such as Carl F. H. Henry) who wanted to distance late-twentieth century conservative Protestantism from its early-twentieth century Fundamentalist militant separatism and justify the study of Evangelicalism as a discrete topic of scholarly enquiry. D. G. Hart, *Deconstructing Evangelicalism: Conservative Evangelicalism in the Age of Billy Graham* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004). Simply put, Hart argues that 'Evangelicalism needs to be relinquished as a religious identity because it does not exist' (Hart, *Deconstructing Evangelicalism*, p. 16).

This latter phrase is an allusion to historian Benedict Anderson's description of the emergence of *national* identity during the eighteenth century.[19] In his book of the same name Anderson described the way in which during the women and men unknown to each other, from a variety of locations, came to feel affinity with one another through the growth of capitalistically-funded vernacular print media (such as newspaper), an erosion of traditional sources of authority which promoted the need for the individual, increasingly responsible for determining her or his destiny, to construct a new legitimising sovereign community, and the emergence of a common language that generated a shared national discourse. Thus national identity was born. The parallels with Evangelicalism are obvious enough.[20] Evangelicalism also relentlessly exploited print media in order to share stories of revival and conversions, thereby linking up remote localities to a broader network; it appealed to the individual's desire for control of her own destiny by diluting a focus on the sovereign election of God and urging her or him to make a decision for Christ but simultaneously provided protection against the possible anomie and dislocation that this new situation generated through its projection of a unified Evangelical community; and it was shaped by the development of what nineteenth-century critic John Foster called the 'Evangelical dialect', a shared set of discursive protocols that intimated religious fraternity and transmitted religious affectation even between strangers.[21]

---

I disagree with Hart, first because he fails to note earlier examples of the use of the term Evangelical (especially in Britain) and second because, although it is true that Evangelicalism is an imaginative construct, this does not make it a falsehood that ought to be disregarded; rather it is precisely what gives it the movement power and purchase. In fact, it makes it *more real* and capable of summoning great loyalty, just as people have fought wars for their 'nation', which is also an 'imaginative construct' if we follow Benedict Anderson's argument. Hart does, however, raise an important point concerning the extent to which individuals in the past would have actually described themselves as 'Evangelicals' rather than by their denominational title, or by some other term such as 'Revivalist'. His argument begs for further research on the actual use of terminology by individuals who have by common consensus been assumed to have been part of the Evangelical movement.

19 B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verson, 1991).

20 Anderson himself has no particular interest in the movement and in fact associates the rise of nationalism in part with the waning of religion, by which he means uniform, hegemonic confessionalism.

21 In fact, the emergence of Evangelicalism was not simply a *parallel* to the emergence of nationalism, but could be construed as interwoven with it, particularly with its strong anti-Catholicism that fed into the type of Protestant national identity identified by Linda Colley in her *Britons: Forging the Nation*

This argument can be illustrated particularly well by reference to the early origins of Scottish Evangelicalism during the 1742 Cambuslang Revival, an event commonly viewed as the major manifestation of Evangelical revival in Scotland. What was significant at Cambuslang was *not* that it was the first revival movement in post-Reformation Scotland. There had been a revival at Stewarton in 1625, at Kirk of Shotts in 1630, at Obsdale in 1675. Each of these movements were local renewal movements, led by the local minister, beginning on the Monday thanksgiving service after the quarterly Communion, and lasting for a protracted period of time.[22] The Cambuslang Revival could have been another such Presbyterian communion season renewal movement. What was new at Cambuslang was therefore not so much the revival itself but the act of imagining that events just south of Glasgow were actually constitutionally connected with events in Wales, England, and New England; the belief that there existed a religious community of shared experiences that transcended locality. This act of imagination here (and parallel acts elsewhere) turned local renewal movements into the international Evangelical revival movement.

This imagination was manifested in several ways at Cambuslang. First, the presence at two of the largest communion meetings of George Whitefield, the international celebrity preacher, added a broader dimension to the local revival, joining it up to religious excitement in other parts of Britain and the New World and infusing it with global significance. Whitefield made fourteen more visits to Scotland, along with frequent trips to America and other parts of the British Isles. The force of his personality helped fashion a new, multi-national religious movement.[23]

Second, William M'Culloch, the minister of Cambuslang, deliberately cultivated aspiration for revival based on his knowledge of global renewal movements. His pre-revival sermons were rooted not only in scripture

---

*1707-1837* (London: Pimlico, 1992). For further discussion of Foster, see M. Spence, 'John Foster and the Integration of Faith and Learning', *Christian Scholar's Review* (2012/13), *forthcoming.*

22 K. S. Jeffrey, *When the Lord Walked the Land: The 1858-62 Revival in the North East of Scotland* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2002). For a broader discussion of the contribution of the Scottish communion season to Evangelical revivalism (particularly in America), see L. E. Schmidt, *Holy Fairs: Scottish Communions and American Revivals in the Early Modern Period* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

23 On Whitefield in Scotland, see H. Stout, 'George Whitefield in Three Countries', in *Evangelicalism: Comparative Studies in the Popular Protestantism of North America, the British Isles, and Beyond, 1700-1900*, ed. by Mark A. Noll and G. Rawlyk (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 58-72.

but by reading from accounts of another religious movement, the account written by Jonathan Edwards, the Massachusetts pastor, of revival in his own New England parish, *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God* (1737). Edward's account in itself signalled something new: the deliberate dissemination of news about revival in order to inspire a confidence that God was working worldwide through parallel events.[24]

Third, as the 'Cambuslang Wark' developed, M'Culloch and other Scottish revivalists displayed a self-conscious reflexivity in publicising revival in their own corner of the world to an international audience. M'Culloch, following Edwards' forensic technique of plotting the contours of the events in his parish, interviewed 110 of the converts at Cambuslang to attempt to narrate what made a revival. James Robe (d.1753) of Kilsyth published his own *A Faithful Narrative of the Extraordinary Work of One Spirit of God at Kilsyth and other Congregations in the Neighbourhood* (1742) followed the next year by *A Short Narrative of the Extraordinary Work at Cambuslang.*[25] Meanwhile, in his *The Signs of the Times Consider'd* (1742), John Erskine (1721–1803), minister at Kirkintilloch, argued that events at Cambuslang must be interpreted as part of a wider move of God which signalled the onset of the millennium.

Finally, the Cambuslang preachers made Glasgow into one of the hubs of Evangelical publishing for reporting news of not just Cambuslang, but the whole worldwide revival. William M'Culloch published the *Glasgow Weekly History*, which used syndicated articles from the parallel London journal, edited by John Lewis. James Robe provided a monthly digest, *Christian Monthly History*, published from Edinburgh. As John Balfour from Ross-Shire wrote to Robe, 'It is a choice Means to promote the Communion of Saints upon Earth.'[26] Scottish revivalists also began a 'Correspondent Meeting', where news of the revivals would be read. In the 1750s numerous Scottish evangelicals held a 'Concert for Prayer', the object of their intercessions being further revival, a code word that came to summarise the common aspirations of these new Evangelicals.[27]

The viability of such a self-conscious Evangelical network was, and continues to be, predicated on mutual recognition and self-authentication. If not quite 'secret handshakes', what makes a true Evangelical is partly determined by other Evangelicals who confirm the testimony and spiritual vocabulary of other individuals or groups and thereby bestow Evangelical identity upon them. And of course it is not one magisterium

---

24 Crawford, *Seasons of Grace*, p. 161.

25 Crawford, *Seasons of Grace*, pp. 187-9.

26 O'Brien, 'A Transatlantic Community', p. 19.

27 Crawford, *Seasons of Grace*, pp. 229-31

making such decision, but rather a complex network of individuals and communities who can often diverge about quite who is 'sound', 'serious', 'saved', and 'solid', to use some of the code words that Evangelicals have deployed to authenticate each other.[28] This makes the movement's boundaries difficult, if not impossible, to draw in any objective way, and it precipitates a complex and often sub-conscious set of decisions made in a thousand different ways by multiple Evangelical sub communities about who is 'in' and who is 'out'.

Evangelicalism is not therefore best not defined as a concrete set of theological beliefs, even though it certainly has a good number of these within its bounds, and several of which are extremely common. Rather, it should be understood as a 'transdenominational community with complicated infrastructures of institutions and persons which identify with "evangelicalism"'.[29] This means that non-theological categories, such as music used, festivals attended, language deployed, organisations belonged to—what we may, in short, call 'the Evangelical style'—can be as important in gluing people together as pure doctrine or theology. Dave Tomlinson, a trenchant critic of the faults of late twentieth-century Evangelicalism, observed that 'evangelicalism must also be understood in terms of its 'culture', or its social ambience.' It consists of 'an entire sub-culture of church service, events, festivals, concerts, conferences, magazines, books, merchandise, record companies, mission organizations, training schemes, holiday clubs and celebrities'.[30] Such bonds allow multiple opportunities for unity, but they also mean that serious theological gulfs can lurk below what appear to be the placid surface waters of the movement. Evangelicals are thus perhaps more surprised than they should be when they discover that, despite attending similar religious jamborees, singing the same Christian music, and consuming the latest Evangelical author, there are some serious issues of theological disparity between them. Fractures

---

28 Smith, 'Evangelical Identities', pp. 7-8.

29 Marsden, quoted in Warner, *Reinventing English Evangelicalism*, p. 31. According to the protocols used in this current article, the current author would have capitalized 'Evangelical' if these words were his own! The contention that Evangelicalism is best defined is as a connexional phenomenon is the central insight of Derek Tidball's *Who are the Evangelicals?* (London: Marshall Pickering, 1994). See also T. Larsen, 'Defining and Locating Evangelicalism', in *The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology*, ed. by T. Larsen and Daniel J. Treier (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 1-14.

30 D. Tomlinson, *The Post-Evangelical* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), p. 27.

within the movement can also be quickly solidified by the construction of subcultural protocols and the creation of sectarian media.[31]

This is the view of an historian of course, and not that of a theologian. This argument is not that Evangelicals themselves should be content to think that style and imagination are all it takes to be an Evangelical. To be Evangelical one must first be an evangelical: that is, one must be desirous to formulate a bold vision of what one believes to be evangelical—Gospel—truth. Evangelicals themselves will thus always be people who want to—and indeed, if they are to live up to their name, *must*—engage in robust debate about what constitutes evangelical doctrine and be convinced that getting this question right is an urgent priority. The sources to which one turns to form such doctrine and practice may vary (recently, for example the Early Church has emerged as a second source of theological interest alongside the traditional touchstone of the Protestant Reformation),[32] but Evangelicals will always be those for whom orthopraxis and orthodoxy *are crucially important.* Acceptance into the Evangelical coalition is based, in part, on the degree to which an individual or community shows this zeal. As Mark Smith has commented, evangelicals are united not on every point of belief, but rather on the presupposition 'that true doctrine can be held and that its holding is not an unimportant matter'.[33] This means doctrinaire liberal Protestants who doubt that unified truth can be found, or who are doubtful that it would have much relevance to the modern world even if it could, are *de facto* excluded. Neither should this argument be taken to imply that Evangelicalism is consequently a movement in which 'anything goes'. One of the binding forces of the network is certainly a core of commonly held tropes about what it means to be an authentic Gospel Christian.

It is being suggested, however, that the bestowal of Evangelical identity comes not through historians or other observers measuring individuals and communities against such a set of predefined characteristics (even if those characteristics have been assembled from listening to many Evangelicals speak), but rather by the self-determining authority of the Evangelical Leviathan itself, which silent yet ineluctably confirms or rejects constituents by relentlessly and almost impenetrably complexly subjecting them to its unspoken protocols of mutual appraisal and authentica-

---

31 This is the theme of P. Ward, 'The Tribes of Evangelicalism', in *The Post-Evangelical Debate*, ed. by G. Cray *et al*, (London: Triangle, 1997), pp. 19-34.

32 G. Kalantzis and A. Tooley, eds., *Evangelicals and the Early Church: Recovery, Reform, Renewal* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2012); D.H. Williams, *Evangelicals and Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005).

33 Smith, *British Evangelical Identities*, pp. 3-4.

tion. Thus no outside observer (even a participant-observer acting as historian) can devise a definitional grid that successfully captures every evangelical within its bounds because this is simply not, historically, the basis upon which the question of who is an Evangelical has been resolved by the movement itself. The most that can be done is to describe the way in which Evangelicalism functions as an imaginative community of mutual affirmation (and mutual exclusion) before proceeding to describe the relative popularity of particular beliefs and practices within this movement on a case-by-case basis. Anything else ends up being misleadingly specific or frustratingly vague.

Reference must be made here to David Bebbington whose grid for defining Evangelicalism, the so-called 'Bebbington quadrilateral', has gained widespread approval. Bebbington argues that Evangelicals can be identified as those who have prioritized '*conversionism*, the belief that lives need to be changed; *activism*, the expression of the gospel in effort; *biblicism*, a particular regard for the Bible; and what may be called *crucicentrism*, a stress on the sacrifice of Christ on the cross'.[34] When all four are found together, he contests, then you have found an Evangelical. Bebbington consciously devised this grid to render a hitherto underexplored religious movement as a legitimate object of professional historical study.[35] A meticulous empiricist, he assembled his master categories by listening to countless individuals and communities speak through the primary sources. 'You... have to have some supra-historical criteriology for determining who you are supposed to be studying,' Bebbington explained in an interview with Neil Dickson. 'The way to do that is through some model of characteristics built up over space and time which provides a common essential core.'[36] Bebbington's definition is thus a survey of popular Protestantism across three centuries intended to bound the story that he wanted to tell.

There is no doubt that his close attention to the sources has indeed yielded four incredibly common characteristics of the movement, hence his definition gaining such a large degree of approval. But his explanation of his methodology begs a question: how does Bebbington (or any historian of Evangelicalism for that matter, because no-one has proposed anything better!) decide which Evangelicals to poll in order to construct the

---

[34] Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, p. 3 (emphasis in original).

[35] This, incidentally, is the kind of act that D. G. Hart criticizes George Marsden and Mark Noll for performing American Evangelicalism history: he argues that they have imposed unity where none existed in history.

[36] 'Evangelical Historiography: An Interview with David Bebbington', *Brethren Archivists and Historians Network Review* 3 (2005), 82-102, at pp. 88-9.

definition of Evangelicalism which will be used to decide who to include in a study of Evangelicalism?! In other words, do Evangelicals exist *prior* to the quadrilateral (or, indeed, to any alternative definition), or does the quadrilateral determine who are Evangelicals? Is there really a movement called Evangelicalism, or is D. G. Hart correct when he suggests that the movement is, in fact, a historiographical fiction?[37]

This is not a principled objection to the idea that Evangelicalism really exists: quite the opposite. But it is to suggest that the reasons for asserting that this is so have tended to rely on an intuitive hunch rather than proven thesis. Evangelical historiography (perhaps rather appropriately given the pragmatic bent of the movement), have been more interested in explaining what Evangelicals have *done* than pausing to probe the way in which the very fabric of the movement has been woven from the cords of language, memory, affiliation and imagination.[38] There is therefore a need for a great deal more historiographical attention to the constructed nature of the Evangelical community, and a need for more focus on the history of the *concept* of Evangelicalism as it has existed across history amongst the very people that we are claiming to have been Evangelicals. Have all so-called 'Evangelicals' believed themselves to be 'Evangelical'? What did they mean by this term? How did they express their affinity with other Evangelicals? What protocols have been essential in generating a sense of discrete Evangelical identity? Such a project would plunge us into deeply into a history of language and the constitutive role of imagination, thus fulfilling what Alistair Chapman and John Coffey have recently suggested ought to be the religious historian's 'principal obligation', namely 'to do everything possible to see things their way—to understand past agents on their own terms in their own contexts'.[39]

---

[37] This is, in fact, the very question that prompted Frank Lambert's thesis (see n. 17 above). American historian of Christianity John Butler had proposed that the notion of a 'Great Awakening' was a fiction, invented by nineteenth-century historian Joseph Tracy. Lambert's reply was that it *was* indeed a fiction but one perpetuated not by historians but by the very eighteenth-century protagonists themselves. The act of imagination created a reality. This insight could be applied far more widely. See: F. Lambert, 'The First Great Awakening: Whose Interpretative Fiction?', *New England Quarterly*, 68 (1995), 650-9.

[38] The work of Lambert and O'Brien on the American Great Awakening identified above (n. 17) is the exception to this statement.

[39] J. Coffey and A. Chapman, 'Introduction: Intellectual History and the Return of Religion', in *Seeing Things Their Way: Intellectual History and the Return of Religion*, ed. by A. Chapman, J. Coffey, and B.S. Gregory (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), pp. 1–23, at p. 16.

## PIETISM

Sweeney refers to Evangelicalism as Reformation Christianity with an eighteenth-century twist. This 'twist' was pietism. It had a profound and ambiguous impact on the question of Evangelical unity. Pietism was originally a renewal movement within German Lutheranism which proposed that 'real faith' was a matter of passionate experience of God rather than bald creedal affirmations. [40] Evangelicals absorbed the temperament of this continental European movement through literature and personal contacts. Evangelicals claimed that correct doctrine *about* Christ should be supplemented by a deep experience of Christ that would transform the emotional centre—the 'heart'—of the individual. The entry point into this 'vital' Christian experience was described by them as 'the new birth', a decisive turning point from nominal to dynamic Christian faith.

Pietism injected into the Evangelical movement a particular vocabulary for describing spiritual reality. Shared testimonies of personal conversion and on-going spiritual experience have been a force for unity. Indeed, Evangelical pietism, with its emphasis on personal testimony, fellowship and affection for Jesus, has been a key ingredient that substitutes for the lack of a publicly acknowledged Evangelical creed. In this sense a commitment to a pietistic spirituality is not just a particular belief that Evangelicals have happened to held in common; it is rather the very glue that has held together a movement which otherwise lacks any express basis for unity.

One of the distinctive dimensions of Evangelical pietism in regard to the question of unity within the movement is communal hymn-singing, a key pietistic innovation of the eighteenth-century revival. The shared

---

[40] The movement is particularly associated with Lutheran leaders Philip Spener (1635–1705) and August Francke (1663–1727). Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism*, pp. 54–5; W. R. Ward, 'Power and Piety: The Origins of Religious Revival in the Early Eighteenth Century,' *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library* 63 (1980), 231–52; G. Nuttall, 'Continental Pietism and the Evangelical Movement in Britain', in *Pietismus und Reveil*, ed. by J. van den Berg and J. van Dooren (Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1978), pp. 207–36; J. D. Walsh, 'Origins of the Evangelical Revival', in *Essays in Modern Church History*, ed. by G. V. Bennett and J. D. Walsh (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1966), pp.132–62, esp. pp. 148-53. Like Evangelicalism, one can use a capitalized term (Pietism) to refer to the official movement within its original central European context, or a low-case term (pietism) to refer to the broader set of attitudes associated with it. Evangelicals *did* have contact with Pietists but they also developed a parallel language and attitude that can also be broadly described as Evangelical pietism. The lower-case initial will therefore predominate in this discussion.

expression of joyful faith and heartfelt devotion transmitted by hymns and songs, from Sankey's *Sacred Songs and Solos* to the charismatic renewal music of the 1960s onwards, has allowed pietistic warmth to pulse through the fibres of the Evangelical movement and has probably been the single-most important factor in forming a common repository of Evangelical theological and Biblical knowledge. Hymnody has been the Evangelical catechism. Late-twentieth century Evangelical hymn writer Graham Kendrick notes that he sometimes has people approach him to exclaim: 'Graham, I found your song in the Bible!'[41]

All Evangelicals have been coloured with pietistic spirituality; all privilege a transformative relationship with Jesus Christ; all value profundity in worship. However, a kind of unqualified pietism that resists channelling personal experience through creedal categories has tended to chaff for those Evangelicals who have felt that vital Christianity must be pegged to classical doctrinal statements, particularly those of the Protestant Reformation. Pietism has thus been both the key imaginative bond between Evangelicals, but it has also injected one of the most fundamental tensions into the movement: orthodoxy versus orthopraxis. Radical pietists have generally resisted interpreting their experience of faith through historical-doctrinal categories because of a fear that dogmatics can shift attention away from the practical outworking of true faith and towards arid debates about abstract concepts. They have believed that actions speak louder than words. As count Nikolaus von Zinzendorf (1700-60), the German Pietist leader put it: 'there is less at stake in the concepts than the truth of experience; errors in doctrine are not as bad as errors in methods.'[42] However, a substantial body of other Evangelicals, generally from a Reformed position, have expressed concern the pietistic tendency dissolves confidence in a uniform body of truth into multiple configurations of experiential impressionism.

Critics of the piestic turn of Evangelicalism certainly have some reason for concern if maintenance of Protestant doctrine is admitted to be central to what it means to be an Evangelical. We shall see in the next instalment of this article that the pietistic emphasis within Evangelicalism has allowed the development of what we can for convenience call 'liberal' theological tenets among individuals who have nevertheless maintained a strong emphasis on zeal of devotion, personal prayer and a relationship with

---

41 G. Kendrick, 'Knowing You (All I Once Held Dear)', at *The Official Graham Kendrick Website*, <http://www.grahamkendrick.co.uk/insight_story.htm> 8 May 2003.

42 Quoted in A. McGrath, ed., *The Christian Theology Reader*, 3rd edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), p. 121.

Jesus. This, in fact, is not surprising since both pietism and liberalism are products of the downplaying of dogma and the rise of the sovereignty of individual self-expressionism in the eighteenth-century. Thus Friedrich Schleiermacher, commonly lauded as the father of liberal theology, spoke with the accent of the Pietist faith of his upbringing when he wrote in his *Addresses on Religion* (1799) that religion 'is above all and essentially an intuition and a feeling... Religion is the miracle of direct relationship with the infinite; and dogmas are the reflection of this miracle'. Evangelicalism has often found unity by following this Schleiermacherian injunction. The privileging of a personal relationship with the Divine over against subscription to a creed has meant that many individuals have been able to fully participate in the Evangelical community while holding doctrinal convictions that depart in some significant ways from the Protestant confessionalism from which the movement originally sprang.

The tendency of Evangelicals to minimize dogmatic divergence in the name of shared love and experience of Jesus has meant that tectonic theological shifts can go for a long time undetected deep under the surface of the pietistic crust. These slowly moving plates eventually cause a fault line to emerge which can produce both on-going tremors and occasional major earthquakes (think, for example, of Rob Bell's *Love Wins* (2011) or Steve Chalke's *The Lost Message of Jesus* (2004)). Evangelicals feel surprised when such conflicts burst into the open precisely because pietistic unity has been so effective at downplaying dogmatic differences. This also makes them forget that none of these controversies are particularly new. For example, in 1867 the honorary Secretary of the Evangelical Alliance, Thomas Rawson Birks (1810-1883), wrote a book called *The Victory of Divine Goodness* that caused a scandal in the Evangelical world because it suggested the reprobate would not be subject to eternal suffering. Aside from having three less words, even the very title this book prefigured the essence of Bell's 'radical' argument!

One further dimension of the contribution of Pietism to the Evangelical movement which arose in the eighteenth century was missionary zeal. This impulse was derived in particular from the Moravians, a lay community descended from the followers of Jan Hus (*c.* 1369-1415) in late-fifteenth century Bohemia. Fired by the Pietist conviction that the joy of experiential relationship with Jesus Christ ought to encourage individuals to share their faith with others, the Moravians established religious communities, orphanages and proselytising enterprises across Europe and the Americas. This evangelistic vivacity was widely emulated among British and North American revivalists. From field preaching to the foundation of international mission societies, Evangelicals poured time, energy and money into enterprises of proclamation and persuasion. In Scotland, such

organizations included the Scottish Missionary Society, the Glasgow Society for Foreign Missions, and the Scottish Bible Society. These agencies aimed for individual conversion and societal regeneration, but perhaps most of all hoped that mission would bring revival which would in turn bring about the eschatological dawning of the kingdom of God.[43]

An energetic commitment to the urgent business of evangelism has spurred on Evangelicals to unity on many occasions, often encouraging the downplaying of doctrinal or ecclesiastical disagreements. However, the relentless activism of the Evangelical movement and a desire to reach as many individuals as possible with the Gospel has again inflames the raw nerve of the movement's oldest and most difficult to resolve division: Calvinism versus Arminianism. The nerve is particularly raw in Scotland. We will return to this theme in detail in the second instalment of the article, but in brief, Calvinist groups have perceived a link between a pragmatic, business-oriented, market-place selling of Christianity and the rise of Arminian, free-will theology which appeared in the eighteenth century in association with Wesleyan Methodism, but burst into full blaze in Scotland in mid-nineteenth century revivalism. Evangelicalism, it seems to many Calvinists, focuses far too much on technique, persuasion, marketing and shallow sentimentalism, all of which reflect its downplaying of God's sovereign grace and election as well as its tendency to promote the salvation experience as a high-octane fillip for the individual, rather than as a sombre act intricately linked to the gravity of sin and the turning aside of God's wrath. Reciprocally, Evangelicals of either explicitly Arminian bent or of a pragmatic pietistic bent who do not see why theology should get in the way of evangelization, have shown impatience with the precisionist tendencies of Scottish Calvinists. 'O hair-splitting Scotland!' wrote the Arminian James Morrison in the mid-nineteenth century. 'How ridiculous does thy narrowness appear to liberal-minded men!'[44] This Reformed critique of Evangelical creedal laxity and shallow pragmatism, and the reciprocal Evangelical Arminian/pragmatist critique of apparently obstructionist dogmatism has occurred

[43] Ward, *The Protestant Evangelical Awakening*, pp. 116-59; A. Walls, 'The Eighteenth-Century Protestant Missionary Awakening in Its European Context' in *Christian Missions and the Enlightenment*, ed. by B. Stanley (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2001), pp. 22–44; J.C.S. Mason, *The Moravian Church and the Missionary Awakening in England 1760–1800* (Woodbridge: Royal Historical Society/Boydell Press, 2001).

[44] F. Ferguson, *History of the Evangelical Union* (Glasgow: Thomas D. Morrison, 1876).

everywhere in the Anglophone world,[45] but Scottish Evangelicals may notice it much more than others because of the relatively high density of a distinctive and deeply culturally-embedded Protestant Reformed Christianity in a relatively small geographical space. An awareness of disunion is thus particularly acute.

This division is rooted not only in particular theological divides, but also in differing attitudes towards the value of ecclesiastical confessions in guaranteeing evangelical authenticity. This difference of opinion was evident during the Cambuslang Revival in relation to the Associate Presbytery, which had been formed after an exodus of ministers from the Church of Scotland in 1733 ostensibly on the issue of patronage but also with its roots in the so-called 'Marrow Controversy' of the 1720s. The Associate Presbytery has sometimes been dubbed the Scottish Methodists because of their commitment to Gospel Christianity; seceeder Ralph Erskine (1685-1752) was the person who had initially extended the invitation to George Whitefield to preach in Scotland. However, the leaders of the Associate Presbytery insisted that Whitefield agree to endorse only their voluntaryistic understanding of church government as defined by the Solemn League and Covenant. Whitefield replied with a typical Evangelical answer: 'I come only as an occasional preacher, to preach the simple gospel to all that are willing to hear me, of whatever denomination'. Ralph Erskine, obviously a believer in *evangelical* doctrines was dismayed at this response and henceforth declined to be part of the new Evangelical network, lamenting that, 'he [Whitefield] says he can refuse no call to preach Christ, whoever gives it'.[46] In other words, Erskine viewed his particular church polity as the only authentic protector of evangelicalism more than he cared for a free-wheeling, free market, non-dogmatic Evangelical project of which Whitefield was a part. As Scotland industrialized, urbanized and democratized, there was little question whether the creedal ecclesiasticism of Erskine or the free-market individualism of

[45] Kenneth Myers, for example, gives a typical lament: 'Within the evangelical subculture, there has always been more concern with quick, practical solutions than with careful theological definition; more emphasis on personal testimonies than on apologetics; a tendency to interpret Christian experience in terms of a subjective "commitment to Christ" rather than as the life of faith as an elected gift of a sovereign God. Within evangelicalism, there is more regard for extemporaneous prayer than for creeds and confessions.' K. Myers, 'A Better Way', in *Power Religion: The Selling Out of the Evangelical Church?*, ed. by M. Horton (Chicago: Moody Press, 1997), p. 48. For a thoroughgoing critique, see Iain H. Murray, *Evangelicalism Divided: A Record of Crucial Change in the Years 1950 to 2000* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2000).

[46] Fawcett, *The Cambuslang Revival*, p. 185.

Whitefield was going to be the more successful. This is the theme with which we will begin the second instalment of this article.

## CONCLUSION

The genius of the Evangelical movement has been its ability to find a basis for unity beyond traditional ecclesiastical confessionalism. However, such unity has relied on alliances and affiliations rather than mergers and unions. The Victorian founders of the Evangelical Alliance, among who were counted several Scottish Evangelicals, recognized this fact when they announced at the founding meeting of the organization in 1846 that uniform subscription would not be required of members:

> That this conference, composed of professing Christians of many different denominations, *all exercising the right of private judgment*, and, through common infirmity, differing among themselves in the views they severally entertain on some points, both of Christian doctrine and ecclesiastical polity, and gathered together from many and remote parts of the world, for the purpose of promoting Christian unions rejoice in making their unanimous avowal of the glorious truth that the church of the living God, while it admits of growth, is one church, never having lost, and being incapable of losing, its essential unity. *Not, therefore, to create that unity, but to confess it, is the, design of their assembling together.*[47]

It is clear from this statement that Scottish Evangelicals should not be surprised to find themselves wrestling with division, diversity or even 'tribalism'. Private judgement has privileged position within Evangelicalism. This makes it inevitable that the movement will live in a constant state of tension with itself, a tension that has been both creative and destructive. Lamenting that the movement has lost its pristine orthodoxy or hoping that a theological cold shower might solve its divisions fundamentally misunderstands the ontology of Evangelicalism. It has only lived and breathed because it has existed in a social-cultural setting of the kind that has valued personal liberty and religious competitiveness. Its members are freely-associating, self-determining groups. Such an environment has meant longevity and vitality for the movement as well as division and rancour. Evangelical diversity is both the movement's tragedy and triumph.

If the Evangelical movement in Scotland is unravelling it is not because of decay from a pristine doctrinal orthodoxy but rather because of a failure of the imaginative bonds that hold together a movement of

[47] *The Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle* (January, 1846), p. 483 (italics added).

individuals associating with multiple Christian communities. However, given that one should expect a coalition to be constantly perplexed by how to bring unity from diversity, disagreements may not be a sign even of this kind of decay but rather an indication that Evangelicals are still fighting hard to discover and act upon what they believe to be evangelical truth. Therefore, if it is the Evangelical coalition we care about, we can conclude that it is probably when Evangelicals *stop* disagreeing with each other that there should be real cause for alarm. As Mark Smith has suggested, the existence of angst about how to define Evangelicalism is itself one of the characteristics by with the movement can be defined![48] Until such anxiety ceases, one should expect the coalition to survive, although individual affiliates may come and go.

If, however, it is not so much the fate of the coalition *per se* that troubles us, but rather the fact that multiple interpretations of evangelical truth that circulate within its bounds, it is necessary to heed the salutary warning of the Victorian Evangelical critic who, gently rebuking a recent proposal by some optimistic clerics for the foundation of a new all-encompassing evangelical denomination based solely on plain Biblical truth, reminded his readers that such a degree of unity was unobtainable. 'Divine ideas,' he wrote, 'are many sided and in their many-sidedness,—viewed in connection with their multiplicity, and their consequent susceptibility of indefinite combinations,—we find part of the reason why there are so many parties at present in the Christian church.'[49] When we remember this, we should probably celebrate that Evangelicalism has been the vehicle for so great a degree of ecumenicity and common purpose more than we should lament that it has failed to fully inaugurate a golden age of theological harmony.

---

48 Smith, *British Evangelical Identities*, p. 17.

49 *The Evangelical Repository* (4th Series), vol. 1 (1867), p. 67. The proposal under review was contained in the book *Unity of Creed, the Union of the Christian Church* (Edinburgh: Elliot, 1866).

# Evangelical Doctrine: Basis for Unity or Cause of Division?

Stephen R. Holmes

School of Divinity, St Mary's College, South Street, St Andrews, Fife KY16 9JU
sh80@st-andrews.ac.uk

## Introduction

Evangelicalism, from its beginnings in the 1730s, has been a self-consciously ecumenical movement. For the first two centuries of its existence, that made it radical; ecumenism is now more commonplace, but the Evangelical vision of shared worship and mission remains remarkable. Evangelical ecumenism has never been marked by a lack of concern for doctrine, but by a differing estimation of which doctrines are non-negotiable. These are the theses I want to argue in this paper. Along the way, I will glance at a couple of recent Evangelical disputes, and try to evaluate them against the background I have built up.[1]

To begin with, I take the beginnings of the Evangelical movement to be in the revivals of the 1730s—the so-called Bebbington thesis. I am aware that this has been challenged to some degree,[2] and I have some sympathy with some aspects of the challenge. Clearly, the Evangelical movement did not arise *ab novo*—or even *ex nihilo*—with the preaching of Wesley, Edwards, and Whitefield. The are significant continuities with what went before, as well as significant shared features with the broader cultural changes of the eighteenth century—and there are also some idiosyncratic features found neither in inheritance or culture; this mixture of the inherited, the culturally-conditioned, and the genuinely new is present in any historical movement, not just Evangelicalism. Our final evaluation of the Bebbington thesis will depend on which elements of the Evangelical movement we judge to be central to its identity, and where we locate them in this pattern of inheritance, influence, and invention.

To take an example relevant to the concerns of this paper, many of the contributors to the Haykin and Stewart volume that attacked the Beb-

---

1 This paper was originally given at the 2011 meeting of the Scottish Evangelical Theological Society. I am grateful to the Society for its invitation to speak to this topic.

2 See Michael Haykin and Kenneth Stewart, eds., *The Emergence of Evangelicalism: Exploring Historical Continuities* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2008) for the most sustained attempt to criticise the thesis to appear in print thus far.

bington thesis wanted to locate Evangelicalism within a broader stream of Anglophone Christianity, Calvinistic in theology and affective in piety; Bebbington's own construction stressed the novelty of certain beliefs about the nature of true conversion, beliefs shared by Calvinists and Arminians alike in the eighteenth century. The question might be starkly put: is Methodism[3] aberrant or definitive of the Evangelical movement? Our answer, of course, depends in part on one's geographical location and interest: it is far easier to see the major story being about continuities in affective Calvinism if one is in Scotland, or if one's area of study happens to lie in New England, than it is if one is in England, or studying the more southerly colonies, where the ministry of the Wesleys was so central to the revival.

(By way of an excursus, I suspect more adequate scholarly debate on the Bebbington thesis will in future have to take great account of this regionalism; the single most curious facet of (most of) the contributions to Haykin and Stewart's book, not excluding David Bebbington's own response, was the constant reference to a monolithic and international 'Enlightenment'; for a generation, now, historians of ideas have insisted on the difference between different national Enlightenments—the aggressive atheism of France not being at all replicated in Scotland, for instance. Jonathan Edwards and John Wesley were both quintessentially Enlightened thinkers, but the Enlightenment traditions they represented were divergent at important points, and very different from the Enlightenment of Diderot or Voltaire.)

## EVANGELICAL ECUMENISM

All that said, it seems to me that something new does happen in the 1730s: to focus on the aspect most relevant to this paper, narratives of surprising conversions challenge inherited accounts of proper processes of Christian initiation, and do so in remarkably similar ways across a surprisingly wide spectrum of protestant churches, forcing processes of common reflection, and even shared mission, which would have been simply unthinkable two generations before. Recall that, in England, in 1688 it was still possible to be imprisoned—and worse—for failing to conform to the liturgy and the discipline of the established church; that religious violence over the question of church government was common in Scotland in 1680; that after the Glorious Revolution and a Presbyterian settlement, toleration was

[3] 'Methodism' here as rhetorical shorthand for 'Arminian streams of Evangelicalism'; I am aware, of course, of the existence of Calvinistic Methodism, and indeed of non-Wesleyan Arminian evangelicals, such as the New Connexion of the General Baptists.

extended to Scottish episcopalians only in 1712; that in New England, the Collegiate School had dismissed its Rector, Timothy Cutler, for Anglican sympathies in 1723. In 1740—fifty years after toleration in England; sixty after covenantors and bishops had slaughtered each other in Fife; seventeen only after Cutler's dismissal—the Anglican priest George Whitefield and the congregational minister Jonathan Edwards made common cause, and they were far from the first so to do. There was an organic and relational unity, imperfect, but real, and so remarkable as to be astonishing in its historical context, from the beginnings of Evangelicalism.

This was testified to by Evangelical preachers. William Seward wrote in his journal for 24th August 1740 'I told them I did not desire them to leave [their] Church but to attend it closely—and that I only wanted to bring them to Jesus Christ and then if they were fully persuaded in their own mind let each remain in the communion in which he was called. If he was called a Churchman, let him remain; if a Quaker, a Baptist, or Presbyterian let him remain so.'[4] Seward was a close friend of Whitefield, who was much less interested in questions of ecclesiology than the Wesleys, it is true, but John Wesley's commitment to the Church of England was significantly tempered by sentiments similar to the Moravian desire to be a vital leaven in all Christian denominations, rather than a separated group.[5] Roger Martin sums up the mood well: '[i]n its first exhilarating phase, the suddenness of the awakening, the sense of millennial expectation it aroused, the freshness of the evangelical experience, created a powerful sense of fraternity among the converts of the movement. Arminians and Calvinists, Churchmen and Dissenters, achieved an unprecedented level of unity.'[6] Given how deep the divisions had run two generations before, this must be counted as extraordinary.

I do not want to offer a historical narrative here, but it is perhaps important to note that this unity was soon threatened—the fierce debates over the doctrines of grace in the 1770s are the most obvious example, but tensions between Churchmen and Dissenters in England arose even earlier. That said, a measure of unity survived, and the great period for Evangelical ecumenism in organisational terms is the birth of the pan-evangelical organisations, beginning with the London Missionary Society in 1795. David Bogue's sermon, entitled 'The Funeral of Bigotry' was as rousing as it was idealistic:

---

4 Quoted in Roger H. Martin, *Evangelicals United: Ecumenical Stirrings in pre-Victorian Britain, 1795-1830* (London: Scarecrow Press, 1983), p. 3.

5 See A.J. Lewis, *Zinzendorf the Ecumenical Pioneer: A study in the Moravian contribution to Christian mission and unity* (London: SCM, 1962).

6 Martin, *Evangelicals United*, p. 4.

> Here are Episcopalians, Methodists, Presbyterians, and Independents, all united in one society, all joining to form its laws, to regulate its institutions, and manage its various concerns. Behold us here assembled with one accord to attend the funeral of *bigotry*: And may she be buried so deep that not a particle of her dust may ever be thrown up on the face of the earth. I could almost add, cursed be the man who shall attempt to raise her from the grave.[7]

We could cite similar sentiments from the founding of the Bible Society in 1804 (John Owen proclaiming 'the dawn of a new era of Christendom'[8]), the founding of the Evangelical Alliance in 1846 (Edward Norris Kirk hailing 'the death of sectarianism'), and many other events between. After the Evangelical Alliance, other pan-evangelical organisations have been founded, but their foundations do not seem to have been marked by this same idealistic euphoria—except, perhaps, for some expressions of charismatic renewal. For half a century, however, Evangelical ecumenism was conscious, distinctive, and celebrated.

Beyond this organisational Evangelical ecumenicity, we can tell many stories of local cooperation and fellowship that crossed denominational boundaries in then-surprising ways. In Olney, to take only one example, John Newton's friendship with the local Congregationalist minister, John Drake, and the local Baptist pastor, William Walker, led to the holding of united services for young people in the late 1770s. There are even some Evangelical congregations that not only refused to own a denominational label, but cannot convincingly be given one: Surrey Chapel, built for Rowland Hill in 1782, would have a Baptist such as John Ryland, Sr, in the pulpit one week, an Anglican such as Henry Venn another, and a Congregationalist such as William Jay still another. In Scotland, the stable chapel of Robert Haldane's house at Airthrey was similarly eclectic.

In the twentieth century, ecumenism became normal beyond the bounds of Evangelicalism. Cross-denominational mission, organisation, and friendship is now normal, and united services are hardly exceptional. This should not blind us to the sheer oddness of Evangelical ecumenism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Of course, the origins of recent ecumenism largely lie in the 1910 Edinburgh Missionary Conference, and so have at least deep origins in Evangelicalism: it would be difficult to describe Edinburgh as an Evangelical event, but the mission movement which gave rise to it was originally a natively Evangelical vision, and many of the societies represented had their beginnings in Evangelical-

---

7 *Sermons Preached in London at the Formation of the Missionary Society* (London: T. Chapman, 1795), pp. 130-1.

8 John Owen, *The History of the Origin and First Ten Years of the British and Foreign Bible Society*, 2 vols (London: Tilling & Hughes, 1816), 1, p. 44.

ism, even if they had drifted away. Contemporary Evangelical suspicion of organised ecumenism stems in part from the very liberal theology that has sometimes been embraced and promoted by the World Council of Churches, and in part from the question of shared organisational membership with Rome. The result is that Evangelicals, for so long ecumenical pioneers, can now seem to be the least ecumenically-minded tradition of the church.

The reality remains that Evangelical cooperation across denominational lines in worship and mission is still so common as to be routine and remains distinctive. Evangelical pulpits are far more likely to be open to preachers of a variety of denominations than other pulpits; Evangelical congregations are far more likely to be involved in trans-denominational mission that other congregations; and so on. (I confess to not having figures to demonstrate these claims, but they seem to me to be incontrovertible, at least in Britain.) Evangelical organisations and conferences are cross-denominational as a matter of course; if others are beginning to catch up, that should not blind us to the distinctiveness of our tradition.

## EVANGELICALS IN CONFLICT

Of course, Evangelicalism can have its vitriolic disputes. I have mentioned the Calvinistic Controversy of 1770; we might add the various debates that marred the early years of the Bible Society, whether Baptists demanding the use of the word 'immerse' or Haldane's concern over the printing of Bibles that included the Apocryphal books; the division over slavery that led to the failure of the plan to form a worldwide Evangelical Alliance; the longstanding and almost visceral lack of trust between Baptists and Methodists in the American south, and so on. But instead, let us come completely up to date, and glance at a two high profile Evangelical disputes from the current century.

In April, 2011, Rob Bell published his latest book, *Love Wins*.[9] Prior to the publication, a promotional video had been posted on YouTube, generating concerned or dismissive responses from several Evangelical leaders associated with a recently-founded organisation known, rather grandly perhaps, as The Gospel Coalition. These responses suggested that one committed to the doctrines Bell would expound in his (not-yet published) book could no longer be considered to be Evangelical. The pithiest—but

[9] Rob Bell, *Love Wins* (London: Collins, 2011).

characteristic—response was John Piper's now-famous comment on Twitter, 'Farewell Rob Bell'—remarkably terse, even for a tweet.[10]

I have commented publicly already on aspects of this debate. There are two questions that need to be untangled: what is Bell saying; and is it an acceptable thing to say? Bell was widely trailed as teaching universalism; in fact, as far as I can see, he explicitly denies that doctrine in the book, holding to an Arminian view that love always gives the beloved the chance to reject. (He does affirm post-mortem offers of salvation, and so it is possible that he ends up logically committed to a position rather like John Hick's, in which Arminian freedom is affirmed, but, in the face of an infinite number of offers, each with a finite chance of being accepted, the final salvation of all is a necessary truth. This is at best a logical deduction from what Bell affirms, and one he refuses to draw, however.) As mentioned, he does assert the possibility of post-mortem salvation, and the possibility of salvation in other religious traditions. Once his position is established, the second question is does this position put him outwith the Evangelical tradition? Even if Bell were committed to universalism, Robin Parry, under the pseudonym Gregory MacDonald, has argued powerfully that dogmatic universalism is an acceptable Evangelical position.[11] The argument might not be right, but it is too well-constructed to be merely ignored or dismissed.

The controversy Bell generated, however, did not particularly turn on that question. In the promotional video, two questions were raised, one about the relative proportions of the saved and the lost, and one, by means of a story, about whether it is appropriate to assert that Gandhi is in hell. It is worth pausing on one of these, and thinking about it carefully. In Bell's own, already endlessly-quoted, words:[12]

> A staggering number of people have been taught that a select few Christians will spend forever in a peaceful, joyous place called heaven, while the rest of humanity spends forever in torment and punishment in hell with no chance for anything better. . . . This is misguided and toxic and ultimately subverts the contagious spread of Jesus's message. . . .

This line was broadcast widely and taken as a full-frontal attack on historic orthodoxy. Zealous defenders of the truth held that Bell must be

[10] John Piper on Twitter, <https://twitter.com/#!/JohnPiper/statuses/41590656421863424> [accessed 17 April 2012].

[11] Gregory MacDonald, *The Evangelical Universalist: The Biblical Hope that God's Love will Save Us All* (London: SPCK, 2008).

[12] *Love Wins*, p. viii.

opposed, denounced, corrected, and bid farewell, because he has ceased to believe the gospel found in Scripture and taught by the church down the ages, and this paragraph was offered as sufficient proof of that. By contrast, I want to suggest that in saying this, Bell is saying nothing that has not been held by the vast majority of Christian theologians down the ages, taught explicitly by many of them, and repeatedly defended as Biblical by the most conservative scholars. If we read the passage carefully, the core claim is about proportion: the offence is in the 'select few' who are saved—not the nature of heaven, nor the nature of hell, but in their relative populations. The message of God's love demands that we hold that God saves many, or most, or all—that the gift of grace is not given parsimoniously. And this is not about the nature of hell, but about who God is—the claim of the book is that 'love wins'.

The question of the relative populations of heaven and hell come the eschaton was asked quite frequently in the Reformed tradition. B.B. Warfield published an essay under the title 'Are they few that be Saved?'[13] His argument was exegetical; his answer a resounding negative. In closing, he paused to point to others who held that the number of the saved would far outnumber the lost: R.L. Dabney; Charles Hodge; W.G.T. Shedd. I could add A.A. Hodge and Jonathan Edwards. This is not a catalogue of woolly-minded liberals. This was the united witness of Old Princeton, a position taken by at least two of the writers of *The Fundamentals*. These names are the very definition of Calvinist orthodoxy. These are the people whose respect for Scripture was such that they developed and defined the doctrine of inerrancy. These are the people with whom Bell is agreeing.

And if we examine what these luminaries actually said, the point becomes more striking still. Charles Hodge calls the number of the lost 'very inconsiderable' on the last page of his *Systematic Theology*, in part as a response to the Biblical texts that assert that God desires all to be saved—for Hodge, the number of the lost is so vanishingly small that 'all will be saved' becomes an acceptable figure of speech. Shedd actually suggests that the error of believing that only a few are saved is equal and opposite to the error of universalism; he asserted that the point Bell writes to oppose is a grave heresy (albeit one that seems presently to be being vigorously defended by all manner of men whose zeal, unfortunately, apparently far outweighs their knowledge). Bell was attacked by faithful and Godly pastors who believed they knew enough to denounce him. They were, unfortunately, just wrong in that belief. This is endemic in recent Evangelical debate; I shall return to the point.

---

[13] B.B. Warfield, *Biblical and Theological Studies*, ed. by S. G. Craig (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1968), pp. 334-50.

This is not an argument that Bell is right to reject a gospel that asserts that few will be saved—although I happen to think that he is—it is an argument that, on one of the two points, so far, on which he has been endlessly castigated and criticised, he is in line with the most impeccable Reformed orthodoxy. If someone wishes to call Bell a heretic or a 'liberal' on the basis of his beliefs about the relative populations of heaven and hell, then they must apply the same terms to Warfield, Hodge, and Edwards. (I could say the same on the other point also, concerning a certainty that Gandhi is in hell, but there is not space here.)

Now, of course, there is a question of how a writer defends the idea of near-universal salvation. The older Reformed tradition had two central lines. On the one hand, in pre-antibiotic days, they generally held that those dying as infants (a significant proportion of the human race) would all be saved; on the other, they tended to assume a postmillennial eschatology under which the last age of the world would be marked by unimaginable prosperity, and so population growth, and by near-universal Christian commitment. The vast preponderance of believers in this millennium so far outweighed the numbers of unbelievers in all earlier ages that salvation was the general norm for humanity. Rob Bell does not assert either of these things (I suppose that, if pressed, he would assent to the salvation of infants, but the point is not a significant part of his polemic); instead he posits a post-mortem gospel offer, held endlessly open. This a well-attested position in recent theology—C.S. Lewis probably held it, for instance; Gabriel Fackre, John Hick, and George Lindbeck certainly do or did; it is also a position that I find simply unconvincing.

This aside, the debate is profoundly important, because it is about who God is. A God who saves only a few is niggardly and ungracious—that is why Shedd regards it as a grave error to believe that only a few are saved; it necessarily posits an unbiblical doctrine of God. Warfield's essay is fascinating on this point. He notes that the argument that few will be saved has apparent exegetical support; he cites Johann Heidegger, who reached that view by reflecting on texts such as Matthew 7:13–14. Warfield thus sets himself to find alternative readings to the apparently-natural ones because the straightforward reading of these texts would be theologically impossible. The broad witness of Scripture is overwhelmingly to the generosity of God in salvation, or so Warfield, Hodge, and most others thought.

Bell's book has had fewer repercussions this side of the Atlantic; most of the responses to the book from Britain were written by people who had at least waited to read it, and were rather more conciliatory in tone, even when raising genuine concerns. There was not, generally, the same sense that this was a matter of Evangelical identity under threat. I understand

that some invitations for Bell to speak were withdrawn, or not offered, but it was all done very quietly. Before those of us in the British Evangelical movement congratulate ourselves on the relative maturity of our response, however, we might recall another debate, sparked in 2003 by the publication of Steve Chalke and Alan Mann's *The Lost Message of Jesus*.[14] Similar to the Bell case, a well-known Evangelical leader published a popular book that was felt by some on the conservative end of the Evangelical spectrum to call into question crucial doctrines; the result was public denunciation of the individual concerned, and a request/demand that Evangelical organisations with which he was involved should distance themselves from him, as a proof of their commitment to the maintenance of orthodoxy. In the case of the debate around the atonement occasioned by *The Lost Message of Jesus*, individuals and churches chose to distance themselves from organisations they had previously supported financially and in prayer,[15] and at least one significant organisational divide, between the various collaborators in the Word Alive Bible week, was represented after the fact by some involved as being centrally related to this debate. I believe this representation to be largely, if not wholly, false, but it has nonetheless become an iconic moment for those who wish to define the divisions in contemporary British Evangelicalism on doctrinal grounds, and has continued in important ways to define the location of various organisations within the landscape of British Evangelicalism.[16]

---

[14] Steve Chalke and Alan Mann, *The Lost Message of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003).

[15] I suppose that this went wider, but the evidence I have concerns the withdrawal of support from Oasis by several individuals and churches, naming this debate as the cause. I was informed of this verbally by Steve Chalke on several occasions.

[16] Word Alive was jointly run by Spring Harvest, UCCF: The Christian Unions, and Keswick. An announcement of the discontinuation of the event, and so the dissolution of the partnership, was made public in March 2007; no reason was given in the announcement, although it was not difficult at the time to find people closely involved with the event who highlighted off-the-record Spring Harvest's belief that the Word Alive week was its least popular event in terms of bookings by some distance. It seemed clear from this first press release, which was issued jointly by all three partners, that the final decision to end the partnership was Spring Harvest's.

On 23rd April 2007, a press release appeared from UCCF ascribing the split to an ongoing debate as to whether someone holding Chalke's views on the atonement should be allowed to speak from an Evangelical platform, and a desire on the part of the other partners in Word Alive to maintain doctrinal orthodoxy. This asserted—erroneously as far as I can determine—that the Evangelical Alliance UK had 'decided to change its constitution' in response

I have argued at some length in previous publications that this debate was also simply badly conducted: on the one hand, historical assertions about atonement theology which did not stand up to a moment's scrutiny were made on both sides; on the other hand, the entire debate was conducted assuming an 'either this or that' approach to the atonement, when the theological consensus for several decades has been that a 'multiple metaphors' view is more adequate. In saying this, I am not asserting that the current academic consensus is right—I happen to think in this case that it is—but that if we are going to threaten to split organisations over a theological dispute, we ought to have a reasonable grasp of the theological issue at hand, which must at least include knowing why we think current scholarship is wrong, if we think it is. As with the Bell book, the major

---

to debates following the publication of Chalke and Mann's book (my best understanding of this reference concerns the revision of the EAUK Statement of Faith agreed in 2005; I was involved in the latter stages of the process of that revision, a process which pre-dated the publication of *The Lost Message of Jesus* and which was not affected in any way that I could discern by that publication). It also claimed that 'Spring Harvest said they regretted they were putting a personality ahead of partnership,' something straightforwardly refuted by Spring Harvest in a strongly-worded press release from Pete Broadbent. It is hard to square this presentation of UCCF walking away with their earlier statement that Spring Harvest had been the initiators of the ending of the collaboration.

On May 21, 2007, a further press release from UCCF admitted one specific, albeit 'unwitting', error in the earlier statement concerning the existence of a request that Chalke be allowed to speak at Word Alive; lamented the public confusion over the issues; and ruled out any further public attempt to clarify what had happened. A comment from Peter Maiden, chair of the Keswick Convention council, in the wake of the public disagreement between Spring Harvest and UCCF perhaps came closest to the whole truth, suggesting that the atonement debate 'created difficulties in the partnership,' but suggesting that the fundamental question had been whether 'there was space for Word Alive in the Spring Harvest programme any longer' (the Keswick statement is no longer online; I am quoting from an online news report published in its wake <http://j.mp/SpringHarvestRegret> [accessed 17 April 2012]).

Given all this, the most plausible reconstruction would seem to be that the Word Alive week was beginning to be perceived as commercially unviable and this, coupled with a general 'growing apart' on multiple issues (the question of women speaking from platforms was also privately asserted by some to have been a part of the mix), led to a split, which (some people connected with) one partner then attempted to represent as largely due to its taking a principled stand defending orthodoxy on one particular issue.

problem with the debate was that many of those engaged in it were ill-equipped.

## THE NATURE OF EVANGELICAL DISAGREEMENT

Of course, Evangelical organisations are hardly unique in struggling with divisive disagreements. The two established churches in the UK are both embroiled in protracted and angry debates over the ethical status of faithful and committed gay and lesbian partnerships, and the Church of England is also struggling to maintain its unity over the question of the consecration of women to the episcopate. The Free Church of Scotland is engaged in an occasionally vitriolic argument over hymn singing (despite the ruling of the Council of Antioch in 268 AD that singing only psalms and refusing to sing hymns to Christ, was unacceptable!) and so on. There are, it seems to me, however, at least two unusual features about the Evangelical debates mentioned, when compared with these other disagreements: they are cross-denominational; and they concern matters of doctrine, rather than practice.

I suppose that these two are linked; it is a matter of common observation that churches—and denominations—generally split over matters of liturgical practice, not over doctrinal issues. It is easy to suggest a rationale for this: assuming that a group of believers share some level of concern for organisational unity—and that may be theological, but it may equally be a concern for keeping the manse or the pension fund—then they can and probably will negotiate disagreements in doctrine, by agreeing not to raise them, or by finding compromise formulas that allow them to slide over our divisions. If, however, they disagree about a point of practice: who should be permitted to preach, say, or even whether leavened or unleavened bread should be used in celebrating communion—then congregational division, at least, seems inevitable. Their disagreements render them unable to attend the same sermon, or the same celebration of the Eucharist. The peculiar character of historic Evangelical unity negotiated this by taking unity outside of the congregation, and by a pragmatic willingness to find *ad hoc* compromises. We might not be able to agree adequately enough on how to celebrate the Eucharist that we can unite, but we can manage one celebration that we will all be able to join in, and so we do.

As a result, for Evangelicals, doctrinal disputes loom larger. We have well-developed strategies of being ecumenical; the question is, when do we employ them, and when do we hold off? This, finally, brings me to the title that I was given. It was not mine, and it seems to me to demand interrogation: what is this thing, 'Evangelical doctrine,' and who gets to

define it? If asked to speak about Roman Catholic doctrine, or Presbyterian doctrine, or Anglican doctrine, one may turn to the Catechism or the Westminster Confession or the Thirty Nine Articles, and be confident of having an official account of the subject under discussion. Evangelical organisations do indeed write statements of faith—although generally they are much briefer than those named—but there are many of them, and they are routinely subject to revision. Whilst there is a common core of doctrines, it is hardly distinctive—Trinity, Christology, atonement, eschatology; there are very significant statements (that of the Evangelical Theological Society in the USA, for example) which do not even include all these items; and other items might be insisted on which are either not common to all Evangelicals, or actively disputed in the tradition—the inclusion of premillennial eschatology in many American Evangelical statements would be an example of the latter.

As a result, faced with controversy over this or that doctrinal point, we cannot simply point to an authoritative definition. I have mentioned briefly already Robin Parry's pseudonymous defence of the possibility of an Evangelical universalism; when Dr Parry 'came out,' so to speak, as the author of that book I was asked for my views on his position; as part of my response, I tested the doctrinal position defended in the book against several of the better-known Evangelical statements of faith; predictably, it fell foul of some, but not of others—in the case of the UK Evangelical Alliance statement, which was revised in 2005, it was acceptable under the older statement when it was written, but less so under the new one. How do we negotiate such complexities?

## EVANGELICAL DOCTRINE: UNITING OR DIVIDING?

The standard definitions of Evangelicalism are not doctrinal. The most generally-accepted definition is the Bebbington quadrilateral of conversionism, activism, biblicism, and crucicentrism;[17] of these, the latter two suggest, not specific doctrinal commitments, but areas of doctrinal concern; the former two are about spirituality: the narration of spiritual experience and patterns of devoted living. Mark Noll essayed a definition in terms of communities of conversation—an explicitly sociological/cultural account, which is very helpful in understanding some of the hard

[17] David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 2-17.

cases.[18] Timothy Larsen has recently offered a five-fold list,[19] which begins by asserting that an Evangelical is 'an orthodox Protestant', but moves on to historical location ('stands in the tradition of the global Christian networks arising from the eighteenth-century revivals...') and spirituality ('has a preeminent place for the Bible in her or his Christian life...') before returning to hover on the boundaries of doctrine and spirituality ('stresses reconciliation with God through the atoning work of Jesus Christ on the cross... stresses the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of an individual...'). At most, these various definitions gesture towards certain theological emphases as being necessary to, but not sufficient for, Evangelical identity. A Calvinist is identified as such by the doctrines she believes; an Evangelical not so.

That said, there has been a persistent attempt by at least some within the Evangelical tradition to draw lines of doctrinal orthodoxy—sometimes, as in 1770, it was Calvinism; sometimes it was believer's baptism, as for the American Landmarkian tradition. More recently, it might be penal substitution, or universalism, or open theism, or either side of the charismatic debate. Lacking any authoritative source for Evangelical doctrine, such debates generally prove almost impossible to settle, and tend to generate more heat than light. How might one prove that all true Evangelicals narrate the atonement in penal substitutionary terms, or deny universalism? There is some historical investigation to be done, to be sure, which however is rarely done adequately. Even where it is done well, the historical data is rarely neat: it is not, for example, especially difficult to find universalists amongst the eighteenth-century Evangelicals, and the number even includes some fairly central figures—Peter Bohler, or, probably, Zinzendorf himself. One cannot then say 'no-one associated with the Evangelical movement has ever held to universal salvation,' and settle the matter. We are left with assertion, either an assertion that such figures are anomalous, or not truly Evangelical, or an assertion that, despite their scarcity, they do establish precedent.

Finally, I might note that whenever I am asked to speak about Evangelical theology, I am reminded of Gandhi's reported comment—I cannot find a good source, so I suspect it to be apocryphal: when he was asked what he thought of Western civilisation, he allegedly replied to the effect that it would be a good idea and we should try it sometime. This might

[18] Mark A. Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism: Evangelicals, Scholarship, and the Bible in America*, 2nd edn (Vancouver: Regent College, 2004), pp. 3-4.

[19] Timothy Larsen, 'Defining and Locating Evangelicalism', in *The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology*, ed. by T. Larsen and Daniel J. Trier (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 1-14, see p. 1.

be said of Evangelical theology. British Evangelicals have not been good theologians, at least through the twentieth century. We produced world-leading Biblical scholars in some numbers, but not a single theologian of the same stature. More seriously, but probably linked, we produce, far more than any other tradition, leaders who appear unaware of how limited their theological knowledge is. As a result when we enter into disputes we often lack the knowledge to dispute well. Sometimes we fail on the level of simple historical knowledge: when the dispute is of the 'can you say this and still be an Evangelical?' sort, the response, 'well, Billy Graham said it, and he usually makes the list...' is available far more often than we realise (not always with Dr Graham as the comparator). More often, we lack knowledge of well-established distinctions and arguments, and so the intellectual finesse to argue well: conflating ideas that should be kept apart, and missing standard theological analyses, we blunder about unhelpfully and unhappily. We don't know what Evangelical doctrine is, and that gets in the way of our disputes far more than that doctrine itself.

All of which said, let me close by suggesting a definition of Evangelical doctrine which might help us navigate the disputes. From the beginnings till today, what has been distinctive about Evangelical theology, I suggest, has not been its content, its conservatism, or its commitment to this or that doctrine or selection of doctrines; it has been a conscious and serious decision about the relative importance of doctrines. We can and will disagree about ecclesiology, or the doctrines of grace, and still work together, because these are not first order. What are first order doctrines for us? I propose this: just those necessary to maintain a particular soteriological scheme. Evangelicals are those who preach the same gospel, of punctilliar conversion and immediate assurance available through faith alone. For this gospel to be true, God must be triune, and Christ must be fully divine and truly human, so we take our stand on classical Trinity and Christology. The basis of this gospel is in the Scriptures, so Biblical authority, sufficiently strong to establish its truth, is central to our belief. And so we could go on.

This account, if accepted, seems to me to carry two important implications. The first is that the debates which will be truly toxic for Evangelicals are those that apparently concern the nature of the gospel itself. This was the case with the doctrines of grace in 1770, and it has been the case with the two recent debates mentioned above. Other arguments will happen, but they will not have the power to divide that soteriological debates will. The second is that this construction of Evangelical theology excludes, or at least marginalises, those who do place other doctrines—baptism; presbyterian ecclesiology; a particular account of church-state

relations; Calvinism—as first order. This seems to me appropriate. 'Evangelical' does not usefully mean 'conservative Protestant'. Rather, it refers to a movement that was self-consciously and offensively radical—in its ecumenism, as well as in other ways—in its eighteenth-century origins, because the mission of taking the gospel to the world mattered far more than the task of upholding inherited doctrinal distinctives.

I notice that in some of the conservative denominations in the USA, younger leaders are eschewing the term 'Evangelical' and describing themselves as 'Confessional'—committed, that is, to the historic beliefs of a particular tradition of Christianity, rather than to a radically missional movement that sits lightly to all traditions in its concern to take the gospel to the world. I do not argue that one is a better position than the other—although I know where I stand—just that they should be distinguished. Evangelical doctrine is missional doctrine, through-and-through, and that which does not serve the cause of mission is, necessarily, not important in a truly Evangelical theology.

# Reflections on a Centenary: Edinburgh 1910, Edinburgh 2010, and Lausanne III

Rosemary Dowsett

4 Borden Road, Glasgow G13 1QX
ScotETS+info@gmail.com

## INTRODUCTION

Centenaries are marked to celebrate what in retrospect are seen to be significant events. Of course, how you define 'a significant event' will always depend to some extent on your point of view. What may be significant for one person or group may be completely irrelevant in the minds of many others.

The centenary of the 1910 World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh displays exactly this kind of ambiguity. Hence a history-of-mission-savvy American, the late Dr Ralph Winter, was the inspiration behind a conference in Tokyo focused entirely on unreached people groups, arguing that this was the chief concern of 1910. An African leader, John Pobee of Ghana, insisted that there must be an event in Edinburgh, bulging with symbolic resonance, revisiting a place where history was made in the era of modern Christian mission. A Malaysian bishop, Hwa Yung, insisted that there must be a celebration in the global south, bulging with a different symbolic resonance, that is, demonstrating visually and geographically the shift of the global church numerically to the global south; that is why Lausanne III ended up in Cape Town.

But, on the other hand, were you to ask most Scots, even most people in Edinburgh itself, and even within the church population, whether they noticed a centenary celebration, or knew what it was about, they would have been puzzled at the question and ignorant of the answer. With a few exceptions, they simply didn't notice it. As someone answered me vaguely, 'Was it someone inventing television?'

## SO WHY BOTHER WITH 1910?

1910 was indeed worth celebrating, if only as an occasion to take stock of what went right and what went wrong, whether its hopes and expectations were realised, whether the World Council of Churches is right to claim to be its continuation, or whether some other body more accurately reflects

its ethos.[1] The Christian faith is an historic faith, and in order better to understand the present we need both to look back and to look forwards.

My guess would be that rather more Scots knew what was going on in 1910 than appeared to be the case in 2010, and that there was a fair measure of civic and national pride in it all, even beyond the active church population.

The impetus was world evangelization, and many Scots, by no means all what today we might call evangelicals, were actively engaged in that: praying, sending, giving, going. In fact, their engagement was disproportionately large for such a small country and population. The nineteenth century, famously named by Latourette as 'The Great Century',[2] had marked the expansion of the Protestant missionary endeavour to an unprecedented degree; travel and communications were easier and faster than ever; high imperialism had wired Europeans—in particular the British—for conquering the world; the Americans were bristling with entrepreneurial, pioneering, can-do spirit; the Scots were building ships as if their life depended on it—and it was only natural to sail on those ships, and emigration was booming; and an astonishing tsunami of missionary journals and letters and books and speakers at public meetings bolstered confidence, with a titillating mix of mystery and exotic information.

No, 1910 wasn't about someone inventing television, but paradoxically it is arguable that more Scots were more informed (sometimes erroneously, it has to be said) about the wider world, and more interested in it, than many are today; and the churches, of a variety of stripes, were more interested in world mission than many are today.[3]

The eight commissions[4] working ahead of the 1910 conference were extraordinarily efficient and resourceful in gathering information from all over the world (with the exception of Latin America, and the Ortho-

---

1 For an excellent study of Edinburgh 1910, see Brian Stanley, *The World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh 1910* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009).

2 See Volumes 4, 5 and 6 bearing that title in K.S. Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity*, new edn (Exeter: Paternoster, 1971; original publication London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1941-45).

3 The repeated references to Scotland and Scottish churches arise not only from the 1910 conference being held in Edinburgh, but also from this paper being given at a conference in Glasgow, for academics and church leaders from Scotland.

4 Carrying the Gospel to all the Non-Christian World; The Church in the Mission Field; Education in Relation to the Christianisation of National Life; The Missionary Message in Relation to the Non-Christian Religions; The Preparation of Missionaries; the Home Base of Missions; Missions and Governments; Cooperation and the Promotion of Unity.

dox world; see below) and in circulating it in carefully crafted reports. This was of course an entirely Protestant undertaking, with very extensive input into the reports from field missionaries and mission agency leaders, but with some national Christian respondents as well. The whole enterprise created quite a head of steam before ever the actual conference began in June 1910, and there is for the most part considerable convergence within each report, although some differences of opinion are also discernible. Those directly involved in cross-cultural mission comprised the very large majority of those who attended the conference; ecclesial dignitaries were in a distinct minority.

## SOME SIGNIFICANT PROBLEMS

At the same time, there was already a wide divergence theologically within Protestantism, for instance between the sacramentalism of the High Anglicans, then in the ascendancy in leadership of the Church of England; the modernism of those committed to Higher Criticism; and the conversionism of the evangelicals. This divergence showed up in 1910, even though the discussion of theology was ruled out of court, deemed to be too divisive, and distracting from the focus on strategy. Even between the evangelicals, there were some significant differences in emphasis, ranging from the methodology of revivalism through to wholistic care. And, in addition, alongside these there were the seeds of both fundamentalism and of anti-intellectualism on the one hand, contrasted on the other with a willingness to work with a more theologically and ecclesiastically disparate team and commitment to some penetrating research and thinking. These differences are important to note, because they haven't gone away.

What was, I think, more or less unanimous was the confident expectation that the whole world would soon become Christian, and that this was an entirely right and proper goal to have. This was despite there being different underlying reasons for believing it was a right and proper goal. The juggernaut was running strongly, and nothing would stop it in its tracks now. All that they needed to agree on, and act upon, was the 'how' of reaching that goal.

Whatever may have happened that they did not foresee—the implosion of Europe in two terrible wars; the huge impact of Marxism in China, Russia and Eastern Europe; the rise of secularism in Europe; and the explosive resurgence of Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam, especially in the second half of the century—their belief that the gospel would take root all over the world was absolutely vindicated. The evangelical activist instinct has been a strong factor in that, though not the only one. Despite all the

setbacks of the twentieth century, Edinburgh 1910 genuinely contributed to the continuation in faith and confidence of so much begun in the previous century; and, in the grace of God, the church has been established in country after country, culture after culture, where in 1910 there was as yet no gospel penetration. It also established a pattern of serious data gathering, first seen in Carey's tooled leather map above his cobbler's bench, and of strategic thinking and action flowing from that data.

So now we can join the twenty-first century.

## EDINBURGH 2010

Early on in the new century, Ken Ross, then Convenor of the Church of Scotland Board of Mission, and the University of Edinburgh's Faculty of Divinity along with the Centre for the Study of Christianity in the non-Western World, hatched a plan to hold a series of public lectures looking back at each of the eight 1910 commission reports in turn, and evaluating them in the light of developments since. Speakers would come from many different parts of the world, and, crucially, from many different church traditions, including the Orthodox and Roman Catholics (who had been excluded in 1910) and the Pentecostals (who had hardly started). Most of the speakers came from the academic world, reflecting the interest of the University.[5]

While this was envisaged as being primarily for interested people in Scotland, and attendance was never very high, a few hardy souls came from farther afield. As often happens, one thing led to another, and a small group of people involved in international mission networks or denominational bodies met to plan first a study process and then later on a conference. It evolved in a slightly ramshackle way, and partly because of Ross's role as a denominational mission leader, and partly because of the early involvement of staff from the World Council of Churches, the composition of the planning group changed. On the one hand, it became much more inclusive of a range of traditions, reflecting what had already happened in the public lectures. On the other hand, there was a strong bias towards denominational representatives, many of them based in Geneva and working in some way with the WCC, and most of them Europeans. Unlike 1910, mission agencies as such and particularly the interdenominational and faith missions which had played such a central role then, were

[5] These papers, in slightly abbreviated form, are collected in David A. Kerr and Kenneth R. Ross, eds, *Edinburgh 2010: Mission Then and Now* (Oxford: Regnum, 2009).

not included, although a number of predominantly evangelical networks (for instance, The World Evangelical Alliance, and the Lausanne Movement) were represented, as were bodies such as the Latin American Theological Fraternity and the International Association of Mission Studies, both led by evangelicals. And significantly, following the pattern of the Towards 2010 lectures, and again with the interests of the University in mind, the study process was designed as academic led rather practitioner led research. This of course shaped the outcomes.[6]

## SHOULD EVANGELICALS HAVE BEEN INVOLVED?

For some evangelicals, especially certain streams in North America, and indeed some of our strongly Reformed friends here in the UK, the very thought of engaging in some shared activity with such a theologically disparate crew is anathema. Some of us who were involved, and the organisations we were representing, got a lot of vitriol.

I continue to believe that it is evangelical missions more than anyone else who are the true spiritual heirs of 1910, whether or not one wishes to make a case for WCC being the organisational heir (with a gap of almost 40 years after the event before WCC was formed). So, in my view it would have been absurd to hold a centenary here in Scotland from which the convictions of men like John Mott,[7] who did so much to inspire 1910, and his unashamed passion for world mission to be at the heart of the church's DNA, were absent.

Sadly, much of the twentieth century saw the withdrawal of evangelicals from the public square, from our universities and influential professional bodies, from politics, from academic theology, and from the wider discourse of the church. There are some great exceptions, and there is perhaps greater awareness in recent decades of what we have lost and the uphill task of recovering ground. Some of the chasms between ourselves and other traditions are of our own making. The question is, are we willing for the hard work of bridge building wherever that may be possible? Are we willing at least to engage in civilised conversation? We have things

---

6 The list of participants in the initial planning group, and then the Council, may be found on pp. 385-7 of the record of the conference, Kirsteen Kim and Andrew Anderson, eds, *Edinburgh 2010: Mission Today and Tomorrow* (Oxford: Regnum, 2011). This volume also outlines talks, findings, and much other information.

7 John Mott was one of the pioneers of the Student Volunteer Movement, formed in 1888 in America. The SVM's clear priority was to inspire students to give their lives in missionary service.

to maintain with firmness, but we also may have things to learn from other traditions.

In the end, evangelicals did get involved in the nine study themes, and have contributed to the many volumes coming out of them.[8] Yes, sometimes that is one voice among many, but at least the voice is not entirely silent, and in some cases it is very clear indeed. Many evangelicals from the global south are much more ready to engage in ecumenical discussion or action than we in Scotland are familiar with. They may not wish to be saddled with all the arguments that have divided northern churches over the centuries—our historical baggage. They may be passionate in their commitment to Scripture, but read it differently. They may be in situations of being a small minority surrounded by another majority world faith, or even under persecution, and they rightly reckon they need one another. High walled separatism is not an option. And some northern evangelicals might be surprised that many Roman Catholics or Orthodox, especially from the global south, can be clearer than many in our own congregations about the uniqueness of Christ, of the need for people to come to personal repentance and faith, of the need to study God's Word and seek to follow it.

## THE COMMON CALL

At the close of the conference, delegates affirmed The Common Call. This document illustrates both strength and weakness. At one level, it is extraordinary that leaders representing Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant of every hue, Anglican, Evangelical, Pentecostal, WCC, could all sign a statement of this nature and agree there is so much we can indeed agree on. I am not aware of any previous gathering, across the traditions, which has achieved such a document. This was not a formal comprehensive doctrinal basis, rather, each paragraph represented by a somewhat circuitous route one of the nine study themes.[9] But as you read it, I don't

[8] The initial findings were summarised in Daryl Balia and Kirsteen Kim, eds, *Edinburgh 2010: Witnessing to Christ Today* (Oxford: Regnum, 2010). This volume was circulated beforehand to all conference delegates to enable prior reading. Subsequent to the conference, Regnum is publishing many volumes, many devoted to one theme in fuller detail, others focusing on confessional or regional responses.

[9] The nine themes were: Foundations for Mission; Christian Mission among Other Faiths; Mission and Postmodernities; Mission and Power; Forms of Missionary Engagement; Theological Education and Formation; Christian Communities in Contemporary Contexts; Mission and Unity—Ecclesiology and Mission; Mission Spirituality and Authentic Discipleship. In addition,

think there is anything an evangelical could say 'I don't believe that, that's not biblical...'. On the other hand, some of the language is undoubtedly fuzzy, and open to far different interpretations, which has indeed been the case. Even the term 'witness' in the strapline for Edinburgh 2010 overall—'Witnessing to Christ Today'—certainly for some participants did not embrace evangelism or mission as evangelicals would understand those terms. There are also many things which we would consider very important that are not spelled out.[10]

I am not sure that it will be especially influential, despite appearing on numerous websites. Edinburgh 2010 has no continuation mechanism, though there will be close to thirty volumes published in the Regnum series. There is much worth studying in these but I am personally doubtful whether they will escape from the academic world.

The one shining exception in my view will be the superb *Atlas of Global Christianity*, edited by Todd Johnson and Ken Ross, and published by Edinburgh University Press. This, in the spirit of 1910, encompasses an astonishing goldmine of data—historical, current, global—most beautifully presented. Despite its eye-watering price, I think this will be a widely consulted reference resource for decades to come.

Will Edinburgh 2010 be memorable in the way that 1910 has been? I personally do not think so. It may prove more significant for some traditions than for others. Will it lead to closer evangelical consensus? No. Will it facilitate conversations with Christians of other traditions? Possibly. I pray so.

## AND SO TO CAPE TOWN

On the face of it, Lausanne III was a mammoth evangelical jamboree. Certainly it was inspiring to be in the company of about 4,000 Christians from almost every people group in the world where the church is already established, or where there are known believers. The glaring absence was that of the China delegation, 200 strong, who at the last moment were prevented by their government from attending.

Unlike Edinburgh, it was an almost exclusively evangelical (including Pentecostals) event—a small number of observers from other tradi-

there were seven transversals, to be applied to each study theme: Women and Mission; Youth and Mission; Healing and Reconciliation; Bible and Mission—Mission in the Bible; Contextualisation, Inculturation and Dialogue of Worldviews; Subaltern Voices; Ecological Perspectives on Mission.

[10] The full text of The Common Call is widely available, including in *Mission Today and Tomorrow* as cited, also on websites including <http://www.edinburgh2010.org/>.

tions were invited—but how diverse that global evangelicalism now is! For those unaccustomed to venturing out of their tribal burrows, it was quite a culture shock, and disorientating, and some retreated back into clusters of their own kind. Others revelled in the opportunity to make new friends, and especially appreciated the table groups of six or eight people, carefully put together across nationalities, traditions and ministries. These groups, retained throughout the week, discussed each Bible study and plenary presentation, prayed together, shared about their own lives and ministries, and in the course of it all learned to respect those rather different from themselves.

There were many memorable moments, among them some of the plenary speakers, some deeply moving testimonies, the celebration of the final evening, and—more personally—particular conversations. The programme was a masterpiece of organisation (some would say, too tightly organised), with hundreds of smaller group meetings alongside the plenaries. The majority of participants were mission practitioners or agency or network or specific mission-focused ministry leaders, as in 1910, but there were also many pastors and local church leaders, with a smaller contingent of academics, business people, politicians and representatives of the professions. The use of every kind of advanced technology, both leading up to the event and during it, was highly skilled, and facilitated the participation before and during the conference of many not able to be actually present.

Far more than in Edinburgh 2010, but echoing 1910, there was a common belief that world mission, in its classical sense, is at the heart of the DNA of the authentic church, and that the whole world owes worship to the Triune God. That is not surprising, given that Lausanne's strapline is 'Movement for World Evangelisation'. There were many themes that came repeatedly from different parts of the world, seeming to express common concerns. We shall look at some of them briefly in a moment.

## SOME LESS POSITIVE CONCERNS

It would be dishonest to suggest that all this added up to total harmony and consensus. The process leading up to Cape Town, and the event itself, were supposed to be a joint endeavour between the World Evangelical Alliance and Lausanne. Perhaps 'Lausanne and WEA' is a bit cumbersome and not very snappy, but WEA was consistently marginalised, largely because of American evangelical politics, including mission network politics, and the wishes of some major donors. In my view, this brilliant opportunity for two global evangelical players to present a truly united front was largely lost, and I regret that hugely.

Further, although there were large contingents from the global south, and although there were many non-western faces on the platform each day, there was a probably accurate widespread feeling that northerners had been the main decision-makers and shapers, and that northern money and power were still alive and well. We may talk about the shift to the global south, but from the southerners' perspective we haven't let go of the power strings or the purse-strings.

This was highlighted by the only two plenaries to cause real resentment and uproar, and in both cases the speaker happened to be an American. In the first case, a very high profile pastor, in his Bible reading, made some insulting comments about the previous day's expositor, who happened to be a Latin American woman. The pastor is well known for his vehement opposition to women teaching men, and here the implication was 'what can you expect if you allow what the Bible forbids—error, of course'. For good measure he included a disparaging aside about what he regards as Latin American suspect theology—and then went on a bender about eternal conscious torment of the unbeliever. This had nothing to do with his passage, as many people noted, but a great deal to do with arguments going on in his own country, no doubt greatly enflamed since Cape Town by the recent publication of Rob Bell's book, *Love Wins*.

This particular incident, and the reactions to it, illustrated several areas where evangelicals simply do not agree, both between different tribes and often between north and south: the role of women in public ministry; the place of social transformation and justice issues; what contextualisation is all about; and how rigid our doctrinal formulations can be, or should be. Behind them all, of course, are issues of hermeneutics, as well as of culture and context. Increasingly, evangelicals in the global south, and a growing number in the north, clamour for rather more grace and humility along with truth claims.

The second incident illustrated another tension between evangelicals, concerning the balance between evangelism defined purely as proclamation, and wholistic mission. For many, it was assumed that this particular battle had been fought and won way back at Lausanne I in 1974, that the influential Lausanne Covenant had made a marked contribution to resolving this, and that—because of that—wholistic mission was what Lausanne stood for. However, when the leader of the Lausanne Strategy Working Group gave his presentation, including some very dodgy statistics, it was clear that he was operating out of a very restricted paradigm for evangelism, that 'finishing the task' meant identifying and reaching unreached people groups as speedily as possible, with a minimalist conversionist message, and thus to hasten the Lord's return. Anything else

was a distraction. According to this paradigm, Europe is a Christian continent.

As with the first incident, the Latin Americans en bloc were incandescent, but equally so were many from every continent, while some others clearly agreed with the presenter. It seems that this is still a matter of deep division. There are deep fault-lines, not consensus, when it comes to eschatology and all that flows from it, the kingdom of God, evangelism and transformation, what is encompassed in the atonement, and so on.

## THE CAPE TOWN COMMITMENT

These divergences were not of course new, and the group tasked with drawing up the Cape Town Commitment was very mindful of them. Part 1 of the CTC is entitled 'For the Lord we love: The Cape Town Confession of Faith', part 2 'For the world we serve: the Cape Town call to action'.[11] Part 1 was drawn together largely through the work of the Lausanne Theology Working Group, together with members of the Theological and Mission Commissions of WEA, and under the inspired chairmanship of Dr Chris Wright. With a very deep desire to be as constructive, inclusive, and irenic as possible, the group chose to avoid some more traditional doctrinal formulations and some of the red-rag-to-a-bull vocabulary, and instead to build the statement around first God's love for us, and then our love response.

Part 1 was prepared well ahead of time, and was supposed to be circulated in advance so as to be a theological framework within which the Congress operated. For reasons that were never given, it was not in fact released until the penultimate night of the Congress. Consequently it did not serve the immediate purpose for which it was written, and equally the feedback looked for by the group in order to amend it where necessary was not possible. It also makes it very hard to know how accurately it represents united evangelical foundations.

Part 2 is a distillation of key themes that came out of the Congress itself, and is shaped around the focus for the six days of plenary presentations and the vast number of complementary seminars. It was an almost impossible task to condense millions of words into a few thousand, but there was each day often a strong common thread, and themes that occurred again and again. For instance, echoing the Indian Azariah in

[11] The full text of the Cape Town Commitment may be found on <http://www.lausanne.org/>, and has already been translated into at least 20 languages. A study guide is expected in 2013, published by Hendrickson.

1910, there were repeated calls for north and south to establish far more equal and true partnerships, untainted by power or history.

Another echo from 1910 was the call for unity, not only among evangelicals, but also for freedom to build better relationships with those of other traditions for the sake of the credibility of the gospel. I think many northerners simply do not understand how deeply many in the global south resent the burden of inherited fractures between different parts of the church, and how on the ground, as it were, especially where Pentecostalism and the charismatic movement have influenced ancient churches, some historic divisions are being blurred. Evangelicals have usually sheltered behind defining unity as spiritual unity. I would question whether we have even that very often. But for many of our brothers and sisters, there is a strong desire for more visible partnership and unity—not organisational union, but observable working together.

From all over the world came the call for moving from superficial evangelism to deeper-level discipleship; in many parts of the world, because our evangelism has been shallow, so too now is the church—the one inch deep and one mile wide syndrome. It resembles the world more than it should, and there is distressingly little deep level conversion and worldview transformation. This is arguably a Scottish problem, not just somebody else's. There were repeated calls for responding more effectively to poverty, AIDs and human trafficking; for humility, integrity and simplicity; for breaking down the false dichotomy between sacred and secular; for mobilising the whole church, in all its daily life, to live out and speak out the gospel fearlessly and winsomely; for the urgent need for leaders with truly godly lives.

Almost all these themes which came across with united voice from across the evangelical spectrum, are related to ethics, character and action. It seems that evangelicals find it easier to agree in those areas than they do relation to some areas of doctrine or some of the strategy that flows out of theological presuppositions.

## CONCLUSION

It is too soon to know what the impact of Lausanne III may be. Will it prove as influential long term as Edinburgh 1910, or even Lausanne I in 1974? I'm not sure about that either. The Lausanne machinery has bold plans for the next twenty years, but whether that will for instance pass the baton on to the global south, or lead to a truer partnership across the globe, is not so clear. Maybe the very idea of globalised plans appeals more in the north than in the south, not least because many parts of the south

suffer rather than gain from economic and cultural globalisation (and resent it), while the north has largely benefited from it.

At the local level, even here in Scotland, will Cape Town make any difference? That, too, is hard to evaluate at the moment. Sadly, I think many of the tribal divisions will remain. Evangelical consensus? Perhaps we all need to commit to praying for miracles.

# THE MOST SIMPLE AND COMPREHENSIVE SCRIPT FOR THE THEO-DRAMA OF SCRIPTURE: THREE ACTS OR FOUR?

DAVID H. WENKEL

1454 ASHLAND AVE, APT 302, DES PLAINES, IL, U.S.A. 60016
dwenkel@gmail.com

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Stephen begins his speech to the Sanhedrin by saying 'the God of glory appeared to our father Abraham...' (Acts 7:2). Stephen's rhetorical recounting of salvation history reflects the significance of narrative power in the early church. Stephen's speech cannot be reduced to mere history and it follows a pattern of using historical summaries as prophetic speech. David G. Peterson notes that potential parallels to Stephen's speech include Joshua 24:1-18; Psalm 78; 106; Ezekiel 20; 1 Enoch 84-90, etc.[1] A tradition of biblical and extra-biblical materials clearly exists that supports the conclusion that God's people should be able to summarize the story (or stories) of the mighty deeds of Yahweh.

With the close of the canon, the content of this Christ-centred theo-drama is now fixed as the prophetic words of Scripture. Yet it is not clear that the number of acts or scenes in the theo-drama of Scripture has been determined.[2] Correctly identifying the number of acts is particularly important because of the turn from the search for the Bible's centre to the search for the Bible's storyline.[3] The overarching narrative plot of the

---

1 David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (PNTC; Grand Rapids/Nottingham: Eerdmans, 2009), p. 245.

2 For an exposition of Christian 'theo-drama' see Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: WJKP, 2008), p. 324 n. 50; Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory, Vol 1: Prolegomena* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), *passim*, esp. pp. 12, 66.

3 Daniel J. Brendsel, 'Plots, Themes, and Responsibilities: The Search for a Center of Biblical Theology Reexamined', *Themelios*, 35:3 (2010), 402. With respect to the turn toward plot and drama, I agree with Richard B. Gaffin Jr.'s argument that redemptive-historical approaches (narrative methods) can complement, rather than replace, more traditional systematic loci methods in 'A New Paradigm in Theology?', *Westminster Theological Journal*, 56:2 (1994), 380. David K. Clark comments that narrative theology is both trendy

Hebrew Scriptures and New Testament combined consists of distinct categories, movements, scenes, or acts. There are various ways of engaging the storyline of the Bible and they all reflect the perspective of the expositor. The number of acts in the story will depend on how much detail the expositor decides to include or exclude. In other words, communicating the storyline of Scripture requires one to 'zoom-in' or 'zoom-out' with respect to certain features.[4] With respect to the most macro-level view of the drama of Scripture, one needs to ask this simple question: what happens next?

Despite slight variations, a very common organizing principle focuses on three acts: (1) creation, (2) fall, (3) redemption.[5] However, there are those who include another act at the end: (4) consummation.[6] Relatively

---

and hard to define in *To Know and Love God: Method for Theology* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2003), p. 46.

4 For a discussion about the 'biblically determined turning points in the history of redemption', see D. A. Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), p. 81.

5 Sean McDowell, *Apologetics for a New Generation* (Eugene, OR: 2009), p. 132; Michael W. Goheen and Craig G. Bartholomew, *Living at the Crossroads: An Introduction to Christian Worldview* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), p. 24; Kevin J. Vanhoozer, 'What is Everyday Theology? How and Why Christians Should Read Culture' in *Everyday Theology: How to Read Cultural Texts and Interpret Trends*, ed. by Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Charles A. Anderson, and Michael J. Sleasman (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), pp. 15-62, esp p. 27; Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview*, 2nd edn (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), p. 12; W. Robert Godfrey, *An Unexpected Journey: Discovering Reformed Christianity* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2004), p. 95; Cornelius Plantinga Jr., *Engaging God's World: A Christian Vision of Faith, Learning, and Living* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), p. 16; Clark M. Williamson, *Way of Blessing, Way of Life: A Christian Theology* (St. Louis: Chalice, 1999), p. 83; Douglas M. Jones III, *Why and What: Second Thoughts on the Christian Message* (Moscow: Canon Press, 1994), p.12; Gaffin, 'A New Paradigm in Theology?', p. 381; Brian J. Walsh, *The Transforming Vision: Shaping a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1984), p. 44.

6 Michael Lawrence, *Biblical Theology in the Life of the Church* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), p. 95; David W. Hall, *Calvin and Culture: Exploring a Worldview* (Philipsburg: P&R, 2010), p.15; Ernst Käsemann, *On Being a Disciple of the Crucified Nazarene: Unpublished Lectures and Sermons*, ed. by R. Landau with W. Kraus; trans. by Roy A. Harrisville (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), p. 43; Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship: Letting the Gospel Shape Our Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), p. 243; Matthew Eppinette, 'Human 2.0: Tranhumanism as a Cultural Trend', in *Everyday Theology: How to Read Cultural Texts and Interpret Trends*, ed. by Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Charles A. Anderson, and Michael J. Sleasman (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), pp. 191-

few label this fourth act as 'judgment', 'restoration', 'fulfilment', or 'glorification'. Because this area lacks precision, historical figures, such as Irenaeus, are cited as holding to three acts and five acts.[7] The literature that uncritically accepts three or four acts is vast and crosses many disciplines, including biblical theology, psychology, ethics, bioethics, apologetics, education, homiletics, and Christian worldview studies. Here I examine recent and influential literature that is generally evangelical. This interdisciplinary study takes up the question: how many acts/scenes does the theo-drama of Scripture have; *are there three acts or four?*

Before entering into the analysis, it will be helpful to create a thick description of what theologians are trying to achieve with three- and four-act theo-dramas. There are two concepts that are present in most of the uses of this narrative theology or salvation history (*Heilsgeschichte*). The first concept is that the theo-drama must be the most basic skeletal structure. The goal is to find the simplest outline of the script of the canon's storyline. There must not be any more reduction or contraction possible while the narrative pattern is preserved. Almost every use of the three- or four-act paradigm is described as 'basic' or is conceptually understood as such.[8] The second concept present is that of comprehensiveness.[9] The goal is to find the skeletal structure that encompasses the canon in a fully orbed manner, where everything fits and reflects the singular authorship of God. Together, these two ideas qualify the critical question: *what is the most simple and comprehensive script for the theo-drama of Scripture?*

## 2. THE MATTER OF CANONICITY

It will be helpful to address the question that will naturally arise: why limit this study to three or four acts? After all, one could point to Wright

208, esp. p.178; Michael S. Horton, *Introducing Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), p. 5; Gordon J. Spykman, *Reformational Theology: A New Paradigm for Doing Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), p. 135; John Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Challenge of Preaching Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), p. 170.

7 R. R. Reno cites Irenaeus as holding to 'creation-fall-redemption' in 'Sin, Doctrine of' in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Kevin Vanhoozer, et al. (London/Grand Rapids: SPCK/Baker, 2005), p. 749. For a discussion of Irenaeus' use of consummation see Eric Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), *passim*.

8 Sidney Greidanus, 'Preaching Christ from the Narrative of the Fall,' *BibSac*, 161 (2004), 262.

9 For a further justification of the criterion of comprehensiveness see Brendsel, 'Plots, Themes, and Responsibilities', p. 409.

and Vanhoozer who both utilize five acts.[10] Michael Goheen and Craig Bartholomew utilize six acts by adding the 'new creation' to Wright's schema.[11] So why not add these to the list? The simple answer is that the list may only contract so far because of the canon of Scripture.

First, I want to affirm the validity of schemes such as Vanhoozer's that utilize more than three or four acts. Again, there are various ways an expositor can develop the biblical storyline or script. For example, one may include or exclude events such as the Exodus, the Resurrection, or Pentecost. This explains why scripts that are more inclusive are valid and uncontroversial. It is well documented that the early Genesis narratives contain three acts: creation, fall, and redemption. Yet Sidney Greidanus approaches this fact from the discipline of homiletics and concludes that there is yet a fourth act (new creation) that lies beyond Genesis.[12] Carl Henry's appraisal of narrative theology acknowledges that the three-act motif does 'not fit all the biblical books'.[13] The basis for a script of the canon cannot be reduced to using one book such as Genesis as its source because canonicity is the theological acknowledgment that God is the single author behind the whole.

Second, I want to affirm that we must base the script on the canon of Scripture.[14] A canonical approach requires that a script that attends to at least the major turning points of the storyline. A canonical approach may be more inclusive but there is also a limit on what it may exclude. For example, no approach that excludes the act of creation can legitimately call itself canonical. It is probably not wise to say there is no maximum number of acts in the script, although it may be quite detailed. But it there is indeed a minimum number of acts in the script that is canonical. Gene C. Fant Jr. argues in the same vein: 'any worldview that deletes one of the elements is not a fully functioning worldview'.[15]

---

10 Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, p. 57; N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (London: SPCK, 1996), pp. 443, 467-72. Also note that Vanhoozer uses a three-act schema in his chapter 'What is Everyday Theology', pp. 27, 29, 34.

11 Michael W. Goheen and Craig G. Bartholomew, *The Drama of Scripture: Finding our Place in the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), p. 13. Also see their use of the three act script in their more recent work in Goheen and Bartholomew, *Living at the Crossroads*, p. 24.

12 Greidanus, 'Preaching Christ from the Narrative of the Fall', p. 262.

13 Carl Henry, 'Narrative Theology: An Evangelical Appraisal,' *Trinity Journal*, 8 (1987), 9.

14 For a discussion of 'canonical scripts' see Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, p. 22.

15 Gene C. Fant Jr., *God as Author: A Biblical Approach to Narrative* (Nashville: B&H, 2010), p. 64.

The canon itself determines what may not be excluded from the most simple and comprehensive view of the storyline. This study specifically asks whether the act or scene of consummation may be excluded from a script that intends to be canonical. We must answer this question negatively; in order to be fully canonical, the script must not be so simple that it excludes the fourth and last act.

## 3. PRESUPPOSITIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Next, we must consider the origins of the three-act position. Some have suggested that the 'creation-fall-redemption-consummation' framework is 'associated with the Reformed tradition'.[16] But such a statement must be well qualified. There is no consensus amongst Reformed theologians as to whether the most macro-level summary of the script of the canon's theodrama requires three or four acts. Indeed, what seems to have gone unnoticed, despite the raucous debate on blogs in the Reformed community, is that there is a correlation between neo-Calvinism and three-act salvation history. Here I want to probe the implications of three- and four-act paradigms for the Reformed tradition and suggest implications for other traditions.

The rally cry of neo-Calvinism is the oft-quoted statement by Abraham Kuyper: 'No single piece of our mental world is to be sealed off from the rest and there is not a square inch in the whole domain of human existence over which Christ, who is sovereign over all, does not cry: Mine!'[17] What is not always clear from this seemingly uncontroversial statement is that it implies a particularly nuanced view of redemption. Specifically, it is associated with the neo-Calvinist view that all of creation is currently experiencing some level of redemption. Despite the popularity of this view throughout evangelicalism, this position has attracted strong opposition.[18] Critics essentially assert that neo-Calvinism is over-realized

[16] Jeff VanDuzer, *Why Business Matters to God: And What Still Needs to be Fixed* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2010), p. 26.

[17] See the use of this quote by James K. A. Smith in *Letters to a Young Calvinist: An Invitation to the Reformed Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2010), p. 99. J. Budziszewski suggests that Kuyper began with Calvin's cosmological principle of God's reign rather than Luther's soteriological principle of justification by faith alone in *Evangelicals in the Public Square: Four Formative Voices on Political Thought and Action* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006), p. 57 n. 61.

[18] For a recent critique of neo-Calvinism and its view of redemption see David Vandrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms: A Study in the Development of Reformed Social Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), *passim*, esp. pp. 348-85.

eschatology—positing attributes to the kingdom of this world that has not taken place yet. This leads many neo-Calvinists to focus on cultural endeavours so much that missionary and soteriological endeavours get set aside.[19]

In contrast to neo-Calvinism stands the 'two kingdoms' approach. The 'two kingdoms' approach argues that (1) God rules all things, and (2) the world is ruled in two fundamentally different ways. The first way is through the 'common kingdom' which is the fallen world. The second way is through the 'redemptive kingdom' that was established with Abraham (Genesis 15-17) and is only entered through faith. Thus, God is not redeeming culture or institutions of this world, as Van Drunen explains, God 'is preserving them' on the basis of the Noahaic covenant (Gen. 8:20-9:17).[20] In this model, there is a significant difference between preservation and redemption.

What appears to have escaped attention is the relationship between neo-Calvinism and three-act approaches to salvation history or theo-drama. This relationship is not one of causation. But two facts point to some type of relationship, albeit by way of correlation. First, several neo-Calvinist theologians stress the three-act model. This includes writers such as Wolters, Plantinga, Goheen, and Bartholomew.[21] One notable exception is James K. A. Smith who has identified himself with *both* three and four-act scripts.[22] Whatever the case may be, there is no doubt that Smith emphasizes the neo-Calvinist model of the present redemption of creation.

The intramural debate between Calvinists and neo-Calvinists points to broader implications. This is important because the neo-Calvinist model of the on-going redemption of culture is widely accepted by evangelicals of all stripes. The neo-Calvinistic approach to Christianity and culture lacks an emphasis on the antithesis between this world and the Kingdom of God. Negatively speaking, there is evidence that the use and popularity of the three-act model of theo-drama stems not from the pat-

---

19 Joel R. Beeke, *Living for God's Glory: An Introduction to Calvinism* (Harrisonburg, VA: R.R. Donnelley & Sons, 2009), p. 311.

20 David Van Drunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms: A Biblical Vision for Christianity and Culture* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), p. 15.

21 Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 12; Plantinga, *Engaging God's World*, 16; Goheen and Bartholomew, *Living at the Crossroads*, p. 24.

22 Smith takes a four-act position in: James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), p. 70; idem, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism? Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), p. 64. He takes a three-act position in: Smith, *Letters to a Young Calvinist*, p. 94.

tern of the canon itself but from the use of a theological paradigm, that presents a powerful vision of Christianity and culture (neo-Calvinism). Inevitably, the focus is on God's redemptive purposes to the exclusion of the world as the realm of sin(fulness). This is indicative of much of western Christianity and is of concern to all Christians, not just the Reformed community. It should be no surprise to find that theological agenda influences how one reads Scripture and how one puts the large pieces together. In sum, there is likely a connection between these Kyuperian neo-Calvinists and the three-act model of theo-drama because it suits their theological agenda.

## 4. INAUGURATED ESCHATOLOGY

A major goal of this study is to raise awareness about the on-going confusion or lack of precision about how many acts or scenes must be in the most macro-level script of the canon. The fact that one of clearest engagements with the topic in our study occurs in an extended book review is evidence of the need for more dialogue about three and four-act structured salvation history. Richard Gaffin Jr.'s review of Gordon Spykman's volume *Reformational Theology* only briefly probes Spykman's use of the four-fold 'creation-fall-redemption-consummation' structure.[23] The benefit of Gaffin's gracious review is that it points us toward the matter of inaugurated eschatology. Inaugurated eschatology is a term that refers to the already/ not yet paradigm: the Kingdom of God (and other fulfilments of promises) is both present and future.[24] Here I want to engage Gaffin's probe of Spykman and maintain that the four-act model remains superior.

First, Gaffin does not make any conclusions but he raises the key question: 'would not a better pattern be the triad creation-fall-redemption, subsuming consummation under the last and developing it under two major subdivisions: redemption present and redemption future (the proverbial "already-not yet")?' The first part of Gaffin's solution is to create a tiered or hierarchical script. It is without controversy that it is necessary to have more detailed data about the intricacies of the canonical theo-drama. We do not need to question the validity or plausibility of scripts that are more inclusive and expansive. The issue is the validity of the creation-fall-redemption pattern that excludes the fourth scene of consummation. *Adding another tier to the model is a highly plausible option but*

[23] Gaffin, 'A New Paradigm in Theology?', p. 381.

[24] For a classic presentation of this model see George Eldon Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom: Scriptural Studies in the Kingdom of God* (1959 reprint; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), pp. 16-17.

*the additional layer prevents this from being a viable alternative for those who are seeking the simplest form of the script.*

Second, the suggestion that a three-act and two-tiered structure is necessary is evidence of the fact that a three-act script alone cannot reflect inaugurated eschatology (already/not yet).[25] If we assume that one's goals are simplicity and comprehensiveness, a three-act script cannot communicate the fact that there are continuities as well as radical changes that take place within the last act. Using one act (redemption) does not adequately summarize the continuities that characterize the already-ness of the kingdom of God. Likewise, one act cannot summarize the discontinuity between the cross/resurrection and the second coming of Christ (cf. Rev. 1:8). Inaugurated eschatology requires two poles to create tension in the middle. For this reason, a four-act model is superior. Gaffin essentially wants to ensure that it is clear that faith appropriates what will happen in the 'eschatological' future and brings it into reality in the present. As a consequence, Christians are aware that their existence 'in Christ' allows the future and final declaration of 'just' to be appropriated and made real in the present so that they are now justified yet a sinner. A four-act model provides a more suitable structure to communicating the tensions that flow through redemption and consummation. *The continuities and discontinuities of an inaugurated eschatology are not possible to communicate with a three-act script of the canon's theo-drama.*

Third, Gaffin's questions direct us to the heart of the controversy: the nature of 'redemption' and the nature of 'consummation'. These terms often go undefined. This may be intentional by some. The nature of a narrative is not to rely upon static propositions and definitions but to allow the ebb and flow of the narrative dynamics to establish definitions.[26] It is not clear that definitions will contribute much from a practical standpoint. Every skeletal structure of a plotline or narrative is only helpful if the narrative eventually has the background explained, characters developed, the crisis clarified, and the resolution flushed out. Here we are moving backwards, from the theo-drama to the skeletal structure. Because we already have a theo-drama in the canon, not any skeletal structure will do. *The theo-drama itself defines the structure of the script and the acts contained therein.*

---

[25] Russell Moore notes that 'evangelical theology has moved toward a Kingdom consensus around the concept of inaugurated eschatology' in *The Kingdom of Christ: The New Evangelical Perspective* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004), p. 25.

[26] Vanhoozer argues forcefully that 'The narrative medium well illustrates the point that form makes a cognitive contribution in its own right' (*The Drama of Doctrine*, p. 282).

Fourth, Gaffin wants to subsume consummation under redemption because of the failure of traditional Reformed theology to integrate the 'eschatological dimension of the Christian life'.[27] This was addressed above as I demonstrated that the tensions of inaugurated eschatology are better explained in a four-act structure. Since 1994, both Reformed theology and Protestant theology in general have taken such a dramatic turn toward narrative that the traditional methods of systematic theology are now being questioned more than ever. Perhaps the pendulum has swung too far. Gaffin's concerns are helpful indeed because they point us to the integrative nature and complexity of the canon. *We cannot allow ecclesiological failures to determine the most simple and comprehensive script of the canon's theo-drama, we must relegate this to Scripture alone.*

In sum, we find that Gaffin's enquiry into Spykman's theological agenda has provided a fruitful avenue to probe the validity of the three-act theo-drama. We see that a three-act theo-drama is too simple to capture the complexities of the canon's content. Specifically, it does not adequately reflect the poles needed to support an inaugurated eschatology. In spite of the church's various failures to embody certain aspects of the canon's theo-drama, we must use the Scriptures alone to determine the structure of the script, as difficult as this may be. Gaffin's enquiry also correctly identified consummation as an area that needs to be looked at more closely; and to this we now turn.

## 5. THE CONSUMMATION OF CREATION AND REDEMPTION

The self-presentation of God in the canon, Graham Cole argues, is divisible into the two strands of creation and redemption.[28] Creation and redemption are distinguishable yet inseparable aspects of the overarching theo-drama of Scripture. With respect to the strands of creation and redemption, I want to do set forth two points. First, I want to acknowledge that the future of creation presents difficulties that may present support a three-act structure. Second, I want to highlight the Parousia as an event that requires a separate scene or act than redemption.

***5.1 The Consummation of Creation.*** With respect to creation and consummation, several items are noteworthy. First, in spite of the fact that many (most?) Christian adults were taught in Sunday school that they would spend eternity with Jesus *in heaven*, there is a definite movement toward

[27] Gaffin, 'A New Paradigm in Theology?', p. 381.

[28] Graham Cole, *He Who Gives Life: The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2007), p. 25.

understanding the final location of the resurrection of God's People as the *new earth*.[29] The ultimate destiny of God's People is not to float around like disembodied apparitions. Now that the focus has shifted toward the 'new earth' rather than heaven, studies on eschatology have taken up the destiny of the earth. There is no doubt that the interest in environmentalism has spurred studies as well. Here I simply want to acknowledge a difficulty with the four-act view of the canon's theo-drama.

The difficulty that the strand of creation poses for a four-act view of the canon's theo-drama is that there is strong evidence that points toward a large degree of continuity between the earth as it is now and the new earth of eternity. For example, David Hegeman argues that the melting of the 'elements' with 'fervent heat' in 2 Peter 3:10-13 does not mean that the present earth will actually burn.[30] Likewise, Al Wolters makes a strong lexical argument that stresses 'the permanence of the created earth' in 2 Peter 3:10-13.[31] Hegeman argues that if the cultural works of men and the natural elements burn up, then this makes it difficult to picture the deeds (*ergon*) that follow the saints.[32] These interpretations suggest that the judgment of the earth (really the entire cosmos) and its cultural works will be judged ethically so that the new earth will contain many of the things we see now. The solution that Hegeman proposes is plausible: there is a parallelism between the way that the fire that descended upon and sanctified the tabernacle in Exodus 40 and the fire that will burn up the earth in 2 Peter 3:10-13.[33] This model is akin to the burning bush that was never consumed by the fire as Yahweh spoke to Moses (Exodus 3). Perhaps the earth will burn even as the bush did so as to produce the New Earth. The result of this exegesis is a stress on continuity: 'we conclude that there will be a real continuity between this world and the next'.[34]

Hegeman's view is reflective of a current trend and theological issue that cannot be resolved by simply referring to inaugurated eschatology. I do not wish to attempt any solution to this matter. The point is to concede that such an emphasis on continuity lends itself toward a three-act model of creation-fall-redemption because the 'judgment' on creation at the 'end of time' is based largely on continuity with the present. However, there are

---

29 N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008), pp. 19-20.

30 David B. Hegeman, *Plowing in Hope: Toward a Biblical Theology of Culture* (Moscow, ID: Canon, 2007), p. 88.

31 Al Wolters, 'Worldview and Textual Criticism in 2 Peter 3:10', *Westminster Theological Journal*, 49 (1987), 413.

32 Hegeman, *Plowing in Hope*, p. 88.

33 Hegeman, *Plowing in Hope*, p. 89.

34 Hegeman, *Plowing in Hope*, p. 90.

other reasons why this alone is insufficient to support a three-act model that excludes the act of consummation.

***5.2 The Consummation of Redemption.*** Vanhoozer notes that the church finds itself within a 'play' or theo-drama, which is 'three-dimensional'—referring to 'creation, fall, and redemption'.[35] This is what sets the context of any culture, anywhere, at any place in time in its proper context (or, we might say co-text). With respect to redemption and consummation, I want to highlight the fact that the nature of the parousia demands a four-scene structure for the canon's theo-drama. My point is that there are characteristics of redemption that require a separate act or scene of consummation.

The last scene of consummation achieves two things. First, in an inaugurated eschatological schema, the 'end' has already begun.[36] A fourth scene of consummation reflects the theology made clear in Hebrews 1:2, since the resurrection of Jesus we live in the 'last days'. Possessing a saving faith in Jesus allows one to appropriate this resurrection as the Holy Spirit unites us with him in his death and resurrection life. Christians appropriate the end times into the present by faith so that the whole Christian life is lived *coram Deo* in light of the future. Second, in an inaugurated eschatological schema, the 'end' awaits us in the future. The final scene of consummation is the critical event in which believers receive the promise(s) of God, including their resurrection bodies.

An inaugurated eschatology must acknowledge that some aspects of God's final and future judgment are already present or have already taken place. In addition, the declaration that a Christian is 'just' or completely righteous in Christ (being justified) has a future element that anticipates the final declaration. A three-act approach to the canon's theo-drama emphasizes the 'already' to the exclusion of the 'not yet' in terms of its skeletal structure. It is possible to incorporate these elements into another tier in the three-act model, but the consummation scene is necessary in order to provide an outline of the script that does justice to the text.

Furthermore, the word 'redemption' is tied very closely to 'salvation' and the concept of deliverance.[37] This is significant for the case against a three-act model of theo-drama because the consummation is inclu-

[35] Vanhoozer, 'What is Everyday Theology? How and Why Christians Should Read Culture', p. 41.

[36] Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, p. 45.

[37] For example, Donald McKim connects the words and concepts for 'salvation' and 'redemption', *Introducing the Reformed Faith* (Louisville: WJKP, 2001), p. 89.

sive of God's final judgment. God's final judgment against sin and death has in some sense already occurred at the cross. And, in an inaugurated eschatology schema, we can see that elements of the final judgment have already taken place. For example, in John 3:19, the 'judgment' is that men preferred to love darkness rather than light. Likewise, in Romans 2:2 Paul speaks about God's present judgment that now 'rightly falls on those who practice such things'. God's judgment is already present even as his salvation is already present. We must also say that God's judgment is future even as his final salvation and final declaration of justification is future. The future judgment of Christ includes elements that are set in striking contrast with his pre-resurrection life. Jesus' first entrance into Jerusalem was on a donkey (Zech. 9:9; Matt. 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-11; Luke 19:29-44; John 12:12-19) but his second entrance will be on a white horse (Revelation 19).

To be clear, the reason why a three-act approach cannot accurately portray the 'not yet' is because it cannot accurately portray both salvation and judgment as two distinct threads of God's cosmic plan to glorify himself. Some people do not have and will never have the benefits of the atonement applied. Because the benefits of the atonement are never applied to those who will suffer God's wrath and perfect justice for sin, they cannot be said to be 'redeemed' in any sense. Simply because the doctrine of eternal punishment restores justice to the cosmos does not mean that eternal punishment can be subsumed under the heading of 'redemption'.

The four-act model is superior because it uses a broad term of 'consummation' which can include both the future saving and judging actions of God at the Second Coming of Christ. Because the three-act model has such a difficulty maintaining a clear model of eternal damnation for those outside of Christ, it also lacks an important dimension of doxology: God's glory in justice. These facts about future judgment are so clear that any potential argument based on creation and the continuity between the present earth and the New Earth lose the weight needed to carry the argument for the three-act model. Only a four-act model reflects God's variegated actions in consummation, namely, his salvation and his wrath through Christ for his glory.

## 6. CONCLUSION

There is a need for a simple and comprehensive script of the canon. The nature of this task is theological and is in some sense derivative and continually open to correction by the canon. At the same time, this task follows in the pattern of testifying to the mighty deeds of Jesus *in nuce*. The danger is reductionism whereby certain unique and important ele-

ments are collapsed into the same act or scene when they should remain separate. Both redemption and judgment redound to God's glory but we cannot totally subsume one into the other. The best way to capture both of these elements is four-act model that includes 'consummation'. Here we have argued that the theo-drama of Scripture must include four elements in its script in order to contain all of the key elements of the canon.

# Reviews

*Augustine and the Trinity.* By Lewis Ayres. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. ISBN 978-0-521-83886-3. 376 pp. £50.

During the last twenty years of his life, in the midst of pressing pastoral business as a bishop and urgent theological polemics against Donatist, Pelagian and anti-Nicene currents, requiring a large correspondence, a constant flow of pamphlets and a preaching commitment that in itself would have made an impressive literary legacy, Augustine devoted his spare moments to two literary compositions of grand proportions, one on the church, the other on the godhead, the *City of God* and his *De Trinitate*, working on them for much of the time in parallel. Both were prompted by the external challenges of his day, but both went far beyond a response to challenges, becoming the vehicles of the exploratory and architectonic ambitions of his intellectual character. The long investment of time in their composition, the public standing of their author and the always-curious, never satiated circles of literary admirers ensured that both works suffered the fate of premature circulation in incomplete and unsatisfactory versions much to the author's annoyance while he was still working on them.

Each was to have an extensive influence on Western European thought, and to be subjected to a variety of conflicting interpretations. The twentieth century, which, for all its sins, has valued Augustine's foundational place in Western theology and philosophy more highly than any period since the Reformation, has seen major reappraisals of both these major works. That of the work on the Trinity has been slower coming, which is hardly surprising. It is a dense and daunting work to read, uncompromisingly philosophical in style and with none of the wide-ranging variety of interests and historiographical curiosity that serve to lighten the theological texture of the *City of God*. Yet in it, perhaps, the older Augustine came as close to revealing his heart as he had done as a young man in the *Confessions*. There is, indeed, much continuity between the long meditation on the first chapter of Genesis which concludes the earlier book and the interrogations of the *De Trinitate*, and the prayerful ardour which produced the most famous purple passages of Western literature burns again, though with a whiter, more intellectual heat in the later work.

The *De Trinitate* left much scope for misunderstanding, partly because of an unexpected structural conception. Dividing its fifteen books into two major sections of seven and eight books respectively, Augustine devotes the first of these to the main topics that had been in contention during the eighty-years of argument that arose from the repudiation of Arius at

the Council of Nicaea. The second develops a wholly original project, that of developing an understanding of the threefold godhead in parallel with an exploration of the dynamics of human thought itself, so taking seriously the claim that the mind of man was made in the image of God. Later this was to become a focus of controversy between East and West, especially when the influence of his speculations led to the unauthorised insertion in the West of the phrase 'and from the Son' into the confession of faith in the Holy Spirit of the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed. This, combined with his explicit reservations on the use of the term 'person' of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, helped to create a standard view of his approach which prevailed into the twentieth century. The West, the textbooks declared, under the influence of Augustine had favoured a more unitarian, the East, under the influence of the Cappadocians, a more trinitarian conception of the persons in the godhead. The view has even had some distinguished defenders among twentieth-century theologians. It has been a valuable achievement of the new scholarship on the work to pull the scholarly floor out from under these textbook caricatures.

How much else has been achieved is apparent from Lewis Ayres' new book, which will be at the centre of any future discussion of Augustine's trinitarianism. Professor Ayres' long involvement with the study of post-Nicene debates makes him the obvious figure to present what is, in effect, a *status quaestionis* on the reappraisal of Augustine's trinitarianism, drawing not only on work of his own but on the contributions of a range of scholars over the past forty years. At the centre of interest, now, is the first part of the *De Trinitate*, often dismissed in the past as a conventional *résumé* of prevailing orthodoxy before the interesting stuff began. It is much clearer now to what extent the two parts of the work support and suppose one another. The second half, meanwhile, is read not merely as a search for "psychological analogies" of the divine trinity, but as a spiritual pedagogy, training the eye of the mind to look beyond the image to the reality. The whole composition comes then to be seen as an unfolding sequence of explorations, a journey taken over twenty years in a spirit of prayer, rather than a statement of dogmatic conclusions. Much more in view, besides, is the use Augustine made of his Latin Nicene predecessors, Novatian, Damasus, Hilary, Ambrose, Marius Victorinus, as well as such minor figures as Optatus of Milevis, Phoebadius and Gregory of Elvira, who represent a Latin school of Nicene argument with its own preferred style and vocabulary, not merely occasional and compromised adaptations of the work of Greek-speaking pioneers.

The index page of Ayres' book declares the shift in emphasis: only two chapters of his twelve are devoted to the second half of the *De Trinitate*. The spotlight is to fall on the major doctrinal undertakings of the first part,

paying close attention to the chronology of the composition, on which we are now much better informed. Also of great importance—especially because of their past scholarly neglect—are Augustine's repeated engagements with the question of the Trinity in the first ten years of his authorship up to and including the *Confessions*. Here we are to be persuaded of two complementary things: Augustine has applied himself to the existing Latin interpretations of Nicene orthodoxy with a fidelity that has rarely been appreciated; his adaptation of the tradition has been in the service of his own major apologetic concerns, not least, in the early years, his concern to assert against sceptics and Manichaeans the intelligibility of the created world. There are constant anticipations, even in the earliest writings, of moves that will become weight-bearing in the mature trinitarian thought: the *proprium* of the Holy Spirit is already identified as Love in the *De moribus*, written before his return to Africa in 389, and as Gift a couple of years later in *De vera religione*. Especially illuminating is the spotlight Ayres throws on the local gathering of bishops at Hippo in 393, when the young intellectual presbyter was charged with presenting an account of the points at issue in trinitarian controversy—anticipatory of many episcopal gatherings since, where some theologian or other has been called in to acquaint their lordships with the faith they were ordained to teach and defend! Ayres effectively uncovers the extent of the theological reading Augustine did in preparation for his presentation (which we know as *De fide et symbolo*) and the way in which directions taken at that point were decisive for his subsequent thinking. It is to this study that Augustine's reticence about the use of the terms *natura* and *persona* is to be traced.

There are many other points at which Ayres' presentation of the findings of the new scholarship is likely to be the key point of reference in future discussion, not least the very carefully nuanced conclusions on the perennially fascinating question, 'Was Augustine a Neo-Platonist?' This book, then, is a significant milestone in Augustine scholarship—a moment at which doubts about regnant orthodoxies, new questions posed, new explorations successfully concluded over something like half a century converge to take over the role of a 'prevailing wisdom'. It is against these positions, and not against the textbooks on which we were brought up, that all future discussions will have to be measured. What it is certainly not is an easy introduction to the topic suitable for passing a relaxed hour of theological meditation. Although the author makes serious efforts to formulate his principle contentions clearly at the head of each section, they can hardly be appreciated unless the reader is prepared to plunge with him into the long passages of close exposition. He will need his copy of Augustine at hand—preferably in Latin, though a consistent attempt is

made to keep the argument accessible to those whose Latin is limited and who depend mainly on English translations.

Nothing was ever going to make this an easy book, but the author could possibly have done a little more to mitigate the difficulties than he has. An occasional witty allusion to a Hollywood movie is, to be sure, welcome relief, but not as welcome as a more carefully combed English style might have been, as well as clearer indications of how one paragraph follows another—even more explicit section-headings. To which minor complaint there is one other to be added. A major work of scholarship deserves scrupulously careful presentation, and this one is let down, whether as a result of slack proofreading or of electronic accidents in reproduction it is hard to say. The work sometimes known as *Eighty three Questions* and sometimes as *Various Questions* is referred to on one occasion by the unheard of title, *Eighty eight Questions*—if only Ayres could produce the extra five! Small errors in Greek and Latin orthography are mainly self-correcting for the reader informed enough to care about them, but there is one instance in which the argument of a whole page (p. 231) is made unintelligible by a careless failure to present the correct grammatical forms of the adjective *alius*.

*Oliver O'Donovan, University of Edinburgh*

*Orthodox Readings of Augustine.* Edited by Aristotle Papanikolaou and George E. Demacopoulos. Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2008. ISBN 978-08814-1327-4. 314 pp. $24.

*Orthodox Readings of Augustine* is a collection of papers presented at a 2007 conference, one which brought together scholars from several traditions to explore Augustine's relevance to Eastern Orthodox Christianity. The essays expose readers to a long and complicated history of translation, circulation, and reception of Augustine's oeuvre in the Greek-speaking the world. I was surprised to learn, for instance, that no Greek translation of Augustine's works existed until the twelfth century (p. 12). More surprising still is that Orthodox theologians endorsed the Latin Father's legacy up to the late nineteenth century, when its theology came under the critical eye of Théodore de Régnon (1892). The familiar charge attributable to de Régnon (pp. 22, 87, 153–4, 195–6) is that Augustine privileged the divine essence over the divine persons, promulgating what many Orthodox believe to be fatal errors in the Western Trinitarian tradition (notably, the *filioque*). Though contributors from both traditions find this standard criticism conceptually wanting (even versions of it from Gunton and Zizioulas), it is also made clear that disagreements between 'East' and 'West' are not easily dismissed on the basis of mistaken assumptions.

The ecumenical aura that these scholars generate is offset in some ways, though enriched in others, by lingering confusions concerning Augustine's metaphysical heritage. The intra-volume dialogue between David Bentley Hart and David Bradshaw is a paradigm example. Hart's essay is a characteristically dense and ambitious discussion of 'metaphysics after Nicaea'. It proposes that fourth-century developments in theology East and West implicitly situated Christian thought in opposition to ontological schemes inherited from its (pagan) philosophical predecessors. A 'new conceptual language had to be formed' among first generations of Nicaean theologians, one which included apophatic strictures that Hart says played no less central a role in Augustine than they did in his Greek counterparts (pp. 206–8). Both Lewis Ayres and Jean-Luc Marion raise analogous claims, with Marion basing his case on the metaphysically loaded (mis-)translation of Augustine's term *idipsum* as 'Being-Itself'. What adjudicates 'apophaticism' in Augustine, however, is not how we render the meaning of certain terms but how we interpret Augustine's statements to the effect that the soul can directly perceive the divine essence. On this question, Bradshaw (and to some extent John Behr) arrives at a different answer. He claims outright, *pace* Hart, that Augustine 'rejects apophaticism'. To the 'key question of whether God is intrinsically an object of intellect... his answer is consistently affirmative' (p. 240).

This important debate will be a familiar one to students of Augustine. Nevertheless, it is not the only debate worth having. Later essays by Carol Harrison, David Tracy and Andrew Louth are illuminating in a different sense. Their focus rests largely on Augustine's sermons and commentaries, which they present as fruitful though often neglected departure points for evaluating his 'orthodox' credentials. Perhaps, they suggest, more need be said about Augustine the *pastor* than Augustine the *metaphysician*, a thought which has been echoed in more recent research on Augustine.

*Orthodox Readings of Augustine* gives members of both traditions a balanced and suggestive engagement with the famous, and infamous, fifth-century Bishop of Hippo. It opens up important questions for future ecumenical discussion, and lays the groundwork for rethinking Augustine in the light of both Eastern and Western traditions. Its only shortcoming is its incompleteness: a forgivable sin, perhaps, given it has shown us how much more work faces those of us who identify with 'East' or 'West'.

*Ian Clausen, University of Edinburgh*

*The Republic of Grace: Augustinian Thoughts for Dark Times.* By Charles Mathewes. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010. ISBN: 978-0-8028-6508-3. 288 pp. £12.99.

In The Republic of Grace, Charles Mathewes reflects theologically on today's world, particularly our public life in the West: our politics, and our problems. Mathewes, Professor of Religion at the University of Virginia, undertakes this quite intentionally as a Christian—even styling his book as 'a primer on politics for Christians' (p. 6)—and delves deeply into the human situation and its ambiguities, dissatisfied with tidy 'us versus them' schemes. In this task, his major conversation partner is Augustine of Hippo, whom Mathewes knows well, and who brings illumination to the analysis.

To summarize very briefly, Mathewes proposes that Christians ought to consider involvement in the politics of the nation-state as a worthy calling, although one also always fraught with risks and ambiguities as one attempts to exercise legitimate power and authority. Mathewes sets out the church's political task as embodying the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love; these are the 'distinctive contributions' that Christian citizens can make (p. 33). Of these he prioritizes hope as especially necessary in the contemporary West, suggesting that this is an essential element for any Christian serving in (or even thinking about) politics today.

According to Mathewes, this hope is not optimism but something engaged with the real: it recognizes the gap between what is and what should be, but does not expect to find 'the solution' to such a problem in history itself. Rather, hope for the Christian is eschatological, oriented towards God's coming new creation. This is the root of what he terms the 'eschatological imagination', which trusts that, in God, all will be well, yet without insisting that it knows just *how* all will be well. The effect of inhabiting this imagination is attentive engagement with the world (p. 39). Over against this, Mathewes places the 'apocalyptic imagination', which he describes as a temptation to believe we understand everything now and know precisely how all will work out; this renders any engagement with the actual world unnecessary. Although Mathewes does not weigh in on the partisan wrangling of the moment, one could find current examples of the 'apocalyptic imagination' with dismaying ease.

Mathewes elaborates this case through two sections, the first entitled 'seeing as Christians', the second, 'looking like Christians'. Through the first, he analyses what he sees as the contemporary cultural, social, and economic climate and how Christians might live in this context through the virtues of (in his ordering) hope, faith, and love. The second section changes focus and asks 'if Christians live those virtues, how might they

appear to others?' This section turns from analysis of society to a more constructive account of how Christians might be involved in politics and culture. Here, Mathewes discusses political authority and its relation to love; the value and limits of liberalism, particularly in relation to faith; and hope and an eschatological imagination shapes Christians' political engagements. For the Christian, Mathewes maintains, political involvement may even be, in some measure, 'sacramental' (pp. 158, 249).

Mathewes makes a persuasive and balanced case for Christian involvement in politics, attentive to the real perils of such a project, and eminently realistic about its potential success. In it, he steers a middle course between the Scylla of 'sectarianism' and the Charybdis of 'Constantinianism', the former of which would disdain any Christian involvement in politics, the latter of which would see no possible tension. This is a real strength of the work, yet also touches on a dissatisfaction of mine.

Perhaps for the sake of appealing to a broader audience, the work does not contain footnotes or endnotes. Instead, Mathewes provides an appendix with references and suggestions for further reading. This can be helpful, but there are points at which I really wanted him to corroborate his case with specific references. For example, on page 191, he contrasts 'two bad positions' Christians often take in relation to the polities we inhabit: collaboration or opposition. But there is no indication in the text of who specifically takes such positions, nor any reference in the appendix. This is too bad, as motivated students might have wanted to read further in this area, and motivated scholars might have wanted either to substantiate or contest Mathewes' point.

Those wanting an account of politics from a strictly biblical-exegetical perspective might best look elsewhere: this is not Mathewes' task. Likewise, those wanting Mathewes to fix his standard to one or another political party or ideology as 'the' Christian option will be disappointed. But if Mathewes is right about the value of hope, and an eschatological rather than an apocalyptic imagination (and I think he is), then perhaps this really is the book such folks *ought* to read. In any event, postgraduate students, as well as some advanced undergraduates and motivated seminarians will find here a readable, engaged and wise approach to the vexed questions of the church and politics.

*Jason A. Fout, Bexley Hall Episcopal Seminary, Columbus, Ohio*

*Race: A Theological Account.* By J. Kameron Carter. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. ISBN 978-0-19-515279-1. 489 pp. £22.50.

The issue of race is multifaceted, politically and socially complex, and rhetorically volatile. But it is always considered to be important. Precisely

why race is considered important has long been a topic for psychologists and sociologists. The role of theology in the creation of race is not something that has received as much consideration, until now. J. Kameron Carter's excellent book opens up the debate around theology and race in fresh and exciting ways and offers a perspective that is not only deep and challenging but potentially transformative.

At the heart of Carter's argument is the suggestion that 'modernity's racial imagination has its genesis in the theological problem of Christianity's quest to sever itself from its Jewish roots'. In their striving for independent identity, the early Christians cast the Jewish people as a racial group who contrasted with Christians. In this sense race is created in the striving for identity. Western Christians in turn, ably assisted by theology and philosophy, began to perceive themselves as a racial group. Jewishness and the Jewish people were situated as belonging to the Orient; a culture and a race apart from the Christian west. Western culture began to take on an identity as specifically Christian. The creation of this distinction led to racialism, that is, the creation of distinct racial groups. Having racialised the Jewish people as 'a people of the Orient' and Judaism as a religion of the east, the door was open for the emergence in the early modern era, of assumptions about Jewish inferiority to Western Christians. Within this 'gulf enacted between Christianity and the Jews, the *racial*, which proves to be a *racist*, imagination was forged'. Viewed in this way race can be seen to be at root a deeply *theological* problem.

The book is divided into three parts. In part one Carter offers a theological account of modernity focusing on the work of Michel Foucault and Immanuel Kant. He carefully traces the movement from a racialised theology that sought to separate Christians from Jews, to a more racist theology that focused on people of African descent. The basic thesis of this section is that Western racism was something that was a direct invention of Christianity. Christianity had its origins in a Jewish sect. in order to develop its own identity it had to show clearly the ways in which it was separate from that sect. The creation of racial differences was a mark and a product of this process. Once this dynamic was achieved it wasn't difficult to apply it to a new racial group: people of African descent.

In part two Carter focuses on three African American theologians, Albert Raboteau, James Cone, and Charles Long. He finds these approaches less than adequate. Liberational approaches are deeply flawed because in effect they leave 'the problem of whiteness uncontested, insofar as at root it is a *theological* problem' (emphasis in original). The issue with liberation theology is that it is not radical enough because it leaves whiteness in its place. The problem of whiteness, like the problem of blackness is much deeper than rights and politics.

The third part of the book is given over to Carter's constructive theological proposition. Building on the work of Raboteau and Cone he develops an Afro-Christian theological vision that points to fresh and new ways of reframing the theology and practice of race. In calling for the rejection of forms of modernist theology that are inherently racist, he asks for a return to a theology within which Jesus' Jewishness and his humanity are seen to be the basis for a reordering of our thinking about race and racial encounters.

This book is an excellent contribution to the complicated debates that go on around issues of race. By drawing the argument into a theological framework Carter challenges the church not only to re-think its theology and its implication in the on-going construction of race, but also to change its practices in response to such new understanding. The book deserves a wide audience.

*John Swinton, King's College, University of Aberdeen*

*Creation and Covenant: The Significance of Sexual Difference in the Moral Theology of Marriage*. By Christopher C. Roberts. London: T & T Clark, 2007. ISBN 978-0-5670-2746-7. 266 pp. £19.99

Somebody had to write this book, and the right person did. Christopher Roberts tackles the issue of gay marriage indirectly by asking what theologians have had to say about the significance of sexual difference. His question does not have to be a prelude to debates about homosexuality—sexual difference should be an important topic of its own—but nobody will read it from any other perspective. Christians looking for a critique of gay marriage will not find that here. Instead, they will find something much more valuable: a defence of sexual difference as a vocation rather than an accident of biology.

Sexual difference is a physical constraint, a material boundary, we could say, that limits the way the shared physical form of humanity constitutes our common experience. As a genuine constraint, it is productive of meaning. Put in other words, gender is a task—or we could say that gender makes sexual desire a task. The task of sexual desire is an adventure in self-understanding, and like all adventures, it works only if there are real limits to what we are capable of accomplishing as well as real mystery about the ultimate destination of our voyage. The question is whether these benefits of limitation and mystery bestowed by sexual difference can be reduplicated by same-sex desire.

Roberts does not address that question in detail, but he provides all the right resources for a full-fledged theological discussion of homosexuality. Most of the book is historical, though he does develop a narrative

arc through a wide range of material. In chapter one he examines five patristic theologians: Tatian, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Gregory of Nyssa, and Jerome. He finds no consensus about the theological significance of sexual difference because some Church Fathers thought it could or should be transcended 'en route to an angelical like existence' (p. 13). There is diversity, but Roberts is careful to show that the result is not chaos. No Church Father treated sexual difference 'as a trivial or indifferent matter' (p. 33).

Chapter two shows how Augustine integrates the created goodness of sexual difference into salvation history. Even celibates, Augustine argued, anticipate an eschaton where sexual difference will persist without complicating or distorting relations between men and women. For married couples, sexual difference disciplines sexual desire to the point of providing a way to distinguish between love and lust. Marriage and continence are thus mutually reinforcing; neither can be fully understood without the other.

Bernard of Clairvaux, the subject of chapter three, builds on Augustine's thought by showing how sexual difference in marriage provides allegorical testimony to God's love for us. Chapter four is, perhaps, a too brief treatment of Aquinas, with the emphasis on his connection of procreation to the common good of the species. Chapter five, on Luther and Calvin, shows how the reformers understood marriage as an act of gratitude for sexual difference. In chapter six, Barth grounds sexual difference in Christ, who teaches us that bodily form is essential to divine revelation. In chapter seven, Roberts shows how Pope John Paul II went further than Barth by appealing to female experience in the light of the person of Mary. Roberts calls this a departure from 'the traditional [theological] theory of sexual difference' (p. 180), but he does not do enough to warrant that claim (aside from an objection to the Vatican's alleged lack of theological discipline—see p. 181). The appeal to gendered, especially female experience might be a modern theological move, but unless one holds up Barth at his most anti-natural theology worst, then specifying the actual content of gender differences is a fulfilment of, not a departure from, the theological tradition. Roberts notes that such specifications 'have tended to lapse into apparent arbitrariness and been vague about their premises' (p. 181). Perhaps so, but unless sexual difference makes a difference in the way men and women experience the world, as well as each other, then it can hardly be said to be grounded in the enduring order of creation.

The last chapter is where things really get interesting. Here Roberts criticizes three theologians whose views of marriage end up legitimating gay marriage: Graham Ward, Eugene Rogers, and David Matzko McCarthy. Ward's postmodern Barthianism makes biology vanish altogether,

Rogers' reduction of procreation to a species good that not every union needs to pursue renders marriage without any criteria other than desire, and McCarthy's emphasis on the social function of marriage strips it of its allegorical depth. In the end, some theologians prize marriage too highly and thus turn up the heat against those who deny its benefits to gays, while other theologians minimize the sanctity of marriage and thus make it seem peevish to limit it to heterosexuals.

All in all, this is an excellent book. But it suffers from a lack of ambition. Roberts keeps his focus on theologians who insist on the created value of sexual difference, but he resists grounding that value in any particular aspects of human nature. This is his bottom line: 'To be what we are, we must find ways of life that thank God for having made us male and female' (p. 237). Is that enough? Sexual difference is given, but surely God gives it to us for a purpose. One leaves this book wondering if Roberts has not sold the farm by downplaying the importance of procreation in sexual desire. Perhaps even more importantly, Augustine's tricky balancing act between affirming sexual differences here and now while arguing that these differences will continue in the afterlife without serving any specific function needs more elaboration. If there is no sexual desire in heaven, then what are the sexual organs, ultimately, for? If they don't wither away in the afterlife, then won't they have an eschatological purpose that is in continuity with the created order? Won't we have desires for others in heaven? On these and other questions, I hope to hear more from this fine young theologian.

*Stephen H. Webb, Wabash College, Crawfordsville, IN USA*

*Sex and the iWorld: Rethinking Relationship Beyond an Age of Individualism*. By Dale S. Keuhne. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009. ISBN 978-0-8010-3587-6. 235 pp. £10.99.

The premise of this book is that contemporary 'postmodern individualism' (the iWorld), has produced a society in which sexual freedom is the most prized value. Only three taboos limit individual autonomy: criticizing someone else's life choices or behaviour; behaving in a manner that coerces or causes harm to others; engaging in a sexual relationship with someone without his or her consent. The pursuit of individualism has, inevitably, produced a fear of loneliness, and many are 'on a never-ending quest for acceptance, love and fulfilment while looking in the wrong place'. All this is in contrast to the 'tWorld' (t = traditional), which was based on Aristotelian values of relationality rather than materialism, and hence on obligation to extended family networks and communities. However the iWorld doubts its values, in particular with regard to sexual

behaviour. Why, for example, are sexual relations outside marriage to be considered immoral? The modernist scientific mindset cannot answer such questions.

While there was much good in the tWorld, Keuhne does not advocate a return to it, since it fostered such evils as slavery, sexual hypocrisy and the subjection of women. Similarly, good has come of the iWorld, but its materialism and disdain of the transcendent are proving harmful. Keuhne's alternative is the rWorld (r = relationality), so called because human fulfilment is found 'when living and engaging in the full constellation of healthy human relationships'. As both politics professor and pastor, Kuehne is interested not only in the theological and Biblical grounding for such a world but also in how public policy might promote and sustain it. This latter would include governmental endorsement of marriage and the extended family, collective self-restraint and promotion of gender equality. A practical example would be the ending of Sunday shopping to support family recreation time.

Keuhne recognises that his thesis is not new. His aim is to help readers rediscover the kind of relational world advocated by Scripture. His undogmatic, informal style, together with illustrations from popular music lyricists such as Joni Mitchell and Bono, help make this an accessible argument which will be convincing and stimulating for many readers. For those unfamiliar with philosophy, the broad-brushed presentation of ideas influencing social change (ranging from Aristotle to Nietzsche) is helpful. Unfortunately, however, the thesis lacks adequate theoretical foundation. Lack of critique renders the argument one-sided. Nor are the sweeping generalisations made about Biblical evidence satisfactory. For example, it is not enough to summarize Leviticus 18 as the 'just say no passage' regarding extra-marital sex, citing only an unpublished manuscript in support. One wonders why the book has been published under an 'academic' imprint.

The main difficulty, however, is Keuhne's failure to consider worldviews other than his own. For example, he claims not to be speaking specifically to Christians, and hopes that his vision of the rWorld can transcend religions, but non-Christians will hardly accept that its 'very foundation' is the Incarnation—and he does not say why they should. Similarly, the many who do find happiness in non-contracted relationships, both heterosexual and homosexual, will want to challenge the assertions that the development of love and spiritual intimacy is impossible outside marriage, and that 'any union less permanent than marriage is detrimental to children'.

In sum, I suspect this book will be heart-warming and stimulating for many Western Christian readers, but there is a good deal of work to be done before the rest of the world is convinced.

*Marion Carson, International Christian College, Glasgow*

*Love Is an Orientation: Elevating the Conversation with the Gay Community.* By Andrew Marin. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2009. ISBN 978-0-8308-3626-0. 204 pp. £9.99.

This important book has a message that merits very careful consideration by the evangelical church. The author is founder of the Marin Foundation, which ministers to the gay and lesbian community in the Boystown area of Chicago. He was brought up in a conservative evangelical home and church, and describes himself as having been homophobic until at college no less than three close friends confessed to him over a three month period that they were gay or lesbian. A major rethink of his attitudes to the issue ensued, in due course leading him to his present clear sense of calling by God to reach out to gays and lesbians with the Gospel in a new way. His book of ten chapters is written in an easy and accessible style, strong on anecdote and personal story but by no means devoid of biblical and theological reflection.

Marin stresses the importance of using the right terminology for any meaningful engagement with what he terms the GLBT community (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgendered; in the UK LGBT is more familiar). Readers who are unfamiliar with such engagement may be surprised to learn that describing someone as a 'homosexual' is considered offensive. Such offence may appear over-sensitive, yet British readers over the age of 40 will recall a time when one referred to the local Pakistani shop or Chinese take-away by using terms which would nowadays be avoided at all costs. The fact that those words were used without any offensive intent is beside the point: if offence is caused, then we must simply learn to change our language.

The thesis of the book is that meaningful conversation between the church and gay and lesbian people has become well-nigh impossible and that a new bridge-building approach is needed. Marin insists that it is the church that must make the first move. He characterizes the current problem thus: 'Whenever I speak at GLBT events... the very first question I am always asked is, "Do you think homosexuality is a sin?" Whenever I speak at Christian events the very first question I am always asked is, "Do you think that gays and lesbians can change?"' (p. 103). He is surely correct to point out that *beginning* with closed questions like these will hardly be conducive to meaningful dialogue. There is also no doubt some truth in

his observation that 'Christians look at a gay or lesbian person and see a potential behavioral change instead of a person longing to know the same Christ we seek' (p. 85).

In the first half of the book, Marin explains in sometimes painful detail exactly what the GLBT community thinks of the church, especially the evangelical church. Yet he is properly critical of the GLBT insistence on equating sexual behaviour with personal identity. He reminds us that 'eternal validation is not from humans' (p.86), helpfully setting the subject of the book in the more general context of human alienation and longing for God. Chapter 7 is the key engagement with the main biblical texts, what he calls 'The Big 5' (Genesis 19; Leviticus 18:22 & 20:13; Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; 1 Timothy 1:9-11). The approach he takes to these could best be described as novel, with both the positive and negative connotations implied by that term. Thus while the 'hospitality violation' theme in the Genesis passage is highlighted, and the traditional 'judgment on sexual sin' angle is not denied, the author concludes that 'the story of Lot's wife and Sodom and Gomorrah teaches us that until people (straight and GLBT) learn to shift their own mind frame from earthly issues, there can never be any forward movement in a personal relationship with Jesus.' In a similar manner each of the 'Big 5' passages is used in turn to derive one of Marin's 'Big 5 principles' that might act as a bridge for the genuine dialogue he espouses, with for example the Timothy passage being used 'to keep open a path for God to accomplish his will for a person's life, even until their last breath'. This is all well and good, although it is hard to avoid concluding that the method adopted results in a downplaying of the clear subject matter of the various texts—sexual ethics. This is of a piece with the author's earlier stated intention, that 'The way forward with the GLBT community is not a debate on the Bible's statements about same-sex sexual behavior but a discussion of how to have an intimate, real, conversational relationship with the Father and Judge' (this reference to both designations of God clearly helps guard against imbalance). The final three chapters contain a manifesto for engagement, with sixteen 'commitments'—putting the 'Big 5 Principles' into practice—which Marin challenges the church to adopt in a meaningful Gospel outreach to the GLBT community. These are extremely helpful and thought-provoking, and could indeed be usefully applied in mission to any situation where cultural factors prove to be a barrier.

While there is a great deal to commend in Marin's approach, his seeming reluctance to reach conclusions on some important matters can lead to a real sense of frustration on the part of the reader. Discussion of the rightness or wrongness of homosexual practice is not merely to be deferred at the start of a conversation to enable that conversation to pro-

ceed, it seems that it is off the menu completely. Marin's sympathies do appear to be with a traditional understanding of sexual practice, yet he is content to allow God to show individual gays and lesbians what 'he feels is best' for their lives—celibacy, practice or change—without saying how the divine will is to be discerned. This over-emphasis on the subjective is consistent with Marin's apparently weak ecclesiology. There is surely some irony that he doesn't see much place for the Christian *community* in helping members of the GLBT community to work these matters out before God.

So is this book worth buying and reading? Most definitely. Christ himself was 'full of grace and truth', but Christians have generally found this ideal combination much more difficult to achieve—not least in the matter of relating to gay and lesbian people. It is understandable that a strong stand needs to be taken for truth, not least when the historic position of the church is being challenged as forcibly as it is at the present time. It is also important that the God's grace should not be misused in the way described in Jude 4. Yet surely Marin's call for an 'elevation' of dialogue, based on unconditional love, is a timely one. As we have seen, his book is certainly open to criticism in various respects, but after all he is undertaking Christian outreach to gays and lesbians when most churches seem content to leave them as 'other'. The thoughtful reader might well call to mind the words of D.L. Moody in responding to criticisms of his method of evangelism: 'I prefer the way I do it to the way you don't do it.'

*Alistair Donald, Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh*

*The Meaning of Sex: Christian Ethics and the Moral Life* by Dennis P. Hollinger. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009. ISBN 978-0-8010-3571-5. 272 pp. £12.99.

*A Conversation Waiting to Begin: The Churches and the Gay Controversy* by Oliver O'Donovan. London: SCM Press, 2009. ISBN 978-0-3340-4210-5. ix + 123 pp. £14.99.

*The Anglican Communion and Homosexuality: A Resource to Enable Listening and Dialogue.* Edited by Philip Groves. London: SPCK, 2008. ISBN 978-0-2810-5963-8. 332 pp. £14.99.

Numerous mainline Protestant churches in north-Atlantic countries are experiencing serious internal conflict over the issue of homosexuality. In the Reformed tradition, the dispute currently threatens the Church of Scotland and the Presbyterian Church USA. A similar process erupted recently among the Lutherans in the Church of Sweden and the Evangeli-

cal Lutheran Church of the USA. The question of same-sex relationships and gay clergy has also brought the unity of the global Anglican Communion as a whole into question, while causing serious divisions in the internal structures of its member churches, such as the Church of England, the Episcopal Church USA, and the Anglican Church of Canada. Homosexuality has become the presenting issue in moral and ecclesiological debates within many contemporary Protestant churches. For some, the issue is a symptom of the theological poverty of liberal Protestantism. Others frame the dispute as a prudish distraction from more pressing economic and social challenges confronting the contemporary church. Many Christians caught up such conflictual rhetoric report that they are exhausted and disoriented by seemingly endless debate. The three volumes under consideration are symptoms of this current stalemate.

Of the three volumes under consideration here, Dennis P. Hollinger's *The Meaning of Sex* offers the broadest approach to the problem of homosexuality, setting it within the context of a more general Christian understanding of sex. Hollinger, professor of Christian Ethics at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, presents what can be described as a traditional approach to sexuality. Although sex is described as a 'good gift from God', he emphasises that it has been created with 'very specific purposes' in mind, and is to be expressed 'in a very specific context' (p. 13). According to Hollinger, sex ought to occur only within the confines of marriage between a man and a woman, and ought to have procreation as part of its purpose and telos.

The book begins with a general survey of different theoretical approaches to ethics, followed by a chapter on different historical 'worldviews' towards sexuality. Both of these discussions set up what is the primary piece of the volume, a presentation of 'The Christian Worldview and Sex'. This chapter is a straightforward articulation of the view that the Christian scriptures affirm a distinction in the order of creation between male and female (which Hollinger describes as both divine and natural 'givens'), and that the biblical portrayal of sex (which he largely locates in Genesis and some brief references to Pauline passages) is one which locates it within a covenantal relationship, out of which emerge offspring (p. 82). Having defined the meaning of sex in this fashion, Hollinger makes light work of contemporary issues in sexual ethics. Pre-marital sex (including masturbation and oral sex) violate the definition outlined above (chapter 5), as does anal sex (p. 156), homosexuality (chapter 7), and pornography (pp. 157–8).

Hollinger never leaves the reader uncertain about his position on any matter under discussion (including whether there will be sex in heaven—p. 90). Nevertheless, there are significant limitations to the volume,

which hinder its capacity to further the contemporary debate over homosexuality and sexuality more generally. The argument lacks methodological precision, in that it flirts with both an ethics grounded on revealed morality as well as on natural theology. For Hollinger, the proper meaning of sex is discernible in Scripture *and* by observing nature. What remains unclear, however, is how these two normative sources relate to each other. Is this a work of 'Evangelical' biblical ethics or a renewed form of natural law ethics? Hollinger is not explicit about this, although his references to scientific 'givens' generally play a supporting role in the argument. But his references to scientific 'givens' renders his argument vulnerable from a variety of directions. First, he largely ignores the breadth and complexity of contemporary studies of sexual behaviour, in which there is little consensus on a number of issues, including gender identity and the genetic basis of homosexuality. More to the point: should a scientific study raise a substantial challenge to any one of his claims (e.g. that 'sexual restraint' promotes 'cultural flourishing', p. 236), does that imply that this new finding should be seen as trumping biblical authority? Hollinger opens the door to such tensions without attending to the consequences. Both Scripture and science are employed to support his reading of the Christian 'worldview' on sexuality, but without attending very deeply to the diversity of hermeneutical issues surrounding biblical interpretation, or to the conflicting nature of scientific theories within the wider medical and scientific communities. As such, the argument may well fail to convince any reader not already inclined to agree with Hollinger's position.

Those sympathetic with the general perspective outlined by Hollinger may find that his concern to challenge the 'highly sexualised nature of contemporary culture' is not complemented by much analysis of the problem. The closing chapter, 'Living in a Sex-Crazed World', is largely a lament over a fallen society, paired with a call for the church to be a 'visible representation of Christ himself' to such a world. When Hollinger acknowledges, however, that 'the church has failed miserably in this realm' (p. 231), this admission does not lead to an analysis of the causes of this failure, anymore than it results in a careful diagnosis of how it is western culture has become so 'sex-crazed'. As such, the discussion's engagement with the problem falls short both pastorally and theologically. At the practical level, the analysis does not diagnose any particular dynamics influencing contemporary attitudes towards sex. This results in a theological approach that slants towards works righteousness: though 'the church has failed miserably', it is told that it simply must be 'the embodiment of the meaning of sex' (p. 243). One might suggest that the church's act of confession and self-examination need go further than this.

Oliver O'Donovan's recent collection of essays, *A Conversation Waiting to Begin*, seeks to be a more probing and reflective contribution to contemporary sexual ethics. These self-described 'polemical essays' are no less than Hollinger's intended to be rooted in an 'Evangelical' approach to biblical ethics, but O'Donovan recognises that, at least within his own Anglican tradition, the traditional arguments over sexuality, along with the hermeneutical issues surrounding the passages relating to homosexuality, have been repeatedly rehearsed without resolving the matter for his church. He suggests that the crisis over homosexuality is the result of the failure of the 'liberal paradigm', which falsely imagines itself to be independent from traditional spiritual authorities (p. 6). By acclimatising itself too closely to contemporary culture, liberal Anglicanism, according to O'Donovan, lost its critical and theological purchase on that culture (p. 13).

The volume offers more than a rehearsal of evangelical criticisms of liberal theology, however, for O'Donovan accepts as a given the presence of gay (he does not specifically mention lesbian) Christians within the church. It is with such a constituency, he suggests, that a conversation has yet to begin, for he argues that the status and identity of homosexuals in the church has only be framed by the liberal paradigm as a question of 'justice' or 'liberation'. According to O'Donovan (somewhat puzzlingly), until now the 'Liberal Paradigm' has been speaking for gay Christians. O'Donovan intends this volume to be a call for gay Christians to articulate for themselves their own understanding of their Christian experience and vocation, in a manner which sets the dialogue 'within the basic terms set by the Christian faith.' (p. 110) O'Donovan's intriguing expansion of the way the debate over homosexuality is frequently engaged is summed up by his suggestion that 'the challenge gays present the church with is not emancipatory but hermeneutic' (p. 117). That he is willing to concede that a properly theological description of homosexual Christian life has yet to be done, and his insistence that such a project must be done in dialogue with gay Christians, is the principal contribution of this book.

In seeking to make room for such a conversation, O'Donovan is self-consciously trying to respond soberly and charitably to the realities of the contemporary Anglican churches. One might ask whether his references to 'gay experience' (in the singular, p. 117), or his stereotypical characterisation of the 'roaming character' of gay relations (p. 111) betray some unhelpful assumptions about his intended dialogue partners, but a generous reader cannot but recognise that a real effort to extend a hand across a fractured divide is being made in these essays. O'Donovan is willing to go so far as to acknowledge that 'we cannot rule out the possibility that we may reach a "revisionist" conclusion' after a healthy debate, so long as that

discussion has been characterised by a 'deep appropriation' and engagement with the Christian theological tradition (p. 108).

The hand that is extended to gay Christians in the book is not offered to the same degree to 'liberals' in the church. Such 'revisionists' (who are never concretely identified) are portrayed as having refused to question their own assumptions (p. 110), of practising 'managerial juridicalization' (p. 115), and of valuing conciliation over truth (p. 19). It is difficult to deny that all of these failures can be found within the contemporary Anglican churches, but the projection of all these exclusively onto his theological opponents violates the hospitable tone O'Donovan self-consciously seeks to set in the book. A symptom of such misrepresentation is present at the volume's outset, when he describes the election of Gene Robinson as the first openly gay bishop in 2003 as being an instance where 'New Hampshire has an idea to sell' (p. 1). Many commentators, both locally and internationally, have since noted that it is more accurate to say that Anglicans in that diocese simply voted for who they wanted as their bishop; they had little intention of sending a 'message' to the world, nor did they imagine they were 'selling a story'. Describing this as merely another instance of some monolithic 'liberal paradigm' falls far short of the standard O'Donovan sets for himself: 'setting stubborn issues within a new and more radically Christian framework' (p. x).

One hopes that O'Donovan would acknowledge this criticism as fair. It can also be imagined, however, that he would consider Philip Groves' edited volume, *The Anglican Communion and Homosexuality*, as an example of the 'Liberal Paradigm's' propensity towards managerial bureaucracy rather than deep theological reflection. The book offers much more than that, but there is a sense in which it reads as a cumbersome summary of past Anglican documents and committee rulings. To a degree, this is a helpful contribution, for many Anglicans do not know the history of their church, and yet if the volume's intended aim is to 'help us listen to one another' and to 'listen to God' (p. 1), then the end result falls somewhat short of this. Although each topic of focus (Mission, Scripture, Sexuality, Science) receives treatment from more than one theological perspective in the church, these differing contributions largely talk past each other. The result is less an example of 'dialogue' than a collection of differing summary reports from conversations that have occurred elsewhere. Although it is understandable that the volume 'does not attempt to "solve" the theological disagreements over homosexuality', it must also be said that it is also unlikely to move the debate any further along the road towards such a goal. The book is a useful reference resource, and can serve as an

instructive introduction to someone new to the debate. What is does not offer is any new insight or direction for future conversations.

*Christopher Craig Brittain, University of Aberdeen*

*Sex and the Single Saviour: Gender and Sexuality in Biblical Interpretation.* By Dale B. Martin. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006. ISBN 978-0-6642-3046-3. 224 pp. £19.99.

This volume contains a valuable collection of mostly previously published works by Dale B. Martin, Professor of Religious Studies at Yale University, which address both broader hermeneutical issues and specific exegetical themes, including same-sex relations, sexual passion, marriage, divorce, and celibacy. The collection begins and ends with a challenge to faith. The introduction calls into question what it calls textual foundationalism, the belief that the text of the Bible 'speaks', and so provides a sound basis for ethics and doctrine, as if its meaning is self-maintained and uncontaminated by the stance of interpreters. Both life experience and methodological discussion of the way texts and their interpreters work show that such an approach is naïve. Equally naïve is the belief that we can know an author's intentions or can know events behind the texts. Even theological considerations, he argues, should warn us against misplacing the meaning of texts to the author's intent and things beyond them, for faith has seen in the texts themselves the Word of God.

At the end of the Introduction one is left wondering what remains beyond subjectivity and is encouraged to find in each following chapter an exposure of false claims to objectivity with a promise that the final chapter might point to a way ahead. Having worked with some of those chapters, I headed straight for the epilogue to read how Martin sees himself as a postmodern Christian historicist. Here he confesses to historical criteria which direct his path away from anachronistic reading: 'I see myself as a responsible historian, attempting to describe what I take to be historically probable by the normal, public methods of modern historiography' (p. 162), though not, as he hastens to add, stopping there as though this were the sole path to meaning. Against reduction of Scripture to a theology of divine narrative or a set of propositions or scholarly reconstruction of the history behind it, Martin urges that Scripture be allowed to be Scripture. The meaning of Scripture resides in its enactment and performance in the community of faith, so that it is like a museum which moves us, a cathedral that evokes our awareness, and a painting which engages us and which we engage with our various ways of seeing and sensing.

With almost evangelical piety he invokes the vulnerability and humility which postmodernism asserts, to call for a hermeneutic of faith. Kierkegaard's image of our being afloat on 70,000 fathoms of ocean is to be one not of panic but trust. 'We must learn to float and accept the risk with joy' (p. 184). It is clear, however, that Martin is not looking out into nothingness, but has his own vision of what abides and needs to be. Love is to be 'our ruling guide for our interpretations of Scripture' (p. 165). He defends this well against the denigration of love in some discussions of ethics, arguing that this biblical principle keeps us 'on our guard that our interpretations of Scripture do not harm but actively promote what is truly good for our neighbor' (p. 169). 'The possibility offered to us now—with the collapse of confidence in scientific or historical or textual foundationalisms and the rise of antifoundationalist philosophies and theologies—is to learn to live faithfully without foundations—or without any other foundation than faith in Jesus Christ' (p. 185). Expressions like 'what is truly good' and 'faith in Jesus Christ' need unpacking, but Martin has produced a strong case for a hermeneutic which allows engagement, including connection and discontinuity, with Scripture. It makes sense of an inclusive ethic which in relation to sexuality affirms the dignity of all whatever their orientation.

The intervening chapters demonstrate Martin's commitment to historical method, challenging attempts to construe meaning convenient for interpreters or their communities, such as when some explain away Jesus' prohibition on divorce, or fail to acknowledge how their contexts have shaped the meanings they see, whether in relation to same-sex relations or marriage. This reviewer reaches different historical conclusions on many points, including on what drives Paul in Romans 1 and how he sees passion, which cannot be canvassed here (see my *Sexuality in the New Testament*, 2010). Martin's reading also renders the ancient texts more remote at points than I see them, but his careful assessments certainly expose the need for authentic engagement, which needs to be open to weigh competing strands in biblical thought, in both assent and dissent, and to embrace such encounter in humility and faith.

*William Loader, Murdoch University, Perth, Australia*

*Jesus, the Bible, and Homosexuality: Explode the Myths, Heal the Church*, revised and expanded edition. By Jack Rogers. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009. ISBN: 978-0-664-23269-6. ix + 228 pp. £11.99.

*Jesus, the Bible, and Homosexuality* aims to justify the church's acceptance of homosexuals by calling it back to the Gospel it preaches, emphasizing

God's love as available to all and all in need of it. Neither Jack Rogers nor anyone in his family is homosexual, so he makes his case that the church should accept homosexuals not from personal experience, but from historical analogies in chapters two and three (i.e. the church changing its stance on the ordination of women and the morality of slavery) and Biblical reasoning in chapters four, five, and eight. He is frank with the reader that he is neither a Biblical scholar nor a historian proper, but a theologian and a historian of doctrine. Thus, he examines the issue from within his own branch of the church and traces the development of various official Presbyterian documents as doctrinal stances have shifted.

Chapters four and five are the heart of his argument. Chapter four lays out the seven Presbyterian guidelines for interpreting Scripture, which Rogers contends are applicable to all evangelical denominations. In his explanation of these guidelines are his two most significant arguments against using certain texts to condemn homosexuality: (1) The Spirit sometimes provides the church with a new understanding of Scripture, thus the church's traditional interpretation is fallible and should always be subject to revision; and (2) 'the assumption of male gender superiority is a significant aspect of the historical and cultural context of the biblical passages that seem to discuss homosexuality,' (p. 63) and since the Gospel does not teach that men are superior to women, the message in these passages is questionable.

In chapter five, Rogers makes a convincing case that the common proof texts against homosexuality (Genesis 19:1-29; Leviticus 18 and 20; 1 Corinthians 6:9; and 1 Timothy 1:10, to name a few) need to be seriously reconsidered. He spends the most time on Romans 1, arguing that the main thrust of Paul's point is warning against idolatry, not sexuality. He claims that Paul's reference to 'natural' and 'unnatural' relations in Romans 1:26-27 is referring to cultural norms, not laying out a theology of natural law or creation. Indeed, he sees natural law merely as a way to argue 'divine sanction... for cultural assumptions' (p. 77).

It is obvious that Rogers has studied the official Presbyterian documents with great care. In chapter seven, he explains his discovery of a flaw in the Presbyterian *Book of Confessions*, in which 'homosexual perversion' was added to a list of sins that would prevent a person entering the kingdom of God. This phrase was not in the original Heidelberg Catechism from which the text was taken—it was added to a subsequent translation in the 1960s—and because of Rogers' discovery steps have been taken to correct the error. He also outlines other corrections that, when rendered, would demonstrate greater inclusivity in the PC(USA) documents.

Rogers' ending statement sums up the argument of the book: 'The more deeply we delve into the biblical word, the more instances we find

of God's radical welcome for all who have faith' (p. 136). His emphasis on returning to the Bible to find the truth of God's love—and then turning to the world to show it—is a welcome contribution to the debate on homosexuality.

This edition includes an expanded chapter seven, an appendix on the progress that has been made toward LGBT equality in the U.S., and a group study guide.

*Lauren Clausen, University of Edinburgh*

*God's Word in Human Words: An Evangelical Appropriation of Critical Biblical Scholarship.* By Kenton L. Sparks. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008. ISBN 978-0-8010-2701-7. 415 pp. £14.99.

This erudite book seeks to persuade evangelicals to embrace mainstream critical scholarship's methods and general conclusions about the Bible, not merely in regard to history, but also in regard to some moral judgments that are made against the biblical text. At the same time Sparks wishes to hold onto a doctrine of divine inerrancy, i.e. that 'God does not err in Scripture' (p. 139). Sparks' *tour de force* takes us through a sweep of church history, complex epistemological discussions, and, of course, biblical scholarship itself, of which he shows real mastery.

The author begins by relating how around the age of 27 he himself had come to embrace such critical scholarship, ironically, through encountering the writing of biblical conservative K.A. Kitchen. Sparks concluded that Kitchen's argument was like that of someone who maintained that the earth was flat. 'At that moment I began to doubt that evangelical scholars were really giving me the whole story when it came to the Bible and biblical scholarship' (p. 12). In fact the themes of flat earthism and of geocentrism recur as analogies for conservative biblical scholarship throughout the book (pp. 17–18, 21, 23, 33, 37, 50, 53, 136, 275, 285–86, 335, 373), which is somewhat unfortunate given the fundamental difference in the level of certainty scholarship is able to achieve concerning what is currently observable in such basic questions of cosmology and questions of unobservable literary processes from the past.

The Introduction contrasts the conclusions of 'modern scholarship' on the Bible with traditional understandings of history and authorship. Chapter 1 'Epistemology and Hermeneutics', which some will find technically challenging, seeks to argue that conservatives have had an unhealthy addiction to certainty in knowledge which can largely be traced to the influence of Descartes. Humans 'understand things always partially and always, in some respects, wrongly' (p. 42).

Unfortunately, this point is foundational for all that follows and is repeatedly assumed throughout the rest of the book, but alternative formulations of the ever-present limits of human knowledge were not considered. Sparks says we should avoid thinking that we as humans can have 'error-free, God-like knowledge' (p. 52). 'Is it therefore possible that God has selected to speak to human beings through *adequate* rather than *inerrant* words, and is it further possible that he did so because human beings are *adequate* rather than *inerrant* readers?' (p. 55). After failing, to my mind, to establish that error has to be involved in all human knowledge, there seems to be a further leap when the level of error which is attributed to human knowledge in general is then ascribed to words from human language which God may choose to use. It seems that Sparks does not adequately distinguish between weakness and limitation in communication or perception on the one hand and straying in communication and perception on the other.

Chapter 2, 'Historical Criticism and Assyriology', traces the discovery of creation stories such as Enuma Elish and the flood story in Gilgamesh 'that were older than, and uncomfortably similar to, the biblical creation and flood stories in Genesis' (p. 60); he also considers Mesopotamian writings such as annals and chronicles, *ex eventu* prophecy, and king lists. From these he draws three conclusions: (1) 'the average person is in no position to evaluate, let alone criticize, the results of critical scholarship' (p. 70); (2) there are eight features shared by Ancient Near Eastern and biblical texts (narratives with the appearance of history which contain fiction; long literary prehistories; bias; inaccuracy; pseudoprophecy; fabrication of facts for propagandistic purposes; two pieces of literature may appear similar in genre but on further inspection turn out to be fundamentally different; being written by people other than the alleged author); (3) that critical scholars do not approach the Bible with greater scepticism than they have for other texts and that evangelicals do not have a problem with historical criticism per se, but with historical criticism applied to the Bible (pp. 71–72).

Chapter 3, 'The Problem of Biblical Criticism', seeks to show that 'biblical criticism arises from a careful and thoughtful reading of the Bible rather than from reckless impiety' (p. 76). Sparks then considers a barrage of generally well-chosen biblical problems. These include arguments that Moses did not write the Pentateuch, that there are problems of chronology in the different texts of Genesis 5 (MT, Samaritan Pentateuch, LXX) and that the most likely original text agrees with none of the extant versions completely, that many of the peoples mentioned in Genesis 10 'date no earlier than the first millennium' (p. 82), that two different genealogies in Genesis 4 and 5 have been created out of one list of names, that the flood

narrative is a composition based on two sources dating probably 'no earlier than the first millennium BCE' (p. 87), that there are many number contradictions between Samuel/Kings and Chronicles, that the book of Isaiah is composite, that Ezekiel got his prophecy about Tyre wrong, that Matthew's account of the Nativity was 'not strictly biographical but was instead a creative composition designed to illustrate the Savior's relationship to Moses' (p. 111), that the Pastoral epistles were probably not written by Paul, that both Daniel and the book of Revelation foretold an eschatological kingdom, but that kingdom did not arrive within the timeframe they predicted. Nor are the problems merely historical. There are also major theological tensions in the Bible and texts can be propagandistic. As an instance of this Sparks considers the stories of David in the books of Samuel, which portray him as kind towards Saul and his descendants, but may hide a much more sinister historical reality in which David was in fact complicit in the death of some of Saul's family.

In chapter 4, '"Traditional" Responses to Biblical Criticism', after briefly dealing with fideistic and philosophical responses, Sparks moves on to consider 'Critical Anti-Criticism: Conservative Evangelical Biblical Scholarship' (p. 144). This sort of scholarship has resorted, apparently, to eight strategies: 'artificial presentations of the evidence' (e.g. K.A. Kitchen on Isaiah 40–55); 'artificial comparative analogies' (e.g. Kitchen's *Ancient Orient and Old Testament*); 'selective and illegitimate appeals to critical scholarship' (e.g. Richard Schultz's appeals to scholars who speak of a 'unity' to the book of Isaiah); 'lowering the threshold for historicity' (e.g. Provan, Long, Longman, Harrison, Hoffmeier, and Kitchen on the Exodus); 'red herrings—the misleading use of "test cases"' (e.g. T. Desmond Alexander on Pentateuchal source criticism); 'misleading and illegitimate harmonizations' (e.g. Brian Kelly on whether Manasseh persisted in evil as in Kings or repented as in Chronicles); 'critiquing biblical criticism with the biblical "testimony"' (e.g. references to Christ's attitude to the OT); 'pleading ignorance and obfuscating the issues' (e.g. Dillard and Longman not being sufficiently clear that they believe Isaiah 40–66 was written during or after the exile).

The remaining chapters are interesting and important, but build upon the foundation of the first four chapters. Chapter 5: 'Constructive Responses to Biblical Criticism' (e.g. the approaches of Barth, Childs, and Barr, who attempt to build a theology having accepted the standard conclusions of biblical criticism); chapter 6, 'The Genres of Human Discourse'; chapter 7, 'The Genres of Divine Discourse'; chapter 8, 'The Context of the Whole and Biblical Interpretation'; chapter 9, 'Negotiating the Context of the Whole'; and chapter 10, 'Biblical Criticism and Christian

Theology'. For reasons of brevity alone these will not be considered here in detail.

If I were to try to summarize the main points which Sparks makes in the book I would say that they are (1) that human knowledge must involve error and therefore God's own revelation must involve error; (2) that scripture contains numerous examples of historical and moral errors so clear that they should be acknowledged by all who have studied the matters carefully; (3) that it is possible, while acknowledging (1) and (2) to create an adequate theology and to accept scripture as God's word.

Conservatives as well as many non-conservatives should have little difficulty in showing that point (1) has not been demonstrated and that Sparks has not yet made even an initial case for the presumption of the validity of point (3). Therefore the most weighty part of Sparks' argument remains point (2), which is, of course, the billion dollar question. We will therefore focus on that question, though of necessity our response will have to be selective and therefore open to criticism.

Let us consider, for instance, the repentance of Manasseh, which Chronicles records and Kings says nothing about. What is interesting about this case, which Sparks finds so persuasive a demonstration of historical error, is that there are few relevant data around today which were not available to pre-enlightenment interpreters. A host of Bible experts from the past considered this difference and were content simply to harmonize by adding the details of the narratives together. Thus it seems unlikely that it is the data of the text themselves which are driving the change in interpretative model. Rather it is the framework with which the interpreter begins that dictates their approach.

Secondly, Sparks takes a rather negative view of the work of K.A. Kitchen, and in fact cites reading Kitchen as the cause of his overnight conversion to critical scholarship. He likens Kitchen's approach to flat earthism. It is, however, as well to remember that Kitchen has probably read a greater range of Ancient Near Eastern texts than anyone else alive and that his appeal is to data, and that those who reject Kitchen's approach usually ignore or fail to explain data which he adduces. Furthermore, the amount of comparative data which he has published, for instance in his classic *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Eerdmans, 2003) represents only a sample of the amount of unpublished relevant data which he appears to have. The onomastic data which K.A. Kitchen and Richard Hess, for instance, have adduced as suggesting earlier dates for biblical material do indeed constitute a weighty argument which is usually ignored. In fact I meet many Old Testament scholars who are simply *unaware* of very significant patterns in the distribution of the names in the

Old Testament. If anyone is like Galileo being prepared to look through the telescope it is Kitchen, not his opponents.

Thirdly, Sparks believes that those who reject the Documentary Hypothesis of the origin of the Pentateuch are unfair because they pick off one argument for the hypothesis at a time and do not admit that the arguments *together* have a greater plausibility than singly. I sympathise with Sparks' argument here. However, my own personal difficulty in assessing the Documentary Hypothesis stems from the fact that, to my knowledge, there is no presentation of the arguments for it which weighs both its power to explain data and its need to adduce secondary literary hypotheses in order to support the system as a whole. What someone like myself needs is a 'balance sheet' in which the Documentary Hypothesis is awarded credibility points when it can explain data and loses such points when one is obliged to posit editorial interference in an *ad hoc* way in order to support the hypothesis. Without such honest setting forth of the arguments, it is hard to evaluate its probability. In my experience, when editors or redactors are believed to have inserted a verse or to have changed a divine name scholars usually assess the likelihood of this from a position of a prior belief in the hypothesis as a whole.

One's evaluation of the general correctness of critical scholarship will probably determine one's evaluation of Sparks' book. However, it should be stressed that Sparks' section on critical biblical scholarship is far stronger than any other part of the book and conservatives need to provide better responses than heretofore not merely to Sparks but to such scholarship as a whole if their position is to be credible. In addition, the following observations can be made about the argument as a whole:

***Sparks' spectrum.*** Sparks believes that there is a spectrum of views on the Bible. At one end are those for whom 'the embracing of biblical criticism has had the effect of desacralizing the Bible. According to this view, the results of biblical scholarship provide "sure evidence" that Scripture is a thoroughly human product rather than a divinely inspired book' (pp. 18–19). At the other end of the spectrum are those who believe that the conclusions of such scholarship 'would represent a serious threat to biblical authority' (p. 19). In the middle, of course, is Sparks with the *tertium quid* option of embracing both biblical scholarship and faith. This spectrum is very important and underlies the whole of his rhetoric. He invites people to see themselves as on the conservative end of the spectrum and to move towards his central position. His is the view, supposedly, which affirms the most important beliefs of both sides. This is why nowhere in the book does he see the need to justify whether his view is coherent or rational. It would be equally compelling to construct a spec-

trum with conservatives and secular scholars at one end in agreement that certain forms of current biblical scholarship, if valid, are indeed incompatible with belief in divine inspiration of scripture, and Sparks at the other end of the spectrum maintaining that they are compatible. But then, of course, the vulnerability or even fideism of Sparks' position would be rather more exposed.

***Faulty understanding of conservative epistemologies.*** Although there is plenty of confusion in evangelical epistemologies, it is not right to trace evangelical desire for certainty, infallibility, or errorless knowledge to Descartes, when one can find so much precedent for language of certainty within the vocabulary of early Christianity. It is also wrong to say that desire for errorless knowledge 'assumes human beings have the capacity to see the world as God sees it' (p. 171). Again, Sparks fails to distinguish between weakness or limitation on the one hand and straying or erring on the other.

***Logical fallacies.*** In certain sections of the book there are unwarranted leaps in the arguments as Sparks speeds over crucial moves, uses key terms equivocally, and fails to consider alternatives. Just as he does this with the epistemological introduction, claiming that all knowledge involves error, he likewise argues that divine accommodation makes room for error in chapter 7 ('The Genres of Divine Discourse'). For instance, Sparks believes that if one disallows human errors in the text one is obliged to 'reject the conceptual validity of accommodation altogether' (p. 247). The idea of something being simultaneously imperfect (i.e. incomplete in some regard) and without error does not even seem to enter his mind as possible. For him the frailty of accommodation has to involve error. Simplification involves misinformation. Terms for error and finitude are used almost interchangeably (e.g., p. 249). The middle is excluded.

***Interpretative cherry picking.*** Sparks is consistent in allowing accommodation to error not merely to involve matters of history, but also of theology and ethics. But this lands him with the new difficulty of deciding which principles of scripture to adhere to. When he sees a text saying that women could speak in church (1 Cor. 11:5; 14:1–33) and one refusing this permission (1 Tim. 2:11–15), Sparks follows the former as that which 'seems to incarnate Scripture's highest ideals' (p. 247). But one wonders how one can judge what is higher. To deal with this Sparks proposes a model of trajectory hermeneutic. One looks not just at scripture, but at the direction in which it is going. One must move 'beyond its explicit words' (p. 289). One will not, however, do so unless the direction is 'vouchsafed by the fact that some parts of the Bible already point us in this new direc-

tion' (p. 289). The problem, of course, is that it is hard for a trajectory hermeneutic to exclude later developments like the strict Augustinian view of sex as a natural development of the NT which itself restricted sex more than the OT. It is hard for me to see Sparks' proposal as anything other than a call to utter subjectivity.

To conclude, it seems to me that Sparks' arguments leave much to be desired. This is a brilliant, though problematic, book. Very substantive points have been made by him concerning biblical studies, but these represent the only parts of the book for which an answer is outstanding or necessary.

*Peter J. Williams, Tyndale House, Cambridge*

*Words of Life: Scripture as the Living and Active Word of God.* By Timothy Ward. Nottingham: Apollos, 2009. ISBN 978-1-8447-4207-3. 192 pp. £9.99.

This is an excellent book which lives up the recommendations from Donald Macleod, Paul Helm, and J. I. Packer. Tim Ward has put us in his debt by producing a clear and profound treatment of doctrine of Scripture for the present day. It is accessible and scholarly, anchored in Scripture's own self-testimony and attuned to the pastoral needs of Christians in the twenty-first century.

After a brief introduction, the argument unfolds in four chapters. In the first, Ward treats us to a biblical theology of the speaking God. Whatever else must be said about God, he presents himself in Scripture as one who speaks. His words make a difference, calling the world into existence, bestowing blessing, executing judgement and drawing men and women into a saving relationship with him. Far from words being an alternative to presence, Ward insists that '*communication from* God is... *communion with* God, when met with a response of trust from us' (p. 34). Jesus Christ, the Word-made-flesh who 'comes as the fulfilment of everything "the word of God" in the Old Testament had been anticipating' speaks the words of the Father and gives his Spirit that his apostles might pass those words on to the ends of the earth and the end of the age. This great chapter might have been made even better by some reflection upon Genesis 11 and the impact of Babel on human language and communication.

The next chapter presents a more systematic treatment, relating Scripture to each divine person of the Trinity in turn. Aware of criticisms sometimes made of standard evangelical handling of the doctrine as abstracted from the biblical narrative of salvation history, overly systematised and lacking in dynamic spirituality, Ward embeds his treatment of the doctrine in the person and activity of the living God. Here Ward makes use

of speech-act theory, but in a careful way which serves rather than dominates his theological discussion.

This is followed by a chapter in which Ward examines the classic attributes of Scripture: necessity, sufficiency, clarity, authority. His treatment of each of these is fresh and edifying. Here is a strong biblical and evangelical case for taking Scripture seriously on its own terms. Particularly refreshing was his clear embrace of biblical inerrancy together with a warning that this aspect should not occupy the central place in our doctrine of Scripture. He is clearly aware of the recent debates, and handles the issues with skill. Very helpfully, he provides advice on how to deal with difficulties that arise (apparent contradictions, alleged errors).

A final chapter deals with the place of the Bible in the Christian life. Particularly helpful here is a little section on the relation of private Bible reading to corporate Bible reading and preaching. He takes seriously the present work of the Spirit, the significance of wisdom gleaned from fellow Christians, and the witness of the Christian conscience; however, he concludes that 'the one place where the voice of God, and therefore what [he calls] "the semantic presence of God" may always reliably be found, is in his speaking and acting in the words of Scripture' (p. 178).

This book should be given to and read by every theological student. Not only will they be encouraged by such a fresh and profound exposition of the doctrine of Scripture as it has been taught and believed by the vast bulk of Christians over the past two thousand years, they will be treated to a master class in how to 'do' theology. Tim Ward's book has deep roots in the explicit teaching of Scripture; it isn't afraid to tackle criticism and hard questions head-on; it engages important contributions directly rather than through the opinions of later commentators, and it evaluates contrary views with courtesy, care, and the courage to show clearly why we must say 'no'. Perhaps as much as anything, it maintains proper biblical and theological proportions. Wide reading and deep, careful thought have produced a book which will edify all who read it.

*Mark D. Thompson, Moore Theological College, Sydney, Australia*

*Predestination: The American Career of a Contentious Doctrine.* By Peter J. Thuesen. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. ISBN 978-0-19-517427-4. xiv + 309 pp. £19.99

The only serious weakness in this fine book is that it is too short. As the subtitle indicates, it concentrates on American disputes and theologians, although in less than 300 pages it also goes back in time to Augustinian foundations and extends outwards to a great deal of British history (including John Wesley *versus* Augustus Toplady). It does not, however,

include the Scotland of Thomas Boston, James Hogg, or John McLeod Campbell, which would have provided grist for unusually interesting comparative history. Peter Thuesen's goal, however, was not to provide a comprehensive account of all the serious arguments over predestination that have occurred in just American history, but, while treating the theological debates seriously, to set those disagreements into broader religious, social, political, and cultural contexts. As a result, if some students might wish for more on Jonathan Edwards' *Freedom of Will*, the long and involved history of reactions to that landmark work, or the views of consequential theologians like E. Y. Mullins or Charles Hodge, all readers are amply rewarded by the wisdom of what Thuesen does provide.

The book's survey, though moving rapidly, explains how predestination factored differently among seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Puritans, depending on temperament and setting as well as exact convictions; how it suffered as a doctrine after the American War for Independence when themes of republican liberty undercut all notions of sovereign supremacy; how it pushed a wide array of sectarians (including Mormons, Adventists, and Christian Scientists) away from traditional orthodoxy; how it engaged the energies of earnest and creative women like Catherine Beecher who, with considerable personal anguish, eventually abandoned the doctrine; how it dominated intra-Lutheran and Lutheran-Calvinist disputes for much of the late nineteenth century; and how in the late twentieth century the doctrine has made a comeback among resurgent Southern Baptist conservatives and some prominent preacher-theologians like John Piper. The survey's great success is to outline the convictions of all participants clearly while also explaining the inner logic that, as examples, moved some Arminians to link their Calvinist opponents with antinomianism and Islam, even as Calvinists were labelling Arminians as papists and naïve perfectionists.

Apart from its expert historical survey, the book is also important for a noteworthy theological argument: that the key theological division in western Christian history has not been between defenders of divine sovereignty and proponents of human free will, but between Christian communities keen to understand the divine-human relationship precisely and Christian communities defined by their sacramental practice. In Thuesen's own phrases, 'there are two larger ways of being religious—two forms of piety, two religious aesthetics—that have existed in tension in Christian history. . . . In place of predestinarianism's mystical awe before God's electing decree, sacramentalism cultivates mystical wonder before the power of priestly ritual' (pp. 6-7). While Thuesen does not oversell this argument, it recurs at strategic points. Thus, when Harriet Beecher Stowe like her sister Catherine Beecher gave up the family's ancestral Cal-

vinism, Stowe did not embrace an anti-predestinarian defence of free will, as Catherine did; rather, she turned to the reassuring sacramentalism of moderate Episcopalianism as a way of both leaving behind the exact theology in which she had been raised and continuing on with much of its ethos, seriousness, and devotion. Again, when American Lutherans ended their internal quarrels over which of their number had slipped into 'crypto Calvinism', it was more because they all agreed on the efficacy of a Real Presence in the Lord's Supper and the salvific character of baptism than because one particular view of predestination triumphed.

If the careful erudition of Thuesen's wide-ranging survey provides evangelical Protestants with fresh insights about their own contentious history, his gentle case for the superiority of practical sacramentalism over predestinarian precisionism also turns this relatively short book into a major theological challenge.

*Mark A. Noll, University of Notre Dame*

*New Perspectives for Evangelical Theology: Engaging with God, Scripture and the World.* Edited by Tom Greggs. Abingdon: Routledge, 2010. ISBN 978-0-415-47733-8. xvi + 223 pp. £19.99.

Tom Greggs' edited collection of essays, written by younger scholars on various doctrinal topics in an intentionally post-critical key, is intended to provide a formative agenda for the next generation of evangelical theologians. David Ford's appreciative foreword finds the lack of a 'single, strict definition of "evangelical"' (p. xiv), conversational tone, and engagement with key figures from the tradition and Scripture congenial. Richard Hays' postscript suggests that the essays partake of Hans Frei's elusive 'generous orthodoxy' by seeking to move evangelical theology from a bounded activity that focuses on gate-keeping to one centred on God as revealed in Jesus Christ.

In compressed summary form: Richard Briggs argues for a reading of Scripture which takes the surprising God to whom the Bible witnesses as central for the reader, a disciple who is open to the complexities of Scripture's functional clarity, patiently persevering in being transformed. Paul Nimmo deploys Barth's reformulation of the doctrine of election in critique of Calvin's double predestination and defends Barth's account from evangelical charges of universalism, a flawed doctrine of God, and inadvertently making God's identity dependent on creation. Paul Dafydd Jones also (not unsympathetically) critiques Calvin by Barth, here on the atonement and much associated dogmatic ground; perhaps most strikingly in Jones' reconstruction of substitution and in emphasizing the effects of the atonement in recreating humanity. George Bailey urges

evangelicals to adopt a Wesleyan dynamic view of entire sanctification. Simeon Zahl argues that evangelicalism contains a pneumatological contradiction (between Lutheran and Pietistic understandings of the effects of sin) at its heart, which neither Wesley nor Edwards can solve, and recommends a Blumhardt-inspired 'charismatic theology of the cross' (p. 90) that prioritizes negative experiences of the Holy Spirit. Ben Fulford appreciatively reads Calvin on the Lord's Supper, but suggests that Calvin neglects the social implications (in the church and for the world) in Paul. Elizabeth Kent criticizes evangelicalism for an inadequate theology of the body, accommodated to the modern liberal state, preferring the incarnate and ecclesial Body of Christ as the one (and community) to whom our individual bodies belong. Donald McFadyen extends Daniel Hardy's insight that human (including church) life is intrinsically social by reading the Gospel of John, Richard Hooker and his own experience as an Anglican village priest to call for a vision of the church as dynamic social truth. Jason Fout offers a 'gift' reading of Paul's letter to the Corinthians that depicts human response to the glory of God as a non-heteronomous dependence which overflows into renewed sociality. Tom Greggs emphasizes the grace of Jesus Christ in an attempt to unsettle the eschatological binaries that entrench separationist tendencies in evangelicalism. Andi Smith uses Yoder to criticize evangelical individualism for failing to prioritize the political consequences of the cross of Christ for the ecclesial community. Sarah Snyder describes Islamic and Christian understandings of the relationship between Scripture and the Word of God, concluding that the differences (especially the Christian insistence on the divine and human authorship of Scripture) need not prevent engagement between 'People of the Book'. Glenn Chestnutt uses Barth to counter evangelical tendencies to supersessionism, and suggests that Barth's negative descriptions of Judaism can be corrected by Barth's later 'parables of the kingdom', opening a place for truth outside the church.

The book is best read as an assortment of trailers advertising films yet to be released; it highlights more substantial work to come from these scholars. As with any collection, the quality is somewhat uneven, but most do promise thought-provoking material in the future. Unfortunately, almost all of these essays begin with largely unsympathetic critiques of evangelicalism; despite the conciliatory tone of Greggs' introduction and the frequent gestures towards the (exploited) difficulty of defining evangelical theology, most of the authors are clear that their targets are evangelicals. Readers of this journal may wish to seek new perspectives for evangelical theology in resources less critical towards the tradition.

*Ben Rhodes, Kings College, University of Aberdeen*

BOOK REVIEWS