Guest Editorial

It is a privilege to be asked to contribute a guest editorial to this issue of SBET. The occasion for this is the inclusion of two papers by Bruce McCormack and John McClean. These were presented at the Edinburgh Dogmatics Conference in 2017. The title of the conference was 'Reformation Theology: Maintenance or Revision?' in 2017. It is pleasing to have these papers published in the Bulletin alongside those included in recent issues.

It was suggested that I might say something about the Rutherford Centre for Reformed Theology and also provide some background to the Edinburgh Dogmatics Conference.

RUTHERFORD CENTRE FOR REFORMED THEOLOGY

Rutherford House was established in 1982 in Edinburgh by the Rev William Still and others, as an evangelical and Reformed research and study centre. In the early phase of its life, it was a residential library and a publisher and, in addition, organised or sponsored numerous reading groups, study groups and conferences. It also sought to promote biblical and evangelical thinking in the churches, by organising training for ministers and elders, producing journals and by engaging with the major issues of the day from an evangelical perspective.

In 2019, Rutherford House became the Rutherford Centre for Reformed Theology and moved from Edinburgh to the Highland Theological College in Dingwall. Despite the change of name and location, the same essential objective remains, namely, to help people to think biblically and theologically. There are three strands to the work. First, research and writing; second, education and training; and third, promotion of the Reformed faith.

In the first strand, we want to make a contribution to academic theology, not least by organising conferences and study groups and through publications. For many years now, an increasing distance has emerged between the academy and the church, with many in the academy pursuing theological reflection in abstraction from a living Christian faith, and many in the churches growing suspicious of academic theology and doubtful of its value. We are committed to working at the intersection between church and academy because we believe that by reconnecting the academic study of theology with the church's worship, ministry and mission, both church and academy will benefit.

In the second strand, for the past few years, our main emphasis has been on elder training, working with individual congregations, groups of

congregations and Presbyteries. This has been an aspect of the work of RH for many years, with David Searle developing some excellent training material, including helping elders to preach and take funerals. We have produced a DVD for elder training and also offer face to face training. Sadly, much of this was placed on hold due to the pandemic restrictions. Also in this second strand is the work of 'Under the Rainbow'. This ministry, run by Jonathan and Judith Keefe, two of our Board members, is a web-based resource for helping those who have experienced infant loss, miscarriage and infertility to think biblically and theologically about their loss.

In the third strand, we work to make people aware of the history and significance of Reformed theology. This includes co-operating with the World Reformed Fellowship on some of their projects. Most of the people of Scotland, including many within churches which trace their history back to the Reformation of 1560, do not know their history and do not understand or affirm Reformed theology. This theology provided the foundation upon which both church and state were established but has all but been forgotten. We want to engage in a re-education programme, not for the sake of historical studies but to demonstrate the significance of Reformed theology for today.

In all three strands, our current emphasis is on ecclesiology (the doctrine of the church). We have an agreement with a publisher, Wipf & Stock, to produce a number of volumes on the theme, the titles and authors of the first six volumes having been approved. We also hope, as restrictions are eased, to organise gatherings and conferences to discuss our biblical and theological understanding of the church.

EDINBURGH DOGMATICS CONFERENCE

One of the most significant elements of the work of RH over the years, now continued by RCRT, is the Edinburgh Dogmatics Conference (EDC). I recently wrote an introduction to the papers from the 2021 EDC (*Engaging Ecclesiology*) soon to be published by Wipf & Stock. In that introduction, I wrote about the history of the EDC and I would like to share some of that with you.

The EDC has taken place every two years since 1985. Since the Tyndale Fellowship, of which some of us were members, focussed on biblical studies, it was thought that we could make a parallel contribution by devoting ourselves to systematic and historical theology, through hosting a conference on Christian Dogmatics. The vision behind the conferences was to create a forum where academic Reformed theology could be presented in a positive way, in engagement with others who perhaps did not

share all of our theological views but were broadly sympathetic and were themselves writing and teaching constructive Protestant theology. In this way, we created an opportunity for academics and ministers from various traditions to come together and encounter one another. It was agreed that the conference would be biennial, alternating with the Fellowship of European Evangelical Theologians conference, which is also biennial and which some of us attend.

The titles of the first few conferences indicate the range of topics under consideration: 'The Challenge of Evangelical Theology: Approach & Method' (1985); 'Issues in Faith and History' (1987); 'The Power & Weakness of God: Impassibility & Orthodoxy' (1989); 'Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell' (1991); and 'The Trinity in a Pluralistic Age' (1993). The normal practice was to produce a book after each conference and some notable volumes were published. Prominent speakers were invited to all of these conferences, and this resulted in serious and sustained debate. It would take up too much space to list all of the contributors over the years, but they have included T.F. Torrance, Paul Helm, Colin Gunton, Henri Blocher, Cynthia Brown, Bruce McCormack, David Wright, Julie Canlis, Kelly Kapic, Oliver O'Donovan, Elizabeth Shively, Michael Horton, N.T. Wright, Karla Wubbenhorst, Lewis Ayres, Francis Watson, Katherine Sonderegger, Don Carson, John Webster, David Fergusson, Donald Macleod, Kees van der Kooi, Kevin Vanhoozer, and many more. The conferences have attracted many speakers and attendees from overseas. For example, in 2017, papers were given by scholars from the UK, France, the Netherlands, the USA, Australia and Hong Kong.

It had been intended that the eighteenth Edinburgh Dogmatics Conference would be held in Palmerston Place Church, Edinburgh, in June 2021. Unfortunately, due to the pandemic, the decision was reluctantly taken to hold the conference by Zoom. Although this was disappointing, there were also significant benefits in that people from all over the world were able to take part. Over seventy people signed up to attend the conference, from eleven countries: the Netherlands, Germany, the USA, Canada, Australia, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Japan, Colombia, and the UK. This was the highest number attending an Edinburgh Dogmatics Conference for some years and was certainly the conference with the highest number of countries represented. Indeed, we had many subsequent contacts from participants in Asia who said that normally they would not be able to attend such a conference in Scotland because of the travel and accommodation costs involved and thanked us for making their participation possible. This is to say nothing of those who faced a travel ban due to the pandemic.

We were planning the conference just as the pandemic was breaking and we did not know if anyone would be allowed to travel to Edinburgh, so we did something we had never done before: we chose all of our speakers from the UK. Our reasoning was that, even if borders were closed, they should be able to attend. This did not in any way lower the standard of excellence of the speakers. The papers were presented by a veritable pantheon of fine scholars: Professor Oliver Crisp; Professor David Fergusson; Professor Tom Noble; Professor Tom Greggs; Professor Gerald Bray; Professor Stephen Williams; Dr Andrew Clarke; and Professor Tony Lane. In the event, they were not required to travel, and the event became a Zoom conference.

The subject of the conference was ecclesiology, the doctrine of the church. The church, especially in Europe, is in steep decline. Many mainstream denominations are losing tens of thousands of members each year, seem unable to attract and hold the attention of young people and have seen hundreds of church buildings closing their doors. In contrast, many churches in Latin America, Africa and Asia are growing. How are we to account for this? The other major problem is the disunity of the church, with schisms, secessions and disruptions meaning that many towns and cities have dozens of churches, each maintaining an independent existence. This is to say nothing of the proliferation of new churches, independent fellowships, house churches and more. Given Jesus' prayer that the church might be 'one,' how can we justify our divisions? Another problem concerns the worship, liturgy and doctrine of the church with its many 'options.' This is to say nothing of the outreach of the church, its mission and evangelism. Are we fulfilling the Great Commission?

As evangelical Christians in the Reformed tradition, RCRT believes that these problems and questions can only be answered and dealt with through a careful biblical and theological examination. Hence our current preoccupation with ecclesiology. The 2021 Edinburgh Dogmatics Conference presented the opportunity to think theologically about the church and our speakers engaged with serious issues in an engaging, challenging and illuminating manner and, both in the papers and the discussions which followed, we were enlightened, provoked and educated.

It is our intention to continue the theme of ecclesiology through the next two Edinburgh Dogmatics Conferences. In 2023 our theme will be 'The Holy Spirit and the Church' and in 2025 it will be 'Creeds, Confessions and the Church'. Further details of these will appear on our website (www.rcrt.scot) in due course.

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Dr McClean's and Professor McCormack's articles were originally delivered at the Rutherford House 17th Edinburgh Dogmatics Conference, hosted by Palmerston Place Church, 29th–31st August 2017. The conference theme was 'Reformation Theology: Maintenance or Revision?'

A Theology of Confessional Theology

John McClean

Recent decades have seen a return of confessional theology in many circles.[1] Generally, there has been a revived sense that theology is a profession of faith grounded in Christian commitment and dependent on the teaching tradition of the church, in contrast to a critical study of theology.[2] Horton observes that 'the more that modern foundationalism is shaken off, the greater the openness to particular confessional theologies'.[3] More specifically, there has been a growing interest in theology which is grounded in the creeds and confessions of the church and is self-conscious of its commitment to a specific confessional tradition. Three recent Reformed single volume theologies have significant discussions of the place of creeds and confessions in their theological method, though this has not been a prominent feature of works from earlier decades.[4] There has been a flurry of books which offer theological discussion

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1 This article is based on material presented at the Edinburgh Dogmatics Conference, August 2017.

2 Mary M. Veeneman, *Introducing Theological Method: A Survey of Contemporary Theologians and Approaches*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017), pp. 15-33 gives Avery Dulles, Karl Barth and Wolfhart Pannenberg as leading examples of what she calls 'Ressourcement and Neo-orthodox Theologies'. See also John Webster, 'Theologies of Retrieval', in the *Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, ed. by John Webster, Kathryn Tanner, and Iain Torrance (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 583–99 and *Theologies of Retrieval: An Exploration and Appraisal*, ed. by Darren Sarisky (London: T&T Clark/Bloomsbury, 2017). Katherine Sonderegger, John Webster, Kevin Vanhoozer, Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, Matthew Levering, Colin Gunton, Robert Jenson, David Fergusson, Kathryn Tanner and Cornelis van der Kooi are some recent thinkers who view the task of theology as confession rather than criticism.

3 M.S. Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology: The Divine Drama*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), p. 4.

4 M. Allen & S. Swain, 'Introduction', *Christian Dogmatics: Reformed Theology for the Church Catholic*, ed. by M. Allen and S. R. Swain (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), pp. 1-6. R. Letham, *Systematic Theology* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2019), pp. 33-35, 220-41, and J.R. Beeke & P.M. Smalley, *Reformed Systematic Theology* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2019), I, pp. 83-114. R. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith:* 2nd Edition (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010), pp. xxxii-xxxiv, notes the importance of engaging with creeds and confessions, but includes Calvin's *Institutes* as a source alongside the Reformed confessions. Earlier single volume systematic theolo-

explicitly grounded in creeds or confessions. [5] My concern with this specific turn to confessional theology, particularly in the Reformed tradition.

Reformed Catholicity serves as an exemplar of this confessional turn. As described by Allen and Swain in their manifesto, Reformed Catholicity is, first and foremost, a return to the study of Scripture. Distinctively, it holds that the key to theological interpretation of Scripture is the great tradition, especially in its Reformed expression and particularly in its confessions. Allen and Swain insist that 'to be more biblical, one must also be engaged in the process of traditioning'. They find an important pedagogic order — first confession or catechism then Scripture. They declare 'one is catechized, then formed as a theologian, and finally capable of reading the Bible well'.[6] The Reformed confessions serve as rules for reading Scripture as they help us pursue 'the kind of biblical interpretation that

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gies by Grudem, Erickson, McGrath and even Horton do not have an equivalent discussion.

5 E.g., M.H. Micks, *Loving the Questions: An Exploration of the Nicene Creed* (New York: Church Publishing, 2005); *Conversations with the Confessions: Dialogue in the Reformed Tradition*, ed. by J.D. Small (Louisville: Geneva Press, 2005); D.E. Willis, *Clues to the Nicene Creed: A Brief Outline of the Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005); *Evangelicals and Nicene Faith*, ed. by T. George (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011); K. Anatolios, *Retrieving Nicaea: The Development and Meaning of Trinitarian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Baker Group, 2011); C. Van Dixhoorn, *Confessing the Faith: A Reader's Guide to the Westminster Confession of Faith* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2014); M.F. Bird, *What Christians Ought to Believe — an Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016); A. Janssen, *Confessing the Faith Today: A Fresh Look at the Belgic Confession* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2016); F. Sanders, *The Triune God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016); B. Myers, *The Apostles' Creed: A Guide to the Ancient Catechism* (Bellingham: Lexham, 2018); *Recovering Historical Christology for Today's Church*, ed. M. Jones (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2019); *The Synod of Dort: Historical, Theological, and Experiential Perspectives*, ed. by J.R. Beeke and M.I. Klauber (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2020); S. Tsoukalas, *The Neglected Trinity: Recovering from Theological Amnesia* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2021); N.A. Almodovar, Nancy & E. Rachut, *Creedal Apologetics: Learning to Use the Apostles' Creed to Defend and Proclaim the Christian Faith* (Eugene: Resource Publications, 2021); M. Heymel, *Woran glaubst du? Evangelischer Glaube im Gespräch* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt 2021); A. Irving, *We Believe: Exploring the Nicene Faith* (London: IVP, 2021); D.F. Ottati, *Living Belief: A Short Introduction to Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2022); T. Hart, *Confessing and Believing: The Apostles' Creed as Script for the Christian Life* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2022).

6 M. Allen & S. Swain, *Reformed Catholicity: The Promise of Retrieval for Theology and Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015), pp. 83-85.

accords with God's overarching economy of salvation and that promotes faith'. Confessions summarise 'the plain teaching of Holy Scripture […] in a way that reflects Scripture's own proportions and purpose' and thus equip us 'to read the various parts of Scripture in light of the whole and with an eye to Scripture's ultimate purpose'.[7]

> Church dogmas provide […] a divinely authorized interpretive key for unlocking the treasures of God's Word, a blessed pathway into Holy Scripture. In terms of more recent hermeneutical parlance, the rule of faith offers an entry point into the "hermeneutical spiral," that fruitful interplay of pre-understanding, reading, and growth in understanding that characterizes all acts of reading.[8]

The order of confession then Bible is pedagogic, and not the order in which the two are given. Allen and Swain stress that Scripture is the source and tradition is goal. They quote Bavinck: 'the external word is the instrument, the internal word the aim'. Scripture reaches its 'destination when all have been taught by the Lord and are filled with the Holy Spirit'.[9] The tradition of the church is the result of her hearing the Lord and formulating her faith in dependence on his revelation, by the power of the Spirit.

Because Scripture leads to confession, the Reformed church must continue to test and prove its confessions against Scripture. Allen and Swain warn that when this task is 'ignored or forsaken', then 'theology quickly degenerates into an arid repetition of dogmatic symbols'. In the movement of traditioning and testing they allow that the 'various expressions of the rule of faith are always subject to revision and reform in light of the clear teaching of Holy Scripture'. The need to test and even revise the confessional tradition is set alongside a hearty confidence in the work of the Spirit in the church, which undergirds a conservative confessional assumption. Confessional doctrines 'stand as "irreversible" expressions of the rule of faith, expressions with which all later summaries of the rule of faith must cohere and which all further summaries of the rule of faith must exhibit'. They are 'ancient landmarks' which are not to be moved.[10]

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7 Allen & Swain, *Reformed Catholicity*, pp. 108-11.

8 Allen & Swain, *Reformed Catholicity*, pp. 113-14.

9 Allen & Swain, *Reformed Catholicity*, p. 36, quoting H. Bavinck, Reformed Dogmatics, ed. J. Bolt, trans. J. Vriend, 4 vols (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003-2008), I, p. 493.

10 Allen & Swain, *Reformed Catholicity*, pp. 111-12. See the comments on confessional revision in C.R. Trueman, *The Creedal Imperative* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), pp. 191-98.

The confessional turn appeals to two authorities — Scripture and confessions. Reformed and evangelical theology is well served by any number of studies of the doctrine of Scripture.[11] In contrast, there is little theological reflection available on the nature of confessions and their authority. There have been a range of useful recent studies of the creeds and confessions.[12] Historically, Francis Turretin and James Bannerman gave significant expositions of the theology of confessing.[13] Trueman offers a broader defense of the validity of moving from Scripture to doctrine, with some consideration of the need to transmit doctrine and the role of the church.[14] Rayburn sets out the case that creeds and confessions persuasively present

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11 B.B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Nutley: P&R, 1948); J.I. Packer, *'Fundamentalism' and the Word of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958); M. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972); J.I. Packer, *Freedom, Authority and Scripture* (Leicester: IVP, 1981); *Scripture and Truth*, ed. by D.A. Carson & J. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983); *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon*, ed. by D.A. Carson & J. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986); *The Trustworthiness of God*, ed. by P. Helm & C. Trueman (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002); T. Ward, *Words of Life: Scripture as the Living and Active Word of God* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2009); J. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2010); Scott R. Swain, *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading: A Theological Introduction to the Bible and Its Interpretation* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011); *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures*, ed. by D.A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016); J. S. Feinberg, *Light in a Dark Place: The Doctrine of Scripture* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2018).

12 James T. Dennison Jr., *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*, 4 vols (Reformation Heritage, 2008–2014); J. Pelikan, V. Hotchkiss, *Credo: historical and theological guide to creeds and confessions of faith in the Christian tradition*, 4 vols (New Haven: Yale UP, 2003); William L. Lumpkin and Bill J. Leonard, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Judson Press, 2011); C. Trueman, *The Creedal Imperative* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012); D. Fairbairn & R.M. Reeves, *The Story of Creeds and Confessions: Tracing the Development of the Christian Faith*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2019).

13 James Bannerman, *The Church of Christ: A Treatise on the Nature, Powers, Ordinances, Discipline, and Government of the Christian Church* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1868), I, pp. 277–302; Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 1992–1997), III, pp. 285-293. See also See W. Hetherington, 'Introductory Essay', pp. 11-34 in R. Shaw, *The Reformed Faith: an Exposition of the Westminster Confession* (Tain: Christian Focus, 2008).

14 Trueman, *Creedal*, pp. 51-80. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, 'May We Go Beyond What Is Written after All? The Pattern of Theological Authority and the Problem of Doctrinal Development', pp. 747-792 in *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures*, ed. by D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016), gives a similar and fuller

to the current generation 'the convictions to which the Lord has already brought his people as the foundation for the church's present and future life and work.'[15] Allen offers some basis for the 'confessional principle' in Reformed theology, clarifying how the Scripture principle leads to the distinction between the magisterial authority of Christ and his Word, and the ministerial authority of the church and its judgements. He reflects on the task of the church and its empowerment by the Spirit.[16] This article offers a theology of confessing, considering the nature and role of confession and how church confessions serve as theological authorities.

TO BE A CHRISTIAN IS TO CONFESS

Barth, characteristically, sets out an understanding of the act of confession grounded in a Christologically determined anthropology. The proper response for humans is to 'bear express witness' to God. We are made for God by his Word. We receive his Word and are called to respond, concretely, by our answering speech.

> In all encounters between God and man this is the issue—that God commands man to be His witness: not just His dumb witness or His unwilling witness; but explicitly His witness, in the execution and in the act of His confession in a particular, marked way.[17]

The content of this praise is not our invention, but our repetition of God's word to us about himself. It has no 'purpose' but to respond to and honour God so it is 'more of the nature of a game or song than of work or warfare'.[18]

In another place Barth explains that 'confessing is the moment in the act of faith in which the believer stands to his faith, or, rather, to the One in whom he believes, the One whom he acknowledges and recognises, the living Jesus Christ; and does so outwardly, again in general terms, in face

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argument for the necessity for developing doctrine, which he affirms must be catholic but has only a passing reference to the authority of creeds.

15 Robert S. Rayburn 'Biblical and Pastoral Basis for Creeds and Confessions', in *The Practice of Confessional Subscription*, ed. by D. Hall (Powder Springs: The Covenant Foundation, 2018. 3rd ed.), p. 48.

16 M. Allen, 'Confessions', *The Cambridge Companion to Reformed Theology*, ed. by P.T. Nimmo, D.A.S. Fergusson (Cambridge: CUP, 2016), pp. 28-32.

17 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Creation*, 4/3, ed. by G.W. Bromiley, T.F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2004), p. 73.

18 Barth, *CD* 3/4. p. 77.

of men'.[19] Barth treats confession as the first concrete act of worship, even before prayer.

Barth's observation reflects the biblical pattern in which the praise of Israel and the church is filled with the joyful narration of God's works for his people (1 Chr. 16:8–22; Pss. 22:23–24; 103-108; Isa. 63:7–9; Jer. 20:13; 2 Cor. 9:15; Col. 1:15-20; Eph. 1:3-14; Heb. 13:15; Jas. 5:13). Christian confession, starting with the affirmation that Jesus is Lord (Luke 6:46; Rom. 10:9; Phil. 2:11; Col. 2:6), includes songs and spoken praise, preaching and witness as well as formal statements of faith.

In our confession we identify ourselves with the Lord, praise him and bear witness to him. Confession is one of the fundamental actions of disciples who 'acknowledge' (ὁμολογέω) Jesus (Matt. 10:23-33). During Jesus' trial Peter denied him (Mk. 14:30, 68-72); while Jesus made the 'good confession' (Mk. 14:62; John 18:33-37; 1 Tim. 6:13). The contrast underlines that faithful discipleship requires confession.[20] Confession is the start of the Christian life (Rom 10:9), marks its continuation, (2 Cor. 9:13, 1 Tim. 6:12, 2 Tim. 2:19; Heb. 3:1, 13:15) and is the eschatological goal (Rom. 14:11, Phil. 2:11).

Barth recognises that while confession may provide a basis for instruction it is first the response to God. It will include denials and condemnations of false views, but it does so to protect God's honour, and any 'No' in our confession serves the joyful acknowledgement of who God is and what he has done, just as 'God Himself, […] says Yes, and only incidentally, relatively and for the sake of the Yes does He say No'. [21] Barth warns of the tendency for the confessor to be 'God's detective, policeman and bailiff', naming and shaming heresy, rather than primarily professing God's majesty and mercy. Though creeds and confessions are provoked by heresy and theological debates and have a necessarily polemic aspect they are first the echo of God's redeeming word to his people. They will be occupied 'with Jesus Christ, with the covenant fulfilled in Him, with the reconciliation accomplished in Him, with His lordship as exclusive lordship, with His unity with God and therefore with the source of all good'.[22]

This expansive view of confession is reflected in the Scots Confession which opens declaring that the reformers have long thirsted to declare their faith to the world. Now they are able to 'set forth this brief and plain confession of such doctrine as is propounded unto us, and as we believe

[19] Barth, *CD* 4/1, p. 777.

[20] J.R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark* (Grand Rapids/Leicester: Eerdmans/Apollos, 2002), pp. 451–52.

[21] Barth, *CD* 3/4. pp. 78-81.

[22] Barth, *CD* 3/4, p. 84.

and profess'. The Scots Confession is well known for its vigour and joy. The opening of the first article opens: 'We confess and acknowledge one only God, to whom only we must cleave, whom only we must serve (Deut. 6), whom only we must worship (Isa. 44), and in whom only we put our trust (Deut. 4)'. This is not merely a formal statement of doctrine, but a confession of the God who has saved and to whom the church is devoted.

THE CHURCH CONFESSES

Volf observes that a church is constituted in the public corporate confession of faith.[23] While each Christian makes their own confession (Rom 10:9), it is a church activity in which the individual participates. The church is created to confess God's name and his deeds. The redemptive and revealing work of the Triune God is the basis for what Webster denotes as an evangelical ecclesiology in which 'gospel and church exist in a strict and irreversible order, one in which the gospel precedes and the church follows'.[24] As the church is formed by God through the gospel it repeats the gospel in its confession. Doctrine is a key mode in which the church gives its confession. The church is called to teach and to set out its teaching in a coherent and comprehensible way. [25] There is no assurance of the infallibility of the church, but there is a proper doctrine of indefectibility, or perhaps better perseverance: God will keep his church knowing and confessing him (Pss. 72:17; 102:28; Matt. 16:18; 28:19-20).

THE CHURCH CATHOLIC CONFESSES

As the company of God's redeemed embodied people the visible church is diachronic, it has historical depth and grows in knowledge of God through time. Successive generations within the church continue to grasp the knowledge of God and deepen in it. Paul's Ephesian prayers for growing unity in knowledge of the truth (Eph. 1:17-19; 3:14-19) receive a historical answer before their eschatological realisation. Bavinck underlines the historical progress of churches knowledge of God.

> Scripture is not designed so that we should parrot it but that as free children of God we should think his thoughts after him […] so much study and reflec-

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23 M. Volf, *After Our Likeness*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), p. 150.

24 J. Webster, 'On Evangelical Ecclesiology', *Ecclesiology* 1.1 (2004), p. 10.

25 On the viability and necessity of developing doctrine see Trueman, *Creedal*, pp. 51-80; Vanhoozer, 'May We Go Beyond What Is Written after All?' and M.S. Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology: The Divine Drama* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), pp. 238-64.

> tion on the subject is bound up with it that no person can do it alone. That takes centuries. To that end the church has been appointed and given the promise of the Spirit's guidance into all truth.[26]

Thus, church doctrine may and should develop. Bannerman argues that the example of the apostles John and Paul opposing false teaching (1 John 4:2–3; 1 Tim. 1: 20; 2 Tim. 2:17, 18) and the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15) show 'the necessity […] for re-casting the doctrines of Scripture in a new mould, and exhibiting or explaining it afresh under forms of language and expression more precisely fitted to meet and counteract the error of the times'.[27] As the church encounters new situations and challenges, including internal heresy and external ideologies and religious views it confesses its faith, often using new terms and concepts to explicate what is biblical.[28] In the course of this response, the church gains fuller insight into the faith. It is not authorised to mint new revelation, but to unfold more fully what is already implicit in biblical revelation. Authoritative biblical revelation is settled, the churches confession can and should develop.

The catholic church is not only the church of the past, but also the global church of today. Reformed theology should be interested in the confession of churches in all nations and culture, and in other Christian traditions.[29] A Reformed theologian should be well grounded in their own confessional tradition, as I will argue below, but this is a not as a defence against other traditions but a basis to engage with and learn from others.

THE TEACHING TASK OF THE OFFICES OF THE CHURCH

Above I affirmed Volf's assertion that the church is constituted by its confession of the truth together, yet I demur from his claim that salvation is mediated through 'one another', *not* through the office-holders.[30] The teachers of the church, while not the *esse* of the church, are entrusted with

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[26] Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, I, p. 83, cf. I, p. 457 'the church has […] a many-sided and profound pedagogical significance for all believers till the day they die'.

[27] Bannerman, *Church*, I, p. 294.

[28] 'It is a fact, often enough acknowledged in the histories of Christian thought and doctrine, that the church's grasp of the truth revealed in Holy Scripture has developed in stages and that these stages or epochs were defined by a particularly concentrated reflection on some central element of the gospel usually provoked by an especially dangerous assault on that truth from within the church itself', Rayburn, p. 26.

[29] See Stephen Pardue, 'What Hath Wheaton To Do With Nairobi? Toward Catholic and Evangelical. Theology', *JETS* 58.4 (2015), 757–70.

[30] Volf, *After Our Likeness*, p. 222.

the ministry of preserving the faith of the church in its confession. They have a particular responsibility to and for the church to proclaim 'the whole will of God' (Acts 20:27). This task is set out in the pastoral epistles where 1 Timothy 2:2 is the most explicit statement of this responsibility: 'What you have heard from me through many witnesses entrust to faithful people who will be able to teach others as well'. The apostolic faith was to be passed on and false teaching countered (1 Tim. 1:3–5; 6:3–4, 20–21; 2 Tim. 1:13–14; 2:14, 23; Titus 1:10–11; 2:1; 3:8–9); so, the elders had to be competent for this task (1 Tim. 3:2; 2 Tim. 2:24–25; Titus 1:9; 3:10–11). The Reformed tradition recognises that God appoints teachers and rulers of the church: 'the Lord Jesus, as King and Head of His Church, hath therein appointed a government, in the hand of Church officers, distinct from the civil magistrate' (WCF 30.1). These governors have a ministry of teaching the church and the power of discipline. Those two aspects of their work unite when they establish the confession of the church.

THE AUTHORITY OF THE CHURCH

As the church is given the task of confession, so it its confession has an authority. This authority is given by Christ, which is why the discussion of church authority is often related to Jesus' gift of 'the keys of the kingdom' (Matt. 16:19), for 'the person with the keys has power to exclude or permit entrance'.[31] The apostles, and with them the church, is given the task to proclaim the gospel, to declare to those who believe that they are received into the kingdom and to warn those who reject the gospel that they are excluded. Since the church is given an authority confess the gospel, it is also authorised to regulate that confession.

The authority of the church to bind people to and lose them from the kingdom depends on what has already been determined in heaven. In reference to the promise to Peter, Carson comments,

> Whatever he binds or looses will have been bound or loosed, so long as he adheres to that divinely disclosed gospel. He has no direct pipeline to heaven, still less do his decisions force heaven to comply; but he may be authoritative in binding and loosing because heaven has acted first. Those he ushers in or excludes have already been bound or loosed by God according to the

[31] D. A. Carson, 'Matthew', in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. by Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), VIII, p. 370; see pp. 370-74 for a full discussion of this key verse. See also G. W. Bromiley, 'Keys, Power Of The,' in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Revised, ed. by G. W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979–1988), pp. 11–12.

> gospel already revealed and which Peter, by confessing Jesus as the Messiah, has most clearly grasped.[32]

This is 'ministerial' authority. The church is empowered to proclaim and apply the Word of God which it is given. Turretin appeals to the power of the keys to make this point. He adds that the commission of an office must include 'the power and right of exercising it' and observes that the teaching office is given titles which recognise its authority — those who direct (1 Tim. 5:17; 1 Thess. 5:12), rule (Heb. 13:7, 17) and govern (1 Cor. 12:28), overseers (Acts 20:28) and stewards (1 Cor. 4:1, 2; Tit. 1:7). Leaders in the church in the Old Testament and New Testament exercise authority (1 Cor. 14:32; 2 Cor. 10:4-8; 13:10; Acts 15:24; 16:4). He insists that this authority is ministerial, economical (i.e. in the role of a steward) and serving. Ministers have no lordship and no authority to promulgate new laws. They serve by teaching and applying 'the laws of Christ'.[33]

THE CONCILIAR EXERCISE OF THE TEACHING OFFICE

The authoritative determination of the confession of the church is always a corporate task.[34] In this view, Reformed theology follows the conciliar tradition in the medieval church.[35] Conciliarism formed the basis of much thinking about ministry in the Reformation, as well as the recognition of the importance of councils.[36] One implication is that the official minis-

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32 Carson, 'Matthew', p. 373. See his discussion on understanding *eimi deō* and *eimi lyō* as perpharastic futures ('shall have been bound/ shall have been bound loosed'), meaning that the prior decision of God now revealed in the gospel authorises the apostles to announce biding and loosing.

33 Turretin, *Institutes*, III, pp. 276-78.

34 See T. David Gordon 'The Church's Power: Its Relation to Subscription', in *The Practice of Confessional Subscription*, ed. by D. Hall, 3rd ed (Powder Springs: The Covenant Foundation, 2018), pp. 364-68.

35 Avis, P. *Beyond the Reformation?: authority, primacy and unity in the conciliar tradition* (London: T & T Clark, 2006), pp. 22-24; B. Gordon, 'The New Parish', *A Companion to the Reformation World*, ed. by R.P. Hisa (Malden: Blackwell, 2004), pp. 412-13.

36 See P. Foresta, 'Transregional Reformation: Synods and Consensus in the Early Reformed Churches' *Journal of Early Modern Christianity* 2.2 (2015), 189-203; P. Robinson, 'History and Freedom in Luther's *On the Councils and the Church*' *Concordia Journal* 43:1&2 (Winter/Spring 2017), 75-87. For Calvin, monarchical episcopacy is an attack on the whole church, not simply on the rights of lesser clergy; J. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. by F.L. Battles, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), IV.11. vi, p. 1216. Bullinger's *De Conciliis* was an important work in setting out the

try of the church is representative of and conditioned by the church as a whole. Bavinck summarises this view that 'the power of ministers actually belongs to the congregation but is exercised by them in its name'.[37]

The biblical argument for conciliarism was developed by medieval thinkers such as Jean Gerson (1363-1429). In part, he based his argument on texts which call for authority in the church to be used for the service of others (Lk. 12:42-48; John 10:11,15; 21:17; Rom. 14:21; 1 Cor. 8:13; 1 Tim. 1:15). More particularly he argued from Matthew 18:18-19 that the whole church has the power of discipline over all its members, and this must include the pope. Paul's rebuke of Peter in Galatians 2 is a plain instance in which even a pope stands in need of correction. Jethro's advice to Moses to appoint judges, rather than carry the load himself (Exodus 18) and the council of Jerusalem (Acts 15) are obvious biblical examples of conciliarism. Flanagin concludes that 'Gerson's conciliarism was built very simply on the biblically based belief that the sort of absolute papalism espoused by many […] was incompatible with the divine structure of the church evident in the scriptures'.[38]

The Reformers rejected Gerson's view that Church councils could not err yet adopted his exegetical argument to show that the doctrine of the church should be established by councils. The importance of councils for the discipline and doctrine of the church was been a persistent note Reformed Confessions. The French Confession (1560) affirms that ministers serve the church by preaching and administering the sacraments. They with elders and deacons 'form the council of the Church; that by these means the true religion may be preserved, and the true doctrine everywhere propagated' (Art. XXX). The Westminster Confession has the fullest treatment of councils among the Reformed Confessions, affirming their value for 'the better government, and further edification of the Church' (31.1) and their ministerial authority to determine 'controversies

need for councils and their fallibility, see P. Ha, 'Puritan Conciliarism: Why Walter Travers Read Bullinger's "De Conciliis"' *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 42.1 (Spring 2011), p. 75.

37 Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, IV, p. 377. He does not entirely agree with this claim, saying that the office is one of service and is for the sake of the church, but that the authority of the office comes from Christ not from the church. At this point, Bavinck assumes a choice between authorisation by Christ and his use of the church to appoint and authorise the office bearers. We can affirm both.

38 D.Z. Flanagin, 'God's Divine Law. The Scriptural Founts of Conciliar Theory in Jean Gerson', in *The Church, the Councils, and Reform: The Legacy of the Fifteenth Century*, ed. by G. Christianson, T.M. Izbicki, C.M. Bellitto (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America, 2008), p. 119.

of faith' and to regulate the worship, government and administration of the church (31.3). It uses many of the same texts as Gerson to establish its doctrine.

On this account, a document is recognised as a confession of the church if it has been approved or received by a council of the teachers of the church. This could be at a local level, though usually it is some broader body. The question of what constitutes a council of the church will be answered differently in various polities and need not be determined in this discussion. For the sake of theology, we may happily consult a range of creeds and confessions, particularly those which have been widely received.

THE AUTHORITY OF CONFESSIONS

We come now to the most pressing question for Protestants about the confessions of the church, what authority may they claim? McCormack observes in relation to the demise of confessionalism in mainstream Reformed thought that 'the greatest theological problem confronting Reformed theology today […] is the problem of ecclesial authority'.[39]

I am not here concerned with the authority of the church to impose its confessions. That is strictly a matter of discipline, rather than doctrine. Churches may or may not require subscription to a confession and those that do have varying terms of subscription.[40] The theologian as they are a member or officer of a particular church will have responsibilities to uphold a confession on the terms of that church.

We can consider the question in terms of the reliability of the teaching confessions, since the authority of church confessions is ministerial and depends on their faithfulness to God's Word. The answer must be carefully articulated. God keeps his church in the truth, but the teaching of the church is not directly identified with God's truth. We cannot *presume* that all teaching of the church is reliable. The ecclesiological reflections above set out the case for an expectation of a reliable tradition, but this

[39] Bruce L. McCormack, 'The End of Reformed Theology? The Voice of Karl Barth in the Doctrinal Chaos of the Present', in *Reformed Theology: Identity and Ecumenicity*, ed. by Wallace M. Alston, Jr. & Michael Welker (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2003), p. 54.

[40] See the discussions of various approaches to subscription in D. Hall, 'Confessing the Faith and Confessions of Faith', *Confessing the Faith Yesterday and Today Essays Reformed, Dissenting, and Catholic*, ed. by A.P.F. Sell (Wipf and Stock, 2013), pp. 12-16 argues for the Congregationalist practice of holding a church confession without requiring subscription.

must be demonstrated, repeatedly, by the examination of the content of the tradition and its consensus.

The consensual position of the Reformed confessions from the classic confessional period (1528-1675) is evidence of the reliability of the confessional tradition.[41] The formation of the Synod of Dordt, with members from England, Scotland, German principalities and Switzerland, was both a sign of this consensus, and served to consolidate it.[42] Muller notes the geographical and theological breadth of the key contributors to Reformed confessions and observes the consensus in 'a consistent reading of the issues of scripture as the Word of God and 'human traditions"; the insistence of 'the priority of the word over the church'; and the marks of the church as true doctrine and right administration of the sacraments. The confessions consistently affirm ecumenical Trinitarian and Christological positions. They 'rule out a physical, bodily, or local presence' of Christ in the Lord's Supper, condemn the Mass and transubstantiation, but affirm a spiritual relationship of Christ to the sacraments. 'The death of Christ is defined […] as a full satisfaction for sin, and […] is consistently posed against other means of reconciliation or satisfaction […] Christ is confessed to be the one and only high priest who alone intercedes with the Father'. The confessions hold to salvation by grace alone, through faith not works, and 'the denial of meritorious works is either made explicit or strongly implied'. The presentation of salvation is monergistic, and many of the confessions include statements about the eternal decrees of God and the doctrine of predestination. The 17th century national creeds (Dort, the Irish Articles and the Westminster Confession) though more detailed, follow a similar pattern of thought while introducing a covenant theology not explicit in the 16th century confessions. Muller's judgement is that the Reformed tradition demonstrates 'considerable diversity within a confessional orthodoxy'.[43]

The verdict of the Reformation was that the tradition was reliable yet required reformation. The course of the Reformation was shaped by the papal excommunication of Luther which demonstrated Rome's refusal to

41 S.H. Moore, 'Reformed theology and puritanism', in *The Cambridge Companion to Reformed Theology*, ed. by P.T. Nimmo and D.A.S. Fergusson (Cambridge: CUP, 2016), pp. 202-9.

42 M. Jones, *Why Heaven Kissed Earth: The Christology of the Puritan Reformed Orthodox theologian, Thomas Goodwin, (1600–1680)* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010), p. 72.

43 R.A. Muller, 'Reformed Theology, 1600-1800', in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern Theology, 1600-1800* (Oxford: OUP, 2016) pp. 168-70.

accept his rediscovery of the gospel.[44] The anathemas of Trent gave conciliar agreement to the rejection of Protestant convictions. Thus, to hold to the Reformation claims entails conflict with elements of the conciliar tradition. The Westminster divines assert that 'all synods or councils […] and many have erred', so 'they are not to be made the rule of faith, or practice, but to be used as a help in both' (WCF 31.4).[45]

The tensions involved are captured most pointedly by asking if it is sustainable to assert the genuine authority of the teaching office of the church while also insisting that it remains answerable to the Scriptures without making that, in effect, a matter of individual judgement for the believer? Hütter thinks it is not. As a Lutheran theologian, he concluded that private judgement was the only effective authority and that 'there was no way forward in the direction taken by the Reformation theologians'.[46] So he moved to Roman Catholicism.

Hütter allows only two choices, submission to infallible councils or private judgement.

The Reformed reply is to argue for a third position, namely that the ecclesial mediation of the faith is ruled by and answerable to the Scriptures, exercising ministerial authority. A non-theological understanding assumes that this arrangement must lead to a clash between the institution and the individual. However, a theological account of church and conscience places both under the authority of Christ in his word taught by his Spirit. This does not eliminate any possibility of a disagreement, since in this age both can err; it offers the prospect of genuine agreement.

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44 See P.W. Robinson, 'History and Freedom in Luther's On the Councils and the Church', *Concordia Journal* 43, no. 1-2 (2017), 75-87.

45 Van Dixhoorn, *Confessing*, pp. 419-20 mentions the fourth Latern Council and Trent as the obvious examples of council which have erred. The list can be extended, since Protestants will also disagree at least with the teaching of Nicaea II (787) on the veneration of icons; Lateran II (1139) on compulsory clerical celibacy; Lateran IV (1215) on papal primacy; Lyons (1274) on purgatory; Basel - Ferrara - Florence (1431-1445) on papal primacy and Vatican I (1869-1870) on papal infallibility and Marian dogma.

46 'I was faced by a simple alternative […] Either I had to bite the bullet and posit—based on my private judgment—the tacit functional infallibility of Luther as the authoritative magisterium […], or I had to accept the reality of a fallible, collective magisterium made up of sundry Lutheran church leaders, synods, and theologians from whose fallible teachings I would accept what I, according to my own fallible lights, would regard as right.' R. Hütter, 'Relinquishing the Principle of Private Judgment in Matters of Divine Truth: A Protestant Theologian's Journey into the Catholic Church' *Nova Et Vetera* (English Edition) 9.4 (Fall 2011), p. 877.

Especially it suggests that the individual believer, nurtured by the Church will come to the conviction that the teaching of the Church is a faithful reflection of the Word of God in Scripture. Bannerman argues that 'Ecclesiastical authority in matters of faith as it is given to the Church to administer, and the right of conscience in matters of faith, such as each man must exercise for himself, are opposite, but not irreconcilable forces in the Church system.'[47]

Both Turretin and Bannerman deal with the situation in which a person does not agree with the confession of their church. Turretin calls on someone who finds a fault with the confession of their church to act peacefully and 'refer the difficulties […] to their church'. The result might be that they 'prefer her public opinion to their own private judgment', or they may need to 'secede from her communion'. Confessions 'cannot bind in the inner court of conscience, except inasmuch as they are found to agree with the word of God', yet he suggests the scenario in which the individual rests in the wisdom of the church.[48] Not surprisingly, Bannerman in the 19th century considers more fully the right of private judgement. The church has the task and authority to declare Christ's doctrine 'yet it must ever be under reservation of the rights of conscience in the individual, and in subordination, as regards the claims on his belief and submission, to the liberty of private judgment'.[49]

The danger for Protestant theology is that private judgement will overrule church teaching. McGrath has identified the priesthood of all believers as Christianity's dangerous idea.

> The dangerous new idea, firmly embodied at the heart of the Protestant revolution, was that all Christians have the right to interpret the Bible for themselves. However, it ultimately proved uncontrollable, spawning developments that few at the time could have envisaged or predicted.[50]

His book is largely a celebration of this dangerous idea, concluding that 'Protestantism possesses a unique and innate capacity for innovation, renewal, and reform based on its own internal resources.'[51] He lauds the diversity and decentralisation of Protestant thought and views the con-

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47 Bannerman, *Church*, I, p. 289, and see his whole discussion pp. 283-90.

48 Turretin, *Institutes*, III, p. 284.

49 Bannerman, *Church*, I, p. 283.

50 A. McGrath, *Christianity's Dangerous Idea: The Protestant Revolution—A History from the Sixteenth Century to the Twenty-First*, (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007), pp. 2-3.

51 McGrath, *Christianity's Dangerous Idea*, p. 478.

fessional tradition as an unwelcome limitation on that variety.[52] Vanhoozer, also recognises the generative power of the 'dangerous idea' and the Pentecostal plurality of Protestantism, though suggests that the Reformation Solas are sufficient to make Protestantism coherent and, more importantly, faithful to the Lord.[53] His approach is less confessional and conciliar than that for which I have been arguing. The implication of my argument is that the private judgement of believers, including and especially the teachers of the church, needs confessional discipline. Reformed theology has a full body of truths with clearer conciliar endorsement and theological retrieval should begin with that confessional tradition. This does not preclude the possibility of confessional revision but places the burden of proof squarely on those who propose revisions.

CONCLUSION

This article has set out theological reasons for Reformed theology to be committed to creeds and confessions as the key guide to interpreting Scripture. It offers a 'theological theology' that church confession is part of God's economy and that the church properly exercises her teaching responsibility and authority with statements prepared and adopted by the councils of teachers. The theologian in the Reformed tradition can receive those thankfully, though they must still consider the range of confessional expressions and the history of confessional revision. There is, of course, another aspect of the case which is to examine the tradition for its harmony with Scripture. For obvious reasons, that is beyond the scope of a single article.

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[52] Discussing the rise of confessional Protestant theology, McGrath comments that the effect was 'that the Bible tended to be read through' them, and this led 'proof-texting' to support the confessional position, which in turn 'lessened the influence of the Bible within Protestantism, in that biblical statements were accommodated to existing doctrinal frameworks rather than being allowed to determine them, and even to challenge them'; McGrath, *Christianity's Dangerous Idea*, p. 103. In the conclusion, he contrasts Protestant traditionalism with those who hold that Protestantism 'locates its identity in its constant self-examination in the light of the Bible and in its willingness to correct itself when it takes wrong turns or situations change', in 'a method, not as any one specific historical outcome of the application of that method'. It refuses to 'regard any past expression of Protestantism as normative'; pp. 464-65.

[53] K. Vanhoozer, *Biblical Authority After Babel: Retrieving the Solas in the Spirit of Mere Protestant Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2016), pp. 230-34.

Reformed theology should grant creeds and confessions a presumptive authority and give greater weight to the conclusions of the councils of the church than to individual opinions. Anyone who wants to differ from the tradition of creeds and confessions accepted by the Reformed tradition must bear the burden of proof to make their case. Familiarity with the confessional tradition (in breadth and depth) should be the *sine qua non* of Reformed theological formation.

What is Non-Negotiable in any Theology that wishes to be 'Reformed'? (Part 1)

Bruce L. McCormack

INTRODUCTION

The theme of our conference poses to each speaker a question: are we called in our day to 'maintain' Reformational theology or to revise it? This question does not arise in a vacuum. It is an obvious question to ask on the occasion of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation; obvious, because the central doctrine of the Reformation — the doctrine of justification — has come under fire in the last forty years or so as never before. Much of the criticism has come from specialists in the theology of Paul. To be sure, Paulinists are not agreed amongst themselves with regard to 'what Paul really meant.' There is no consensus where a positive alternative to the 'Lutheran Paul' is concerned. But most do seem to be in agreement that Luther's dialectic of faith and works reflected a set of late-medieval concerns not shared by Paul. And agreement on that negative point has effectively de-centred the doctrine; denying to it the status of a 'central dogma' which would condition the explication of other doctrines. In its place, other doctrines are now seen by many as more nearly central to NT teaching. The primary candidate is 'union with Christ' as the putative foundation of Christian soteriology. And with this shift in understanding of fundamental doctrines has come a suppression of forensic thinking more generally in favour of metaphysically-grounded ontologies of God and of human persons — which has also had an impact on the doctrine of the atonement since that doctrine too was conceived by the Reformers in a forensic frame of reference.

In any event, it is understandable that we should find ourselves here this week, discussing maintenance and/or revision. I do not think myself that these contrasting terms should be thought of as an either-or. Revision, after all, is inevitable in any genuinely 'Reformed' theology. What makes it inevitable is the 'Scripture-principle.' Any theology which says that Scripture alone is the 'norming norm' and that all other 'authorities' can never rise higher than the level of a subordinate 'standard' is a theology which is open, as a matter of principle, to revision. That is why there is no place in Reformed theology for the Catholic understanding that the 'official' teachings of the church are irreformable. It is, of course, true that pan-Christian statements like the Nicene Creed have a *practical* irreform-

ability insofar as it cannot be expected in a divided Christendom that all the churches which have a stake in that Creed would ever be in a position to speak together in carrying out a revision — a problem rendered *absolutely* unresolvable by the fact that at least one of those churches subscribes to the irreformability thesis. But that cannot be allowed to keep us from seeing that the 'Reformed' could never agree that the Creed is 'irreformable' *as a matter of principle*. And if that is true of the Creed, it is also true of the Reformed confessions.

On the other hand, the goal of any proposed revision must be to bring the Reformed witness more into line with the witness of Scripture. That being the case, revision can never be an end in itself. And revision ought never to occur simply because the *Zeitgeist* is blowing in a different direction. 'The Church Reformed according to the Word of God and always reforming' is a church that has a starting-point in received teachings ('The Church Reformed') — so that any proposed revision would have to be revision of *that* received teaching — in the light of the Word of God. It is here that things get very interesting.

How are we to differentiate between legitimate doctrinal development and a change which amounts to a 'break' with the Reformed tradition altogether? A change so massive or so fundamental that those carrying it out would have to find another label by which to define what they believe than the word 'Reformed'? Can we develop criteria by means of which developments might be assessed? Just what is non-negotiable in any theology which wishes to be recognized as 'Reformed'?

I want to suggest that no doctrinal proposal can be regarded as a legitimate development of a classically 'Reformed' doctrine which does not honour the concerns which animated the authors of its original and originating formulation. Establishing what those concerns were requires asking some historical-critical questions. For example: did the originating formulation of a specific doctrine take its rise in a situation of conflict? Was this doctrine formed in studied opposition to something else? Were the authors saying no to something even as they said yes to this? And, in any case, what was at stake for them? What theological values did they seek to uphold? And, most importantly: can the same things be said differently? Can the theological values seeking expression in the originating formulation find expression in a new and different formulation?

I would hope that it is clear that in asking questions like these we are not placing ourselves in a situation of 'anything goes.' In fact, the bar has been set pretty high for the authorization of a doctrinal proposal as 'Reformed.' Careful historical work is required in the attempt to understand what lies behind specific confessional formulations. And critical-systematic decisions have to be made as well. Forensicism, for example,

is not a doctrine. It is more nearly a frame of reference which enabled the Reformers to order topics one to another in a coherent and self-consistent way. Can a frame of reference be abandoned without altering the doctrines formed with its help *from the ground up*? Can a frame of reference be enriched if not replaced, so as to continue upholding core values? That is a more nearly systematic and constructive question than a historical one. In any event, I will try to be faithful to the following 'rule': *only those developments are legitimate which are authorized by the tradition itself.*

I turn then to the question I have been asked to address: what is non-negotiable? It is quite probable that something non-negotiable can be found in every Reformed doctrine. But time will not allow me to treat the full range of doctrines touched upon in the Reformed confessions. What I would like to do is to treat those doctrines only which — precisely by being controverted — contributed most directly to 'defining' the term 'Reformed' as a *distinctive* branch of Reformational theology. To ask what is non-negotiable in relation to these doctrines is to ask what it is that makes any theology to be 'Reformed' at the most foundational level. Those doctrines are: first, justification and atonement and then, Christology and sacramentology. The reason for treating them as pairs will become clear as I proceed. In each case, I will be asking the kinds of questions I have just elaborated. I will not treat here the Scripture-principle or the doctrine of predestination. The Scripture-principle was shared by the Lutherans (albeit differently deployed) — and predestination had been the common property of all Augustinians for more than a millennium — and would continue to be upheld by the Dominicans after the later Lutherans sought to distance themselves from it. So my focus will be directed to doctrinal distinctives.

I. JUSTIFICATION AND ATONEMENT

The linkage of the doctrines of justification and atonement is made necessary by the fact that the early Reformed understood the mechanism by means of which the so-called 'happy exchange' took place in forensic terms. 'He took what is ours and gave to us what was His' means, on Reformed soil, that Christ took upon Himself our guilt and gave to us His righteousness. And the mechanism by means of which this occurred was imputation. God imputes our guilt to Christ; God imputes Christ's righteousness to us. That is why I treat these two doctrines together.

But 'imputation' is a term borrowed from the commercial sphere, from the practices of accountants. Something is or is not credited to one's account. Why, then, do we speak of the early Reformed treatment of justification and atonement as 'forensic'? The reason is that both have to do

with divine judgment. And because that is the case, both are construed as occurring in a courtroom setting. Justification is the outcome of the trial of a sinner at the bar of God's justice. It is a declarative act by means of which a sinner is pronounced 'not guilty' and, therefore, not liable for the penalty ordained by God to be the appropriate sentence for sinners. By the same token, what takes place in atonement is that Christ is made by God to be the sinner, the guilt-bearer in our place. And in our place, He is judged by God, found guilty and suffers the penalty of that eternal 'death' which was our just deserts. I am sure all of this is very familiar to most of you. For the others, I would hope that you can see how the term 'imputation' functions as a description of the mechanism by means of which the judgment taking place in the divine courtroom is effected. Imputation is a tool; divine judgment is the overarching interpretive horizon — which tells you how important the forensic is. I turn then first to justification. Thus far, I have only said what was necessary to defend treating the two doctrines together as a pair. But there is much more to be said.

A. Justification

The shared Protestant conception of justification was not fully formed by the first generation of Reformers. It took the Osiandrian controversy in the 1550s to bring final clarity into what the Reformed, especially, wished to say with respect to the content of this doctrine and its entailments. But the foundational importance of this doctrine was recognized from the earliest days. Zwingli called it 'the sum of the gospel' in his Sixty-Seven Articles of 1523. And the First Helvetic Confession referred to it as 'the principal article.' To be sure, in neither case is the term 'justification' employed. But the subject-matter treated under that term subsequently is clearly what is in view.[1] And the decisive point for our purposes here

[1] This is what Zwingli says in Article II. 'The sum of the gospel is that our Lord Jesus Christ, the true Son of God, has made known to us the will of His heavenly Father, and by His innocence has redeemed us from death and reconciled us to God' (*Reformed Confessions of the 16th Century*, ed. by Arthur C. Cochrane (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966), p. 36). In Article LIV, Zwingli adds that 'Christ has borne all our pain and misery' (Cochrane, p. 42). And so, it is the righteousness of Christ which provides the basis for the 'remission of sins' in Article L (ibid.). The First Helvetic Confession reads (at Article 12): 'Consequently in all evangelical teaching the most sublime and principal article and the one which should be expressly set forth in every sermon and impressed upon the hearts of men [and women] should be that we are preserved and saved solely by the one mercy of God and by the merit of Christ.'

is that this subject-matter is referred to as 'the sum of the gospel' and the 'principal article.'

Calvin would later say of justification that it,

> is the main hinge on which religion turns, so that we devote the greater attention and care to it. For unless you first of all grasp what your relationship to God is, and the nature of his judgment concerning you, you have neither a foundation on which to establish your salvation nor one on which to build piety toward God.[2]

Calvin tells us that the only reason he treated faith and repentance before turning to justification is because he wanted first to show 'how little devoid of good works is the faith through which alone we obtain free righteousness by the mercy of God'.[3] The order of teaching adopted here — first faith and repentance or 'sanctification' in *Institutes* III.ii-x and then justification in III.xi-xix — is meant to quell Catholic criticism of the Reformer's doctrine in advance, i.e. before Calvin has even gotten to the doctrine of justification and, therefore, before the Catholics would have had opportunity to criticize. He achieves this goal by showing first how highly he values 'good works' and how important they are in Christian life. But now he comes to the doctrine which he regards as foundational to the Christian life. He says we must 'first' know God's judgment concerning us if we are to have a 'foundation on which to establish' our salvation. It might be possible to interpret these lines as merely epistemic — as the first thing believers ought to think about as they reflect upon the saving work of God — were it not for the fact that linking the human act of reflection with the term 'foundation' would all too easily suggest that faith itself is a work, a thing which Calvin clearly wanted to avoid. No, what he is saying is that we are to build piety on the foundation laid in God's judgment — a judgment which is firm and secure. Justification is the doctrine which treats this *wholly objective* divine judgment.

My point for now is this: it is not the Lutherans alone who believed that justification is the doctrine by which the church stands or falls. The Reformed had other ways of saying this but what they said amounted to much the same thing. If we are to take 'being Reformed' seriously, then we have to understand the doctrine of justification as having fundamental (or foundational) importance. It is because it has this importance that Calvin says he will 'devote the greater attention and care to it'; that is to

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2 Calvin, *Institutes*, III.xi.1, p. 726. [N.B. The page references to the *Institutes* will always be to the McNeill edition.]

3 Ibid.

say, 'greater attention and care' than was given to faith and repentance. The doctrine of justification has fundamental significance for Calvin.

What then is the content of the Reformed doctrine of justification in its mature form? And what did Calvin's response to Osiander add to the mature conception? It is appropriate that we turn first to Calvin. He it was who provided the most thorough and compelling response to Osiander. First, then, the definition, then the contra-Osiandrian supplement.

Calvin actually has *two* definitions of justification which are not obviously compatible. I am not saying that they could not be made compatible; I think they can. But that would require more work than Calvin did. In any event, here is the first and most basic definition — the one most often cited. 'Therefore, we explain justification simply as the acceptance with which God receives us into his favour as righteous men [and women]. And we say that it consists in the remission of sins and the imputation of Christ's righteousness.'[4] So defined, justification has two parts. There is the forgiveness of sins and there is the positive imputation of Christ's righteousness. We might express this with even greater precision if we were to say that justification includes a positive imputation of Christ's righteousness and a negative non-imputation of sin and guilt. The relation between the two is made more clear by my reversal of Calvin's ordering. For it is precisely the positive imputation of Christ's righteousness which, on Calvin's view, *effects* the non-imputation of our sin and guilt. Where Christ's righteousness is, there can be no unrighteousness. And so Calvin says, 'Justified by faith is he who, excluded from the righteousness of works, grasps the righteousness of Christ through faith, and clothed in it, appears in God's sight not as a sinner but as a righteous man.'[5] This is *not* Calvin's best formulation, since it opens him to the charge of making the divine declaration to consist in a 'legal fiction.' But it is important for us to see that the positive imputation is what brings about the non-imputation of sin and guilt. It is important to say that because it allows Calvin to maintain a truth dear to him, viz. that the ground of our justification — not just in its initiating moment but in every moment of the Christian life — is to found 'outside' of ourselves in Christ alone. Why 'outside' of us? The answer to that question is simple. It is because the justified are still sinners. There will never be a moment in the life of any justified person in which she is not still a sinner. But remember now! The content of the divine verdict is innocence. Not guilty! A sinner can never *be* this. And so, we have to face the fact that it is not only the case that *our* works can never justify us; not even *God's* work *in* us will ever bring it about that we are

4 Calvin, *Institutes*, III.xi.2, p. 727.

5 Ibid., pp. 726-27.

now innocent in ourselves and as such. If God were to kill us and raise us from the dead in the eschatological sense of 'new creation,' then we might well say that we are innocent (since it will no longer be possible for us to sin). But until that day, we are sinners — who can never be 'innocent.' If then God's verdict is true, its basis must be found in One who is truly innocent, who is sinless. In sum, our situation is this. 'Outside' of us (*extra nos*) the ground — and, therefore, the truthfulness — of God's verdict is complete. But God's sanctifying work in us is never complete and even if it were, it could not change the fact that we have been sinners. My point is that what God does in us could never result in a verdict of innocence. So we cannot surrender the 'outside' of us when speaking of justification. We are justified, as Luther said, by Christ's 'alien' righteousness, not by God's work in us that follows upon justification.

Based upon what we have seen thus far, we may justly lay stress on two points of non-negotiability. Calvin has defined justification in studied opposition to the Catholic view that justification is a divine act of making the sinner righteous in herself. For Calvin, justification, precisely because it takes place through imputation, has no ontic significance. It is, he says, a 'legal term' having to do solely with our standing before God. The second point is this. Because the sinner is made righteous 'not intrinsically but by imputation', the basis for God's determination to regard us as righteous is 'outside' of ourselves. 'This is a wonderful plan of justification that, covered by the righteousness of Christ, they should not tremble at the judgement they deserve, and that while they rightly condemn themselves, they should be accounted righteous outside themselves.'[6] Both of these points — that justification is a 'legal' term and that its ground is 'outside' of us are, I would say, non-negotiable. If continuity with central Reformational teachings is necessary in order to use terms like 'Lutheran' and 'Reformed' with integrity, then this is a good place to start.

The second definition heightens the stakes where the charge of a 'legal fiction' is concerned and leaves Calvin with an unresolved problem. The second definition is this: '"To justify" means nothing else than to acquit of guilt him who was accused, as if his innocence were confirmed.'[7] In one respect, the language of 'acquittal' is nothing new. To say that the divine verdict is 'not guilty' is to say 'innocent' of all charges. And to speak of innocence in the setting of a court trial is to speak of 'acquittal.' There really is no way around that conclusion. And there is much to be said in favour of it. Most importantly, it allows Calvin to tie his treatment of justification quite directly to his reflections on the problem of how Christ 'is

6 Calvin, *Institutes*, II.xi.11, pp. 740-41.
7 Calvin, *Institutes*, III.xi.3, p. 728.

made sin' for us (2 Cor. 5:21). With respect to the atoning work of Christ, Calvin says 'This is our acquittal: the guilt that held us liable for punishment has been transferred to the head of the Son of God [Isa. 53:12].'[8] Or again (just to underscore the parallel Calvin finds between the way our sin was made to be Christ and His righteousness made to be ours): '"The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all" [Isa. 53:6]. That is, he who was about to cleanse the filth of those iniquities was covered with them by transferred imputation.'[9]

Now the obvious question to raise at this point is how well Calvin's doctrine of justification as acquittal accords with Paul's teaching. Paul never speaks of acquittal. He speaks more simply of God reckoning as righteous those who place their faith in Christ — and even more simply of justification *by* faith. And through his citation of Psalm 32:1-2 in Romans 4:7-8, Paul links justification to the forgiveness of sins. And with that, we are brought up against Calvin's unresolved problem.

If you were to ask most Protestants what justification is about, they would probably answer: the 'forgiveness of sins' or 'pardon.' They would probably not say 'acquittal.' And it is quite true that talk of 'acquittal' makes any talk of the forgiveness of sins seem strange. After all, if one is truly innocent, there is nothing to be forgiven. But are we truly, really made 'innocent' by God? Eschatologically, yes — on the traditional account. And so I suppose we could say that justification is a divine verdict which looks forward to the eschatological glorification of the sinner which provides her with a completely clean slate, an absolutely new starting-point. But that would seem to reduce justification to glorification. And so I ask: are we, in some meaningful sense, already innocent here and now, in our historical lives, so that a verdict of not-guilty could already have been pronounced upon us in Christ? The answer, I would say, is that this can only be true if the eschatological verdict has already been rendered in the death and resurrection of Christ — and rendered in such a way that the sinner *as such*, the very being of sin and all of us *as sinners* were truly and really 'in' Christ, present 'with' Christ, when He died in our place. If we were there — not 'engrafted later' but already there — if the divine sentence was pronounced upon us and carried out in a Christ in whom we are already 'present', then it could be rightly said of us that 'our old man was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin' (Rom. 6:6-7). The 'old man' has been crucified! Think of that! And that would then mean that, we were also in Christ when He was raised from the dead. In His resurrection, He is the

8 Calvin, *Institutes*, II.xvi.5, pp. 509-10.

9 Calvin, *Institutes*, II.xvi.6, p. 510.

New Creation in the midst of time — and we are the 'new man' in Him. Not in ourselves as yet! but in Him!

Of course, if Calvin had thought of all of this, he would have been a Barthian. He didn't get this far in his thinking. He tends to treat 'pardon' and 'acquittal' as synonyms (which they cannot be) — or, in one instance places them together in way that suggests a distinction which he fails to explore.[10] But this Barthian addition I am gesturing towards does have the effect of resolving the problem Calvin left unresolved. Barth has provided a convincing reason to interpret what Paul says about justification as 'acquittal.' Acquittal is the divine judgment with respect to the sinner whom God has killed in order that she might be made alive. In other words, *Calvin has opened the door widely to appealing to the nature of the atonement in order to understand justification*. Barth simply took that move a step further. Here we have a perfect example of how it is possible to honour the values Calvin held most dear in his treatment of justification without remaining strictly tied to his account. And we can now see the advantage: 'acquittal' as a verdict pronounced upon a sinner in her place and time would make the charge of a 'legal fiction' an impossible one. For in this case, the one who is being called innocent is not a sinner. For if we are already 'in' Christ, present with Him as He submits Himself to the eschatological judgment of God, then a verdict of acquittal is the only possible outcome that can befall the sinner who has truly and already been put to death with Christ and raised with Him to a new condition of life in which she can sin no more. Of *that* person, of the eschatological human subject already appearing in the resurrection of Christ, we are right to speak of acquittal. And this is most certainly not legal fiction. I should add that, in my view, the word 'acquittal', while not part of Paul's vocabulary, does a very good job of describing the divine verdict registered in the cross and the resurrection, understood as a single, two-part event. If the blessed are those to whom the Lord will not reckon sin (Rom. 4:8), then surely they are without guilt — and therefore, worthy objects of divine acquittal. And when you add to this Calvin's conception of a positive imputation of Christ's righteousness (which seems to make excellent sense of Rom. 5:1-11), you are very close to 'acquittal' as a proper interpretive tool in reading Paul.

What then of the contra-Osiandrian supplement introduced by Calvin? It is not possible to overestimate the importance of this supplement. Historically, what I am about to discuss now became basic to ongoing disagreements with the Lutherans — and for that reason, is rightly

[10] Calvin, *Institutes*, II.xi.11, p. 738.

understood to constitute a 'defining' element where what it means to be 'Reformed' is concerned.

Osiander understood justification in quasi-Catholic terms as a 'making righteous' or 'just.' That by itself would have been enough to arouse Calvin's opposition. But Osiander also believed that the righteousness that is made ours in justification is the righteousness that belongs to God essentially and, therefore, to the divine nature subsisting in the Person of the Mediator. That being the case, it is only by being united to Christ in *both* natures that a participation in Christ's divine nature is made possible. In this way, a particular understanding of union with Christ is being made the basis for justification. And the righteousness which is made ours in justification is, for Osiander, the righteousness which the eternal Son brought with Him into the incarnate state, an 'essential' righteousness which is then infused, so to speak, into the believer. Calvin refers to this idea as a 'strange monster' and sets himself the task of refuting it.

Calvin's alternative is clear. It is not the righteousness proper to God that is imputed to us in justification but the 'acquired' righteousness which accrues to the human obedience and reconciling sacrifice of the God-human.[11] In other words, it is the human righteousness of Christ which is made ours in justification. The divine nature of the Mediator is needed, Calvin thinks, to give to Christ's human work an infinite worth, but it is still a human work which is the ground of our justification. Calvin finds biblical support for this conclusion in 1 Corinthians 1:30 in which it is said that Christ was 'made' righteousness for us, a passage which he then links to Philippians 2:7-8.[12] According to the latter passage, the eternal Son 'took upon himself the form of a servant' and in it was 'obedient to the Father.' The Son could not, by nature, obey the Father (being equal to Him) but could obey only as human. Therefore, Christ was obedient to the Father unto death 'not according to his divine nature but in accordance with the dispensation enjoined upon him.'[13]

Taking a step back, we can say: it is because the reconciling and redeeming work of Christ is conceived of by Calvin as a human work that he is led to say that the righteousness which is bestowed upon us in justification is the perfect but human righteousness of the Mediator. This does lay upon him the obligation of advancing an alternative understanding of union with Christ than that taught by Osiander. This he does under the sign of an eschatological understanding of 2 Peter 1:4.

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11 Calvin, *Institutes*, III.xi.8, p. 734.

12 Ibid., pp. 734-35.

13 Ibid., p. 735.

> I shall not labor much in refuting the Scriptural proofs that he [Osiander] brings forward, which he wrongly twists from the heavenly life to the present state. 'Through Christ,' says Peter, 'were granted to us precious and great promises […] that we might becoming partakers of the divine nature' [2 Pet. 1:4]. As if we now were what the gospel promises us that we shall be at the final coming of Christ.[14]

Calvin's understanding of union with Christ in 'the present state' is carefully adjusted to the need to overcome 'the mingling of Christ with believers' which he finds in Osiander. 'Mystical union' is closely linked with the 'indwelling of Christ in our hearts.'[15] Whatever else may be said, it is clear that Calvin has no interest in or even understanding of a metaphysically-grounded conception of the union of divine and human but rather, locates the concept of 'union' in the lived existence of the believer — in the 'psychological self' if I may put it that way, the 'experiencing self' we know ourselves to be empirically.[16] This being the case, he can also say, 'he unites himself to us by the Spirit alone'[17] — and the chief work of the Spirit is faith.[18] By faith, we lay hold of Christ, embrace Him and His benefits, and in this way are united to Him. Although the 'supernatural gift' of faith and union with Christ are simultaneous, a certain logical priority must be granted to the Spirit's work of effecting that faith in us which 'lays hold of' Christ. Nothing could make it more clear that union with Christ cannot be thought of as the ground of justification.[19] The truth is that

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14 Calvin, *Institutes*, III.xi.10, pp. 737-38.

15 Ibid., p. 737.

16 Of this self, we might rightly say: 'Innumerable people live within us. If I think and feel, I know not who is thinking and feeling, I am only the place where there is thinking and feeling, and though they do not end here, it is as if everything ends, for beyond thinking and feeling, there is nothing.' José Saramago, *The Year of the Death of Ricardo Reis*, trans. by Giovanni Pontiero (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1991), p. 12. A metaphysical 'essence' is but an idea, an abstraction which consists in a catalogue of attributes which we have acquired through phenomenal observation — which is then used to organize experience. But it is we who create such ideas and they have no reality in themselves. Suffice it to say that Calvin showed no interest in such things.

17 Calvin, *Institutes*, III.xi.1, p. 538: 'the Holy Spirit is the bond by which Christ effectually unites us to himself.'

18 Calvin, *Institutes*, III.xi.4, p. 541.

19 Given Calvin's insistence — when dealing with the topic directly — that it is Christ's righteousness as it is in Himself and not as it is in us which provides the ground of justification, they do violence to Calvin's teaching who would like to make union with Christ the ground. The pivotal passages to

Calvin does not know of a concept of 'union with Christ' that is anything more than a willed act of self-identification on the part of the believer; an act of submission, of surrender to One who remains Other than herself, resulting in a conformity of her life to that of the Other.

One final point: the gifts bestowed upon Christ by the Spirit for carrying out His mediatorial office are the gifts in which we obtain a share through faith and regeneration. But it should be clear that if these gifts are *given* to Christ by the Spirit, then they are not uncreated graces proper to His divine nature. They are created excellences, bestowed upon Christ's human nature to which we are united in faith. In later Reformed theology, this point would acquire enormous significance in debates between the Lutherans and the Reformed. For the Reformed, it would be foolish to speak of a participation in the 'life of God' — where that phrase is meant to describe the eternal life that is proper to God as God. Our participation is in the Mediator *according to His human nature* and, therefore, a participation in created graces. The thought of a participation in the *uncreated being* of God is simply an impossible one on Reformed soil. And that, too, I would take to be a non-negotiable element in Reformed thought. To be sure, this commitment does make the Reformed something of 'the odd man out' in ecumenical discussions these days. And I am sure that it is an embarrassment for a fair number of Reformed theologians who care deeply about ecumenical relations. But they do need to understand that if it is the *Reformed* tradition they would represent in dialogue, this is really not a negotiable matter.

So how much of Calvin's teaching on justification found its way into the Reformed confessional tradition? The answer is: all of what I have here characterized as non-negotiable elements are witnessed to a number of the most formative confessions of the same period. That imputation is a 'legal' term having to do with our standing before God, that the ground of righteousness is to be found in Christ alone and not in God's work in us, that the focus falls on Christ's *human* obedience as constituting the righteousness that is made ours — all of this is to be found in the three

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which they make appeal teach only a simultaneity of justification and union with Christ, not an *ordo salutis* in which union is made to be the first thing. For example, 'as long as Christ remains outside of us, and we are separated from him, all that he has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value for us. There, to share with us what he has received from the Father, he had to become ours and to dwell within us.' Calvin, *Institutes*, III.xi.1, p. 537. The Spirit's work of effecting faith in an individual is her regeneration — which includes an indwelling of Christ in her heart by the power of the Holy Spirit. But regeneration and justification must be kept separate.

primary confessions composed in what Robert Kingdon has called the 'great age of confession building' (1560-1600).[20] I have in mind here the French Confession (co-authored by Calvin); the Belgic Confession (which was influenced by the French); and the Second Helvetic Confession (first drafted by Heinrich Bullinger in 1561 and published in 1566). According to the French, 'we rest simply in the obedience of Jesus Christ, which is imputed to us as much to blot out all our sins as to make us find grace and favour in the sight of God'.[21] The pastoral importance of this teaching is immediately added, 'we believe that in falling away from this foundation, however slightly, we could not find rest elsewhere, but should always be troubled'.[22] We are said to be 'partakers of this justification *by faith alone*'.[23] No mention is made here of 'union with Christ.' On the contrary, the French ascribes 'regeneration in newness of life' to that faith which is worked in us by the Holy Spirit.[24] The language of both the 'remission of sins' and 'acquittal' are also found here, guaranteeing that both would stand alongside of each other in a tensive relation as the Reformed tradition moved forward. Neither formula can be said to be non-negotiable but, on the other hand, neither can be excluded as acceptable Reformed teaching either.

The Belgic Confession follows Calvin in making Christ's obedience to be the source of our righteousness. We must, it says, rest 'upon the obedience of Christ crucified alone, which becomes ours when we believe in him'.[25] The Belgic makes explicit the instrumental character of faith, so that faith contributes nothing positive to justification. 'We do not say that faith itself justifies us, for it is only an instrument with which we embrace Christ our Righteousness. But Jesus Christ, imputing to us all his merits, and so many holy works, which he hath done for us and in our stead, is our Righteousness'.[26]

The Second Helvetic Confession also makes it clear that the righteousness of Christ which is said to be imputed to us is the righteousness which accrues to 'Christ's sufferings and resurrection' — clearly human activities.[27] Like the Belgic, the Second Helvetic also helpfully adds that faith

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20 Robert Kingdon, 'Foreword' to Jill Raitt, *Shapers of Religious Traditions in German, Switzerland, and Poland, 1560-1600* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), p. viii.

21 *French Confession*, Article XVIII, Cochrane, p. 150.

22 Ibid.

23 *French Confession*, Article XX, Cochrane, p. 151.

24 *French Confession*, Articles XXII and XXI, respectively, Cochrane, p. 151.

25 *Belgic Confession*, Article XXIII, Cochrane, p. 204.

26 *Belgic Confession*, Article XXII, Cochrane, p. 204.

27 *Second Helvetic Confession*, Chapter XV, Cochrane, p. 256.

does not justify insofar as it is a human act. The reason faith is said to justify lies elsewhere, 'because faith receives Christ our righteousness and attributes everything to the grace of God in Christ, on that account justification is attributed to faith, chiefly because of Christ and not therefore because it is our work. For it is the gift of God'.[28]

All of this is completely consonant with Calvin's doctrine, even if the formulations are more economical. And there would, thereafter, be no departures on any of the points I have described as non-negotiable within the Reformed tradition as such — not on the official level of Church confession at any rate. I am deliberately leaving to one side the recent signing by representatives of the WCRC of the 'Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification' because it is not clear to me what that signing means for WCRC member churches. Originally composed by Lutheran and Catholic theologians, the central chapters of JDDJ set forth a 'common understanding' (what Lutherans and Catholics were able to say together) and differing explications of that common understanding (Lutherans would understand the shared teaching this way; Catholics that way). Given that the document is not amended each time a new church or group of churches signs on to it, any differences on the level of explication which might have been thought important by the Reformed could not be expressed. But, then, it is not clear whether the WCRC's actions have any binding significance for member churches anyway. It could be that the signing was more of the nature of a symbolic gesture than it was constitutive of any member church's doctrinal witness.

In sum, it would be difficult for me to understand how any doctrine of justification could be rightly characterized as 'Reformed' which did not: a) operate wholly within a judicial or forensic frame of reference; b) which did not affirm that the ground of our justification is at every moment of our Christian lives to be found 'outside' of ourselves in Christ alone; and c) which did not lay stress on the fact that the righteousness that is bestowed upon us is Christ's *human* righteousness, the righteousness of obedience.[29] No concept of 'union' with Christ's 'person' — whatever that might be thought to entail — should be allowed to shift the centre of grav-

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28 Ibid.

29 It could be argued that JDDJ upholds the first two commitments. It should not be surprising, however, that the third does not come to expression — it being a distinctively Reformed teaching. And it is also the case that the classical Lutheran confession in this area of doctrine was assimilated to the requirements of the so-called Finnish School of Luther interpretation at significant points — which, had they been any more explicit — would have made impossible the third non-negotiable element in Reformed teaching.

ity in justification from the alien righteousness to the work of God 'in' us, a making righteous of one who can never again be innocent.

B. Atonement

There really should be no question but that the early Reformed tradition understood the atoning work of Christ primarily (if not exclusively?) along the lines of 'penal substitution' — the view that Jesus Christ took the place of the 'elect' in order to be burdened with the guilt of their sins (both actual and original) and, on that basis, to be tried, convicted, sentenced and executed. Thus, the human drama played out in Jerusalem was but the instrument of the divine judgment which provided the overarching horizon of theological meaning where the passion and crucifixion were concerned. And there really was no deviation on this point; not among the early Reformers or in the most formative confessions. This is not good news for those theologians who, while belonging to Reformed church bodies and wishing on that basis alone to be known as 'Reformed,' function instead as 'free church' theologians (if not 'independent contractors') who pick and choose freely from the smorgasbord of options placed on offer today by equally free theologians from other denominations and traditions. It is worth repeating: a theological tradition can be extended, amended, and/or improved upon in relation to any doctrinal commitment. But to simply abandon one's own traditional stance on any subject without having so much as made the attempt to extend, amend and improve — and to opt instead for the greener pastures of another tradition does not entitle one to the label 'Reformed.' Nor does the fact that one belongs to a Reformed denomination if theology plays no constitutive role in that 'belonging.' Here again, deciding what is non-negotiable and what is subject to further development is the decisive question.

In relation to that last named consideration, it seems to me that frames of reference continue to be more significant than the categories employed in bringing theological values to expression because frames of reference remain consistent across a range of doctrines — which is why justification and atonement had to be treated together. Both were thought about by the early Reformed in a forensic or judicial frame of reference which linked them together. To leave that frame of reference in relation to even just one of the two would be to sever the organic connection between them. To leave that frame of reference in relation to both would be to ensure that neither could be 'Reformed.' I will begin as before with Calvin. Here we can be much briefer since I have already touched upon the mechanism by means of which our guilt is transferred to Christ.

The reconciling and redeeming work of Christ involves more than atonement. The word 'atonement' is applicable only to Christ's death. It is

wrongly employed, if we take Calvin as our guide, to the whole of Christ's work; above all, when doing so means the abandonment of the judicial setting in which the meaning of Christ's death is rightly interpreted. To be sure that we do not miss this, the divine pedagogy itself arranged that Christ's death should result from a trial, resulting in the judicial verdict of condemnation.

> To take away our condemnation, it was not enough for him to suffer any kind of death: to make satisfaction for our redemption, a form of death had to be chosen in which he might free us both by transferring our condemnation to Himself and by taking our guilt upon himself. If he had been murdered by thieves or slain in an insurrection by a raging mob, in such a death there would have been no evidence of satisfaction. But when he was arraigned before the judgment seat as a criminal, accused and pressed by testimony, and condemned by the mouth of the judge to die—we know by these proofs that he took the role of a guilty man and evildoer.[30]

Or again: 'For he suffered death not because of innocence but because of sin.'[31] So, though Christ committed no acts of sin and was, through conception by the Holy Spirit, cleansed of the sin nature that is shared by all others so that He bore no personal responsibility for it, His death was not the death of an innocent but of a guilty human being.

Two 'benefits' come to believers from Christ's death. The first is the death of death. 'By dying, he ensured that we would not die. […] He let himself be swallowed by death, as it were, not to be engulfed in its abyss, but rather to engulf it that must soon engulf us.'[32] The passage is tantalizing. Calvin no doubt has in mind biological death when he says that Christ ensured that we would not die. Of course, it is not a straightforward statement even then — because the end of human life continues to be death for all until the curtain is brought down on human history with the final judgment. Calvin looks forward here, in all likelihood to the general resurrection of the dead. But, then, resurrection is not what overcomes death in his view; it is Christ's death which does that. It would make far greater sense, given that this is the case, if Calvin had in view 'spiritual death' — that death in God-abandonment which is the penalty for sin, the 'second death' spoken of in Revelation 20:14. *That* death does die in that the penalty is fully paid, in that sin itself is condemned in the flesh of Christ and is no more. In that this takes place in the cross of Christ, we might justly say that the end of all things has invaded time

30 Calvin, *Institutes*, II.xvi.5, p. 509.

31 Ibid.

32 Calvin, *Institutes*, II.xvi.7, pp. 511-12.

and been concretely realized for the 'elect' in one human being. This is, I would say, to push Calvin to greater self-consistency than he was able to achieve. But to bring this to your attention here is to remind you that Calvin's version of penal substitution leaves certain questions open and identifiable problems unresolved. The question is: can these questions be addressed and the problems resolved through a series of corrections/amendments which do not constitute the abandonment of Calvin's frame of reference or his central commitments? I think they can — though this is not the place to engage in a defence of the doctrine.[33]

The second 'benefit' of Christ's death is, Calvin says, that our mortification is effected through our participation in it.[34] He is here thinking of the 'mortification' which can and should follow in our lived historical existence as Christians. But as I suggested earlier, he would have done better simply to say that the sinner died (was annihilated and taken away) in Christ. Any mortification which occurs in our here and now is the result of our willed activity in response to the Spirit's work of effecting faith in us.

When we turn to the confessions from the period which establishes the originating trajectory of the meaning of the word 'Reformed', we find the doctrine of the atonement treated most expansively in the Scots Confession (1560), the Belgic Confession (1561) and the Heidelberg Catechism (1563). The language of the Scots is, rhetorically, quite striking.

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[33] I would suggest that there are two quite real problems that have always been felt and sometimes clearly articulated. These problems will not go away by being ignored but must be addressed head on. First, is there a true equivalency between the penalty owed and the penalty paid for Calvin? This question, it should be noted, is not adequately formulated when it is made to be a question about how 'three days' in the tomb can be equivalent to 'eternal' (in the sense of 'endless') punishment. The 'penalty' is, in this case, is separation from God, alienation from the source of one's good, of 'life' characterized by peace and joy. That is what the Substitute must experience — and, in experiencing it, 'consume' it, exhaust its power. A second question is one raised by Faustus Socinus and renewed by today's feminists. Does the penal substitution theory (in all of its forms) allege abusive behaviour on God's part in relation to God's Son such that violence on the plane of human to human relations is granted legitimacy by it? I have addressed these problems elsewhere. See Bruce L. McCormack, 'The Ontological Presuppositions of Karl Barth's Doctrine of the Atonement' in *Glory of the Atonement: Biblical, Historical and Practical Perspectives*, ed. by Charles E. Hill and Frank A. James III (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2004), pp. 346-66.

[34] Calvin, *Institutes*, II.xvi.7, p. 512.

> [We acknowledge and confess] That our Lord Jesus offered Himself a voluntary sacrifice unto His Father for us, that He suffered contradiction of sinners, that He was wounded and plagued for our transgressions, that He, the clean innocent Lamb of God, was condemned in the presence of an earthly judge, that we should be absolved before the judgment seat of our God; that He suffered not only the cruel death of the cross, which was accursed by the sentence of God; but also that He suffered for a season the wrath of His Father even in the midst of His anguish and torment which He suffered in body and soul to make full atonement for the sins of His people.[35]

The Belgic says:

> We believe that God, who is perfectly merciful and also perfectly just, sent his Son to assume that nature in which the disobedience was committed, to make satisfaction in the same, and to bear the punishment of sin by his most bitter passion and death. God, therefore, manifested his justice against his Son when he laid our iniquities upon him, and poured forth his mercy and goodness on us, who were guilty and worthy of damnation.[36]

Even more simply, the Heidelberg Catechism has the following:

> He bore in body and soul the wrath of God against the sin of the whole human race, so that by his suffering, as the only expiatory sacrifice, he might redeem our body and soul from everlasting damnation and might obtain for us God's grace, righteousness and eternal life.[37]

Taking a step back, I would observe in concluding this section that if you are going to treat justification forensically, you really must treat the atoning work of Christ forensically — and vice versa. The two are intimately linked in this frame of reference since the 'righteousness' imputed to us in justification is a righteousness which is acquired by Christ through His fidelity to God's call to be a propitiatory sacrifice. If it is in Christ's death that our guilt is borne and the penalty accruing to it is paid, then the two doctrines cannot be treated in differing frames of reference without producing dissonance. Even the attempt to marginalize (while retaining) the forensic element in justification cannot sit well with, say, a metaphysically-grounded ontological theory of redemption.[38]

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35 *Scots Confession*, Chapter IX, Cochrane, pp. 169-70.

36 *Belgic Confession*, Article XX, Cochrane, p. 202.

37 *Heidelberg Catechism*, Q.37, Cochrane, p. 311.

38 Part 2 will appear in the next edition of *SBET* [ed.].

'New Creation' in Paul

Sherif A. Fahim

INTRODUCTION

'Creation' and 'new creation' are familiar expressions to Christians. This familiarity is due not only to the direct meaning of the word 'creation' and its derivatives as found in the creation story in Genesis 1 and 2, but also to the connection with God's work of restoration of His people and of the whole creation after the catastrophe of the Fall. At the very end of the drama of Scripture, we see God proclaiming 'Behold, I am *making* all things new' (Rev. 21:5), referring to the consummation of His great restoration. Throughout the Scripture, we find different writers describing God's saving activity in the language of creation. 'The objects of God's saving activity are his rebellious creatures who, along with the entire created order, are cursed with futility and decay (Gen. 3:17, 18; Rom. 8:20, 21).'[1]

The phrase καινὴ κτίσις is used only twice in Paul's letters, in Galatians 6:15 and in 2 Corinthians 5:17. However, while the exact terminology might be missing, the idea and the theology of 'new creation' permeates the whole of Scripture. Generally speaking, we can understand the term 'new creation' used by Paul in three ways: 'the soterio-anthroplogical meaning, the soterio-cosmological meaning or the ecclesiological meaning'.[2] If 'new creation' is taken anthropologically[3], then the meaning would be the new nature that the Christian enjoys in regeneration. If the expression is taken ecclesiologically, then it refers to collective reality, that is the people of God, the Church. Finally, if it is taken cosmologically, then the expressions would be referring to the restoration of the whole cosmos and order of creation. In each of these views, Jesus Christ and His work are central, and the Holy Spirit and His work is vital in the realization of these three categories of new creation. The question to be asked in this article is 'What did Paul mean by new creation in 2 Corinthians 5:17 and Galatians 6:15?' In answering this question, I will sketch out a brief his-

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1 Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, 'New Creation, New Creature', in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), p. 1544.

2 Moyer V. Hubbard, *New Creation in Paul's Letters and Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 222.

3 Sometimes this view will be referred to in the article as 'the individualistic view'.

tory of the interpretation of this expression. Then I will sketch the challenges for the anthropological view which started to rise in more recent scholarship. Finally, I will argue for the primacy of the anthropological view in the light of exegetical, contextual and theological evidences.

HISTORY OF INTERPRETATION

The following historical survey is not comprehensive, but it gives a brief history of the mainstream of the understanding Paul's term; new creation. As Hubbard notes, 'Any historical survey of Paul's new creation motif would have to grant pride of place to the anthropological interpretation'[4]. Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-215) applied an anthropological reading to the concept of the new creation in his Stromata 3.8.[5] John Chrysostom (344/354–407; fl. 386–407) also held to the same reading.[6] Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335–394), agreed as well with the anthropological emphasis. He commented on 2 Corinthians 5:17, 'For, when the soul hates sin, it closely unites itself with God, as far as it can, in the regimen of virtue; having been transformed in life, it receives the grace of the Spirit to itself, becomes entirely new again and is recreated.'[7] In addition to these early church fathers, this reading has support in a number of other early Christian writers like Tertullian, Jerome, Augustine and many others.[8] Interestingly, Matta El Maskeen, an Egyptian monk, a prolific writer and the most important Coptic theologian in the 20th century argues for the primacy of the anthropological meaning in his commentary on Galatians.[9]

During the reformation, in his famous commentary on Galatians, Luther commented on Galatians 6:15, 'A new creature is one in whom the image of God has been renewed.'[10] One of the finest biblical expositors of his age, John Brown (1784-1858) explained the term καινὴ κτίσις in his

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4 Hubbard, *New Creation*, 2.

5 'Quare si quis est in Christo, nova creatura est,' nec amplius peccatis dedita: 'Vetera præterierunt,' vitam antiquam exuimus: 'Ecce enim nova facta sunt,' castitas ex fornicatione, et continentia ex incontinentia, justitia ex injustitia. (English Translation: Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature and no longer devoted to sin: 'The old things have passed away,' we put off the old life).

6 John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians*, 11.4.

7 Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Christian Mode of Life*, FC 58: 141-42.

8 Hubbard, *New Creation*, p. 2.

9 Matta El Maskeen, *An Exposition of Saint Paul's Epistle to the Galatians*, (Wadi El Natroon: Anba Makar Monastery, 1996), pp. 686-87.

10 Martin Luther, *A Commentarie of M. Doctor Martin Luther Upon the Epistle of S. Paul to the Galathians* (London: Thomas Vautroullier, 1575), p. 280.

commentary on Galatians in connection with the other incident in 2 Corinthians. He saw 'new creation' in 2 Corinthians 5 'describing the whole change which takes place when a man becomes a Christian, the change of state, as well as the change of disposition, the change of relation, as well as the change of character, but only restricted it to the latter in Galatians 6'.[11] This anthropological reading continued as 'the standard interpretation of the great German theologies and monographs of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.'[12]

However, this consensus dramatically shifted in the twentieth century. As more interest in the Jewish background of the New Testament arose, other categories started to prevail in interpreting the meaning of the 'new creation' by Paul. Adolf von Harnack (1851-1930) did not challenge the anthropological interpretation of καινὴ κτίσις, but he suggested that Paul was using a traditional rabbinic motif unfamiliar to his readers.[13] Harnack argued that the best understanding of Paul is dependent on the socio-religious context of the pre-Christian Paul, rather than on Paul's writings themselves. The new interest in the Jewish background was accompanied with the rise of the 'apocalyptic Paul,' in which we find more emphasis on the cosmological interpretation of 'new creation.' Wearing these interpretive lenses, 'new creation' became an expression that 'refers to the creation being renewed and restored by God in the age to come'.[14]

According to this apocalyptic view of Paul, the resurrection of Christ was the initiation of the new age, which will only be fully recognized at the *parousia*. In this way, the new creation is defined through a cosmological category, in which the old world is replaced through the apocalyptic shift of the Christ event by the καινὴ κτίσις. Douglas Moo observes this view is common in contemporary interpreters.[15]

Another recent view is the ecclesiological one. According to this view, 'new creation' is a collective term referring to the people of God, the church. Proponents of this view point to number of key texts from Isaiah 40-55 and Isaiah 56-66. We will look at this more closely below. According to this view, new creation in Galatians 6:15 is illustrated in Galatians 6:16 by 'the Israel of God.' 'The New Creation (Gal. 6:15-16) are

11 John Brown, *Galatians*, Geneva Series of Commentaries (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2001), p. 379.

12 Hubbard, *New Creation*, p. 2.

13 Hubbard, *New Creation*, p. 3.

14 Yongbom Lee, 'New Creation', in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. by John D. Barry et al., (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

15 Douglas J. Moo, 'Creation and New Creation', *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 20, no. 1 (2010), p. 41.

(collectively) God's Israel.'[16] For the ecclesiological view, another phrase that is closely connected to 'new creation' in Paul is the term *new man* in Ephesians 2:15. 'Peace has been made by a new man having been founded in Christ: again, a collective image (Eph. 2:15)'.[17] 'This phrase signifies the community of those who are "in Christ," regardless of ethnicity'.[18] Richard Hays sees the church as an aspect of the new creation in his book *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*.[19]

Other Options

Many scholars argue that choosing between the three categories of the meaning of 'new creation' in Paul is unnecessary. For instance, Gottfried Nebe combines the anthropological and ecclesiological interpretation together as he says, 'In Corinthians the new creation is as in Galatians an ecclesiological collective and individual term.'[20] Others see the scope of 'new creation' in Galatians 6:15 and 2 Corinthians 5:17 as cosmic and anthropological.[21] While Jerry L. Sumney argues for the primacy of the cosmological and ecclesiological as he comments on 2 Corinthians 5:16-17.[22]

Other scholars refuse to choose any category to have the primacy over the others. Levison contends that, 'it is not possible to choose definitively between these options. Nor is it necessary, for all three mutually illuminate each other.'[23] The same view is held by Douglas Moo who argues for 'a broad view that includes all the three categories'.[24] This last view sees the new creation as a new state of affairs inaugurated by the Christ event. Accordingly, the new creation is a reality that Christians become

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16 J. Duncan M. Derrett, 'New Creation: Qumran, Paul, The Church, and Jesus', *Revue de Qumran* 13, no. 1–4 (October 1988), p. 602.

17 Derrett, 'New Creation', p. 602.

18 Lee, 'New Creation'.

19 See Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics*, edition. (London: T & T Clark International, 1997), p. 198.

20 Gottfried Nebe, 'Creation in Paul's Theology', in *Creation in Jewish and Christian Tradition* (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), p. 123.

21 Elwell and Beitzel, 'New Creation, New Creature', p. 1546.

22 Jerry L. Sumney, '"In Christ there is a New Creation": Apocalypticism in Paul', *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 40, no. 1 (2013), p. 42.

23 John R. Levison, 'Creation and New Creation', in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. by Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993), p. 190.

24 Moo, 'Creation and New Creation', p. 42.

partakers of.[25] This last option does not deny the individual transformation within the scope of the new creation. However, many times it denies that the primary notion that the new creation is anthropological.[26]

This begs the question: Are each of the three categories of new creation present in Paul's letters, but with the primacy of one particular aspect more than the others, that is the anthropological, as the church has predominantly claimed for many centuries?

ARGUMENTS AGAINST ANTHROPOLOGICAL PRIMACY

The phrase 'new creation' appears only twice in Paul's letters, in Galatians 6:15 and 2 Corinthians 5:17, and it never occurs in the Old Testament. Although this precise phrase is not an exact quote, there are many interesting parallels found in the Old Testament, especially the cases in Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. In fact, one of the main arguments that downplays the primacy of the anthropological interpretation of Paul's new creation depends primarily on the Jewish background of Paul in understanding his expressions.

Isaiah

The book of Isaiah is considered by many commentators to be the most important Old Testament background for Paul's new creation motif.[27] 'The pervasiveness of creation language in Isa 40-55 is resonated in Paul's use of creation language to describe the 'new things' that God is doing among his new covenant people'.[28] The language of newness is also present in Isaiah 65:17 and 66:22. In these texts, 'Isaiah envisages an ultimate salvation that extends beyond the people of Israel or even the land of Israel to include the entire cosmos'.[29] The parallelism between Isaiah 43:18-19 and 2 Corinthians 5:17 is quite significant. In fact, the LXX translation uses the same words for 'old' and 'new', similar to what Paul uses in 2 Corinthians 5:17 (ἀρχαῖα & καινά). G. K. Beale comments on this parallelism, 'especially striking is the contrast found nowhere else

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[25] G. K. Beale, 'The Old Testament Background of Reconciliation in 2 Corinthians 5-7 and Its Bearing on the Literary Problem of 2 Corinthians 6.14-7.1', *New Testament Studies* 35 (October 1989), p. 556.

[26] e.g. John M. G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015), p. 395.

[27] Peter Balla, '2 Corinthians', in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed by. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), pp. 765–66.

[28] Moo, 'Creation and New Creation', p. 54.

[29] Moo, 'Creation and New Creation', p. 45.

between τὰ ἀρχαῖα and καινά which is connected by ἰδοὺ plus creation vocabulary'.[30]

Therefore, the argument against the primacy of an anthropological interpretation of the new creation in Paul goes like this: Paul's background for the new creation language comes from Isaiah. Isaiah's allusion to a new creation is more concerned with 'a future era when God transforms this sinful world into a completely new creation'.[31] For them, 'Paul interprets Isaianic material as prophecy of eschatological salvation which God has accomplished in Christ.'[32] With this background, Paul must have used the term 'new creation' in a broad way, in which human transformation is not excluded but still not the point of focus.

Jewish Apocalyptic Writings

Another possible background for Paul's use of 'new creation' is extra-biblical Jewish literature. 'We meet the concept of new creation infrequently in Jewish literature like 1QS 4:25, 2 *Baruch* 32:6, 2 *Baruch* 44:12, 4 *Ezra* 7:75, 1 *Enoch* 72:1, *Jubilees* 1:29 and 4:26'.[33] By way of example, 2 Baruch 32:6 speaks about the day when 'the Mighty One will renew His creation'.[34] 1 Enoch 72 also refers to the luminaries of the heaven and the way that they will remain as they are, 'till the new creation is accomplished which dureth till eternity'.[35] Jubilees 1:29 talks about the day of renewal in a cosmological sense.[36] Having this background as a highly educated Pharisee, it can be argued that Paul's use of 'new creation' must have been guided by Jewish apocalypticism.[37]

Pauline New Creation

Approaching Paul himself now, should we start with the expression 'new creation' in Galatians first or 2 Corinthians first? Would it make a difference? Some scholars looking into the same issue, like Douglas Moo, chose to start with Galatians because 'he thinks that it was written some

30 Beale, 'The Old Testament Background of Reconciliation', p. 553.

31 Gary V. Smith, 'Isaiah 65-66: The Destiny of God's Servants in a New Creation', *Bibliotheca sacra* 171, no. 681 (January 2014), p. 42.

32 T. Ryan Jackson, *New Creation in Paul's Letters: A Study of the Historical and Social Setting of a Pauline Concept* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2016), p. 123.

33 Nebe, 'Creation in Paul's Theology', p. 121.

34 *Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, ed. by Robert Henry Charles, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), p. 499.

35 Charles, *Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, p. 237.

36 Charles, *Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, p. 13.

37 Moo, 'Creation and New Creation', p. 46.

years before 2 Corinthians'.[38] In her book review of Moyer Hubbard's monograph *New Creation in Paul's Letters and Thought*, Susan Eastman believes that Hubbard's conclusion—that 'new creation' in Paul is primarily anthropological—is due to approaching 2 Corinthians first.[39] Had he started differently, the results could have differed. According to Eastman and Moo, understanding the new creation first from Galatians then to 2 Corinthians would lead easily to downplaying the primacy of the anthropological interpretation of new creation. A necessary presupposition for this line of thought is that 'new creation' has the same meaning in both instances. As we are discussing the arguments against the primacy of the anthropological interpretation, we will follow Moo and Eastman's order; Galatians then 2 Corinthians.

Galatians 6:15

In the closing section of the letter (Gal. 6:11-18), Paul is wrapping up the most important issues that he wanted to communicate to the Galatians. The centrality of the Christ event for Paul is not debated in Galatians 6:14. Participation in the death of Christ which Paul raised earlier in Galatians 2:20 is the critical point that makes all the difference.

For the opponents of the anthropological interpretation, 'Christ's death effects the transfer from 'old age' to new, so, as believers identify with Christ, they find themselves transferred from the old age to the new;'[40] that is, the new creation. According to this view, Paul contrasts belonging to the world with belonging to the new creation. Compelling circumcision is an expression of enslavement to the law, 'which Paul portrayed in Galatians 3:23-4:3 as enslavement to στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου'.[41] Therefore, relativity of circumcision is an expression of belonging to the new creation. James Dunn describes this contrast as he comments on Galatians 6:15

> 'World' is a term Paul confines to the present age, but 'creation' (like 'age') can also be used for the age to come (cf. Rom. 8:19–22 and 2 Cor. 5:17— 'new creation'). By 'new creation' he presumably means the world of existence made new, recreated, to serve as a fitting context for God's children (cf. Rom. 8:21); the word can mean 'creature', but the contrast with 'world' suggests the larger

38 Moo, 'Creation and New Creation', p. 47.

39 Susan Grove Eastman, 'New Creation in Paul's Letters and Thought', *Review of Biblical Literature* 5 (2003), p. 461.

40 Moo, 'Creation and New Creation', p. 48.

41 Jackson, *New Creation in Paul's Letters*, p. 89.

meaning (cf. Isa. 65:17; 66:22). Paul in fact speaks in apocalyptic terms of 'two different worlds.'[42]

Therefore, the 'world' for this team is not just the created world. Κόσμος is 'the fallen sinful world, with particular focus on the value system of that world. It functions as a close equivalent to the term "old age" in Galatians 1:4'.[43] Jesus Christ gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age. 'The cross of Christ shatters every ordered system of norms, however embedded in the seemingly 'natural' order of the 'world' (cf. Galatians 4:3)'.[44] This present evil age in Galatians 1:4 is contrasted with the new creation inaugurated at the resurrection. The vital point that puts an end to this world and inaugurates a new creation with a new state of affairs, new values, new kind of life is the death and resurrection of Christ. Dunn explains this turning point as follows: 'With Christ's death the exclusive rule of sin and death has been broken; with Christ's resurrection the new age/creation has already begun'.[45]

Galatians 5:6 is an almost identical verse to Galatians 6:15. They are similar in the syntax and in the terminology used. The only difference is that the last part in which 'new creation' is substituted with 'faith working through love.' Moo argues that both verses 'assert that the coming of Christ introduces a whole new state of affairs in the world'.[46] For opponents of anthropological interpretation, the contrast highlighted in Galatians 5:6 is between 'a community and a mind-set determined by a rite which divided humanity into two thus sharply distinct classes ("the circumcision" and "the uncircumcision") and another mind-set and community characterized by the openness of faith and the spontaneity of love'.[47] Accordingly, 'new creation' is the title of this new community and this new mind-set that is characterized by faith working through love. In conclusion, opponents of the anthropological interpretation did not deny the anthropological aspect of the new creation in Galatians 6:15, at least not all of them.[48] Therefore, they saw 'new creation' primarily pointing to a new objective reality that was inaugurated by the Christ event and

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42 James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, Black's New Testament Commentaries; 9 (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 1993), pp. 342–43.

43 Moo, 'Creation and New Creation', p. 48.

44 Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, p. 394.

45 Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, p. 343.

46 Moo, 'Creation and New Creation', p. 48.

47 Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, p. 271.

48 e.g. Moo and Jackson argue the 'new creation' is primarily objective, but also view it as having an anthropological application. See. Moo, 'Creation and New Creation', p. 41 and Jackson, *New Creation in Paul's Letters*, pp. 89, 101-2.

believers partake of this new reality when they are united with Christ (cf. Gal. 2:20 and Gal. 6:14).

2 Corinthians 5:17

When it comes to 2 Corinthians 5:17, denying the primacy of the anthropological soteriological interpretation of καινὴ κτίσις becomes harder. The reason is the individualistic language that Paul uses ὥστε εἴ τις ἐν Χριστῷ, καινὴ κτίσις. The εἰ and the τις translated 'If anyone' stresses the anthropological sense of the verse. Literally, the text means 'If anyone is in Christ, new creation'. Because of the individualized sense and the soteriological context, many interpreters think that 'new creation' here refers to individual regeneration.[49] Murray Harris argues, 'The εἰ and the τις combine to give καινὴ κτίσις a personal reference relating to an individual's faith-union with Christ.'[50] Consequently, many English translations translate 2 Corinthians 5:17 as follows: 'Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away; behold, the new has come.' However, reading it in the light of Galatians 6:15 and in the light of Isaianic background led opponents of the anthropological view to understand 'new creation' differently.

As noted earlier, the parallelism between the Isaianic tradition and 2 Corinthians 5 can hardly be denied. Opponents of the anthropological primacy can highlight at least three main points that contribute in understanding the 'new creation' in 2 Corinthians 5:17. First, in both texts, we can see a radical change from old things to new things. Isaiah 43:18-19 stresses the wonderous newness that God will create to the extent that the old will not be remembered.[51] Similarly, Paul says that 'the old has passed away; behold the new has come'. Second, Paul quotes from Isaiah 49:8 in 2 Corinthians 6:2 as he refers to 'the day of salvation'. Thirdly, Isaiah's promise of renewal clearly points to the restoration of Israel as His covenant people and to a cosmic renovation (cf. Isa. 43:19, Isa. 65-66). Definitely, individual transformation is implied, but 'Isaianic background does not focus on this point, which shows that the individual renewal is part of a larger picture'.[52]

The question then, in the eyes of these opponents, is: why did Paul use the new creation motif in 2 Corinthians? Paul had a difficult time as

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[49] Vilson Scholz, 'New Creation in Paul', *Missio apostolica* 7, no. 2 (November 1999), p. 91.

[50] Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2005), p. 432.

[51] Jackson, *New Creation in Paul's Letters*, p. 120.

[52] Moo, 'Creation and New Creation', p. 55.

an apostle with the church in Corinth. Most probably, under the influence of rival teachers (2 Cor. 5:10-10-12, 11:4-5, 11:12-15, 11:19-23, 12:11), the Corinthians questioned Paul's apostleship.[53] For the Corinthians, 'Paul's appearance did not match the powerful and authoritative image which they felt should be characteristic of an apostle'.[54] According to the opponents of the anthropological view, Paul defended his apostleship by encouraging the Corinthians to change their epistemology so that their views might be shaped according to the new age inaugurated by Christ.[55] In 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 a clear basis is set which is the Christ event, upon which life should change. A turning point is strongly expressed in verse 16 'ἀπὸ τοῦ νῦν' 'from now on,' which refers to the new age the church started to live in.[56] The contrast between the two ages is even more stressed at the end of verse 16: 'we regard him thus *no longer*.' Entering this new age necessarily means that the Corinthians' standards of evaluation should change to fit this new age. Participation in the new creation inaugurated by the Christ event means that their evaluation of Paul's ministry should be according to the standards of the 'new creation'.[57] This line of thought becomes clear in the next verse as Paul says that if anyone is in Christ there is 'a new creation' and that the 'old things have passed away'. 'The new era that is present in the church demands a new way of thinking, a new way of evaluating Christ, ministers, and all things.'[58]

A great emphasis is put unto the death and resurrection of Christ as the turning point of history upon which 'new creation' is inaugurated. This view includes a necessary change in those who are ἐν Χριστῷ that results in a reorientation of their values and priorities.[59] However, for them, καινὴ κτίσις 'does not speak in the first place of personal, individual regeneration, the individual past and the personal renewal. It is a matter here of redemptive-historical categories of old and new.'[60]

ARGUMENTS FOR ANTHROPOLOGICAL PRIMACY

This section will present the main arguments for the anthropological interpretation with some responses for the counter arguments that were

53 Moo, 'Creation and New Creation', p. 53.
54 Jackson, *New Creation in Paul's Letters*, p. 128.
55 Jackson, *New Creation in Paul's Letters*, p. 128.
56 Sumney, '"In Christ there is a New Creation"', p. 42.
57 Beale, 'The Old Testament Background of Reconciliation', p. 558.
58 Sumney, '"In Christ there is a New Creation"', p. 42.
59 Moo, 'Creation and New Creation', p. 54.
60 Herman N. Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of his Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), p. 194.

mentioned in the previous section. Noticeably, proponents of the anthropological interpretation do not necessarily deny other aspects of 'new creation.'[61] For instance, Hubbard contends, 'Both new-creation texts are expanded either ecclesiologically (Gal. 6:6), or anthropologically-universally (2 Cor. 5:18-20) so as to preclude a narrowly individualistic perspective'.[62] However, he also affirms the primacy of the anthropological interpretation of 'new creation' in Galatians 6:15 and 2 Corinthians 5:17.

Old Testament Background

Proponents of the anthropological interpretation affirm that the new creation motif employed by Paul finds its roots in the later prophets, such as Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Isaiah 40-55 has the highest concentration of creation language in the whole Bible, and that language is employed precisely to communicate a message of redemption.[63] God is promising that he will deliver His people by doing something new (cf. Isa. 48:19, Isa. 51:9-10). Then Isaiah goes further with the language of newness especially in chapters 65 and 66 with more emphasis on the renewal of the creation. One may say that the whole emphasis in Isaiah is about the renewal of the creation, but this claim would not accurately reflect the promises of Isaiah. God's act of new creation, 'involves a complete reorganization of life; the hazards of life are removed (65:19–20, 23, 25). The God who has seemed far off will now be near (65:24), and the existence of His people will no longer be precarious and uncertain but perpetual and safe (66:22).'[64]

Other texts in Ezekiel and Jeremiah also communicate the idea of inner renewal.[65] The well-known text in Jeremiah 31:31-34 contains a promise of a new covenant with its emphasis on an inward renewal of God's people. In fact, the central point of the new covenant is the inward cleansing and renewal of God's people, which solves their central plight, that is their sin.[66] Ezekiel also wrote about a similar promises of a new spirit (11:19, 36:26), a heart of flesh (11:19), a new heart (36:36), His Spirit (36:27) and God's accompaniment with His people (11:20, 36:28). There-

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61 Dan Lioy, 'New Creation Theology in 2 Corinthians 5:11-6:2', *Conspectus: The Journal of the South African Theological Seminary* 17, no. 03 (March 1, 2014), p. 61.

62 Hubbard, *New Creation*, p. 232.

63 Hubbard, *New Creation*, pp. 12, 14.

64 Philip H. Towner, 'New Creation', in *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. by Walter A. Elwell, Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), p. 562.

65 Lee, 'New Creation'.

66 Hubbard, *New Creation*, p. 18.

fore, both prophets looked forward for the time when God would perform an act of new creation in the heart of His redeemed people.[67]

Extra Biblical Literature

While anthropological new-creation texts can be deduced from the Old Testament, similar evidences are scarcer in extra biblical Jewish resources, but not absent. In fact, Moo points to the reality that 'older interpreters regularly shed light on Paul's new creation language by citing rabbis' application of "new creation" language to inner renewal and forgiveness'.[68] Nebe argues that the story in 2 Maccabees 7:23,[69] about the martyrdom of a Jewish family for the sake of the law, connects creation and resurrection, and that this story provides an interested reference related to 'new creation' in 2 Corinthians 5:17 and Galatians 6:15.[70]

Another related reference is the Hellenistic-Jewish romantic narrative *Joseph and Aseneth*, which was contemporary to the New Testament writings.[71] In this narrative, the conversion of Aseneth to Judaism is understood to be a new creation as described by a heavenly man.[72] The text says in *Joseph and Aseneth* 15:4-5 'Behold, from today, you will be renewed and formed anew and made alive again, and you will eat blessed bread of life, and drink a blessed cup of immortality, and anoint yourself with blessed ointment of incorruptibility'.[73] Definitely this idea of conversion is not identical to Paul's or to any of the New Testament writers. However, the possible common point is that an individual conversion can be rendered as a new creation.

Accordingly, to claim that interpreting 'new creation' in Paul anthropologically is invalid because his Jewish background did not teach this interpretation is an inaccurate claim. Truly, the expression 'new creation' is not used verbally in the Old Testament and was generally used to denote cosmological renovation in extra-biblical texts. However, the idea of conversion was well known and connected to God's act of creation whether in the Old Testament or in Jewish extra biblical texts.

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67 Hubbard, *New Creation*, p. 24.

68 Moo, 'Creation and New Creation', p. 46.

69 'Therefore, the Creator of the world, who shaped the beginning of humankind and devised the origin of all things, will in his mercy give life and breath back to you again, since you now forget yourselves for the sake of his laws.' (NRSV)

70 Nebe, 'Creation in Paul's Theology', p. 124.

71 Hubbard, *New Creation*, p. 55.

72 Levison, 'Creation and New Creation', p. 189.

73 Cited in Lee, 'New Creation'.

Pauline Material

Now it is time to examine the meaning of 'καινὴ κτίσις' in the light of its literary-theological context in Galatians and 2 Corinthians.

Galatians 6:15

Previously, we saw that the main argument in Galatians, according to the opponents of the anthropological interpretation, is the contrast between an old and a new state of affairs, with the Christ event as the turning point at which the new aeon was inaugurated. On the other hand, those who hold to the anthropological interpretation argue that central to Paul's argument in the letter is the antithesis between internal spirituality and external spirituality, the flesh and the Spirit, faith and works of the law. Another way of framing the debate would be: Does Paul argue about soteriology or ecclesiology?

Although, ecclesiological and sociological dimensions existed in the situation in Galatia that Paul was addressing (cf. Gal. 3:28, 6:16), his main point was more soteriological.[74] For example, in the introduction to the letter, Paul's language is quite strong. He warns against accepting a different *gospel* and even pronounces anathemas against whoever preaches a different gospel (Gal. 1:7-9). Noticeably, the agitators are mentioned in Galatians 1:7 and in Galatians 6:12-13. For Paul, compelling the rite of circumcision upon Gentiles was considered to be preaching another gospel. Also, in Galatians 2:16-21 after referring to the debate with Peter, Paul uses this instance to illustrate the antithesis between nomistic observance and faith in Christ as the means to the right standing before God. Therefore, the main thesis then can be summarized as: 'no one is made right with God on the basis of external ceremonies or human efforts of any kind but only through the unilateral action of God in the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the object of the believer's trust and the One whose Spirit liberates and empowers all those whose sins are forgiven.'[75] In this soteriological context, Paul makes reference to the new creation motif. Paul's main issue is: What really matters for being a Christian? Is it an external performance or a right standing before God and a new creation by the Holy Spirit? As Timothy George summarizes, 'Justification by faith is not a legal fiction but a living reality that manifests itself in the new creation'.[76]

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74 Hubbard, *New Creation*, p. 200.

75 Timothy George, *Galatians*, The New American Commentary v. 30 (Nashville, Tenn: Broadman & Holman, 1994), p. 438.

76 George, *Galatians*, p. 438.

External vs. Internal

This antithesis between external performance or legalism and internal transformation through union with Christ will be a controlling theme throughout the whole letter up to Galatians 6:11-18. In Galatians 6:12-13 Paul describes the mindset of a legalist as a person who seeks boasting and tries to avoid shame and persecution. The cross of Christ is a stumbling block for those seeking to boast in our performance and avoiding persecution. Justification by faith in Christ means abandoning any merit through our works and depending totally upon Christ. Moreover, following the crucified Christ means sharing in His suffering and rejection, a position which contradicts the mindset of boasting before men. By beginning verse 6:14 with ἐμοὶ δὲ, Paul puts himself and true believers (6:14-15) in opposition to the agitators in Galatians 6:12-13.

Paul as a Paradigm

Paul expresses this boastful mindset by describing the agitators as 'those who want to make a good showing in the flesh' (6:12). This description is a clear reference to those who are more concerned with external appearance. He reiterates the same idea in 6:15 when he relativizes circumcision. The other alternative for Paul is boasting in Christ and His death (6:14) and being a new creation (6:15).[77] In fact, in Galatians Paul used his own life as a paradigm of this antithesis. In Galatians 6:12-18, 'Paul returns to the paradigmatic first-person singular, underscoring the importance of the autobiographical narrative in chapter 1 and 2'.[78] He was someone who used to boast in the flesh and in his religious life (Gal. 1:14). But when he met the risen Christ, that encounter made him someone new no more seeking any praise from men. On the contrary, we see him confronting Peter for trying to avoid shame for the sake of Christ (Gal. 2:11-12). Following this line of thought, we can see that,

> Paul's rejection of his Torah-oriented way of life was the result of his transforming encounter with Jesus Christ (1:15-16; 2:19-20), and it is difficult not to see these crucial themes (formerly/now, external vs. internal) crystalized in the words 'neither circumcision nor uncircumcision, but *new creation*'.[79]

Faith and Spirit

This antithesis between the external and internal is expressed in the following chapters in Galatians in terms of faith versus law and the Spirit

[77] Towner, 'New Creation', p. 562.
[78] Hubbard, *New Creation*, p. 91.
[79] Hubbard, *New Creation*, p. 226.

versus the flesh. Paul seeks to define the true people of God who are changed internally by the work of the Spirit through hearing the gospel of Christ by faith. Among their descriptions are the following: They received the Spirit by hearing with faith (Gal. 2:2); they are sons of Abraham (2:7); they are sons of God (3:26); they are heirs of the promise of Abraham (3:29); they are children of the free woman (4:31). From chapter three through chapter five verse twelve, 'Paul is keen to define God's people in terms of faith and the Spirit and to move them away from the law and nomistic observance'.[80] After putting this doctrinal foundation in place and showing the fallacy of the agitators, Paul moves to ethical exhortations showing the difference between a life led by the Spirit and life guided by the flesh (Gal. 5:13-26).[81]

The role of the Spirit as a clear identifier of who true Christians are and of the way the Spirit works in the life of the true believers is prominent in Galatians. The contrast between the flesh and the Spirit is plain in the letter as well. In Galatians 3:3 Paul puts the Spirit and the flesh against each other where nomistic obedience, including circumcision, is a synonym for perfection by the flesh. Surprisingly, Paul never mentions the word 'Spirit' in his closing section; however, he clearly refers to the agitators as 'those who want to make a good showing in the flesh' (Gal. 6:12). He points to circumcision in particular as the expression of this boasting. Then in 6:15, after abolishing any fleshly cause of boasting, whether circumcision or uncircumcision, he asserts what really matters is 'new creation,' which is the work of the Spirit. Therefore, the absence of καινὴ κτίσις in the whole letter previously and the absence of the Spirit in this closing section may imply that an interchangeability exists between the Spirit and 'new creation' in Paul's mind. By interchangeability, I do not mean that 'new creation' and the Spirit are the same thing, but I mean that 'new creation affords possession of the Spirit (3:3; 4:6) and life lived in dependence on and submission to the Spirit (5:16-18, 25; 6:8)'.[82]

More light can be shed on the antithesis between the relativity of circumcision and 'new creation' in Galatians 6:15 by referring to corresponding texts (Gal. 5:6 and 1 Cor. 7:19) in which Paul uses the same phrase 'neither circumcision nor uncircumcision' to relativize the importance of circumcision. The three verses are:

Galatians 6:15 'For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.'

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80 Hubbard, *New Creation*, p. 200.

81 George, *Galatians*, p. 374.

82 Towner, 'New Creation', p. 563.

Galatians 5:6 'For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.'
1 Corinthians 7:19 'For neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision but keeping the commandments of God.'

Comparing these three verses, we see that new creation in Galatians 6:15 is replaced by 'faith working through love' in Galatians 5:6. In other words, 'new creation' is expressed in the life of the Christian by faith working through love.[83] 'Faith is the result of God's new creation work; it cannot be attributed to the autonomous work of human beings but is a creative and miraculous work of God.'[84] This faith is not a dead faith but must produce fruit in love. This fruition is expressed in 1 Corinthians 7:19 in which 'new creation' is replaced by 'keeping the commandments of God.' In other words, keeping God's commands is the consequence of faith, the result of being a new creation. 'Such obedience is not the basis of justification, but the result of justification and an expression of the new life granted to believers.'[85]

Opponents of the anthropological interpretation of 'new creation' do not deny the antithetical nature of this section in Galatians (6:12-18). However, they stress the antithesis between the cosmos and 'new creation' instead of the old life characterized by boasting in appearance and 'new creation' characterized by boasting in the cross of Christ. The question is Why would someone choose one of these two views? In fact, the emphatic personal pronouns of 6.14 should play a significant role in deciding which way to go. 'In verse 14 Paul's personal pronouns are placed in the emphatic position (ἐμοὶ … ἐμοὶ … κἀγὼ), while in verse 15 new creation receives the emphasis, and it seems only reasonable to relate the two'.[86] In other words, the antithesis in 6:14-15 is not between the new creation and the world but between new creation and the old self that is crucified with Christ.

On the other hand, adopting the anthropological interpretation of the new creation does not negate the antithesis between being a new creation and the present evil age (cf. Gal. 1:4). However, 'new creation' in Galatians 6:15 is not set as the opposite pole of the old age, rather, Paul speaks of 'new creation' that exists in this old age; and because of union with Christ, this new creation is dead to this world (6:14).

John Brown summarizes the meaning of new creation in Galatians as follows:

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83 Brown, *Galatians*, pp. 380–81.
84 Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), p. 317.
85 Schreiner, *Galatians*, p. 318.
86 Hubbard, *New Creation*, p. 223.

> It is that new mode of thinking and feeling which, growing out of faith of the truth respecting the Cross of Christ – produced by the Holy Spirit, and manifesting itself in love and its fruits, – constitutes the essence of true Christianity. […] It (new creation) is a new way of thinking, of feeling, and of acting – a new system of sentiments, affections, and habits, all of them the work of the Holy Spirit, growing out of faith of the truth, which he produces in the soul, – faith working by love.[87]

2 Corinthians 5:17

Coming to 2 Corinthians 5:17, Proponents and opponents of the anthropological meaning of 'new creation' agree on the reason that provoked Paul to write this letter. The Corinthians had a low view of Paul's ministry and even questioned his authority for lacking a showy ministry.[88] In response, Paul is exhorting the Corinthians so that their actions and their life may be in conformity to their identity as 'new creation.' The following arguments support the claim that Paul's main aim of using the expression 'new creation' in 2 Corinthians 5:17 is to point to the individual transformation that included a new way of evaluation.

Individual Language

First of all, the singular pronoun of the protasis τις employed in 2 Corinthians 5:17 governs the apodosis and therefore, it implies that καινὴ κτίσις is referring to anyone who is in Christ. The other option would be to disconnect the protasis from the apodosis and in this case the text reads 'If anyone is in Christ, then the creation is renewed.' In that case, new creation becomes an objective reality rather than a subjective one, which would be at odds with the whole context. For instance, in 2 Corinthians 5:14-15, Paul speaks about the reality of union with Christ and what it implies. To be united with Christ means that one has died with him and becomes alive for him. In 5:17, Paul repeats the same idea of union with Christ using the expression ἐν Χριστῷ. Therefore, Paul's use of this pronoun affirms that Paul has individuals in mind. He is referring to a subjective experience that takes place at conversion.[89]

Paul as Paradigm

Again, Paul gives his own conversion as a paradigm for the transformation from an old creation to a new creation. In 2 Corinthians 5:16, he

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87 Brown, *Galatians*, p. 379.

88 Lioy, 'New Creation Theology in 2 Corinthians 5', p. 70.

89 David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, The New American Commentary v. 29 (Nashville, Tenn: Broadman & Holman, 1999), p. 286.

speaks of the change of one's standards of assessment. This change can be identified by his use of the temporal references 'from now on … now … on.' He used to regard people and to regard Christ himself in a wrong way that has been now changed. The resemblance between Paul's former misconception of Christ and His mission and the Corinthians' misconception of him and his mission is unavoidable here.[90] Paul called this wrong way of assessment κατὰ σάρκα, which is translated 'according to the flesh.' We can infer that when he says 'no longer', his intention was he now knows Christ κατὰ πνεῦμα.[91] Therefore, a subjective experience in the spiritual life of Paul himself is in view here. Because of Christ's death and resurrection, and because Paul's own conversion to Christ, he ceased to make superficial assessments of others as he once did before even with Christ Himself.[92]

Creation and New Creation

Although Paul did not use the word creation or any of its derivative in 2 Corinthians except in 5:17, the principle of creation is referred to in different ways. In 2 Corinthians 4:6, Paul depicted his own conversion as a creatorial act of God, using the analogy of creation of light in the creation narrative. Is it justifiable then to understand Paul's expression 'new creation' in the following chapter in soterio-anthropological terms? Definitely, yes!

Another reference to the creation narrative is the allusion to the man's creation in the image of God. In 2 Corinthians 4:4, Paul described unbelief as being blind from seeing God's glory in the face of Christ and he referred to Christ as εἰκὼν τοῦ Θεοῦ. With Christ described as the image of God, the figure of Adam in the creation story as the image of God is lurking in the background.[93] At the same time, a few verses earlier, in 2 Corinthians 3:16-18, Paul describes conversion in 3:16 in terms of removing a veil and that through its removal we are enabled to κατοπτριζόμενοι 'behold as in a mirror' God's glory (3:18). This mirror is the face of Jesus Christ (cf. 4:4,6), who is the image of God. Moreover, Paul goes on to describe sanctification as transformation to this very same image of Christ (3:18). Therefore, creation is seen Christologically where Christ is the origin of creation, the pattern of creation and the goal of creation.[94]

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90 Hubbard, *New Creation*, p. 177.

91 Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), p. 294.

92 Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 427.

93 Hubbard, *New Creation*, p. 158.

94 G. W. H. (Geoffrey William Hugo) Lampe, "New Testament Doctrine of Ktisis", *Mid-Stream* 4, no. 2 (1964), p. 76.

New Covenant

One final point in this context is the relation between the work of Christ, the work of the Holy Spirit and the new covenant. The transformative work of the Spirit described in 3:16-18 has a Christological goal (cf. 3.18; 4:4).[95] '2 Corinthians 3:18 is a powerful summary of the passage on the new covenant ministry that began at 2:14'.[96] This new covenant language with all the references to the inner transformation of human hearts by the agency of the Spirit (cf. 3:3; 3:6; 3:15; 3:18) is echoing the promises of Jeremiah and Ezekiel. As we mentioned earlier, both of these prophets, argued that Israel's main problem resided in the heart and presented the solution in terms of God's new work in the heart. Paul saw himself as a minister of the new covenant (3:6) whom God used to fulfill this pneumatological restoration based on the Christ event. Here we see the centrality of the soterio-anthropological aspect of Paul's ministry in which the promises of the prophets are fulfilled in the transformational work of the Spirit described in creational language.

Commonalities

In the last analysis of the meaning of 'new creation' in Galatians 6:15 and 2 Corinthians 5:17, many common features can be identified. First of all, in both texts, the centrality of the Christ event is crucial. Second, the role of the Spirit in transformation is vital in the literal context of both verses. Another similarity is the antithetical nature between the old and new, the flesh and Spirit, the external and the internal, and life and death. Moreover, both texts expand the meaning of new creation either ecclesiologically or anthropologically-universally, thus avoiding the narrow understanding of new creation as merely anthropological. Finally, Paul's autobiography is central to the argument of both letters in which his conversion is highlighted.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, although there are many views in understanding the meaning of 'new creation' in Paul, most of them agree that generally speaking new creation is a broad expression. Moreover, there is a consensus on the centrality of the death and resurrection of Christ and the agency of the Holy Spirit in creation. The real distinction between the different views though, lies in the primary meaning of 'new creation'. I lean more to agree with the mainstream of theologians through all the ages, that καινὴ κτίσις is primarily soterio-anthropological without denying that other

[95] Hubbard, *New Creation*, p. 156.

[96] Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 204.

aspects of renewal are included in the broad meaning of 'new creation.' I would agree with Harris as he says:

> Like the Johannine γεννηθῆναι ἄνωθεν (John 3:7) and the Petrine ἀναγεννηθῆναι ('to be born anew/again,' cf. 1 Pet. 1:3, 23), the Pauline καινὴ κτίσις refers to individual rebirth or regeneration (παλιγγενεσία, Tit. 3:5) as God's sovereign and creatorial act. Yet it is true that the renewal of the individual in conversion prefigures the renewal of the cosmos at the end (cf. ἐν τῇ παλιγγενεσίᾳ, Matt. 19:28; also Rom. 8:19–23).[97]

Even in texts like Colossians 1:15ff and Romans 8:19-22, with the clearest eschatological expectations of cosmic renovation, man's restoration is still central in that final renovation.[98] This final scene is called 'a new heaven and a new earth' (Rev. 21:1); however, 'new creation' is clearly related to Paul's belief that the new age (salvation, life in the Spirit) has broken into the old age. The idea of a new heavens and earth or of a renewal of the universe may be behind Paul's concept. If there is a direct relationship, what we have is Paul's anthropological and soteriological application of the broader future promise to the life of individuals in the present age. New creation status implies newness of life and a new manner of life that accords with God's will. The two concepts are inseparable.

[97] Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 432.
[98] Lampe, 'New Testament Doctrine of Ktisis', p. 81.

Reading Romans After Christendom

Dr. David W. Smith

INTRODUCTION

The history of the reception of Paul's Letter to the Romans reveals the extent to which this remarkable document has repeatedly been read and interpreted in ways that have transformed individual lives and set in motion movements of reform or mission that have been of great historical significance. The role played by this epistle in the lives of Augustine and Martin Luther are obvious examples of its transformative potential, while more recently, Karl Barth's discovery of it in the early twentieth century set in motion a theological movement which had widespread and profound influence in the context of the modern world. In the preface to the first edition of his commentary on Romans in 1918, Barth said that he had written this work 'with a joyful sense of discovery'.[1] He later enlarged on his personal circumstances at the point at which the discovery of Paul's gospel was made:

> I myself know what it means year in year out to mount the steps of the pulpit, conscious of the responsibility to understand and interpret, and longing to fulfil it; and yet, utterly incapable, because at the University I had never been brought beyond that well known "Awe in the presence of history" which means in the end no more than that all hope of engaging in the dignity of understanding and interpretation had been surrendered.[2]

It could be claimed that the reception history of this letter is the outstanding example of the propensity of biblical texts to burst into new and unanticipated life when read in particular historical and cultural contexts. Periods in which major cultural shifts occur appear be the times in which readers or expositors are offered the possibility of fresh lenses with which to engage with long-familiar biblical texts. This notion of the Bible as containing 'exploding texts' has been helpfully discussed by Walter Brueggemann who distinguishes between the 'scribal' role of securing the text and keeping it available, and the re-discovery of the prophetic significance of the same scriptures in a new situation in which entirely fresh questions may arise. The 'scribes' guard the text which had its origin

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1 Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 1.

2 Ibid., p. 9.

in prophetic utterance 'until another prophet comes, who will be grasped by the lingering text, and who becomes the occasion of a fresh textual explosion'.[3]

If this concept of the explosive potential of the biblical texts is accepted it immediately raises a very important question: since the Letter to the Romans has (to mix the metaphor) repeatedly *erupted* with enormous power at different turning points in the history of Christianity across the past two thousand years, *might it be possible that it is about to do so again at the critical juncture in world history at which we discover ourselves today?* If it is valid to suggest that the discovery of the relevance of Romans by Augustine occurred at the dawn of Christendom, and the second associated with Martin Luther took place at the mid-point of that phenomenon, does the collapse of the attempt to create a Christian civilization provide the context for a fresh and transformative reading of Paul's letter?

THE CONTEXT FOR THE RECEPTION OF ROMANS TODAY

I propose that there are at least three major historical developments which, taken together, have created a global situation which threatens an agreed sense of the meaning of human existence, the security and well-being of the human family, and ultimately the continuing existence of the planet on which we exist together. The first of these factors can be identified as *the crisis of the modern Western world*. This has been variously categorized as postmodernity, or late modernity, but either way the terminology suggests a civilization that has lost its moorings and exists in a dangerous cultural, moral and existential vacuum. This crisis of meaning has long been recognised by thoughtful people who, while often themselves having turned away from faith, express concern that the loss of God in technologically powerful societies can only result in ethical confusion and social conflict. Albert Camus expressed the anguish he shared with many of his twentieth century contemporaries at the absurdity of a world without its Creator in memorable passages like the following:

> During the last century, man cast off the fetters of religion. Hardly was he free, however, when he created new and utterly intolerable chains. Virtue dies but is born again, more exacting than ever. […] The sources of life and of creation seem exhausted. Fear paralyses a Europe peopled with phantoms and machines.[4]

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[3] Walter Brueggemann, *Texts That Linger, Words That Explode: Listening to Prophetic Voices* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), p. 18.

[4] Albert Camus, *The Rebel* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), p. 243.

That was written in 1951 at a time when many Western intellectuals shared the author's sense of the *absurdity* of life in a godless world. In the seven decades which have passed since that time the pain of the loss of God has been largely forgotten while the historical events which have changed our context – the collapse of Communism, the rise and dominance of a new form of global capitalism, the creation of an interconnected world through the technology of the internet – have left us with what has been described as an 'age of uncertainty'.[5]

The second factor which has shaped the historical situation in which we find ourselves is *the collapse of Christendom*. Sociologists have long debated the nature, causes and consequence of secularisation, but as we are now well into the twenty-first century there can surely be little doubt remaining that we find ourselves in a post-Christian culture in which the images of flourishing congregations and a widespread respect for 'the holy' increasingly fade from our rear view mirrors. What is particularly striking is the depth of the crisis in European Catholicism, given that this tradition has been more heavily invested in the Christendom project than any other. As long ago as 1963 the theologian Karl Rahner could write:

> Let us get away from the tyranny of statistics. For the next hundred years they are always going to be against us, if we ever let them speak out of turn. *One* real conversion in a great city is something more splendid than the spectacle of a whole remote village going to the sacraments.[6]

In a remarkable passage from which, I suggest, Protestants who hanker after a 'revival' which might return us to the world we have lost can learn, Rahner called upon European Catholics to abandon 'the defence of the old facades which have nothing, or very little, behind them'. The time has come to cease maintaining 'the pretence of a universal Christendom', because only by 'letting all this go' can we 'be free for real missionary adventure and apostolic self-confidence'.[7]

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5 See Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Times: Living in an Age of Uncertainty* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007). He describes the 1970s as a crucial turning point at which a brave new world emerged consisting of 'erased or punctured boundaries, information deluge, rampant globalization, consumer feasting in the affluent North and a "deepening sense of desperation and exclusion in a large part of the rest of the world" arising from "the spectacle of wealth on the one hand and destitution on the other"' p. 49.

6 Karl Rahner, *The Christian Commitment* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1963), p. 33.

7 Ibid., pp. 34-35.

The third historical factor which defines our context in the present era, and acts as a counter-balance to the first two, is *the emergence and significance of world Christianity*. The phenomenal growth of Christianity across the Global South had long been noticed by the late Andrew Walls and is now a widely discussed topic both within and beyond Christian academia. This phenomenon has been variously described as the 'next Christendom',[8] or as evidence of a global revival which, it is hoped, might counterbalance Western secularism and trigger the re-evangelization of Europe.[9] Such interpretations fail to recognise the distinctive nature of Christianity beyond the West and so miss its real significance in the context of the era we have described. Lamin Sanneh and Michael McClymond point out that the growth of Christianity in many different cultural and linguistic contexts has resulted from 'the indigenous ferment of mother-tongue engagement in Scripture', and they conclude that this 'post-Western resurgence' demonstrates Christianity's character 'as a world religion that is not tied to Western cultural delineations but thrives in the multiple idioms of the adopted societies'.[10] They add the important observation that the cultures within which this dramatic expansion of Christianity has occurred 'are not the heirs to Western Christendom in its Catholic and Protestant streams despite the legacy of colonial rule'.[11]

Which brings us to the central question with which this discussion is concerned: *does the historical and cultural context which we have briefly described, being a time of massive change and deep uncertainty, create the kind of situation in which Paul's Letter to the Romans might again become an exploding text, with consequences capable of impacting the entire human family?*

READING ROMANS AFTER CHRISTENDOM

The broad lines of interpretation of the Letter to the Romans in the many published commentaries used by teachers and preachers throughout the twentieth century reflected an understanding of the context, purpose and content of the book which emerged during the era when Christendom was

8 See Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

9 See Mark Shaw, *Global Awakening: How 20th Century Revivals Triggered a Christian Revolution* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2010).

10 'Introduction' to *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to World Christianity*, ed. by Lamin Sanneh and Michael McClymond (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2016), pp. 1-2.

11 Ibid., p. 2.

a major force in the Western world. Questions began to be raised concerning that received tradition when in 1964, Krister Stendahl suggested that,

> the main lines of Pauline interpretation – and hence both conscious and unconscious reading and quoting of Paul by scholars and lay people alike – have for many centuries been out of touch with one of the most basic of the questions and concerns that shaped Paul's thinking in the first place: the relation between Jews and Gentiles.[12]

I do not intend to discuss the lengthy, often heated, debates which followed the publication of Stendahl's lectures, but his fundamental claim that the biblical texts which exploded at the time of the Protestant Reformation did so in relation to the urgent and anguished questions which arose at that particular juncture of history is surely correct. As has been suggested above, such dramatic, prophetic readings of the Bible result in major upheavals and transformations, but they are relatively brief and are followed by the return of the 'scribes' who oversee the routinization of charisma and guard the new tradition which is intended to preserve the gains which have been made.

My question is whether the collapse of Christendom, the cultural crisis of the West, and the dramatic emergence of churches shaped by a wide variety of cultural contexts is creating a situation in which the Letter to the Romans is about to explode once more? Consider the phenomenon of world Christianity and the eruption of faith in a mosaic of cultural contexts. This movement is characterised not only by cultural diversity, but also by the fact that it has emerged very largely among peoples who find themselves at the economic and political margins of a globalised world. In that respect it represents a return to the model of missionary expansion which we discover on the pages of the New Testament where the movement described in the book of Acts is *from* the margins of occupied Galilee *to* the imperial capital of Rome.

Lamin Sanneh has said that if we are to understand the changing face of Christianity today, 'we must forget our modern rationalism, our proud confidence in reason and science, our restless search for wealth and power', and enter sympathetically into the mood of the new Christians who 'are standing between the shipwreck of the old order and the tarnished fruits of self-rule of the new, finding all the dreams of a worldly utopia shattered by betrayal, war, vanity, anarchy, poverty, epidemics, and endemic hostility'. It is in such contexts that poor people living in depop-

[12] Krister Stendahl, *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), p. 1.

ulated villages or burgeoning slums are 'flocking to the churches because the old fences of what used to be home have crumbled'.[13]

The question we must ask concerns the ways in which Paul's Letter to the Romans is being read in such contexts? Elsa Tamez provides one example from the favelas of Latin America where, she says, 'Paul's message of the justice of God realized in justification by faith shines like a ray of the dawn's light pushing back the darkness'.[14] However, Tamez observes that this doctrine was brought to South America by Protestant missionaries whose formulation of it had arisen 'in a social and political context different to ours'. The message too often reached the suffering peoples of South America 'in a garbled form' and the breadth and glory of Paul's gospel was lost when justification by faith was merely repeated like a mantra with no recognition of its true content within the text of Scripture.

> What does justification say to the poor indigenous peoples of Peru, Guatemala, Bolivia, or Mexico, who suffer both hunger and permanent discrimination? It is shameful to bring them the message that God has justified the sinner with no contextual specificity, or with nothing to distinguish the faces of sinners. If we accept that sin has to do with social reality, justification also has to be understood within the same horizon.[15]

It is not possible within the limits of this essay to cite multiple Christian witnesses from the non-Western world, but the fact is that a growing chorus of voices like that of Elsa Tamez are to be heard across the globe, pleading that the Bible be read, interpreted and heard in relation to the concrete realities of globalisation and its impact on the majority of believers within the worldwide Body of Christ.

I want to cite a witness from Asia who underlines the urgency of such pleas addressed to fellow believers and identifies an additional aspect of the context beyond the Western world. Michael Nai-Chui Poon points out that Asia's geological configuration is different from that of the trans-Atlantic world, in that it rests 'on two stable continental platforms, and

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13 Lamin Sanneh, in *The Changing Face of Christianity: Africa, the West, and the World*, ed. by Lamin Sanney and Joel A. Carpenter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 222-23. He concludes: 'They are inspired and comforted by the narratives of ancient scripture, throwing themselves on the mercy and goodness of God and upon one another's charity. […] The dramatic response of compressed, pre-industrial societies of the non-Western world to Christianity has opened a new chapter in the annals of religion'.

14 Elsa Tamez, *Amnesty of Grace* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), p. 1.

15 Ibid., p. 21.

two major arcs of volcanic instability that stretch from Indonesia to the Philippines islands'. This geographical and geological context creates an environment marked by vulnerability, volatility and fragility as central features of Asian life.

> To the present day, migrant workers, refugees of war and stateless people testify to the fragile and fluid conditions in human life that are punctuated by eruptions of wars, tsunamis and earthquakes. Makeshift tents replace cathedrals as carriers of Christianity at the start of the third millennium. Peoples are on the move; and so too faith is on the move.[16]

The writer concludes that ecumenical experiences in the Pacific Rim suggest that this region of the world 'opens up spiritual horizons and awakens moral tasks *that Christendom experiences cannot reveal*'. He adds that if globalisation has created the need for a world church to discover a new theological grammar, syntax and semantics for today's world, 'the Pacific Rim may well be a fruitful area for this theological work.'[17]

ROMANS IN THE POST-CHRISTENDOM WEST

The developments in world Christianity to which we have referred above, important as they unquestionably are, do not stand alone but are contemporaneous with fresh readings of the Pauline literature emerging within the post-Christendom West. The massive shifts which have taken place in the culture of Europe and North America as the result of the collapse of the Soviet Union, leading to claims concerning 'the end of history' and the triumph of unfettered capitalism, have led biblical scholars to reflect on the analogies between this particular situation and the imperial context of the ancient world within which Paul's letters were written. Theodore von Laue, a pioneer of the sub-discipline of world history, concluded

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16 Michael Nai-Chui Poon, 'The Rise of Asian Pacific Christianity and Challenges to the Church Universal' in *Ecumenical Visions for the 21st Century: A Reader for Theological Education*, ed. by Melisande Lorke and Dietrich Werner (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2013), p. 69.

17 Ibid., p. 70. Italics added. A key statement in relation to this discussion is the article on 'Theological Method' by T.D. Gener and L. Bautista in *Global Dictionary of Theology*, ed. by William Dyrness and Veli-Matti Karkkainen (Nottingham: IVP, 2008), pp. 889-94. They conclude: 'Times have changed. With the collapse of Euro-American (Western) dominance in Christian theology, there is an increased recognition of a polycentric world and a polycentric world Christianity, with emphasis on many theological centres' (p. 890). There is a second article under this heading on pp. 889-98 by Kevin Vanhoozer which is also very important.

that the historical phase of Western domination had run its course, creating 'an interdependent world supporting five and more billions of human lives, a large percentage existing in comparative misery'. He concluded that the prospects for the future appeared to be grim, not least because 'the West has spent its spiritual capital' and the Judeo-Christian spiritual restraints in individual and collective life had 'ceased to be a public force within the West itself'. Von Laue concluded that it was no surprise that people reared in the Western tradition 'have compared this age with the Roman Empire at its decline, undermined by decadence within and threatened by barbarians without'.[18]

That historical quest for analogies between the imperial age of Roman domination in the Mediterranean world and the emergence of globalisation today is paralleled by the discovery on the part of biblical scholars of analogies between modern Christianity's experience of 'exile' in an age governed by a false ideology, and the context of the primitive church in relation to imperial Rome. It is not possible here to survey the growing body of literature reflecting this move in detail but I note four themes characteristic of post-Christendom readings of the Letter to the Romans.

First, a great deal of attention has been paid to *the urban context of the city of Rome and to Paul's understanding of the specific challenges this presented to the Jesus community*. The address of the letter, 'To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints' (Rom. 1:7), immediately draws attention to the specific geographical, social and religious character of the situation within which the Roman *ecclesia* existed. And yet, as James Harrison has observed, the vast majority of commentaries on this letter 'have shown little interest in the material, documentary, and visual aspects of the city of Rome', thus overlooking the important fact that Paul addresses 'the pastoral, social and political issues that Roman believers faced in Neronian Rome'.[19] The crucial importance of this theme concerns not only the understanding of the original context of the letter, but the application of its message once the interpreter comes to relate the text to the 'second horizon' of the contemporary world which is witnessing urbanisation on a scale never before seen in human history. As Harrison says,

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[18] Theodore von Laue, *The World Revolution of Westernization: The Twentieth Century in Global Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 362.

[19] James R. Harrison, *Reading Romans with Roman Eyes: Studies on the Social Perspective of Paul* (Lanham: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2020), p. 3. This volume is the latest, and possibly the most significant, contribution to a post-Christendom reading of Romans. A somewhat less demanding, yet very stimulating entry into this literature is Peter Oakes, *Reading Romans in Pompeii: Paul's Letter at Ground Level* (London: SPCK, 2009).

> An interpretation based on painstaking analysis of the available historical evidence and its intersection, exegetically and theologically with Romans, has hopefully a better chance of being correct than an abstract analysis with no anchor in the complex world of mid-50s Rome. […] To ignore the Neronian context of Romans runs the risk that the social and political dimensions of Paul's theology will be overlooked and, consequently, the complexity of Paul's theology is thereby diminished.[20]

Notice that Harrison includes the *visual* dimension of the Roman imperial world as a key aspect of the urban environment within which the house and tenement churches of Rome bore their testimony to the crucified Messiah. That Paul's letters were written and heard in an oral culture in which messages were largely communicated either by oral performance or by visual means has gone largely unnoticed in the highly literate culture of the Western world. The 'gospel' of the *Pax Romana* was promoted in imagery which saturated the cities of the Empire; architecture, statues, monuments, public inscriptions, images on coins, and the very design of the cities themselves, all placarded the ideology of the Caesars and their claims to be the agents of the salvation of the world. Within this urban environment the denizens of Rome 'would have engaged with Paul's epistle to the house and tenement churches of the city, either being confronted with its startlingly new message or being persuaded to adopt its costly implications despite the consequences'.[21]

The *second* theme found in post-Christendom readings of Romans concerns *the missiological character of the letter and its relationship to Paul's burning ambition to reach the western limits of the empire in order to preach Christ to the Spaniards who had yet to hear his name*. Although explicit mention of the planned mission to Spain does not appear in Paul's letter until the penultimate chapter, the hope then expressed, that the believers in the megacity at the heart of the Empire would 'assist me on my journey there' (Rom. 15:24), can be read as the culminating point toward which the entire epistle has been moving. In his monumental commentary on this letter Robert Jewett demonstrates both the importance of reaching Spain within Paul's broad, universal vision of what the Gospel would achieve, and the very considerable difficulties to be overcome if he was to gain access to the furthest Western limits of the Empire. Paul

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20 Harrison, *Reading Romans*, p. 3.

21 Ibid, 25. See Davina Lopez, *Apostle to the Conquered: Re-imagining Paul's Mission* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008) and especially Brigitte Kahl, *Galatians Re-imagined: Reading with the Eyes of the Vanquished* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010) for brilliant discussions of the visual nature of Roman urban culture.

needed to introduce his theology of mission in order to dispel misunderstandings concerning his motives and 'to encourage the Roman congregations to overcome their imperialistic behaviour toward one another, because it discredited the impartial righteousness of God'.[22]

Once again, the historical and cultural context of our times enables us to read this letter, not as an abstract theological treatise, but as the expression of a transformative vision of the Christian mission which has enormous relevance with regard to the unprecedented opportunities for the witness of world Christianity in this 'age of uncertainty'. As Jewett expresses it:

> There are many indications that the Letter to the Romans was designed to prepare the ground for the complicated project of the Spanish mission, including the insistence that the impartial righteousness of God does not discriminate against "barbarians" such as the Spaniards, that all claims of cultural superiority are false, that imperial propaganda must be recognised as bogus, and that the domineering behaviour of congregations toward one another must be overcome if the missional hope to unify the world in the praise of God is to be fulfilled.[23]

The *third* theme to which I wish to draw attention concerns *the economics of the kingdom of God*. In the same discussion of the mission to Spain to which reference has just been made the apostle, having indicated the crucial importance of the Spanish mission, surprises his hearers with the news that he must first retrace his steps and return to Jerusalem. Having just spelt out the missional priority of the Western edge of the Empire, he announces an imminent return to the East, despite previously claiming that his work there had been completed! Why this dangerous journey to the heart of his Jewish community which was even then experiencing severe economic distress and deepening religious crisis? The purpose was related to the project of 'the collection' which had been a fundamental aspect of Paul's ministry since the day he had met with James, Peter and John in Jerusalem and vowed 'to remember the poor' in Palestine (Gal. 2: 9-10).

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[22] Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary,* Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), p. 88. If, as being argued here, Romans is fundamentally missiological it is not surprising that it has had significant influence on the modern missionary movement. See Andrew F. Walls, 'Romans One and the Modern Missionary Movement' in his *The Modern Missionary Movement in Christian History* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), pp. 55-67.

[23] Jewett, *Romans,* p. 79.

Here again is a dimension of this letter often ignored, or regarded as a marginal detail when, in fact, it expresses a crucial aspect of Paul's understanding of the Gospel and of the praxis which flows from it. The economic structure of the ancient world can be represented as a pyramid in which obscene amounts of wealth were funnelled up to a small minority at the top, while vast numbers of landless people, migrants who poured into the cities, and a vast army of slaves, survived above or below subsistence. At the lowest level were the 'absolutely poor', living in rags and without shelter or sustenance. The project of the 'collection' was a concrete expression of solidarity within the Body of Christ, a visible sign of the reconciling power of the Gospel, and the evidence before a watching world that the kingdom of God was indeed breaking into the darkness and injustice of the world. Dieter Georgi says that Paul's Gentile converts had realized that 'by accepting the meaning of the preaching of Jesus' resurrection from the dead, they had been led toward and integrated within a unique, worldwide community: the people of God of the new creation'.[24]

Here, surely, is a further example of the manner in which the lenses provided for us in a post-Christendom era enable us to see what has frequently been treated as a marginal text as having enormous significance at a time when globalisation is creating social and economic injustices which both mirror and exceed the divisions of the ancient world. Paul's collection of funds for the poor in Jerusalem challenged the Hellenistic concept of 'an economy geared toward growth of production and profit' and, drawing upon the covenantal ethics of the Hebrew Bible and the example of Jesus, attempted, like the church described in Acts 2, to model a common wealth.

> Increase of wealth for him needs to be common wealth. The money collected for Jerusalem grows also, but into a universal divine worship. The money involved becomes a social force, a gift from community to community. […] In this process the subjugation of the universe under the Rich One who became poor has begun, and the unification of humanity has been initiated.[25]

The *fourth and final* example concerns what I will call *the ecological reach of the Gospel and the hope of the healing of the created world*. I refer of course to the wonderful passage in Romans 8 in which the whole of creation is depicted as waiting 'in eager expectation' for the consummation of redemption in which it will share! The picture of the created world 'groaning' like a woman 'in the pains of childbirth' is extraordinary and

[24] Dieter Georgi, *Remembering the Poor: The History of Paul's Collection for Jerusalem* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), p. 117.

[25] Ibid., p. 153.

finds tragic illustration in the multiple images of the rape and burning of the planet in the contemporary world.

I return here to James Harrison's remarkable book which contains a chapter relating this text in Romans to the understanding of nature in the Julio-Claudian period. He notes that there were large-scale pleasure parks in imperial Rome, which were kept in private ownership for the use of an elite. Following the infamous fire of Rome in 64 CE, Nero created a garden that outstripped all the others and Harrison asks how the emergence of the Roman construct of nature would have 'been perceived by believers after they had been confronted for the first time by Paul's conception of the "groaning creation"' (Rom. 8:18-25)? It is impossible to capture the richness of this discussion here, but I quote a passage which summarises Harrison's conclusion. He suggests that Romans 8:18-25 was the 'first salvo' in a debate about nature that extended into the second century and that, implicit in this famous passage is a searching critique of imperial Roman views of nature.

> Paul's "second Adam" theology and concomitantly, our conformity to Christ, the image of God, open new vistas for understanding our ecological stewardship of the groaning planet, including the abandonment of late capitalism's addiction to greed and the relentless consumption of increasingly scarce resources.[26]

CONCLUSION

My personal response to the question posed at the beginning of this essay – whether we might be witnessing the Letter to the Romans bursting into new life as an 'exploding text' once again – is to affirm a positive reply on the basis of the evidence which I have attempted to outline. However, such explosions do not happen when fresh and transformative expositions of long familiar texts are presented at the scholarly level in books that, however brilliant, will be read only by an intellectual elite. What is needed is the transfer of such knowledge to Christian teachers, leaders, preachers and – dare I say it – worship leaders! When that happens the latest, and perhaps the greatest, textual explosion could both renew and unite the worldwide Body of Christ and halt the march of our globalised world toward the ultimate catastrophe. I end as I began with a quotation from Walter Brueggemann who nicely sums up the action required for the Letter to the Romans to burst into fresh life yet again:

[26] Harrison, *Reading Romans*, p. 224.

The rehearing and respeaking of prophetic texts with fresh contemporaneity does not depend primarily upon critical and technical interpretative matters, but upon a capacity for imagination and intuition, coupled with courage, which dares to assert that these texts, concretely located and specifically addressed, can now and must be concretely relocated and readdressed as illuminating and revelatory in contemporary contexts.[27]

[27] Walter Brueggemann, *Texts That Linger*, p. 18.

All Things New: Revelation as Canonical Capstone. By Brian J. Tabb. (New Studies in Biblical Theology 48). Downers Grove: IVP, 2019. ISBN: 9781783599158. 270pp. £14.99.

Reading, writing, or preaching the book of Revelation need not be like Alice falling down the rabbit hole into wonderland. Granted, there are complex passages and multiple OT allusions which can make it challenging. However, as Brian Tabb shows in this addition to the NSBT series, tracing key biblical theological themes makes it possible to form a coherent interpretation of the Apocalypse which benefits both the academy and the church.

So why another book on Revelation? One reason is that much of the existing material is either set on predicting the future or has decided to confine the book to its historical context, but Tabb provides an alternative position. He adopts an eclectic position, suggesting that Revelation 'is a book – indeed, the *final* book – of Christian Scripture meant to decode our reality, capture our imagination and master our lives with the word of God and the testimony of Jesus' (p. 2). The central thesis of his work is an expansion of Bauckham's argument concerning Revelation as the climax of prophecy. Tabb wants to take this a step further recognising that the canonical position of the book means that it is not only the climax of prophecy, but the capstone of Christian Scripture. Revelation is not a detached piece of literature but the 'fulfilment or goal of previous prophecy' (p. 19), the 'grand conclusion in the already-not-yet reign of Christ' (p. 24). Allowing the location of the book to frame and shape our interpretation of its message is something which I fully agree with and I am grateful for Tabb's work in highlighting this important hermeneutical principle.

Making a claim is one thing, however substantiating it is another. Across the four sections which make up the body of this work Tabb does provide a convincing case for viewing Revelation as the canonical capstone. Some may like to have seen detailed engagement with the Apocalypse's chequered history in the canon, however, I do not think that this detracts from the book. Each section traces a theme across the OT which finds its climactic fulfilment in Revelation. The themes are as follows; the triune God (chapters 2-4), worship and witness (chapters 5-6), judgement, salvation, and restoration (chapters 7-9) and the word of God (chapter 10). Two chapters help to illustrate how Tabb fleshes out his thesis. In chapter 6 he discusses the place of the nations in the Apocalypse and the battle for universal worship. The OT is replete with passages concerning the place

of the nations and the opportunity for them to draw near to God. In light of Christ and the climactic role of Revelation, the choice which has always been discussed and issued in Scripture is given unmistakeable clarity. As the capstone of the canon, Revelation places a binary decision before all the peoples of the world; will you worship the Lord or the beast? This is not only helpful as it shows the connections between the Apocalypse and passages from Ezekiel and Zechariah, but it reminds the reader of the pressing need for all nations to have uncompromised gospel witnesses who are worshiping the Lord, inviting those they live beside to join them from among all peoples in giving glory to God.

In Chapter 8, Tabb draws upon the theme of the urban world across scripture, demonstrating how the Apocalypse utilizes OT depictions of the city such as Babel (Gen 11:1-9) and Tyre (Ezek 27:1-28:19) to make sense of the prominent influence of Rome in the everyday lives of the believers in the first century. As a side to his main thesis, Tabb helpfully argues that 'Babylon is not simply a cipher for Rome but is a rich biblical-theological symbol for the world's idolatrous, seductive political economy' (p. 164). Standing at the climax of Scripture John presents believers with a radical Christocentric alternative. They are to focus on the coming new Jerusalem, the faithful bride (21:1-22:5) as opposed to the great whore, Babylon (17:1-18:24). In an increasingly urbanized world, where compromise with Babylon is only a click away, it is important to remember 'the bride's enduring beauty and the harlot's borrowed bling' (p. 183).

At a more mundane level *'All Things New'* provides a number of helpful tables laying out passages from the OT alongside their counterparts in Revelation which some will find very helpful. The bibliography is also a good resource as it identifies not only the main contributors to studies in Revelation, such as Beale and Bauckham, but more recent articles and texts as well.

In recognising the canonical position of Revelation, and by handling it as a book within the wider context of the canon of Scripture, Brian Tabb offers the reader a very helpful guide to making sense of the climax of the canon. I find Tabb's argument and assessment convincing and would recommend this volume to any student, pastor or lecturer who is preparing to teach on the book of Revelation.

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Hebrews. By John W. Kleinig. (Concordia Commentary), Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2017. ISBN: 978-0-7586-1603-6. lix + 815pp. £38.84.

The Concordia Commentary series offers high quality exegetical commentaries from confessional Lutheran scholars. There have been several additions to the series in recent years and these volumes have been welcomed as significant contributions to the scholarly literature on the biblical documents. John Kleinig, an ordained pastor in the Lutheran Church of Australia and an emeritus professor of the Australian Lutheran College, has the distinction of having written two commentaries in this series: one on Hebrews and the other on Leviticus. It seems entirely appropriate that Kleinig should have devoted so much of his scholarly energy to these two documents since they are so closely connected in biblical theology.

The physical commentary is well produced and is easy to read. It is a large book, both in terms of its physical dimensions and in terms of its page count. The length of the book is probably due to some extent to the comfortable size of the font and the generous margins. Reading and working with this book is a pleasant experience.

One of the distinctive features of this series is the inclusion of numerous excurses interspersed throughout the exegetical comments. These address topics such as 'Divine Speech Acts in Hebrews', There are also many charts and tables. Another distinctive feature of this series is the use of 15 'icons', images placed occasionally in the wide margins to draw attention to key theological and/or pastoral texts relating to topics such as 'Temple/Tabernacle' or 'Incarnation'.

While the commentary is generally readable, it is evidently a detailed analysis of the biblical texts in their original languages. Greek and Hebrew script is used liberally throughout the commentary, and particularly in the 'Textual Notes' sections. Readers who have limited or no ability to read the ancient scripts will generally find that Greek and Hebrew are translated, although there are numerous references to the grammatical features of the text that some readers may have to skip over. In any case, readers with limited knowledge of Greek and Hebrew will be able to make good use of the commentary. Students and preachers who wish help in developing their language skills will find much assistance in Kleinig's notes.

Kleinig's exegesis demonstrates familiarity with important literature in Hebrews scholarship. The footnotes engage with both classic and recent scholarship in various scholarly languages, yet the emphasis of the exegetical comment is on the message of the canonical text.

There were a few places in the commentary where distinctively Lutheran theological and liturgical perspectives came through, notably in references to the sacraments. These do not detract from the value of the commentary, but rather provide stimulating opportunities for readers who belong to other theological traditions to reflect on their own understanding. Not surprisingly, Luther (along with Lutheran confessional statements) is cited frequently, which many will consider to be a commendable feature!

Following the exegetical 'Analysis' sections, Kleinig provides comment on 'Reception and Application'. This provides a valuable emphasis on the importance of the passage in question for Christian worship and discipleship, frequently with a distinctively Lutheran flavour.

All in all, this is an excellent resource for preachers, teachers and students. The Concordia Commentary volumes tend to be rather expensive compared to volumes in other comparable series which may, unfortunately, limit their appeal, but those who choose to engage thoroughly with this commentary (and others in the series) will find a reliable guide to help them reflect exegetically and theologically on the biblical text.

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The Messianic Theology of the New Testament. By Joshua W. Jipp. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2020. ISBN: 978-0-8028-7717-8. xi + 484pp. Hb. £38.00

Joshua Jipp is associate professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. This book grew out of a doctoral seminar on 'Messianism and New Testament Christology' (p. 2). Jipp had already published a monograph entitled, *Christ is King* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), which addresses messianism and kingship in Paul's Christology. This book develops the earlier work by discussing messianism in the New Testament as a whole. Jipp's work is a valuable addition to a body of literature that presents the characterisation of Jesus as king as a (though not necessarily *the*) significant emphasis in the literature of the New Testament.

After an introduction (pp, 1-17), which provides the reader with initial orientation to the key issues and recent discussion, the book has two main sections. The first, and longer, part (pp. 21-309), entitled 'The Messianic Testimony of the New Testament' is composed of nine exegetical chapters dealing with: the four canonical gospels (the chapter on Luke discusses Luke–Acts); the letters of Paul (three chapters); one chapter that deals mainly with Hebrews and 1 Peter, plus a short note on James; and one chapter on the Apocalypse. The second part (pp. 313-404) addresses five issues, building on the findings of the exegetical studies. Jipp has chapters

on 'Scripture', 'Christology', 'Soteriology', 'Sanctification and Ecclesiology', and 'Politics, Power, and Eschatology'.

The essays in Part One are clear and competent studies of the respective texts. Jipp combines both careful analysis of the features of the biblical text and critical engagement with relevant scholarship. In each chapter, Jipp highlights particular aspects of messianism that the biblical author in question emphasizes. For example, Matthew, according to Jipp, draws attention to Jesus as 'the Son of David who saves his people from their sins' (chapter 1) while Mark emphasizes 'the powerful, humiliated Son of God and the kingdom of God' (chapter 2). Jipp acknowledges that some of the material on Paul is drawn from his earlier work. Those who have already read that book may expect a measure of repetition. Throughout the book, Jipp builds on the argument of Matthew Novenson that *Christ* is an 'honorific' (an ancient convention whereby a description of honour is attached to a person's name, such as 'Alexander the Great'). Indeed, throughout his work, Jipp's engagement with important scholarship is a particular strength. Students and pastors will find that careful attention to Jipp's footnotes will provide a valuable orientation to recent scholarly discussions.

The material in Part Two attempts a synthetic approach to the biblical texts. The strength of these chapters is that, along with a more thematic approach to the biblical data, they go beyond exegesis and, in some cases, beyond 'biblical theology' as commonly understood, to engage in a constructive manner with post apostolic interpretation (for example, Justin Martyr and Irenaeus, pp. 322-26) and with questions raised by systematic theology and contemporary society (for example, politics and power, chapter 13). It is good to see work that seeks more integration between theological disciplines than has sometimes been the case. A weakness of this approach is that there is, of necessity, a fair measure of overlap between the discussions in Part One and those in Part Two. There are frequent instances of the phrase, 'we have seen'. This need not be a significant drawback, however. Rather, it can be regarded as reinforcement of the findings identified and also a clear signal of the necessary connection between exegesis and theological synthesis.

While Jipp's work has a more specific focus than some studies of New Testament theology (such as Craig Blomberg's excellent recent volume with Baylor University Press), and so is not an alternative to such books, his work will be of great value to students, preachers and teachers who wish to read the texts of the New Testament with particular sensitivity to the messianic emphases which pervade them.

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Marriage, Scripture and the Church: Theological Discernment on the Question of Same-Sex Union. By Darrin W. Snyder Belousek. Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, 2021. ISBN: 9781540961839. xxi + 325 pp. £22.24.

Marriage, Scripture, and the Church surveys and engages the theological debate around same-sex marriage through the lens of a historically informed, biblical theology of marriage. Darrin Belousek, a scholar who serves within a denomination which itself is divided on this issue, seeks to provide a resource for the church to discern the matter critically, compassionately, and faithfully. The back cover calls it 'A Theology of Marriage for the Contemporary Church', and it is that, on a number of significant levels.

The book is divided into four sections and is supplemented by several online appendices. In section one, 'Surveying the Situation: Where We Are', Belousek scans the developments of the last century in society and theology which have led to this debate, and follows up with an explanation of the assumptions underlying his approach. These assumptions include the primacy of Scripture, the responsibility of innovationists to justify their proposals, the need for consistency and charity in interpretation, and the relevance as well as insufficiency of experience in working out doctrine.

Section two, the longest at nearly 140 pages, is titled 'Framing the Question: A Matter of Marriage' and provides a succinct but thorough biblical theology of marriage. Rather than narrowly address scriptural passages which explicitly discuss same-sex relations, Belousek argues that the issue is about the theology of marriage and whether it may be revised. To discern this question, he first surveys the biblical teaching on marriage. He concludes that marriage is consistently defined as a man-woman covenant relationship and as such is a controlling theological metaphor throughout Scripture. Belousek drills down on the teaching of Jesus on marriage and observes that Jesus, as the prime interpreter of Scripture, anchors marriage to the creation model of a man-woman relationship of lifelong fidelity.

Additionally, in this section Belousek mines the resources of church history for both theological boundary markers and past examples of error which needed correction. In doing so he demonstrates persuasively that, despite a range of disagreements concerning marriage, the church has always, in all places and at all times, held marriage to be a man and a woman joined in covenant. This supports his assertion that the burden of

proof for changing the church's theology of marriage lies with the innovators.

While throughout the book Belousek engages the debate on same-sex marriage, it is in Part 3, 'Evaluating the Case: Assessing Arguments for Marriage Innovation', where he engages at length with several major arguments. Chapter 7, 'Hasn't the Church Changed Before?' offers respectful and careful rebuttals to proposals that changing the doctrine of marriage is similar to previous changes in marriage practices in ancient Israel, ideas about cosmology, and views on women and slaves. Chapter 8, 'Might Scripture Provide Support?' critically evaluates biblical arguments based on analogy with eunuchs and Gentiles, the concept of hospitality, and Paul's counsel, 'it is better to marry than burn'.

Part four, 'Seeking a Direction: Which Way to Walk' evaluates first an alternate approach of innovationists unlike those seeking a biblical or historical rationale: '[move] the church along a path toward sanctioning same-sex union without meeting a burden of proof' (p. 257). Next, using Acts 15 as an interpretive framework, he evaluates the idea that the Holy Spirit may be giving the church a new revelation which legitimizes same-sex marriage; this would in fact be a remixed version of the early heresy of Montanism, and would introduce another Jesus to the church.

Belousek concludes that the church does not have warrant to modify its doctrine of marriage, but that it should embrace, care for, listen to, and learn from gay believers faithfully living out their discipleship.

I expect most innovationists will find this a challenging read. Belousek leaves few rocks unturned in his methodical evaluation and rebuttal of a wide range of innovationist proposals. He shows the issue is not simply ethical but theological, having implications for the doctrines of creation and salvation. These features, along with the biblical and historical theology of marriage undergirding the work, will make this an extremely useful text for those seeking to articulate a traditional view of marriage in response to various arguments for revision.

However, Belousek does not spare traditionalists in his critique. He provides evidence that the protestant church's openness to contraception use for intentionally non-procreative marriage, no-fault divorce and remarriage, and laxity concerning heterosexual sexual sins seriously weakens its defence of traditional marriage. He challenges those who would seek to change a gay person's sexual orientation: 'More important than one's sexual orientation this way or that is one's spiritual disposition toward, or away from, God' (pp. 196-97). And, especially, he models integrity in representing his dialogue partners and charity in disagreeing with them.

Almost as an aside, Belousek notes at the outset that the next related theological debate will be over sex outside marriage. Trends among younger evangelicals confirm this; if he addresses it in a future work, I expect it will, like this one, be an important resource for the church's discipleship in the 21st century.

David Mitchell, Connect Church, Kirkaldy

Reading with the Grain of Scripture. By Richard B. Hays. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020. ISBN: 978-0-8028-7845-8. xiv + 467pp. £39.56.

Since the first edition of his doctoral dissertation, *The Faith of Jesus Christ*, Richard B. Hays, has been leading the way in New Testament interpretation. Now Hays has gifted us with an anthology of his work that deserves a wide readership. In *Reading with the Grain of Scripture*, Richard Hays has (lightly) edited and collated several important articles and essays written in the latter half of his career, with the earliest going back to 1996, and the latest appearing in 2019. The essays themselves cover a diverse range including hermeneutics, the historical Jesus, the apocalyptic theology of Galatians, and host of theological themes found throughout the canon. As one would expect, the most significant ideas that have characterized Hays's scholarship – intertextuality, echoes, and theological interpretation – can be found in almost every chapter. While we have long been accustomed to the importance of intertextuality for Paul, *Reading with the Grain of Scripture* gives examples of just how fruitful his model can be across the canon. For those who are unfamiliar with Hays or who have not spent time reading his works, this book gives an excellent introduction to just how significant Hays's thought is for the field.

The book is divided into four parts, each dealing with major portions of New Testament studies. The first section focuses on New Testament interpretation. For those who have grown weary of the myopia present in some works of interpretation, these articles here are a balm. The essays offered here take seriously the credal confessions of the church and do not divorce history and theology into different, disconnected spheres. Also refreshing is Hays's commitment to the integrity of the canon. Unlike many others, Hays adamantly promotes the idea of theological and hermeneutical unity based on divine authorship. In his interpretation of Old Testament in light of the revelation of Christ, Hays is most influenced by the so-called 'apocalyptic school of Paul'. However, regardless of one's approach to interpretation, Hays presents an encouraging and fortifying account of how to read Scripture as a whole in light of the triune God and the resurrection.

The second and third sections deal with Jesus and Paul, respectively. The former concerns various aspects of the historical Jesus debate. Those up-to-date on historical Jesus studies, while benefitting from Hays's perspective, may find these a bit of an old hat. Of the four articles, one concerns the Jesus Seminar, hardly an influential group in the guild today, and two are responses to books, one by the former pope, Benedict XVI, the other from the pen of NT Wright. The last article is a reprint of a section from Hays's justly famous *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (HarperOne: 1996).

As to be expected with a collection, the book is uneven. In general, the unevenness is due to the age of some essays. Others are so occasional that their relevance is difficult to judge. However, the value of this book lies not so much in what it advances but rather in what it offers. *Reading with the Grain* gives readers a glimpse into to the mind of Richard Hays as he has wrestled with Scripture over the course of a lifetime. Hays's contribution to the world of New Testament studies is hard to overstate, and the essays compiled here demonstrate his wide-reaching influence. To those who know Hays well, each essay provides further evidence of his stature.

Not every exegetical conclusion will convince, and Hays's tendency towards critical scholarship will dissuade some. One should read Hays with discernment, but one should nevertheless read him. Since the essays are generally on a more popular level, some non-specialists, even laypeople, may find large chunks, if not the whole, accessible and edifying. For pastors, seminarians, and more advanced readers, this is a fine volume worthy of your time.

J. Brittain Brewer, Calvin Theological Seminary, USA

Revelation. By Buist M. Fanning. (Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament). Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020. ISBN: 9780310244172. 623pp. £40.

Well known and widely respected, the Zondervan Evangelical Commentary on the New Testament (ZECNT) seeks to provide an accessible academic exposition of the Greek text. The latest addition to the series written by Buist M. Fanning (Professor emeritus, Dallas Theological Seminary) on the book of Revelation is a welcome addition, aligning well with the aforementioned goals.

The volume begins with an introduction handling issues of genre, hermeneutic, dating and authorship. Fanning embraces a threefold genre for the book (apocalypse, prophecy, epistle) but majors on the role of prophecy throughout. A few details are worth noting. First, Fanning opts for non-apostolic authorship suggesting instead 'another church leader,

a prophet known to the churches of Asia Minor, also named John and influenced by the apostle' (p. 28). Understandably this will be a point of contention for some since a good case can be presented for the apostolic alternative. Secondly, he adopts an eclectic hermeneutic, drawing together futurist, preterist and idealist interpretations of Revelation's many visions. Although Fanning holds an eclectic position he favours a futurist approach. This means that the commentary follows an adapted form of futurist dispensationalism which, on the whole, resits literalism.

Given the smorgasbord of OT references and allusions in Revelation a typological reading proves helpful, and Fanning outlines these benefits in his introduction (p. 40-49). I find this a convincing position as it can be clearly demonstrated (e.g. Exod. 7-12; Rev. 8-9; 16) and takes seriously the relationship seen across scripture between OT type and eschatological antitype. One area where this reading falls down is how the interpreter discerns which of these types have found fulfilment in the first century and which are awaiting fulfilment at the eschaton.

A significant point in Fanning's commentary is his view of the Millennium (Rev. 20:1-6). He outlines 'the phasing of the earthly messianic kingdom into a preliminary stage (the millennium) and a culminating stage (eternity in the new creation)' (p. 511). As with other dispensationalists, Fanning advocates that this period of time is when God's promises to defeat his enemies and the promised messianic rule from Jerusalem will be experienced. The division between preliminary and ultimate is something I do not find convincing since the expectation of the messianic rule from God's city is intricately linked to the promise and visions of the new creation (Rev. 21-22) in a way which it is absent from the millennial text (Rev. 20).

That being said, Fanning's earthiness provides something important to engage with. For example, it is possible to skirt the implicit physicality of the new city (Rev. 21) by favouring an overly spiritual reading. Since this city is being set up as an alternative to the physical reality present in the Roman world of John's recipients (Rev. 17-18), it would make sense that he is communicating about a physical alternative to reorientate the minds of believers. This would also make sense of the wider theological view of scripture where work, commerce, community and Christ are not mutually exclusive.

Structurally, the ZECNT contains both Greek and English texts at the beginning of each verse under discussion. Fanning's volume continues this valuable inclusion making it easier to engage in more detail with the authors comments. Practically, this is a good tool for use in the classroom where students have direct access to the text on the same page. There are also some helpful textual observations in the footnotes which prove ben-

eficial for further engagement. It would also be a good resource for pastors teaching through the book of Revelation.

Martin Paterson, OMF International, Glasgow

A Companion to the Theology of John Webster. Edited by Michael Allen and R. David Nelson. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2021. ISBN: 9780802876744. 366pp. £40.99.

Over the last two decades, John Webster produced a flurry of essays which, both friends and critics agree, ignited a movement of Protestant *ressourcement*. Webster's early death and the unfinished status of his magnum opus – a multi-volume systematic theology – leave his future influence uncertain, but this volume is a compelling testament to his ongoing relevance.

The *Companion* includes a forward by Kevin Vanhoozer sketching the way his own theological development followed Webster's trajectory, a masterful biography from Webster's colleague and confidant Ivor Davidson, five chapters on Webster's 'theological development', eleven chapters on Webster's treatment of central dogmatic *loci*, and a concluding chapter from David Nelson outlining the prospective shape of Webster's unpublished systematic theology on the basis of a proposal submitted to Baker Academic. The essays on the whole are well executed, and while largely appreciative, the *Companion* is no hagiography; even the most glowing essays offer incisive evaluation. The *Companion*, furthermore, manages to serve both as a helpful introduction for novices while likewise offering engaging interpretations of Webster which offer insights for even the most seasoned of readers. I was particularly struck by Nelson's account of the way in which Webster's early criticisms of Eberhard Jüngel motivated his mature theological methodology, Sarisky's crisp portrayal of the importance of the category of 'sanctification' in Webster's doctrine of scripture, and Wittman's description of Webster's critical adoption of Ingolf Dalferth's approach to metaphysics.

The vexed question of Webster's development, how Webster began his career commenting on Jüngel, moved to Karl Barth, and in his final years gave sustained attention to Thomas Aquinas, the patristics, and the Protestant reformers and scholastics, is dealt with artfully. While some variation can be seen amongst the contributors – Holmes and Nimmo identify a more pronounced shift between Webster's 'apocalyptic', Barthian phase and his later engagement with Thomas than some others – the overall tone of the volume is remarkably consistent. The contributors largely agree that certain dogmatic emphases regarding, for example, divine aseity, the way in which divine action evokes rather than competes

with human moral agency, and the need for a *theological* rather than 'neutrally' philosophical or historical response to contemporary intellectual quandaries, were present from the outset. Webster's expanding set of conversation partners did not signal a fundamental shift – though there was development at certain points – but allowed him to more perspicuously formulate convictions present in his earliest writings.

In one of the finest essays, Katherine Sonderegger captures something of what it might mean for evangelical theology to benefit from Webster's approach. Sonderegger cites some of Webster's most incisive criticisms of evangelical theology, suggesting that the harshness of these criticisms is precisely because Webster sees himself as speaking in some sense 'to his own'. Sonderegger's essay as a whole concerns Webster's Christology. Her thesis is that while Webster's Christology might appear blandly conservative – as he without anxiety redeploys Chalcedonian categories in sharp contrast to the wide-spread Christological revisionism of the twentieth century – this misses the moral dimension of Webster's thought, which follows Barth in emphasising the irruptive witness of the risen Christ. Webster is keen to stress that Christ is not collapsed into the past, the church, the tradition, or the Bible itself, but speaks for himself today, demanding a hearing and shattering our defences. The lesson, when juxtaposed with Sonderegger's citation of Webster's criticism of the dominant path of contemporary evangelical theology, is that Webster's methodology may well be termed 'traditional', in that he lovingly retrieves the riches of historic catholic and Protestant divinity, but nonetheless unlike many of his evangelical followers, Webster refused to denigrate modern theology and was not uncritical in his reading of the Christian tradition. As Ivor Davidson correspondingly notes, for Webster, '*ressourcement* or retrieval also needed care: no idealising – or demonising – of epochs and their legacies; no drift of 'tradition' into stasis or self-satisfaction; no conflation of the revelatory authority of the living one with the church's proprietary stock' (p. 14).

Let us close, in view of the helpful insights offered in this *Companion*, asking tentatively what shape an evangelical theology attentive to the legacy of John Webster *might* take? It might involve not repristination or slavish repetition of the past, nor an anxious policing of the boundaries of evangelical 'orthodoxy' – some of which, Webster would likely suggest, is not 'orthodoxy' anyway – but a joyful return to the sources of Christian doctrine with the expectation that our own 'evangelical' assumptions and beliefs will not only be confirmed and strengthened but likewise overthrown and challenged by the gospel witness. One of the great maladies of evangelical theology, according to Webster, is the false assumption that we can 'take as read' our current theological assumptions, which leads us

to view theology as basically polemical and apologetical (*i.e.* as answering objections to what we *already* believe; see John Webster, 'Jesus Christ', in *The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology*, eds T. Larsen and D. Trier, CUP, 2007, p. 52). In contrast, Webster suggests: 'The text of Scripture is a permanent protest against the tendency of Christian culture to 'de-eschatologise' itself and its condition, that is to convert the presence of God into 'what may be touched', and thereby to refuse to stand beneath the sign of its own contradiction….It is because we are bitten or stung by God through the biblical text that we talk of the 'authority' of Scripture' (John Webster, *The Culture of Theology*, eds Ivor J. Davidson and Alden C. McCray, Baker Academic, 2019, p. 71). Yet alongside this, an evangelical theology which learned from Webster might cultivate a studied indifference to the fashions and prejudices of academic culture and a willingness to trust that the patient exposition of scripture and the Christian tradition offers the best riposte to modern unbelief. Most of all, an evangelical theology which learned from Webster would commit itself to patient attention to and contemplation of the triune God, whose living Word resists all attempts at domestication. It would consist in redeemed men and women continually brought face to face with the 'disorienting goodness' (p. 229) of Jesus Christ. I am thankful for the ways this new *Companion* might contribute to such a theological revival.

Jared Michelson, Cornerstone, St Andrews

The Ministry of Women in the New Testament. Reclaiming the Biblical Vision for Church Leadership. By Dorothy A. Lee. Baker Academic, 2021 (Paperback) ISBN: 978-1-5409-6308-6 221pp. £13.50.

My heart slightly sank on encountering yet another book on the role of women in church leadership. The arguments on both 'sides' are well rehearsed. However, I very soon warmed to the rigour and nuancing of Dorothy Lee's interpretive skill and conclude that this is a monograph well worth reflecting on.

Dorothy Lee is an Anglican priest in the Diocese of Melbourne, Australia and a research professor of New Testament at Trinity College, Melbourne. In the Preface she sets out her stall. Her concern is what she perceives to be the hermeneutical imperialism (p. xi) that 'blithely ignores' both the clear diversity of the New Testament witness to the role of women in the early Christian movement and its cultural context. She is troubled by 'a hidden misogyny' which she suspects drives some of the debate and finds the terms 'complementarian' and 'egalitarian' distinctly unhelpful. Women's perspectives, she argues, are unique and need to complement that of men – but in an egalitarian way. For Lee it is careful and attentive

biblical interpretation which is key, which involves not only holding to the objectivity of the text and its authorial intent but being open to what Paul Ricoeur called 'a surplus of meaning', where fresh insights can be discovered as the text interacts with new contexts.

The most stimulating and refreshing aspect of the book is her extended and well researched treatment of the witness of the Four Gospels. She not only makes some sharp observations about Jesus attitude to women but paints a moving and detailed portrait of the role of women in the ministry of Jesus, underlining 'that all Christian women, like all Christian men, have one and the same fundamental vocation: to be disciples of Jesus Christ' (p. 11). She notes from Matthew/Mark, for example, how the four male disciples who were first called fade into the shadows when it comes to the passion and it is a group of ministering women who emerge confidently into the foreground. Women too become the primary witnesses to the resurrection. Lee makes the helpful point that women were almost certainly present in many (crowd) scenes where they are not explicitly mentioned, advocating (quoting Lynn Cohick) that we need to 'exercize more imagination to repopulate the ancient landscape with women' (p. 33). Were women present, for example, in the sending of the Seventy and other mission activities? In her treatment of Luke/Acts, Lee emphasizes the use of the verb *diakonein* for the women who supported Jesus (Luke 8:3) and for Martha who 'serves' Jesus, and highlights the women described as 'co-followers' (*synakolouthousai*) of Jesus (Luke 23:49). She wonders whether the number of named female disciples in Luke's Gospel, which adds up to seven, is as intentional as the number twelve. In Acts she notices the relative lack of prominence of women in key roles but argues that there is still an inclusiveness, an inclusiveness which one day will come to fruition. For her the key issue is 'where the text faces' (p. 73), namely re-defining roles and relationships in terms of the Gospel rather than patriarchy. In John's Gospel she particularly draws out how such women as the woman of Samaria, Mary Magdalene and Mary who anoints Jesus become models of faith.

Dorothy Lee's treatment of the Pauline texts is less thorough and breaks little new ground. She highlights the extraordinary list of women in Romans 16 and explores the various options for the more contentious passages of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16, 1 Corinthians 14:34-36 and 1 Timothy 2:11-15. She argues, for example, that the prohibition of women 'not to have authority over a man' refers to 'a dominating authority that seeks to gain the upper hand over others' (p. 125). The lack of detailed treatment of these passages compared to that in the Gospels was disappointing. After reviewing the rest of the New Testament material, a chapter follows on the role of women in the post-apostolic tradition where she makes the inter-

esting, if inconclusive, observation that 'continuing arguments against women's ministry point to its persistence in the early church' (p. 165). This is followed by a slim chapter on the theological issues at stake and the bold conclusion that 'women's sense of calling in the contemporary church is not primarily a product of Western feminism – though it has played its part – but largely a re-calling of the church to its evangelical roots, not only in the New Testament but also in the early centuries of the church's life' (p. 183).

This book has a number of strengths, most notably its thorough and stimulating treatment of the Gospel material. Many treatments of this topic far too quickly migrate to the Pauline material. I also appreciated some fascinating scholarly details such as the existence of some women leaders in ancient synagogues. Her central argument that the biblical material forms a *trajectory* rather than simply a mirror, a future pathway rather than a present reality, is well made. However, there were major weaknesses too. Although the book is a *New Testament* overview, Lee's theological reflections were surprisingly limited with minimal consideration of the significance of Pentecost (p. 179), no consideration of the present age as an anticipation of the new creation, the debate over the trinity and role subordinationism, and no assessment of the gifts and offices of the church.

A generous reading of the *Ministry of Women in the New Testament* would see her argument as subtle and subversive – for central to her thesis is the question of what is meant by leadership. If, as Jesus modelled and taught, leadership in God's Kingdom is not about upholding patriarchal domination, as in the Roman Hellenistic world, but rather about embracing a counter-cultural model, then this was precisely what was exemplified by many of the ministering women of the New Testament. If leadership is about 'discipleship writ large' or 'icons of Christ' as she prefers to term it, then women are most certainly to be included (p. 34). A more critical assessment would argue that precisely because the author never offers a clear definition of church leadership, let alone ordained ministry, she has conflated the idea of women's status and dignity as model disciples with the particular role of an overseer of a Christian community. That said, there is much here to move us, challenge us and bring us back to Scripture with fresh eyes.

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The Beauty of Preaching: God's Glory in Christian Proclamation. By Michael Pasquarello III. Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2020. ISBN 978-0-8028-2474-5. 288pp. £21.99.

This work of homiletical theology by American Methodist Michael Pasquarello, with its focus on the potential of preaching to reveal God's beauty, is a goldmine for preachers. Here they will find valuable insights for proclaiming Christ attractively as well as food for a preacher's soul. Pasqarello calls on preachers to root their preaching in 'attentive receptivity to God's self-sharing by which the Spirit illumines our minds to contemplate, delight in, and long for the beauty of Christ's holiness as the fruit and effect' of their preaching (pp. xix-xx). As the book title indicates, beauty and glory are regarded as synonyms.

In order to persuade modern preachers to develop a 'homiletical aesthetic', the author draws extensively on three historical exemplars: Augustine, John Wesley, and Martin Luther. He also borrows in passing a multiplicity of quotations from a wide range of others, from Pope Francis to Eugene Peterson, as well as providing numerous useful footnotes referencing other works. Pasquarello on his own account also explores biblical texts which he regards to be key to his theme, particularly from Isaiah, Romans and Mark.

Two early chapters trace the beauty of God and the beauty of preaching as recurring themes in Augustine's *Confessions and Expositions*. Augustine's exposition of Psalm 103, is cited as a call for the church both to give thanks for the beauty of creation and to confess the reality of sin. For Augustine beauty is supremely revealed in redemption. Christ is beautiful, 'fair of form beyond all humankind', both in his person and in loving the church even when she was ugly. 'To make her [the church] beautiful he became ugly himself' (*Expositions* 5:111, on p. 103).

Pasquarello moves on to remind us that John Wesley believed God's 'design' was to 'spread scriptural holiness in the land' (p. 137). In the Wesleyan understanding, God's holiness is beautiful (cf. Pss 29:2; 96:9): 'The beauty of holiness shines forth with the brightness of the Father's love manifested in the Son, the express image of his person in whom the divine glory dwells in human form' (p. 156). Pasquarello reminds us that the good news Martin Luther announced was that a beautiful Saviour became ugly so that sinners, made ugly through sin, might be made beautiful through the work of divine grace. Lutheran scholar Mark C. Mattes' summary is quoted: 'God loves sinners not because they are beautiful, but they are beautiful because they are loved' (p. 168).

The author shares his aim in writing this book: 'I want to show that responding to the beauty of God's glory is the heart of preaching' (p. xxii).

For Pasquarello preaching is worship, and 'the end of worship is the glorification of God and the sanctification of all things human' (p. xxiv). Preachers, he says, 'must be rooted in prayer, in attentive receptivity to God's self-sharing by which the Spirit illumines our minds to contemplate, delight in, and long for the beauty of Christ's holiness as the fruit and effect of our preaching' (p. xx). Preaching is 'doxological speech, the offering of a preacher's whole self in adoring praise to God, and its purpose is to summon hearers to embrace 'a doxological way of life' in praising the true and living God (p. 15). Pasquarello believes the beauty of preaching can help pastors who struggle in churches where ministry is framed primarily as 'a mode of faithless, market-driven competition and soul-less ecclesial survival' (p. 14).

Pasquarello is persuasive in identifying God's beauty with his glory and in lamenting the marginalisation of divine beauty in much contemporary preaching. But sometimes the reader senses a tendency to decry the instructional component in preaching, and to look somewhat askance at substitutionary atonement. And the typological treatment of Jesus' anointing in Mark 14 may be over-stretched. Further, while doxological preaching would, no doubt, contribute towards much needed healing of ecclesial and theological fragmentation – as Pasquarello contends – serious theological study and dialogue are also required. However, such qualifications do not negate the usefulness of Paraquarello's book as a rich resource on the oft neglected theme of divine beauty.

All readers who preach will strike homiletical gold within its pages. There are many *nuggets* to be found here!

Fergus Macdonald, Edinburgh

Grace and Freedom: William Perkins and the Early Modern Reformed Understanding of Free Choice and Divine Grace. By Richard Muller. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020. xii + 230pp. ISBN 978 0 19 751746 8, 751748 2, and 751749 9. Hardback £47.99.

This erudite monograph is the latest from Richard Muller, the reigning godfather of early modern (Reformed) historical theology. Thematically, the volume extends his prior study of grace and free will, *Divine Will and Human Choice* (Baker, 2017), doing so with particular focus on William Perkins of Cambridge (1558–1602). This choice adds to the current rehabilitation of Perkins's legacy, catalyzed by W.B. Patterson's *William Perkins and the Making of a Protestant England* (OUP, 2014) as well as the recent reprinting of the Perkinsian corpus (in 10 volumes) by Reformation Heritage Books.

The project is comprised of seven dense chapters which do not lend themselves to short-form synopsis. Several of their key activities, however, deserve mention. First, there is the way Muller nicely situates Perkins in his context. In this vein, he astutely illumines the way in which Perkins's ideas were responsive to Catholic-Protestant debates. And he also provides a timely clarification on Perkins's relationship to the Puritan movement of the late-Tudor England. Like Patterson, Muller maintains that Perkins 'was not an Elizabethan Puritan,' even though his thought had 'a major impact…on later Puritan piety and doctrine' (p. 14). Additionally, the volume perceptively pinpoints the various and sometimes subtle influences on Perkins's thought. Some such sources are unsurprising (e.g., Augustine, Ursinus, Zanchi, etc); others may cause eyebrows to raise, such as Perkins's appropriation of the theory of *praemotio physica* from the Dominican theologians Dominico Bañez and Francisco Zumel.

At the centre of the project is Muller's (very) careful exposition of Perkins's thought on grace and free will and the way they relate. To a large extent, this explication centres on Perkins's 1601 *Treatise on Gods Free Grace and Mans Free Will*, though this is hardly the only place in his oeuvre where the topic is engaged (Muller helpfully catalogues Perkins's other ruminations on this subject in pp. 25–42). In probing Perkins's perspective, Muller provides a clear presentation of his definition of the will (i.e., a faculty or ability for choosing or rejecting) and considers how this squares with the more voluntarist or more intellectualist conceptions of willing which were extant in late medieval/early modern anthropology. He also highlights the Augustinian hue of Perkins's doctrine; following Augustine, Perkins contemplates of the will's freedom with reference to the four-fold (theological) state of humanity, that is, humanity before the fall, after the fall, after regeneration, and within the glorified state. The implications of each state for the functioning of the will are charted and evaluated over the duration of chapters 4–6.

Among other notable lessons deriving from this study two are particularly important. First, as Muller underscores in his conclusion, Perkins's defends a 'fundamental liberty of nature' (p. 186). In other words, his efforts to reconcile grace and free will within the economy of salvation – even while clearly assigning the priority to the former – neither lead to nor countenance a fatalistic, deterministic ethos (pp. 172–181, 187–188). Second, and relatedly, this means that Perkins's conception, as Muller notes right from the start, disrupts the compatibilist–libertarian dichotomy typifying much post-Enlightenment rumination on grace and free will (pp. 3-5, 186–188). What Perkins proffers is another alternative, in which the divine determination of a regenerate will in no way 'removes

the basic liberties of contradiction and contrariety, the will's capabilities of electing and rejecting its objects' (p. 164).

The virtues of this project are many. For example, it leaves readers with an understanding not merely of Perkins's views but also of wider Reformed thought on the will's freedom. It also offers a clarion reminder that even while Perkins's theology is markedly experiential and devotional (hence his being dubbed a 'father of pietism' by Heinrich Heppe), it is also properly scholastic. Further, and especially appreciated by this reviewer, there is Muller's remarkable capacity for parsing and explaining the finer points of Perkins's scholastic deliberations. In this arena, high points include Muller's commentary on Perkins's ideas about God's sovereignty and the advent of sin (pp. 99–108), the nature of cooperation in the context of salvation (pp. 126–135), and the ways in which God governs the human will (pp. 167–172).

At the same time, it is precisely such fine-tuned commentary which will, I suspect, limit this book's accessibility. Indeed, Muller's exacting exposition can prove quite tedious at times, all the more so for those with limited background knowledge. For this reason, I disagree with another reviewer's suggestion that the volume stands to be a helpful resource for pastors who would teach on its subject matter. To the contrary, this is a work foremostly for specialists; even for advanced graduate students, it will demand much effort. Notwithstanding, the ideas it illuminates would be of great benefit to a wider audience, certainly those who are perplexed or existentially burdened by the interface between God's grace and the human will. Accordingly I hope that someone may consider transposing its key systematic themes into a more congenial form for engagement by pastors and educated laypersons. I must confess that attempting just such an undertaking has crossed my mind.

Revd Dr Roger L. Revell, University of Oxford