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EDITORIAL

## THE CHURCH AND ISRAEL

GEOFFREY W. GROGAN

BIBLE TRAINING INSTITUTE, GLASGOW

The Jews and Israel have had a most important place in the story of the twentieth century. When the century opened, Zionism, forged through the pogroms and the Dreyfus case, was still new. 1917 brought the Balfour Declaration. The thirties and forties witnessed the Nazi persecution and the horrors of the gas chambers. In 1948 the British mandate ended and the State of Israel was born, not without much travail. Since then we have seen a constant state of war between Israel and her neighbours (modified only in part by the Sadat-Begin accord), with a series of short, sharp conflicts, and such events as the Munich Olympic killings, Entebbe and the Ethiopia airlift.

What does all this mean for the Christian Church? Not surprisingly these events have stirred much interest in Church circles. Christians have pondered and discussed the significance of Zionism, the return to the Holy Land, the recapture of the Old City of Jerusalem, and the establishment of the 'Christian Embassy' in the city. More and more Christians have visited Israel and some now make an annual pilgrimage at the time of the Feast of Tabernacles.

In 1982 the Handsel Press published *The Witness of the Jews to God* which was edited by David Torrance. This volume brought together a varied group of thirteen writers. As David Lyon says in his foreword, 'there is disagreement among the writers at many points, not least where questions relating to the Land arise', but 'the writers all share the conviction that the Jewish people have a decisive place in God's creative and redemptive purpose for his world, that the fact that Jesus was a Jew is a central matter for faith, and that it is decisive for effective witness to the Kingdom that the Christian Church draw near to the Jews in humble and thoughtful dialogue'.

The following year Colin Chapman's volume, *Whose Promised Land?*, gave a conspectus of attitudes towards Israel through quotations from a wide variety of sources, dealt with the theological issue of the relationship between Israel and the Church, and set out some hermeneutical principles. In this book he expressed unease about the philosophy of Zionism and argued that largely uncritical Christian support for Israel is usually buttressed by a handling of the Old Testament Scriptures which does less than justice to the hermeneutical principles

the New Testament teaches us. He encouraged the reader to consider not only the sufferings of the Jews but also those of the Palestinian refugees.

Now the Handsel Press has published a series of four booklets under the general title *Church and Israel*. Clearly these are intended for the general Christian reader. The editor, Jock Stein, says of the series that it is 'sustained by the double conviction that (a) God has a great and continuing purpose for the Jewish people, and (b) that the Christian Church is (in New Testament language) grafted into Israel'.

The first of these is *The Mission of Christians and Jews* by David Torrance. He argues that God's covenant with Israel has been fulfilled in Christ but not in such a way as to be superseded. God still speaks to the Church today through Israel about his sovereign purposes in history and about his judgement and mercy. Christians should share Paul's deep longing for the Jews to come to Christ, but, because 'we belong to the same family', because of 'the long and sad history of Christian anti-semitism', and because of the impact the holocaust has had on the Jews, we must approach them sensitively in a spirit of deep repentance and humility.

*Anti-Semitism and Christian Responsibility* is by David Torrance and Alastair Lamont, and the contribution of each writer is clearly identified. David Torrance maintains that anti-semitism is not just antagonism to people who are different but has a distinctive quality because the Jews 'represent all the other peoples and nations before God' and, because of his peculiar identification with them, they represent God to the world. 'Anti-semitism is a rejection of God and his electing grace.' His appendix explores the causes of anti-semitism from this general perspective. Alastair Lamont emphasises the roots of the Christian faith and of the Church. He traces the deepening division between the Synagogue and the Church in the early Christian centuries and the various types of anti-semitism, from the 'dismissive form' in which the Jews are relegated to 'the dustbin of history', to ways in which the church itself prepared the way for the holocaust. He attacks the idea that the Church is the New Israel, replacing the Jews as God's people, and deals with alleged anti-semitism in the New Testament.

James Walker has written *Israel - Covenant and Land*. He relates God's covenant with Israel to his covenant with mankind and all creation. 'Israel is ... the focal, pivotal point wherein the covenant of God with all creation can most clearly be seen.' He sees the promise of the land to them as very important. 'Circumcision and the ceremonial law are both signs of the covenant, whereas the land is subsumed into and embraced within the covenant.' The Jews will come to faith within the land. They need to take seriously the Old Testament teaching about car-

ing for the stranger within the gates. Keeping faith with Israel does not necessarily mean approval of all she does.

Howard Taylor's *World Hope in the Middle East* is much the longest of the four booklets. Readers of this journal will recall his stimulating article 'The Continuity of the People of God in Old and New Testaments' in the Autumn 1985 number. God's redeeming purpose 'is to restore man and nature to their original position of reflected glory'. All are equally precious to God, but he chose Israel for a destiny of 'suffering that bears witness to the cross of Jesus.' God even used their disobedience to reveal himself more fully to them in his justice and mercy, in a revelation culminating in the death and resurrection of Jesus which fulfils Israel's destiny as set out in the Old Testament. This does not mean that there is no longer a unique place for Israel in God's plan. The death of Jesus is the sign of Israel's scattering but his resurrection means that one day she will be revived and restored. The Church should not therefore claim to have replaced Israel as God's chosen people. He says, 'We must prayerfully look forward to the time when a truly renewed Christian Church is united in Christ with the descendants of Abraham - a blessing to all the earth.'

What about the Land? The return of Israel to the Land is 'a foretaste of the New Creation when again the whole of nature will be released from its bondage to decay.' What about the Palestinian Arabs? 'We should not regard Arabs as merely Gentiles. Their destiny is unique too.' Islam, however, 'is a rejection of the electing grace of God' in its rejection of Isaac and Israel. 'Although Israel like other nations has not always acted fairly - or justly - so that many Palestinian Arabs do have genuine grievances, still their record is a good one by any standards, especially compared with other middle eastern nations.'

Howard Taylor identifies the sin of the Church as refusal to see its root in Israel, that of the Jews as misinterpreting God's election of grace as favouritism, and that of the Arabs as the Islamic refusal to accept God's election of Isaac and Israel and the expression of this in a determination to destroy Israel.

These booklets and the other literature referred to, raise a host of important issues for evangelicals. Even at the *historical* level there is some disagreement. When *Whose Promised Land?* was published, Halver Ronning (in *Mishkan* 1, p.58) accused the author of 'omitting and misrepresenting historical facts', but as Colin Chapman pointed out in the next issue of the same journal, Ronning gave no examples. Clearly all who write on the subject must seek to give a fair and balanced presentation of the historical facts.

Then there are *ethico-political* questions. Do the Jews or the Arabs have the primary moral right to the Land? Now that the State of Israel is an established fact, what should be the attitude of Jews to Arabs within

it? In his booklet James Walker says 'great suffering has occurred in many a Palestinian and Arab home through Jewish violence, in many a Jewish home through acts of Arab violence, all of which are an affront to the living God who is God of the whole world'. Whatever the facts, this attitude is surely right.

Important *exegetical* questions have to be faced. Romans 11 is clearly crucial for the whole debate. It concludes the most massive piece of sustained theological reasoning the Bible contains. All the booklets make reference to it. Does 'all Israel' in Romans 11:25 mean 'all the elect both Jew and Gentile' (Calvin) or 'the nation of Israel as a whole', an interpretation held among others, by Barth whose discussions of Romans 9-11 (especially in the *Church Dogmatics*) have influenced several of the booklet authors, and Cranfield, who is also one of the contributors to *The Witness of the Jews to God*? At some points there is insufficient biblical material in the booklets, although this is not the case in Howard Taylor's work. For example, David Torrance says, 'nowhere does scripture say or imply that in Christ and in the giving of the New Covenant, the Old Covenant is set aside and of no further use in the economy of God'. It would have been good to see at this point some comment on passages like II Corinthians 3 and Hebrews 8 which might be thought to teach the opposite. There are quite a number of points in the booklets that really need biblical documentation for the sake of the reader. Moreover Alastair Lamont's comment on John 8:39-44 is quite unacceptable: 'this is one Jew arguing with other Jews and, in the heat of argument, using the language of the hyperbole'. This exegesis pays much too high a price in terms of theology and reverence.

So we move on to *theological* questions. The relationship between Israel and the Church is perhaps the most important and far-reaching issue for eschatology. All other eschatological questions are deeply affected by the answer given to it. Does the Church replace Israel as the people of God? Are there two peoples? If so, then what are their different functions in the one purpose of God? What is the 'people of God' status of Hebrew Christians, who would appear to belong to both? The whole issue of the theology of the land, on which contributors to the *Witness of the Jews to God* took a variety of positions, is also tied in to the question of Israel and the Church.

The debt of some of the writers to Barth on more than the interpretation of Romans 9-11 is evident. For instance, the influence of the Swiss theologian's approach to double predestination is in James Walker's booklet (p.5), when he writes of Israel's election both for rejection and salvation, with both finally fulfilled in Jesus.

The subject has, of course, very considerable *practical* implications. How should Christians view the State of Israel? If they are to support it, should this be unqualified and without criticism of Israel? Some

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writers are suggesting today that a re-discovery of the Jewish roots of the Christian faith raises questions as to whether the festivals of the Christian year should have replaced the Old Testament system of feasts or even if Christians should have moved their day of worship from the seventh to the first day of the week. What about the Christian approach to the Jews? Should this be in terms of dialogue or of evangelism? Must we wait until the Church as a whole has come to humble repentance for attitudes and acts of the past, or should Christians in a spirit of penitence and humility seek sensitively to preach the gospel to the Jewish people today?

These booklets and the other literature mentioned in this article present these challenging questions to us all. They all take us back to the most basic fact about the Bible, that is, that it consists of two Testaments. Indeed, almost all the major questions that divide evangelical Christians are related to the great *hermeneutical* issue of the relationship between the Old Testament and the New. Notable studies of this have come from evangelical sources, but we should be giving the subject a place of the highest priority in research. Meantime we should seek to learn from God through the insights of each other, and keep the situation in the Middle East in our prayers as well as our studies.

# HUGH ROSS MACKINTOSH: THEOLOGIAN OF THE CROSS<sup>1</sup>

THE VERY REVD  
PROFESSOR THOMAS F. TORRANCE

I first came to know Professor Mackintosh personally when in October 1934 I moved from the Faculty of Arts in the University of Edinburgh to the Faculty of Divinity, housed as it then was partly in Old College and partly in New College. I had already become familiar with some of Mackintosh's works during my studies in classics and philosophy, and was eager to sit at his feet in preparation for the holy ministry. In New College I was more than ever drawn to his deeply evangelical and missionary outlook in theology, and to his presentation of Christ and the gospel of salvation through the cross in ways that struck home so simply and directly to the conscience of sinners. Here was a theology that matched and promised to deepen that in which I had been brought up by my missionary parents. I was far from being disappointed. To study with H. R. Mackintosh was a spiritual and theological benediction, for he was above all a man of God, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. His exposition of biblical and evangelical truth in the classical tradition of the great patristic theologians and of the Reformers was as lucid as it was profound, but it was always acutely relevant, for the central thrust of the Christian message was brought to bear trenchantly and illuminatingly upon the great movements of thought that agitated the modern world. We were made to see everything in the light of the revelation of God's infinite love and grace in Jesus Christ and of the world mission of the gospel. How frequently he used to refer to 'a vast and commanding sense of the Grace of the Eternal'!

I shall never forget the teaching of Professor Mackintosh in the academic session of 1935-36 during the course on Christian Dogmatics which he gave New College students in their second year. It was a basal course which covered all the main doctrines of the faith. The central bulk of it had to do with Christology and soteriology, but the nerve of it all was the forgiveness of sins provided directly by God in Jesus Christ at infinite cost to himself. It is at this point, Mackintosh felt, that everything becomes crucial, for that is where the real nature of the Triune God becomes disclosed to us as through the reconciling sacrifice of the Son and in one Spirit we are given access to the Father and come

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1. This article is also due to appear in a commemorative volume *H. R. Mackintosh: 1870-1936*, edited by the Revd Robert R. Redman, Jr.

to apprehend him in accordance with what he is in himself, even though what he is in his Triune Being infinitely transcends our comprehension.

During the previous academic session, 1934-35, Mackintosh's lectures had made an unusually disturbing and profound impact, and we became aware in the College that a theological revolution was in process, clearly evident in the excitement and transformation of our seniors. This must undoubtedly be linked with the impact upon New College of the first half-volume of Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics, The Doctrine of the Word of God*, which had just been translated by G. T. Thomson and published in Edinburgh by T. & T. Clark. This had the effect of reinforcing the strong biblical and incarnational emphasis of H. R. Mackintosh in which he had anticipated Barth's reaction to the liberal teaching of Ritschl and Schleiermacher. No one could accuse Mackintosh of not giving careful attention to Ritschl and Schleiermacher, for along with A. B. Macaulay and J. S. Stewart he had been responsible for making their greatest works available in English, so that the welcome he gave to Barth's *Dogmatics* was something that could not be ignored. It was he above all who encouraged us to study the theology of Barth, for criticise it as we might, it was nonetheless 'the Christian thinking of a great Christian mind . . . of incalculable import for the Church of our time'.

It soon became clear that through this alliance of the Christian dogmatics of H. R. Mackintosh with the Church dogmatics of Karl Barth something of great importance had begun to take place among us - the essential status of evangelical dogmatics as the pure science of theology was being rehabilitated at a level that the Church in Scotland had not witnessed since the end of the First World War. As Mackintosh used to teach us, dogmatics is not the systematic study of the sanctioned dogmas of the Church, but the elucidation of the full content of revelation, of the Word of God as contained in Scripture, and as such is concerned with the intrinsic and permanent truth which Church doctrine in every age is meant to express. It is 'systematic' only in the sense that every part of Christian truth is vitally connected with every other part. No doctrine can be admitted which does not bring to expression some aspect of the redemption that is in Christ. Thus for Mackintosh as for Barth it is in Christ alone that the truth of dogmatics finds its organic unity. There is no knowledge of Christ apart from his truth and no knowledge of his truth apart from Christ, for he himself is the co-efficient of his doctrine. Thus seriously to study Christian dogmatics was from beginning to end an empirical encounter and a personal engagement with the tangible reality of Jesus Christ. Properly pursued in this way dogmatic theology becomes 'the conscience of the Church'.

It was Mackintosh's habit to give out to his students at the beginning of each class one or two sheets in which he presented in succinct

paragraphs the contents of the lecture he was about to give. These were doubtless revised from time to time, but in the lectures of 1935-36 he was often very unhappy with what he gave us. He would ask us to strike out certain paragraphs and put a question mark to others - I think particularly here of his lectures on the nature, origin and diffusion of sin. Some days he would come into the lecture room clearly troubled as though still wrestling in his mind and soul with the truth which he sought to express, but on other days he would come mastered by profound serenity of spirit which was almost awesome as we were ushered through his teaching into the presence of God. The lectures he gave us were often a form of what St Paul called *logike latreia*, 'rational worship'. And they were always evangelical and redemptive in their import. Many a would-be theological student was converted in his classes, although some, as I well remember, used to get very angry for they found themselves questioned down to the bottom of their being. Mackintosh was immensely modest and never arrogant, but he left no room for compromise in the way his lectures drew us out under the searching light of the holy love of God incarnate in Christ. Mackintosh himself was so consumed with the moral passion of the Father revealed in the death of Jesus on the cross, that in his lecture-room we often felt we were in a sanctuary where the holiness and nearness of God were indistinguishable.

When Professor Mackintosh died in June that year (1936), I was devastated. I had been wandering about the Middle East so that news of his death took some time to reach me. He and his teaching meant so much to me that suddenly New College seemed quite empty. As I asked myself what I had learned from him my thoughts kept returning to the unconditional grace of God freely poured out upon us in Jesus Christ his incarnate Son, at infinite cost to himself. *The Doctrine of the Person of Jesus Christ* and *The Christian Experience of Forgiveness*, his two major works, undoubtedly enshrine the main substance of his incarnational theology which he consistently presented from a soteriological perspective. The primary emphasis was on the supreme truth that it is none other than God himself who has come among us in Jesus Christ, and who in the crucifixion of his incarnate Son has taken the whole burden of our sin and guilt directly upon himself - all in such a way that the passionate holy love of God the Father enacts both the judgement of sin and the forgiveness of the sinner.

As a young man Mackintosh had studied in Marburg where he became greatly indebted and attached to Wilhelm Herrmann, and where he laid the foundation for his unparalleled knowledge of German Lutheran and Reformed theology, not least of Ritschl and Schleiermacher and their illustrious disciples. He was drawn to the Christ-centred emphasis on experience which he found in Schleiermacher, for it rang bells in his

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own Highland evangelical religion; and he was drawn to the moral emphasis of Ritschl, for it rang bells in his own moral passion derived from his Scottish Calvinism. Right from the start, however, Mackintosh felt compelled to operate primarily with ontological, rather than with psychological or ethical categories, in his understanding of Jesus Christ, for the very essence of divine revelation and the very substance of the gospel of salvation were at stake. Thus we find his insisting again and again that if the revelation of God in the New Testament is true, Jesus Christ must be in himself what he reveals; and if the New Testament message of salvation is true, what Jesus Christ does for us must be what God himself does. Christians are bound to place Christ either within the sphere of the Divine or without. Either he is one with the Father or he somehow is different and unlike. Apart from a real identity or unity between the revealer and revealed, revelation suffers from a fatal discrepancy, and apart from a real incarnation Christianity suffers from a blank which nothing else can fill. Hence with reference to Matthew 11:27 or Luke 10:22 or John 5:27, like Athanasius and the Nicene theologians, Mackintosh laid constant emphasis upon the unique, incomparable and unshared connection in knowing and being and act between the Son and the Father. As he used to express it in his lectures: 'When I look into the face of Jesus Christ and see the face of God, I know that I have not seen that face elsewhere and could not see it elsewhere, for he and the Father are one.' It was thus that his appropriation of the Nicene *homoousion* constituted the corner-stone of H. R. Mackintosh's Christology and soteriology. Judged from that standpoint he found the concepts of divine revelation in the theologies of Schleiermacher and Ritschl to be very weak and inadequate, and their conceptions of the gospel to be evangelically and soteriologically seriously deficient.

Mackintosh never shrank from the ontological implications of this high Christology. Thus in an early work of 1912, *The Person of Jesus Christ*, he argued that if Jesus is God incarnate, then we must think of him consistently and strictly in accordance with 'the constitution of his being'. We are bound to think of him, therefore, as constituting 'the hinge and pivot of the universe, the Person on whom everything turned in the relation of God to man'. In fact the last foundations of being were in him. That is how Mackintosh interpreted the Messianic role ascribed to Jesus. 'All creation in heaven and on earth, all the divine ways of history, all time and eternity - they meet and converge in this one transcendent Figure.'

Moreover, if Jesus Christ is on the divine side of reality, then we really have no option but to think about him with all our might and with the best intellectual instruments at our command. 'Reason - which is more than logic - insists on coming into our faith.' Thus Mackintosh

would have nothing to do with the Ritschlian conception of faith as an attitude of mind entirely independent of reason. On the contrary, we are obliged before God to use our reason in thinking out to the end the absolute and final issues constituted by Jesus. 'If we regard him as Saviour, we must see him at the centre of all things. We must behold him as the pivotal and cardinal reality, round which all life and history have moved.' That is a place, Mackintosh went on to argue, out of which his Person simply cannot be kept.

We dare not permanently live in two mental worlds, dividing the mind hopelessly against itself. We cannot indulge one day the believing view of things, for which Christ is all and in all, and the next a view of philosophy or science for which he is little or nothing or in any case ranks as quite subordinate and negligible. After all we have but one mind, which is at work both in our religion and our science; and if Christ is veritably supreme *for faith*, he is of necessity supreme altogether and everywhere. It becomes increasingly impossible to revert to a scientific or philosophical attitude in which the insight into his central greatness which we attain in moments of religious vision is resolutely and relentlessly suppressed. At every point we must be true to experience, and the deepest experience we have is our experience as believing men. Hence, if the thought of Christ we have reached is valid, it must be carried consistently up to the top and summit of being, as something which is true with a truth that will stand the closest scrutiny and verification of sympathetic minds.

It was precisely on these Christological grounds, and because of the unity of redemption and creation and of faith and reason which they implied, that Mackintosh strenuously rejected the rigid dualism that had been injected into Western thought through the rationalism and determinism of Enlightenment science and philosophy. Thus he constantly objected to the tendency in modern thought, found even in Christian forms, to cut the universe in two halves, one physical and the other spiritual; and thereafter to argue that a mechanically constituted system of laws rules in the first half, but not in the second. Here the notion of a closed mechanistic universe had been allowed to interpose itself between man and God with a deistic and secularising effect. It shut off the world of matter from God, and caged human beings within the prison of inexorable 'laws of nature', thus suffocating thoughts of prayer and miracle and the free interaction of God and mankind.

For Mackintosh such a closed deterministic conception of the universe conflicted sharply with the nature of God the Father revealed in the incarnation of his Son, and our understanding of the omnipotence,

providential ubiquity, accessibility, and freedom of God to protect and save his children. Thus, along with his colleague Professor Daniel Lamont, who in earlier life had been an assistant to Lord Kelvin, Mackintosh welcomed the concept of a time-dependent universe, advocated scientifically by Einstein and philosophically by Bergson, which through its inherent properties was open to the future and not closed. Yet it was not on scientific or philosophical grounds that Mackintosh himself took his stand, so much as on the irrefragable conviction that a mechanistic explanation of the universe conflicted sharply with the essential nature of God the Creator and Redeemer revealed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. But it did mean for Mackintosh that an obligation is laid upon the believer to think out to the very end the bearing of the Father's immeasurable love upon the whole universe of visible and invisible reality, in which it would be quite inadmissible to hold theological, scientific and philosophical conceptualities completely apart from each other.

Now if faith places Christ on the divine side of reality, as perfectly of one being with God, how are we to understand the incarnation and the cross? It was in connection with that question that kenotic theory had been brought into prominence in attempts to harmonise the deity of Christ with his life and work within the limitations of human existence and suffering in space and time. Mackintosh, however, while giving the kenotic conception sympathetic consideration, would have nothing to do with any metaphysical speculation about an emptying of divine attributes in the incarnation, for God could not be thought of as emptying anything out of his own essential being as God. *Kenosis* was rather to be understood as the self-emptying of God himself into our frail contingent existence but our estranged condition under the condemnation of his eternal truth and righteousness. That is to say, *kenosis* has to be understood as the utterly astonishing and incomprehensible act of God's self-humiliation and self-abnegating love in which he freely made himself one with us in our actual existence in order to share the shame of our sin and guilt and through atoning sacrifice to effect our salvation. For Mackintosh, then, the concept of *kenosis*, religiously and soteriologically understood, was not to be taken as an explanation of 'how' the incarnation took place, but as the almighty act of God in surrendering himself to humiliation and death in order to forgive our sins - it was a revelation of the inexhaustible power of God's love. It was in fact another way of expressing the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ who for our sakes became poor that we through his poverty might become rich. Jesus Christ is God with us, Immanuel, who coming out of the very being and bosom of God, and coming at such infinite cost, constitutes in himself the message that 'God loves us better than he loves himself'!

Mackintosh could never refer to the cross of Christ without an instinctive feeling of awe and wonder at the forgiveness of sins effected in it by the incredible act of God's atoning self-sacrifice. He had no hesitation in speaking of the death of Christ as the central fact in the whole history of God's relations with the world, for in it God interposed *himself* in the utterly impossible predicament of his alienated children in order to break the power of sin and guilt and redeem mankind from its tyranny. The forgiveness of sins was for Mackintosh the greatest of all miracles, the wonder of wonders. It was the supreme instance of God's omnipotent Love. What he found so breath-taking in the forgiveness of sins was the conjunction of the infinite holiness and the infinite love of God manifested in it. Divine forgiveness carries in its heart the complete exposure, rejection and condemnation of sin through the self-maintaining reaction of God's very nature as God, and yet it is the utterly inexplicable act in which God in his unfathomable love has taken that fearful judgement of our sin upon himself and paid the price of our redemption. In the forgiveness of sins enacted in the crucifixion of Jesus the holiness and nearness of God, the judgement and love of God, are inextricably woven together. 'The passion of God is there.' Hence it is made clear that 'none can pardon sin, ultimately, save he who expiates it, and through whose experience of pain the costly gift is mediated. Thus the Cross which detects the sin reveals also the unspeakable love of God.'

It was characteristic of Mackintosh's personal appreciation of the staggering truth of divine forgiveness, not just as a gracious declaration of pardon, but as a mighty act of God, that he should have entitled his book about it *The Christian Experience of Forgiveness*. The Gospels tell us that even before his death and resurrection it was the supreme prerogative of Jesus to impart forgiveness, to put it right into the heart of men and women in such a way that it became 'an experimental truth' in their lives. Thus Mackintosh could say of Christ: 'He saved men by his filial life even before he saved them by the self-sacrifice of his death.' How much more with the fulfilment of his redemptive mission! The incarnate presence and activity of God himself in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, is not just the greatest fact of all history but remains throughout all history as the supreme empirical event confronting and challenging human beings through the gospel. Jesus Christ risen from the dead, with the virtue of his atoning death in him for ever, and therefore embodying the forgiveness of sins, continually steps out of the pages of history, a tremendous and exacting reality, creatively evoking from human beings an evangelical experience of forgiveness that answers to the very experience of God himself in mediating it through the sacrifice of Calvary. It was thus that Mackintosh could speak so vividly of the 'experienced', 'felt' or 'tangible' reality of Christ as Lord and Saviour, and could not but interpret everything in the New Testa-

ment gospel in accordance with the commanding impact of that reality upon his mind and heart.

The Christian experience of forgiveness, however, is not simply the experience of an external relation to the cross to be interpreted in moral terms. In line with his rejection of Ritschlian moral categories for ontological categories in his understanding of the Person of Christ, Mackintosh held, with Calvin, that we partake of all his saving benefits only as we are united to him. Thus, in contrast to his colleague James Denney in Glasgow who interpreted St Paul's doctrine of union with Christ only in moral or judicial terms, Mackintosh operated with a conception of a spiritual and personal union with Christ that goes far beyond anything that human beings can experience with one another, for it involves a relation of mutual indwelling and spiritual coalescence between Christ and his people. Mackintosh was undoubtedly influenced here by his old teacher, Wilhelm Herrmann, whose book *Communion with God* he urged all his students to study closely. Herrmann taught that the Christian lives through sharing in 'the inner life of Jesus' in which he finds his own life becoming spiritually subdued in conformity to the historic life of Jesus. However, Mackintosh differed radically from Herrmann in the latter's exclusion of the resurrection from 'the historic Jesus', which meant that Herrmann's notion of union with Christ could be interpreted finally as little more than a sharing in the spiritual convictions of Jesus. For Mackintosh, on the other hand, the resurrection must be included in the entire empirical fact of Christ, so that to share in the inner life of Jesus means to be united to him in the wholeness of his incarnate reality as the crucified and risen Son of God. This must include, in some real measure, an intimate assimilation into that inner life through sharing in the power of Christ's resurrection, and with constant reference to his self-consciousness as reflected in the Gospels and the impression it made upon the first Christians.

Mackintosh's soteriological restatement of the *unio mystica* as an empirical truth derived not a little support from the teaching of John McLeod Campbell, with whom also he shared an approach to the understanding of Christ and the atonement in terms of the *inner* relations between the incarnate Son and the Father, and therefore of the direct action of God upon sinful humanity. Although he was somewhat critical of McLeod Campbell's notion of 'vicarious penitence', Mackintosh agreed with him in refusing to separate the incarnation from the atonement, and thus in declining to offer a doctrine of atonement in terms of a merely *external* moral or judicial transaction between God and sinners, as though Christ's righteousness and our guilt were both externally transferable. Far from rejecting the forensic element in the atoning and propitiatory work of Christ, however, he interpreted it as falling within the inner being of Jesus in terms of his active as well as his pas-

sive obedience under the judgement of divine holiness and love. The rendering of atonement is to be understood, then, in terms of the inward experience of the incarnate Son in a profound union with sinners in the actualities of their alienated existence and fearful perdition - 'My God, my God why hast thou forsaken me?' - whereby he took completely upon himself shame and responsibility for their sin and guilt in acceptance of the righteous judgement of the Father, but all in unbroken union with the Father and in perfect identity in will and mind with his condemnation of sin. Thus in his atoning life and death Jesus Christ realised directly in his own profound experience as the obedient Son the unspeakable pain and infinitely costly experience of the Father in the mediation and actualisation of forgiveness. The ultimate stress in Mackintosh's doctrine of atonement was definitely upon the immediate act of God in the vicarious passion of Christ, and thus upon the inseparable and inherent relation between the judgement and love of God. Of absolutely essential and crucial significance, therefore, was the link between the atonement and the divinity of Christ, apart from which the cross of Christ could not be understood as the final revelation of divine love or as the ultimate disclosure given to mankind of the inner nature of God the Father Almighty, who not only made all things visible and invisible but whose providence unceasingly overrules and directs the whole course of events in the universe.

In his doctrine of atonement Mackintosh was also clearly influenced by the ontological understanding of it offered by the great Greek Fathers, evident in their soteriological principle that 'the unassumed is the unhealed', to which he frequently referred. That is to say, the incarnation itself, and indeed the whole incarnate life of the Son of God, as Calvin also taught, must be regarded as a redemptive and saving event reaching its great climax in the crucifixion and resurrection, in which God in Jesus Christ penetrated into the dark depths of our fallen and enslaved humanity in order to break the hold of sin and guilt entrenched within us by atoning expiation, and to redeem us by the power of his endless life in his resurrection from the grave. The fruit of that atoning emancipation is the forgiveness of sins, but precisely because of the oneness of the incarnation and the atonement, and of the person and the work of Christ, divine forgiveness is for ever embodied in the Person of the crucified and risen Jesus and becomes empirically ours in a profound union with him effected in us through faith by the indwelling Spirit of God.

At an earlier point reference was made to the awesome fact, constantly pointed out by Mackintosh, that in the very heart of the divine act of forgiveness there is a profound conjunction of the utter holiness and the infinite love of God. The unconditional self-giving of God in love to the sinner in the sacrificial death of Jesus carried intrinsically

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with it the absolute rejection by that love of the inconceivable wickedness for which Jesus came to make atoning expiation on the cross. It is there in the cross that the gravity of sin is revealed. Thus it may be said on the one hand that God's inexorable opposition to sin is exhibited as much in forgiveness as in judgement, and on the other hand that God's holiness has a redemptive as well as a condemnatory aspect, and indeed that his judgement is finally a manifestation and instrument of his grace. 'Grace means that in his loving self-bestowal his severity is absorbed, yet does not disappear. It is a stringent love, and by being less stringent God would become not more loving but less Divine.' It was in this light that Mackintosh taught us to think of the wrath of God as the obverse of the moral passion of his love when he stooped down to suffer in behalf of men and bring them forgiveness at unspeakable cost to himself; and it was always on this ground that he exposed the moral superficiality and soteriological deficiency of any attempt to eliminate the notion of wrath from the doctrine of God. 'In sober truth, it is only the man who knows what grace is that can tell what wrath and judgement are.' He used to tell us that he never forgot that day in Marburg when he heard Herrmann say that Ritschl's attempt to expel the conception of God's wrath against sin from theology was itself a great sin against the Christian mind. I imagine also that it was for this reason that the very first essay he asked us to write for him was one on the wrath of God.

Let me now refer back again to those lectures which Professor Mackintosh gave us in the Spring of 1936, in which his thought was so clearly engaged in a process of transition. What was actually going on in his mind? I think I began to understand at least a little of what was involved when in the following year I read and reread his last book *Types of Modern Theology*, which was, so to speak, his last will and testament to us. In it we were given in an expanded form his Croall lectures which he had first delivered in 1933, but which he had been revising each year as he read them again to his senior class. They were prepared for publication by his close friend Professor A. B. Macaulay, who tells us that all but the last thirteen pages had been given their final revision by Mackintosh before his death on June 8, 1936. Macaulay, who had recently retired from Trinity College in Glasgow, had been lecturing in New College in place of Professor Daniel Lamont during the latter's absence on Moderatorial duties in the Kirk. When Mackintosh died, Macaulay, who was not so sympathetic to Barth as Mackintosh, took over his classes until Professor G. T. Thomson joined us from Aberdeen.

*Types of Modern Theology* is a profound and brilliant work revealing a remarkable mastery of the history of modern thought. In it Mackintosh offered a penetrating analysis of the dominant theologies of

the nineteenth and twentieth centuries associated with Schleiermacher, Hegel, Ritschl, Troeltsch, Kierkegaard and Barth. Again and again he found the gospel itself to have been precariously in balance as people of admittedly great intellectual stature sought to interpret it within prevailing cultural patterns of thought alien to it and the biblical thought-forms in which it has been mediated to us. Along with his shrewd epistemological questions, he put to them the searching questions with which he was wont to test every theology: How far is it rooted in God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ? Can it be preached to sinful people in need of forgiveness? How effective will it be in the mission field? 'The message that does not evangelise, the Christianity that does not convert, abroad or at home, cannot be true.'

Mackintosh did not evade the great philosophical or critical issues with which these continental theologies had wrestled in seeking to commend Christianity to modern culture, for he handled them with a generous sympathy and respect, but he was as relentless as he was rigorous in assessing the justice they did to the absoluteness of the divine initiative in revelation and the uniqueness of God's identification with mankind in the incarnation. The judgements he passed upon their evangelical and soteriological inadequacy were judgements, he felt, which could not but be passed by a mind that has submitted trustfully to divine revelation in Jesus Christ. Soren Kierkegaard and especially Karl Barth, to whom Mackintosh devoted a third of the book, clearly measured up best to his theological scrutiny. His trenchant handling of their thought was not without sharp criticism - this was particularly the case with Kierkegaard, though not always, I think, with sufficient understanding of his real intention - but his warm appreciation of the fundamental change in theological outlook to which they contributed so powerfully showed the direction in which Mackintosh's own thought was moving.

It was, I believe, in the course of revising *Types of Modern Theology* and particularly in coming to terms with Karl Barth's theology of the Word of God, that Mackintosh was forced to think through his own theological convictions in a more radical way than ever before. Thus he allowed his own judgements on nineteenth-century theology, especially on Schleiermacher and Ritschl, to reflect back upon himself, and at the same time he asked how far his own theological position stood up to the challenge of Karl Barth in his criticism, exaggerated though it sometimes appeared to be, of the whole development of Protestant thought since the Reformation in allowing the preaching and teaching of the gospel to be compromised by humanism and secularism. Mackintosh's own commitment to a thoroughly biblical, evangelical and Christocentric stance in preaching and teaching alike made him appreciative of but also sensitive to Barth's penetrating exposure of the hidden and subtle

ways in which even a Christocentric approach can be betrayed from below.

Three aspects of Mackintosh's own thought, as I think he came to realise, were open, at least in some measure, to Barth's critique. Let me hasten to add, however, that they were all aspects in which Mackintosh had clearly anticipated Barth: in his stress upon the divine initiative, his biblical understanding of sin, and his conception of the uniqueness of divine revelation.

According to Mackintosh it is a conspicuous feature of the Christian faith that in his grace God always takes the initiative with us and maintains that initiative in all his relations with us. However, he had been in the habit of linking this to an innate hunger or craving or need of man for God which he held to be 'a true point of contact for the gospel of Jesus Christ - a point of contact not created by man but kept in being by God'. Although he claimed that Christian faith does nothing so silly as to turn these human cravings into an explanation of religion itself, he could nevertheless argue that to some extent we may tell what must in general be the character of the Reality that will adequately evoke and satisfy those cravings or needs. It was precisely to such a line of thought (the deadly *analogia entis!*) that Barth traced the subtle naturalism that had steadily corrupted and compromised the gospel in Germany - a point which Mackintosh must have taken to heart, if only through his own analysis of the religious notions of Hegel and Troeltsch, making him develop even further his own emphasis on the originality and absoluteness of Christianity and the danger of allowing our understanding of revelation and grace to be trapped in 'nature'.

Nowhere had Professor Mackintosh been more critical of himself than in respect of his lecture summaries on sin, to which I alluded earlier. As I look back upon these, what strikes me is that they were written with too much attention to the philosophical and moral and even evolutionary accounts of evil that come to prevail in Protestant theology since Kant. As such they did not match up to Mackintosh's profound understanding of the infinite moral passion of God in the atonement or to his account of the utter exposure and judgement of sin in the cross of Christ and its enactment of forgiveness. But that was, as far as I recall, the way in which Mackintosh lectured on the nature of sin in spite of what he had written beforehand. I can still hear him say, 'At Holy Communion I feel ashamed for my whole being, for my *good* as well as for my evil.' Kierkegaard's sharp distinction in *Fear and Trembling* and in *Training in Christianity* between an ethical and a religious (that is a distinctively Christian) view of sin had clearly struck home to Mackintosh and chimed in completely with his dominant soteriological perspective. Moreover, from Barth he learned to think again of the profound antagonism of sin that is deeply ingrained in the human

reason and which constantly assumed deceptive 'moral' and 'religious' forms. It was doubtless the radical nature of Barth's doctrine of justification that influenced Mackintosh here and threw him back more squarely onto his own understanding of the judgement of the unconditional grace of God upon the whole being of man.

In his analyses of modern thought Mackintosh charged it again and again with a weak sense of revelation, which he traced back to a dualist outlook deriving from Enlightenment rationalism in which God was shut off from all direct action in the empirical world. He used to point to a very different view of God held by D. S. Cairns of Aberdeen, who thought of the kingdom of God as providentially and triumphantly intervening even in the realm of nature which mechanistic science claimed as its own exclusive reserve. An 'unerring' criterion Mackintosh used to apply in this connection was the view a theologian had of 'petitionary prayer', but he also sought to determine how he reacted to the 'incomparable majesty of the Bible'. Thus he would ask whether a theologian's method was to proceed by introspection or self-understanding rather than by listening to the voice of God speaking in his Word. It is understandable, therefore, that Mackintosh was instinctively drawn to the supreme truth upon which all Barth's theology turned, that God himself is the content of his revelation, and therefore that the incarnational revelation of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit must be regarded as grounded in eternal ontological relations in the Godhead. *Ab initio* God is revealed as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This meant that what God is toward us in his Word he is inherently and eternally in himself, and thus that in the Word of God it is none other than God himself that he communicates to us. Not only is it the case that the eternal Word is the *prius* of revelation; in actual fact the Word of God is Jesus Christ, and it is he, the incarnate Word, who is mediated to us through the witness of the Holy Scriptures. The effect upon Mackintosh of this Trinitarian doctrine of the Word of God was to impart new ontological and objective depth and greater concreteness to his conception of divine revelation through the Bible, which is already evident not only in his concluding chapter on Karl Barth but throughout all his discussion in *Types of Modern Theology*.

There is one further point which I must mention in my recollection of H. R. Mackintosh, the profound interrelation he cultivated between preaching and teaching the gospel. This was particularly evident in his quite unforgettable 'sermon class' in which, through unsparing yet sympathetic criticism of the sermons we prepared, he instructed us how to let them arise out of a thorough exegesis of the Scripture and to work out for ourselves how we might best speak the Word of the gospel directly to the human heart. I think here particularly of the simple and direct messages he composed so effectively for distribution as evangeli-

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cal tracts in the *Monthly Visitor*. They were Mackintosh's counterpart to Barth's latter sermons to prisoners, but were evangelically directed to the 'alarmed conscience' of sinners in a rather more telling and personal way. He once published, through Drummond's Tract Depot in Stirling, a beautiful pamphlet entitled *The Heart of the Gospel and the Preacher*, which is all about the place that must be given to the atonement both as the central truth and as the permanent undertone of all preaching. 'Without preaching the Atonement we can never satisfy the conscience or heart of man.' 'Assured reconciliation was beyond hope until Jesus, bearing in Himself the very grace and life of God, numbered Himself with the transgressors and took our burdens as His own.' There in his own words we have expressed for us the essence of the faith of Hugh Ross Mackintosh, and the central nerve of all his theology.

# ISAAC WATTS AND ARTISTIC KENOSIS

## THE RATIONALE BEHIND THE WORK OF BRITAIN'S PIONEER HYMNWRITER

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To many people, Isaac Watts is remembered as the author of several famous Christian hymns. What few realise is that these well-known hymns were not written in a vacuum, but conceived in an era of deep controversy with regard to the praise of the Protestant churches. For Watts not only possessed the poetic ability to write meaningful hymns, but also the argumentative skills to present successfully the biblical case for their introduction into public worship, and he also had the good fortune to see the praise of the majority of the nation's churches transformed within his lifetime. However, as is the case during many such times of change, there remained denominational and geographical areas unaffected by the insights of the movement. So, two and a half centuries later, the words and convictions of Watts can perhaps be heard and applied once more, as we address the issues in a manner which is biblical, scholarly and expedient and adding several forgotten dimensions to the continuing debate.

### **The Concept of his Mission: Artistic Kenosis**

In the field of hymnography, no one held such a pioneering or chronologically decisive position as Watts. Before him attempts were tentative, and whatever may have moulded the development of later hymnographers, none of them can be said to be totally unaffected by his example, even if they did not imitate him stylistically. Born in Southampton in 1674, he was of Puritan stock and had the privilege of a non-conformist education in Newington Green Academy for dissenters. Widely read in Greek, Latin, French and the Classics, his Puritanism is evident from the strong scriptural base of much of his writings. He spent much time in meditation, revelling especially in the Psalms and also familiarising himself with the works of Milton, Bunyan and Baxter. Like Milton, his literary output included various contributions to the religious controversy of the period as well as poetic offerings, the main difference being that, whereas Milton was for much of his life prevent-

ed from completing his *magnum opus Paradise Lost* by endless disputes, Watts' hymnwritng was finished by the age of 45, leaving him the rest of his days to tackle the various theological debates.

It was a compelling desire to institute a reform in the worship of the church and the sacrifice of the personal satisfaction attainable from more secular poetry, which provided the key to Watts' purpose in writing. On every occasion he chose effective communication rather than originality, immediate application rather than the acclaim of posterity. It is, however, his preference for comprehensibility over poetic virtuosity which marks much of his output: 'I would neither indulge any bold metaphors, nor admit of hard words, nor tempt an ignorant worshipper to sing without his understanding.'<sup>1</sup> Always open to criticism, he was careful to omit from the second edition of *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* all those that did not have 'a general and extensive sense, and may be ... sung by most persons in a worshipping congregation.'<sup>2</sup> Perhaps he was over-careful in this respect and underestimated the aesthetic capacity of his readership, but nevertheless his stipulation that local congregations should feel free to substitute a phrase of their own 'where any unpleasing word is found'<sup>3</sup> is evidence of the depth of his desire not to 'exalt myself to the rank and glory of poets, but . . . to be a servant to the churches, and a helper to the joy of the meanest Christian'<sup>4</sup>

Of course his hymns were widely accepted in public worship, not a few are preserved for posterity and his work does show much originality and personal characteristics as well as a high degree of poetic achievement, in which he masterfully harnessed the vast topics with which he was dealing within the limited framework of metre and rhyme. This, however, was a result of the artistic kenosis, the voluntary redirection of artistic ability so that all his knowledge might be channelled into the instruction of the people. In his first collection of published material, *Horae Lyricae* (1705), his poetic ability is clear for all to see. He shows a mastery of various complicated metres and forms, and provides the modern reader with a glimpse of what might have been, had he not decided to attend to another more pressing demand.

### **The Defence of his Mission: the Need for Reform**

Having shown his competence as a poet of some considerable ability in various styles and genres, Watts was to apply that ability to his main purpose, a reformation of the system of praise used in the church of his day. The Psalmody debate was a long-standing one, dividing the Protes-

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1. *Isaac Watts, the Poetical Works*, in 7 vols.; Edinburgh, 1782, vol. I, p. xlii.

2. Quoted H. Escott, *Isaac Watts Hymnographer*; London, 1962, p. 175.

3. Vol. III, p.x.

4. Vol. I, p. xliv.

tant church from the Reformation. In England and especially in Scotland the Calvinistic principle of *quid non iubet, vetat* ('what [Scripture] does not command, it forbids') was dominant, and the Lutheran ideal of providing freely composed hymns in the vernacular of the people was dismissed as having been carried over from Rome. Watts' arguments in favour of reform were many, and although he was not the first to compose hymns in the English language he seems to be the undisputed champion of the cause, arguing clearly and logically for an extension of the existing canon of praise which would be more applicable to the New Testament church. As a minister of the Christian church he adopts the position of one who was forced into action by the poverty of praise available to the local congregation. He believed reform to be essential because the present situation was not only unedifying for believers but an unhealthy witness to outsiders.

Of all our religious solemnities, psalmody is the most unhappily managed, that every action which should elevate us to the most delightful and divine sensations doth not only flat our devotion but too often awaken our regret.<sup>5</sup>

To see the dull indifference, the negligent and the thoughtless air that sits upon the faces of a whole assembly while the Psalm is on their lips might tempt even a charitable observer to suspect the ferocity of inward religion.<sup>6</sup>

He saw this as a result of adhering too closely to the words of the pre-gospel age: 'thus by keeping too close to David in the house of God the veil of Moses is thrown over our hearts'.<sup>7</sup> It is understandable that this was anathema to one who was to write:

The sorrows of the mind  
Be banished from the place.  
Religion never was designed  
To make our pleasures less.<sup>8</sup>

The curses, Hebraisms and Jewish intricacies he regarded as stopping the worshippers' hearts on their ascent to heaven, and many of the 'deficiencies of light and glory' which are remedied by Christ and the

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5. Vol. III, p. vi.

6. Vol. III, p. v.

7. Vol. III, pp. vi-vii.

8. Vol. IV, Book II, No. 30.

New Testament could be eradicated by giving the Psalms an evangelical turn and making David 'speak like a Christian'.<sup>9</sup>

What need is there that I should wrap up the shining honours of my Redeemer in the dark and shadowy language of a religion that is now for ever abolished, especially when Christians are so vehemently warned in the Epistles of St Paul against a Judaizing spirit in their worship as well as doctrine?<sup>10</sup>

It also promoted hypocrisy; 'why will ye confine yourselves to speak one thing and mean another?'.<sup>11</sup>

When the majority of Christians sing the Psalms, often in the first person singular, they are expressing 'nothing but the character, the concerns, and the religion of the Jewish King',<sup>12</sup> while their own circumstances are completely different.

Moses, Deborah ... David, Asaph and Habakkuk ... sung their own joys and victories, their own hopes and fears and deliverances ... and why must we under the gospel sing nothing else but the joys, hopes and fears, of Asaph and David? Why must Christians be forbid all other melody but what arises from the victories and deliverances of the Jews?<sup>13</sup>

The question of hypocrisy also applies to those passages referring to musical instruments:

Why then must all who will sing a Psalm at church use such words as if they were to play upon the harp and psaltery, when thousands never saw such an instrument and know nothing of the art?<sup>14</sup>

He realized that it was impossible to compile a book which would exactly suit the circumstances of every worshipper, but the principle of constant reform meant that the songs of praise written today are more likely to aid the modern worshippers in their application of doctrinal truths to the contemporary situation than those written thousands of years ago. If David was not restricted to Moses who was chronologically and theologically nearer to him than today's church, why should such restrictions fall on modern congregations?

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9. Vol. I, p. xxxvi.

10. Vol. I, p. xxxvi.

11. Vol. I, p. xxx.

12. Vol. I, p. xvix.

13. Vol. I, p. xxvii.

14. Vol. I, p. xxvii.

Watts tackled the psalm versus hymn question directly. Though many found his Christianised psalms a halfway stage to hymnody, Watts' psalms and hymns are organically related. In his most famous work on the subject, 'A short essay toward the improvement of psalmody', he answers many objections to departing from current practice and issues a straightforward attack on what he sees as the illogicality of the present position. He accused the Psalter of being a crippling convention, of putting the original Hebrew in a straitjacket and being as much 'the inventions of men' as a freely composed lyric which took Scripture as its base.<sup>15</sup> The Psalms also left untouched vast areas of Christian doctrine. Christ's name is never specifically mentioned. Communion is particularly badly represented and churches have had to 'confine all the glorious joy and melody of that ordinance to a few obscure lines'.<sup>16</sup> 'Where can you find a Psalm that speaks the miracles of wisdom and power as they are discovered in a crucified Christ?'<sup>17</sup>

Watts therefore had no doubts about the unsuitability of the contemporary system of praise as confined entirely to psalms, he regarded the few New Testament hymns, rather than completing the canon, as showing the insufficiency of the Psalter and an example of how New Testament Christians expressed their joy in the light of the cross. His treatises on Psalmody and his Prefaces have in them an aggressive, perhaps bitter streak, in marked contrast to his usual moderation, which shows the urgency and seriousness with which he viewed the whole subject. To him reform was not just desirable, it was necessary; nor was it a question of modification but complete revision:

If the brightest genius on earth, or an angel from heaven, should translate David, and keep close to the sense and style of the inspired author, we should only obtain thereby a bright or heavenly copy of the devotions of the Jewish king, but it could never make the fittest psalmbook for a Christian people.<sup>18</sup>

A closer look is needed, however, at his two collections, the *Psalms of David Imitated and Hymns and Spiritual Songs* to see the practical result of this theoretic debate. For although only a few actively read his arguments, thousands make his hymns their own and it was the high standard of the hymns, without which all such arguments would have remained academic debates, which eventually decided the outcome of the centuries-old controversy.

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15. 'A short essay toward the improvement of Psalmody', pp. 241-2; quoted Escott, p. 122.

16. Vol. I, p. xxiii.

17. 'A short essay' p. 258; quoted Escott, p. 125.

18. Vol. I, p. xlv.

**The Completion of his Mission: the Works**

Although his *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* were published and written first, the *Psalms of David Imitated* will be examined first in order to complete this discussion concerning the influence of psalmody. Watts was, from the beginning, committed to a total revision of the system of praise and the introduction of freely composed hymns 'upon divine subjects'. However, by more or less terminating his hymnic output in 1719 with the publication of the *Psalms*, he was providing a bridge by which the transition from psalm to hymn could be made more easily. These 'imitations' had three characteristics. They were evangelical, expressing the truths brought to light by the gospel which the Psalmist saw 'but through a glass darkly'; 'There is no necessity that we should always sing in the obscure and doubtful style of prediction when the things foretold are brought into open light by a full accomplishment.'<sup>19</sup> They should be freely composed and not fall into the trap of the old Psalter which put adherence to the letter of Scripture above effective communication, and they should also express the thoughts and feelings of the singer, not simply of David or Asaph:

Where the Psalmist uses sharp invectives against his personal enemies I have endeavoured to turn the edge of them against our Spiritual adversaries, sin, Satan and temptation ... Where the words imply some peculiar wants or distresses, joys or blessings, I have used words of greater latitude and comprehension, suited to the general circumstances of men.<sup>20</sup>

This is seen in practice throughout his *Psalms*. Animal sacrifice becomes Christ, the Lamb of God; the ark brought with shouting into Zion becomes the Ascension of Christ; the mercy of God is supplemented with reference to the dying Saviour. In the words of Manning, they are 'baptised'.<sup>21</sup>

The psalms themselves are imitated in a workmanlike manner. Escott reminds us that in order fully to appreciate Watts' style, one must take a look at the existing 'anarchic versification' of Sternhold and Hopkins which was familiar to the congregation, and realize that it was because of his prosodic knowledge that the metrical stanza to which he limited himself was transformed from banality to versatility and craftsmanship.<sup>22</sup> The single theme and progression of thought inherent

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19. Vol I, p. xxxiii.

20. Vol. I, pp. xxii-xxiii.

21. B. L. Manning, *The Hymns of Wesley and Watts*, London, 1942, p. 80.

22. Escott, p. 18.

in the Psalms are retained in Watts' imitations. Characteristics such as repeated lines or couplets, and accumulation of nouns, which were the hallmarks of many of his hymns, can be seen retained here. Often the psalms are annotated by Watts as he explains his reasons for a certain rendering; Psalm 1, for example:

In this work I have often borrowed a line or two from the New Testament, that the excellent and inspired composures of the Jewish Psalmist may be brightened by the clearer discoveries of the Gospel.<sup>23</sup>

These *Psalms Imitated* aroused intense hostility in a minority but generally found a double welcome from those wishing to use psalms and hymns jointly, and those prepared as yet for psalms only. Thousands were sold within the first year of publication. This was probably in no small way due to the fact that *Hymns and Spiritual Songs*, by this stage in its seventh edition, had considerably enhanced Watts' reputation.

In *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* (1707) we have Watts' most important contribution to the hymn genre. Apart from a few short sermonic offerings and songs for children later in life, all of Watts' best-loved hymns are contained within this volume. As John Patrick was his predecessor in psalmody revision, a few notable names preceded him in hymnwriting, 'watering the ground' and preparing the public mind for the acceptance of hymns. Watts himself acknowledged their influence and, in a sense, repaid them, since it is largely due to his triumph in this field that earlier works of Mason, Ken, Crossman and Baxter are still sung. In almost every zone of hymnwriting into which he ventured and which he set about perfecting, he had predecessors. Boyse was writing sacramental hymns; Keach, homiletic hymns for the Baptists; Barton, free paraphrases in the style of exegesis. This practice of allowing one verse of Scripture to illuminate and interpret another, was the basic principle of Watts' hymnwriting and was later perfected by Wesley: 'I might have brought some text or other and applied it to the margin of every verse.'<sup>24</sup> A glance at *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* will reveal that its structure is in keeping with his lifelong principle of *festina lente*. Sandwiched between the two generally accepted sections of 'Collected from the Scriptures', and 'Prepared for the Lord's Supper', there is the innovatory 'Composed on Divine Subjects'. However, to emphasise how small a step the transition really is, Nos. 146-150 at the end of Book I are freer paraphrases and Nos. 142-3 have no biblical text affixed. Part I pre-empt's the method of his *Psalms of David Imitated* with Old Tes-

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23. Vol. I, p. 52.

24. Vol. III, p. xiii.

tament passages translated in New Testament light and almost the entire volume written in the three 'Psalm tune' metres (Common, Long and Short). The kenosis is clear in his statement that even in his syntax he is accommodating himself to the restrictions of the present system:

I have seldom permitted a stop in the middle of a line, and seldom left the end of a line without one, to comport a little with the unhappy mixture of reading and singing which cannot presently be reformed.<sup>25</sup>

In spite of this, Watts' vocabulary, syntax, imagery and literary characteristics are stamped on all of his hymns.

In theme and outlook Watts is cosmic; the cross is central, not only to him but to the world. He makes much of the planets, globe, stars, in an almost Miltonic obsession with the vastness, eternity and spaciousness of the universe with the Passion scene as the backcloth. This is seen particularly in two of his great Communion hymns. The first positions the crucifixion in the context of the cosmic whole, while the second's choice of initial verb and its final response give the hymn a beauty and breadth communicated through many generations.

Nature with open volume stands  
To spread her Maker's praise abroad . . . .

Here on the cross 'tis fairest drawn  
In precious blood and crimson lines.<sup>26</sup>

When I survey the wondrous cross  
On which the Prince of Glory died . . . .

Were the whole realm of nature mine  
That were a present far too small. . . .<sup>27</sup>

In style, parallelism and accumulation permeate his work, the former being perhaps an unconscious result of so much work in the Hebrew Psalter with its parallelism. The latter results in a compilation of nouns and phrases which, although in danger of becoming ridiculously repetitive and sometimes employed badly, usually result in a deepening of the verse's effect and an illumination of its message. Look at some of his most famous lines:

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25. Vol. III, p. x.

26. Vol. IV, Bk. III, No. 10.

27. Vol. IV, Bk. III, No. 10.

See, from his head, his hands, his feet . . . .

Demands my soul, my life, my all.<sup>28</sup>

Here his whole name appears complete  
Nor wit can guess, nor reason prove  
Which of the letters best is writ;  
The power, the wisdom, or the love.<sup>29</sup>

While life and thought and being last,  
Or immortality endures.<sup>30</sup>

The gradual build-up of statement leading to a response is another popular device. Occasionally, as in 'When I survey', the statement and response are alternated, but generally the latter is reserved for the end. Book II No. 30 is a ten-stanza piece about heaven, with the final stanza beginning: 'Then let our songs abound ...'. Book III No. 1 is a seven-stanza hymn on the Lord's Supper, six stanzas of statement followed by:

Jesus, thy feast we celebrate,  
We show thy death, we sing thy name  
Till thou return, and we shall eat  
The marriage supper of the Lamb.

Combine this idea of response with the overall cosmic theme of Watts' work and we are left with two of his finest verses. Juxtaposed, they illustrate the bridge between the 17th and 18th centuries, contrasting grandeur and inward emotion, communicating both the condescension of the Almighty and the need for a human response and all within the framework of alliterative, symmetrical verse:

Well might the sun in darkness hide  
And shut his glories in,  
When God, the Mighty Maker, died  
For man, the creature's sin.

Thus might I hide my blushing face  
While his dear cross appears;

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28. *Ibid.*

29. Vol. IV, Bk. III, No. 10.

30. Vol. II, Ps. 146, 2nd version.

Dissolve, my heart, in thankfulness;  
And melt, my eyes, to tears.<sup>31</sup>

Structure and progression of thought were principles uppermost in Watts' mind. Sometimes verses are linked by a single word:

... nor hell shall fright my heart away  
Should hell with all its legions rise

Should worlds conspire to drive me thence  
Moveless and firm this heart should lie . . . .<sup>32</sup>

And just to prove that this is not coincidence, see how he binds together what is arguably his most inspired verse:

See, from his head, his hands, his feet  
*Sorrow and love* flow mingled down.  
Did e'er such *love and sorrow* meet  
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?<sup>33</sup>

#### An Assessment of his Mission

It is difficult to assess the real value or importance of Watts' hymnographical work. Generally regarded as the father of modern hymnody it is, in the words of Gill, difficult to 'conceive of Watts ceasing to be ... a benefactor as long as men have spiritual needs and aspirations, and as long as the English language endures.'<sup>34</sup> Yet his true worth does not stem solely from his chronological position (all the genres in which he excelled were already in existence) nor from the quality of his hymns, good as they are, for Ken's 'Evening hymn' and Crossman's 'My song is love unknown'<sup>35</sup> are just as good. Rather it lay in a combination of the two at a time when the great majority of the people were ready to accept the advent of hymns, and although he invented no new measures but 'accommodated himself to the conditions of musical decadence surrounding him',<sup>36</sup> he once and for all determined the type of the hymn, making it impossible for any future exponent of the genre to be totally free from his influence. He worked within his personally constructed framework of gradual transition from metrical psalm through Chris-

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31. Vol. IV, Bk. II, No. 9.

32. Vol. IV, Bk. II, No. 4.

33. Vol. IV, Bk. III, No. 7.

34. Quoted A. P. Davis, *Isaac Watts*, London, 1948, p. 215.

35. *Church Hymnary*, 3rd edition, Nos. 641 & 224.

36. L. Benson, *The English Hymn, its Development and Use in Worship*, Richmond, Virginia, 1962, p. 207.

tianised psalm, to free paraphrases and hymns, and this philosophy of worship which undergirded all of his writing gave it a direction and a purpose and accounts for its ready acceptance by the people.

In spite of the winnowing of two centuries of hymn books, his best are still among the classics of devotion in all hymnals. In the words of Routley: 'many people have written large numbers of hymns, not a few are still doing so. But none of these has produced twenty immortals.'<sup>37</sup> It is true that Watts' hymns soon came to hold a tyranny which was as great as the metrical Psalter, but this was directly in conflict with the spirit of *semper reformanda* in which he was composing. Part of the reason for the tyranny was that, beside Watts, many later attempts seemed poor and lacking in originality, and many who could not write poetry attempted hymns. These were bound to fail since, in Watts, the church now had a completed songbook for every major occasion and all subsequent additions would have to prove worthy of inclusion in the canon.

Isaac Watts cannot be ignored. Motivated by neither material gain, literary fame, nor theological bias, but solely out of a love for his Saviour and a desire to use his artistic gifts to improve the medium of praise, while still retaining a firm biblical and doctrinally Reformed position, his skilful writing has demonstrated that innovation is not synonymous with anarchy; nor are Old Covenant psalmody and post-Christian hymnody mutually exclusive. For him, a church which allowed the reading of any part of the full canon of Scripture, which encouraged extemporaneous prayers of praise and adoration, and which prided itself in its exegetical exposition of the whole counsel of God in its public services, could not justifiably impose unnecessary restrictions on the *sung* worship of the assembly. Watts' call is as much a call for theological consistency and inward spiritual renewal as it is for ecclesiastical reform. It is the response to such a call which is the true test of any church's claim to purity of worship.

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37. Routley, E., *Isaac Watts*, London, 1961, p. 14.

# CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY AND CULTURAL PLURALITY<sup>1</sup>

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H. Richard Niebuhr's 1951 book *Christ and Culture* has earned its status as a modern Christian classic. It has been an immensely influential work. Not only has it provided hosts of educated Christians with the categories which they employ in thinking about the patterns of Christian cultural involvement, but it has also had a significant impact on those scholars who make it their full-time business to engage in the Christian study of cultural phenomena.

When we read Niebuhr's book carefully today, however, it seems obvious that it is marred by at least one very serious defect: an almost complete inattention to the fact of cultural plurality. For some of us, it now seems impossible to spend much time thinking about Christ and *culture* without quickly getting around to questions about Christ and the *cultures*.

For one thing, the rather intense ecumenical explorations that have occurred since Niebuhr wrote his book make it clear that the differences among the perspectives that he discussed cannot be understood without considerable attention to cultural plurality. What Niebuhr took to be accounts of the relationship between Christ and culture-as-such seem to be more plausibly viewed as attempts to work out the relationship between Christ and two or more cultural systems. The Amish may be 'against' contemporary technological culture, but not because they are against culture-as-such; they are loyal to the technological 'simplicity' of an earlier rural culture. Roman Catholic liberation theologians undoubtedly believe that Christ is in some sense 'above' culture; but this does not deter them from opposing, in the name of Christ, the cultural values of capitalism. And the 'Christianized' culture of the super-patriot is not necessarily the cultural *status quo*; it is often an idealized political culture of the past. In short, when we look at the actual views and practices of proponents of the viewpoints represented in Niebuhr's typology, we find it difficult to attribute to them a stance toward culture *simpliciter*. Each group is attempting to co-ordinate the competing claims which are presented to it by conflicting cultural and subcultural systems.

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1. This paper was first presented at the Consultation of Theologians and Anthropologists at Los Angeles in April 1986.

The situation gets even more complex when we turn from the older ecumenical arguments - Reformed versus Anabaptist, Lutheran versus Catholic - to the newer discussions of cross-cultural matters as they affect the global Christian community. Here the issues raised have to do with a kind of 'ecumenism' that no Christians can avoid - least of all those Christians who are committed to bringing the gospel to the nations. For example, conservative Protestants may be able to formulate plausible theological rationales that exempt them from the meetings of conciliar ecumenism. But they cannot avoid theological challenges that arise from the kinds of 'household' discussions that occur among people from many tribes and tongues who have responded in faith to their own evangelical proclamations.

Niebuhr was not completely unaware of the issues raised by this latter kind of cross-cultural discussion. But he disposes of the subject quickly in a single paragraph in his opening chapter. He refers to scholars, particularly Troeltsch, who have argued that Christian thought and practice have become 'inextricably intertwined' with Western culture. But Niebuhr has difficulty taking this concern seriously:

Troeltsch himself . . . is highly aware of the tension between Christ and Western culture, so that even for the Westerner Jesus Christ is never merely a member of his cultural society. Furthermore, Christians in the East, and those who are looking forward to the emergence of a new civilization, are concerned not only with the Western Christ but with one who is to be distinguished from Western faith in him and who is relevant to life in other cultures. Hence culture as we are concerned with it is not a particular phenomenon but the general one, though the general thing appears only in particular forms, and though a Christian of the West cannot think about the problem save in Western terms.<sup>2</sup>

Here we have Niebuhr's own rationale for his lack of attention to cultural plurality in *Christ and Culture*. Since the Christ with whom he is concerned can never be viewed as a member of this or that cultural system, Niebuhr thinks he can legitimately ignore the differences among cultural systems and ask only the general question of how Christ relates to culture-as-such.

This seems much too facile. Indeed it has the feel of a *non sequitur*. At the very least it seems possible to move from premises similar to Niebuhr's to the opposite conclusion. If the Christ with whom we are concerned is never a member of one particular cultural system but 'is relevant to life in other cultures', then is it not important to ask how

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2. H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, New York, 1951, pp. 30-31

## CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY AND CULTURAL PLURALITY

differing enculturated understandings of Jesus Christ are to be compared and evaluated? Don't we have to ask how Christ *can* be relevant to life in diverse cultural societies? And since 'the general thing' called culture appears, by Niebuhr's own admission, 'only in particular forms', must we not then pay much attention to those particularities?

One suspects that Niebuhr's lack of interest in these questions has to be understood in the light of his sympathetic reference to 'those who are looking forward to the emergence of a new civilization' - one perhaps where cultural particularities will yield to an Enlightenment-type vision, or be gathered up into some overarching synthesis-culture. But, however that may be, Niebuhr does make it clear that he favours 'the general things' over the 'particular forms'.

Niebuhr's brief comments on this subject exemplify one way in which some Christians deal with the fact of cultural plurality: they assume that the problems posed by cultural particularities are not 'deep' issues for Christians to wrestle with. If we focus on culture-as-such, 'the general thing', the surface disparities among various culturally-situated understandings of the Christian faith will eventually disappear.

It is not so common these days, however, for Christian scholars - even those who might have some sympathies for the Niebuhrian approach - to attempt to dispose of the difficulties as quickly as Niebuhr did. Most people who think about these matters at all seem to believe that significant attention must be given to the facts of cultural diversity. There are all sorts of factors that can be invoked in order to account for this change of mood since Niebuhr's day. For one thing, we have all become familiar with accusations of 'cultural imperialism' on the part of critics of the 'North Atlantic consensus' in theology. To such critics today, Niebuhr's self-confident talk about 'the general thing' will sound for all the world like 'the particular thing' in a rather familiar guise.

But it is not just because of duress that we take such things seriously. Many of us have also learned much from Christian cultural particularities other than our own. It is difficult, for example, for a white, male 'North Atlantic' theologian, even one of a rather conservative bent, to come away from a serious sampling of the writing of, say, James Cone, Gustavo Gutierrez, Kosuke Koyama and Phyllis Trible, without at least some inkling that his theological horizons have been expanded in crucial ways. Such experiences give rise to the felt need to account for the fact of cultural plurality.

But why? Why is the fact of culturally diverse theological formulations a *problem* that we must account for? Different cultures have different eating habits and different technologies for disposing of garbage. But most of us do not trouble ourselves in searching for *theories* that will somehow 'account' for those differences.

The fact is that the phenomenon of culturally diverse theological formulations *is* experienced as a problem with various degrees of intensity. Straightforward relativists will be the least troubled; they will hold that, given the absence of cross-culturally binding norms for deciding the 'correctness' of theological formulations, diversity of formulation, like culinary plurality, is a 'given' which must simply be accepted. On the other end of the spectrum are, for example, Enlightenment-influenced thinkers for whom the diversity must eventually be eliminated by means of the global spread of, say, rational technology.

Cultural plurality does pose a problem of sorts for evangelical thought. But evangelicals certainly ought not to approach the problem with a deep sense of outrage over the fact of theological diversity. There are at least four reasons why the existence of some degree of such culturally-situated diversity fits well into the evangelical worldview.

First, since all evangelicals accept some version of the doctrine of what traditional Calvinists call 'the antithesis', there is for them a basic diversity that is built into the very scheme of things from the time of the Fall until the Last Judgement. During this dispensation human society is caught up in a cosmic struggle between belief and unbelief. The basic patterns of belief and unbelief stand in radical opposition to each other. If there were no other factors which influenced human consciousness, then, we could still expect important differences to show up between the 'cultures' of righteousness and unrighteousness.

Second, there is the fact of continuing human sinfulness even *within* the Christian community. Abraham Kuyper, who was himself capable of sketching out the patterns of the antithesis in the starkest of terms, once remarked that he was continually struck by the fact that the world often acted better than he expected it to while the church often acted worse than anticipated. This is an important observation. The rebel sigh is still to be heard in each Christian heart. The global community of blood-bought sinners has not yet been fully sanctified. This 'not yet' operates alongside of the 'no longer' in the Christian community, a factor that contributes to our inability to arrive at a complete consensus on significant matters of teaching and practice.

Third, there is the fact of our finitude. Human finiteness is not a result of sin; our first parents were created perfect, but theirs was a finite perfection. Because we are beings who, even in our redeemed state, continue to be ignorant about many things, we should not be surprised over cognitive differences among Christians who are limited in their grasp of the riches of both the creation and the Creator.

Fourth, there also seems to be a contributing factor that has to do with special cultural 'assignments' which God distributes among the peoples of the earth. Herman Bavinck once suggested that there is a 'collective' possession of the image of God. The Lord distributes differ-

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ent aspects of the *image*, Bavinck argued, to different cultural groups.<sup>3</sup> Only when the redeemed peoples representing various tribes and tongues of the earth bring 'the glory and the honour of the nations' (see Isaiah 60:5 and Revelation 21:26) into the Holy City will we see the many-splendored image of God in its fulness.

Bavinck's proposal may be wrong, taken as an account of the *imago dei* in particular. But it may be correct in its broader intent. To be sure, there is a genuine threat here of reinforcing the kind of racist ideology that finds the 'separate development' of ethnic groups to be a showpiece of orthodox theology. But even recognizing the real and present danger of that kind of perverse thinking, it is important to recognize the strong hint in the Scriptures that there will be in the eschaton a full gathering-in of the unique gifts of different cultural groups, and that we can begin to anticipate that eschatological gathering-in here and now in the post-Pentecost church.

In one of his helpful discussions of the proper ingredients of a Christian epistemology, Arthur Holmes has argued that Christians must approach the phenomenon of human cognitive disagreement with two complementary attitudes: 'epistemic humility' and 'epistemic hope'.<sup>4</sup> Because we believe that 'all truth is God's truth', we are aware of the fact that only the Divine Knower possesses a clear and comprehensive knowledge of all things. Thus the grounds for Christian epistemic humility. But we also know that God has promised to lead us eventually into that mode of perfect knowing that is proper to us as human creatures. Thus the basis for our epistemic hope.

The bearing of these two attitudes on the issues of cross-cultural diversity should be immediately clear. We believe that all crucial issues of human cognitive disagreement are ultimately dissolvable. But we also know that for now we see through a glass darkly. Nonetheless, we can enter into cross-cultural discussion with the firm conviction that the matters about which we presently disagree as Christians, no matter how basic they may seem to be, will not forever divide us. Cross-cultural epistemic harmony will someday be attained, as a gift of the Kingdom that awaits us. And so we press on, in humility and hope.

Recognizing the tentativeness that is proper to Christian cross-cultural explorations in the present age, how then shall we live as those who are called to explore cultural particularities in the light of the Gospel?

The recent theological attention given to cultural diversity has been associated with two themes in contemporary Christian thought: contex-

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3. Cf. Herman Bavinck, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, vol. II, pp. 621-622. The relevant paragraph is translated and quoted by Anthony Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, Grand Rapids, 1986, pp. 100-101.

4. Arthur F. Holmes, *Contours of a World View*, Grand Rapids, 1983, p. 128.

tualization and liberation. In popular discussions these two themes are sometimes viewed as interwoven. But properly understood, they are clearly distinguishable; indeed, they can come into open conflict with each other.

Contextualization, like its close kin indigenization, is a theme that is emphasized by people who want to draw sympathetic attention to the ways in which the Gospel is received and interpreted in diverse cultural situations. It is not uncommon in circles where contextualization is viewed with favour to hear pleas that we take an honest and critical look, in approaching non-Western, or non-North-Atlantic, cultural situations, at the ways in which our presentations of the Gospel might be shaped by 'Western linear thinking' or 'Enlightenment rationalism' or the thought patterns of 'scientific technology'. There is a discernible bias in favour of theological pluralism in such discussions.

Defenders of liberation theology, on the other hand, do not necessarily approach diverse cultural situations with a love of pluralism. They will often be quite critical of, say, Third World cultural patterns - even though they may also share the contextualizers' fear of importing the dominant patterns of Western cultural life into other situations.

The differences here seem to have come out clearly in a published discussion a few years ago in which Sister Joan Chatfield, a Maryknoll missionary, issued an urgent call for the elimination of sexism as it affects both the community of people engaged in evangelizing programs and the patriarchal cultures toward which those efforts are directed.<sup>5</sup> One of the respondents to Chatfield's article was evangelical anthropologist Marguerite Kraft, who - while agreeing that we can learn more about how God wants men and women to work together in Christian mission - insisted nonetheless that the sexism issue is

a western cultural struggle, one which we should not be dumping on the rest of the world. Status and roles are given to the individual by the culture and most cultures have a clearly defined division of labour according to the sexes. I do not see this as sexism. There is nobody so blind as one who tries to force her agenda on everyone without first trying to understand from the other person's point of view.<sup>6</sup>

Here we seem to have a clear example of the way in which contextualization and liberation can stand in tension. Situations arise for missiological reflection where we must decide whether liberation concerns are to override contextualizing considerations, or *vice versa*.

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5. Joan Chatfield, 'Women and Men: Colleagues in Mission', *Gospel in Context*, vol. 2, no. 2, April 1979, pp. 4-14.

6. Marguerite G. Kraft, response to Chatfield, *Ibid.*, p. 20.

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To be sure, both Chatfield and Kraft would likely insist upon introducing nuances in formulating their positions in more detail. Nonetheless, the differing tendencies manifested in their comments point to a very important question for a theology of cultural plurality: from what point of view, in the light of what norms, is it permissible to criticize a contextualized understanding of the Christian faith? At least four different responses to this question can be discerned in recent missiological discussion.

The first position is a straightforwardly relativistic account of theological plurality. Pure examples of this response are not easy to find: it is difficult to imagine an 'anything goes' approach to theological contextualization that still deserves to be called Christian. When, for example, Marguerite Kraft responded to Joan Chatfield's call to fight against Third World sexism, she did not say that, since right and wrong are culturally relative, sexism should be tolerated in a place like northern Nigeria. Rather she argued that what might, at first glance, *look* like a Nigerian manifestation of sexism might not in fact be so - or at least might not be *blatantly* so - when the larger cultural context is taken into account. Kraft's argument was not a live-and-let-live relativism; instead she was advocating the caution of 'first trying to understand from the other person's point of view'.

But there are writers who seem willing to concede quite a bit to a relativistic point of view. For example, the Asian theologian C. S. Song writes:

There is no such thing as a theology immune from cultural and historical influences. Theology is culturally and historically not neutral. A neutral theology is in fact a homeless theology. It does not belong anywhere.<sup>7</sup>

Song goes on to argue that it is wrong to look for an ecumenical theology that is somehow 'abstracted from' or the result of a 'synthesis' out of, particular cultural theologies. The only proper ecumenical theology is, he tells us, one that 'is confined within "particular" theologies'.<sup>8</sup>

Song says more than this - and other remarks of his suggest that we should perhaps not put too much weight on these sentences if we are to understand him correctly. But nonetheless these Kuhnian comments, taken on their own, do seem to contain a strong suggestion of relativism. Each theology is tied to its cultural 'home'. To criticize a prop-

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7. C. S. Song, 'Open Frontiers of Theology in Asia', *Netherlands Universities Foundation for International Cooperation Bulletin*, vol. 26, nos. 3/4, Summer/Autumn 1982, pp. 52-53.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 54.

erly domesticated theology is to attempt to stand outside of any 'home' whatsoever - which is impossible to do, Song seems to think. To attempt such a critical perspective, then, is to smuggle domestic norms from one home to another. All of which seems to suggest that cross-cultural evaluation is simply impossible.

A second position attributes 'privileged-culture' status to some contemporary cultural point of view. Here the perspective of a specific cultural group is taken as the reference point from which other cultural systems can be legitimately assessed. In his well-known 'lamb and wolf' speech at the 1979 World Council of Churches' Conference on Faith, Science and the Future, Rubem Alves castigated the 'scientific civilization' of the West for what he views as its project of working for 'the final assimilation of all non-western, non-scientific cultures' into itself while it dismissed 'as superstitious the beliefs of other peoples, considered primitive'.<sup>9</sup>

Alves' characterization of the situation seems to suggest that he is endorsing the perspective of one or another Third World culture. But this interpretation does not comport well with the fact that he immediately goes on to condemn the 'home'-grown dictatorial regimes of those cultures. It turns out that both the 'civilization' of the West and various non-western despotic cultures are to be critically assessed from the point of view of what Alves labels 'the culture of oppression'.<sup>10</sup> His privileged-culture, then, is the viewpoint of oppressed victims as identified by means of the categories of liberation theology.

In arguing that the point of view of the oppressed peoples of the earth provides us with a critical reference point in evaluating other culturally situated claims, Alves is agreeing with his westernised opponents that there is indeed an existing privileged-culture perspective. His disagreement with those opponents - which is, of course, more than a trivial one - is over *whose* cultural perspective provides us with a reliable Archimedean-point.

A third position is one that we might label 'dialectical'. This is a viewpoint that gets negative mention in the comments by C.S. Song that were quoted above, where Song tells us that a proper ecumenical theology is not to be found by looking for a 'synthesis' to emerge out of the interplay of particular enculturated theologies.

It is unlikely, however, that Song's warning will be sufficient to stem the current tide of Hegelianism. The hope for a dialectically-produced synthesis beats strong in the bosom of contemporary Christian thought. To cite just one prominent case: in *God Has Many Names*,

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9. Rubem Alves, 'On the Eating Habits of Science: A Response', *Faith and Science in an Unjust World: Report of the World Council of Churches' Conference on Faith, Science and the Future*, vol. I, edited by Roger L. Shinn, Philadelphia, 1980, p. 41.

10. Alves, *Ibid.*, pp. 42-43.

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John Hick expresses the confident expectation that we will someday achieve not merely a synthetic Christian theology, but a synthetic 'world theology' as such:

A global theology would consist of theories or hypotheses designed to interpret the religious experience of mankind, as it occurs not only within Christianity, but also within the other great streams of religious life, and indeed in the great non-religious faiths also, Marxism and Maoism and perhaps - according to one's definition of 'religion' - Confucianism and certain forms of Buddhism. The project of a global theology is obviously vast, requiring the co-operative labours of many individual and groups over a period of several generations.<sup>11</sup>

On this account it is indeed possible to criticize particularized theologies - but only from the point of view of a future synthesized theology which we do not presently possess. Our present criticisms of cultural particularities can only be based on assessments of what will or will not move us creatively in the direction of the future synthesis.

None of the three positions mentioned thus far will be satisfactory to evangelicals. Each of them is, we might say, too *historicistic*. Each invests some aspect of cultural development as such with normative status. The relativistic position assumes that the plurality of culturally developed perspectives is a 'given' that we cannot get beyond. The privileged-cultural position absolutizes a specific contemporary cultural perspective, whether it be that of Western 'scientific technology' or the culture of the 'oppressed of the earth'. The dialectical position absolutizes the point of view that will be manifested in some future cultural synthesis, which will emerge out of the interaction among present particularities.

A fourth, non-historicistic - and more satisfactory - position is given theological formulation by the black South African Allan Boesak. In the course of his critical discussion of the Black Theologies of North America, Boesak takes note of James Cone's insistence that theology be done 'in the light of the black situation'. This insistence - obviously stemming from privileged-culture tendencies - is, Boesak argues, misleading:

The black situation is the situation within which reflection and action take place, but it is the Word of God which illuminates the reflection and guides the action. We fear that Cone attaches too much

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11. John Hick, *God Has Many Names: Britain's New Religious Pluralism*, London, 1980, p. 8.

theological import to the black experience and the black situation as if these realities *within themselves* have revelational value on a par with Scripture. God, it seems to us, reveals himself *in* the situation. The black experience provides the framework within which blacks understand the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. No more, no less.<sup>12</sup>

This last comment is a telling one. The black experience, Boesak insists, is not itself divine revelation; rather it is no more than the situation in which blacks have received that revelation. But neither is it *less* than a situation to which God has addressed his revelation. This means that while the black historical experience is not on a par with Scriptural revelation, it is at least on a par with the *white* historical experience, which must *also* be denied revelatory status.

On this view, cultural particularities are 'situations' in which Christian people receive, and give theological shape to, the Gospel message. No such situation constitutes a privileged-cultural perspective as such. The test of theological truth is not whether a claim is espoused by a particular cultural group, but whether that claim can be shown to be legitimate in the light of the revelatory source, the Scriptures. The Bible alone has privileged status as an Archimedean-point for testing enculturated theological claims.

We may think of such a position as 'dialogical' in nature. Of course, the importance of dialogic activity of some sort or another can be stressed from the point of view of, say, dialecticism. Hick, for example, writes of the need for 'dialogue' among representatives of world religions. But on this fourth view, dialogue is understood, to use a distinction recently formulated by Alasdair MacIntyre, not as aiming at a 'dissolution' of opposites into a 'synthetic both/and' but as an encounter in which we are open to the possibility that there will be an 'either/or of incommensurability' that can only be decided 'in the exclusive favor of the victor'.<sup>13</sup>

The dialogical position being proposed here does not entail the view that truth as such is whatever emerges out of serious cross-cultural dialogue. The test for truth is not tied to the results of *any* sort of human activity. Again, 'all truth is God's truth'. But dialogue may be a crucial *strategy* for discerning God's truth with increasing clarity. Cross-cultural dialogue - talking together about the way the Word has been appropriated by us in our diverse cultural particularities - is an indispensable part of the process whereby the Christian community grows in

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12. Allan A Boesak, *Farewell to Innocence: A Socio-Ethical Study on Black Theology and Power*, New York, 1977, p. 12.

13. Alasdair MacIntyre, 'Bernstein's Distorting Mirrors: A Rejoinder', *Soundings*, vol. LXVII, no.1, Spring 1984, pp 32-33.

wisdom.

Like the proponents of the dialectical position, then, we will cherish the process of give-and-take among representatives of various cultural viewpoints, even though we do not thereby mean to imply that truth is nothing more than that which emerges out of an ongoing dialectic. And like the privileged-culture position, we will be open to the possibility that cross-cultural dialogue will sometimes require 'either/or' choices among conflicting perspectives - although it is to be hoped that the requisite attitudes of epistemic humility will keep us from regularly insisting that 'exclusive victories' be declared.

And what of the first perspective? Is there also something that we must concede to relativistic pluralism? Here it might be instructive to attend to a piece of advice offered by two professors from the bastion of North American fundamentalism, Liberty Baptist University, Ed Dobson and Ed Hindson, co-authors of *The Fundamentalist Phenomenon*. One consistent theme in their extensive defence of fundamentalism is a focussing on the existence of ethical 'absolutes', a reality to which they think other Christians, including many of us in the broader reaches of evangelicalism pay insufficient attention. Having stated their bold *apologia*, however, Dobson and Hindson turn in their own final chapter to a rather remarkable critique of the weaknesses of fundamentalism as a movement. They list ten such weaknesses. For our purposes here, though, Weakness Number Eight deserves special mention: 'Because of the Fundamentalists' commitment to the truth, there is a tendency among them to overabsolutism . . .'<sup>14</sup> It is difficult to improve on this charming formulation. We must be absolutists. But we must avoid 'overabsolutism'.

Relativistic pluralism, taken as a comprehensive theory about cross-cultural truth (or the lack thereof) is false. But it may serve nonetheless as an important procedural warning to us, lest we, like the Fundamentalists criticized by the Liberty Baptist professors, be so zealous in our 'commitment to the truth' that we err in the direction of 'overabsolutism'.

More specifically, while we must show zeal for the truth in cross-cultural matters, we must be careful not to squeeze all the riches of theology into the territory of the cognitive. There may be a residual, stubbornly-resistant core of theological plurality that will be with us even after we have become longtime citizens of the eternal Kingdom. All theological issues that are strictly matters of truth will surely be decisively settled in the presence of the eternal Throne. But it may be that some of our cross-cultural - and perhaps even our *intra*-cultural -

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14. *The Fundamentalist Phenomenon: The Resurgence of Conservative Christianity*, edited by Jerry Falwell, with Ed Dobson and Ed Hindson, New York 1981, p. 183.

theological differences have more to do with differences of style and temperament and cultural 'tone' than with the 'truth' in the strictest sense. Perhaps something of the many-splendored riches of our diverse cultural 'assignments' will be celebrated *in* their cultural particularities long after the last tribal delegation has entered in through the open gates of the New Jerusalem.

# IMPASSIBILITY, ASCETICISM AND THE VISION OF GOD

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'Many decades were to elapse before the key-phrases in doctrine, in philosophy, in liturgy, and in ethics made good their footing against vast numbers of competing formulae. But the thought of the *vision of God* as the goal of human life, and the determinant, therefore, of Christian conduct, came rapidly to its own. Before the first of our extant creeds had assumed its present shape - before any dominant liturgical form had emerged from the primitive fluidity of worship - before so much as the bare terminology of the great Christological controversies had entered the new vocabulary - before it was certain whether "the Word" or "the Son of God" should be the crowning title of the Risen Lord - before even the propriety of speaking of the Godhead as a Trinity had become apparent - before the Church had passed a single one of these milestones in her history, the first of a great line of post-apostolic theologians had declared: "The glory of God is a living man; and the life of man is the vision of God".' So wrote Kenneth E. Kirk,<sup>1</sup> and his reference is to Irenaeus (*Adv. Haer.* 4.xx.7). The theme of the vision of God is one of the most practical and fruitful concepts of Scripture.

For many in contemporary Christianity, either the 'vision of God' is held to be unattainable in this life or the phrase is regarded as a poetic convention. Not so with Calvin. In the *Institutes* I:1:2-3 we read, '. . . it is evident that man never attains to a true self-knowledge until he have previously contemplated the face of God, and come down after such contemplation to look into himself.' 'Hence that dread and amazement with which, as Scripture universally relates, holy men were struck and overwhelmed whenever they beheld the presence of God.' In this opening chapter, beholding God is spoken of in terms of contemplation. 'But should we once begin to raise our thoughts to God, and reflect what kind of Being he is, and how absolute the perfection of that righteousness, and wisdom, and virtue, to which, as a standard, we are bound to be conformed, what formerly delighted us by its false show of righteousness, will become polluted with the greatest iniquity. . .' Calvin, however, goes beyond this. In Book III:2:1, writing of contemporary experience, he says, 'Paul further declares, that in the person of Christ the glory of God is visibly manifested to us, or, which is the same

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1. *The Vision of God*, 1931, p.1.

thing, we have "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ". And in section 19 of the same chapter, 'As soon as the minutest particle of faith is instilled into our minds, we begin to behold the face of God, placid, serene, and propitious; afar off, indeed, but still so distinctly as to assure us that there is no delusion in it'. The knowledge of God in this section is not simply propositional. The Canons of Dort (1618-9) speak of the gracious countenance of God, 'to behold which is to the godly dearer than life, and the withdrawal of which is more bitter than death'. (V art. 13).

Among the Puritans, listen to for example, Christopher Lowe: 'Consider . . . that Jesus Christ himself, was under spiritual desertion as well as thou: Christ himself cried, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Matt. 27:46. Here was *subtractio visionis*, though not *unionis*.<sup>2</sup> Matthew Sylvester's sermon-lecture asks, 'How many a gracious person from whom God hides his face, trust in the Lord as his God?'<sup>3</sup> He says 'No counsel nor encouragement will, or can, avail that soul for trust or conduct which neglects its stated work and watch, which God enjoins it to, and expects from it . . . . "Repent and do your first works" was the grave and sober counsel (Rev. 2:5). Begin then, with thyself, and end with God, and work thyself up to his will, and thou shalt see his face with joy'. William Spurstowe, who also was concerned to encourage the Christian who was feeling depressed or deserted, declared that belief in the word was not the end, but the means to the end. 'Eye God in the promises', he counselled. 'Promises are not the primary object of faith, but the secondary: or they are rather the means by which we believe, than the things on which we are to rest ... The promises are instrumental in the coming of Christ and the soul together; they are the *warrant* by which faith is emboldened to come to him, and take hold of him; but the union which faith makes, is not between a believer and the promise, but between a believer and Christ'.<sup>4</sup> Goodwin would take us further. (Sermon XV on Eph.1:13, 14, p 236). 'I yield, my brethren, that the sealing of the Spirit is but faith, if you compare it to heaven. ... But let me tell you that it is faith elevated and raised up above its ordinary rate; as Stephen's eye with which he saw Christ was his natural sight, but it was his natural sight elevated, raised up above the ordinary proportion of an eye; so is this, a light beyond the ordinary light of faith.' Again, in Sermon XVI (Eph. 1:13,14, p. 242), with reference to the 'seal of the Spirit', he said, 'I gave you these three things:- the first was, that it was a distinct light from the ordinary light of faith, a light beyond that light. It is indeed faith ele-

2. Quoted in *The Genius of Puritanism*, Peter Lewis, 1975, p. 105.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 121.

4. *The Wells of Salvation Opened*; see Lewis, *op.cit.* pp 114f.

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vated, though not to vision, where faith shall cease, as it is in heaven; yet Stephen's bodily eye was raised to see Christ beyond what the power of the ordinary sight could have done, so here is a light beyond what the ordinary light can reach unto.' In quoting Goodwin, let me hasten to add that I do not endorse everything he says here, nor do I accept his understanding of the 'seal of the Spirit'. The value of his words lies in their testimony to an experiential dimension witnessed to in Scripture which goes beyond a sense of assurance.

The concept of the 'vision of God' is regarded by many with suspicion. It has little obvious relevance for the pragmatic mind. Protestant evangelical theologians, too, alarmed by the subjective vagaries of the wilder Anabaptists and their spiritual descendants, have rightly sought to safeguard the unique position of the Scriptures. Yet in doing this, they have unwittingly detracted from the Scriptures by failing to recognise the place given in the Word to the 'vision of God'. When the theme could not be avoided it was emasculated. They have frequently been confirmed in this by the tendency in the history of the Church to see the vision of God as inextricably bound up with a damaging unbiblical asceticism.

It is essential, at this point, to emphasize that the pursuit of the vision of God down through the ages does not present a simple monolithic pattern, and disentangling even the most dominant strands is highly complicated. Yet certain generalisations can profitably be made, I believe, if only to indicate cul-de-sacs and dangerous diversions. I intend to highlight significant points which should help us on our contemporary journey, but do not intend to give a complete historical analysis. I trust that this attempt at depiction will not be vitiated by the broad brush strokes and necessary selectivity.

One of the disturbing things is that many have seen the pursuit of the vision of God as requiring a self-destructive rigorous ascetic lifestyle. This is particularly true in the monastic movement from the 4th century onwards and in the Byzantine Hesychast tradition of the 14th century. This in turn was fuelled by the concept of the impassibility of God. Many today cannot do justice to the biblical theme of the vision of God because they rightly reject a non-biblical asceticism so often associated with it, and yet, fascinatingly, they retain a belief in the impassibility of God which has encouraged world-despising life-styles. Impassibility, asceticism and the vision of God are frequently closely intertwined. This area is our primary concern and will enable us to be selective. The positive result of this study should be a sharpening of our focus on the biblical data and the blessing that will ensue from that.

### Impassibility

Conservative New Testament scholars have argued vigorously, and, I believe, convincingly for 'propitiation' as the correct translation of *hilasterion*.

Yet, generally, when evangelicals have been embarrassed by references to the anger of God in Scripture they have run to the bolthole of anthropomorphism. The astonishing thing about this is that we are told that it helps us to discover the real meaning of the text while in fact, the 'explanation' contradicts what the text actually says! The text says that God gets angry in certain situations, but we know that that cannot possibly be the case in any way that is really analogous to the anger we experience. In fact the truth is that God does not get angry. So much for the perspicuity of Scripture! And to add insult to injury we are told that not only does the text, if taken as it stands, give us an erroneous picture, but it does so to help us to understand it better. One cannot help wondering what has been gained by the scholarly study of *hilasterion* if, at the end of the day, the anger of God is a concept as illusory as the so-called reality of those mystics who have cut loose from Scripture.

The concept of God repenting also causes embarrassment, yet there are a number of statements in Scripture to this effect: Gen. 6: 6,7. Ex.32:12,14. Deut.32:36. Jud. 2:18. I Sam.15:11,35. II Sam.24:16. I Chron.21:15. Ps.90:13, 106:45, 135:14. Jer.18:8,10, 20:16, 26:3,13,19. 42:10. Joel 2:13,14. Amos 7:3,6. Jonah 3:9,10, 4:2 - twenty-seven occurrences in all; twenty-nine if we add Is.1:24 and 57:6. In apparent contrast we read, 'God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should repent. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfil it?' (Num.23:19). '. . . the Glory of Israel will not lie or repent; for he is not a man, that he should repent' (I Sam.15:29). These two verses are understood in a time-less, philosophical way, and all the other verses are interpreted in harmony with this misunderstanding. This is done by labelling them anthropomorphic. The determining factor is not Scripture, but a complex which includes a reluctance to ascribe to God anything which appears unworthy, and the concept of his impassibility - a concept imported from pagan Greek philosophy. The concept was not without its problems. It was the answer of Plotinus (AD 204-270) to the Sceptic, Carneades (213-129 BC). 'All living beings, he (Carneades) argued, God included, must be subject to substantial change . . . and to emotional disturbance; but susceptibility to change entails susceptibility to destruction . . . Hence the object of Plotinus' doctrine of the impassibility of incorporeal beings was to de-

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fend their immortality by exempting them from change . . . .<sup>5</sup> This, however, raised the question of the relations of the gods to the world in which we live. Plotinus reasoned that the gods must have two souls. This is illustrated very clearly in his treatment of prayer. Prayer to the celestial gods cannot touch their higher souls, which are absorbed in contemplation and unaware of anything in the sensible cosmos; it does, however, provoke an automatic response from their lower soul, which grants the petitioner's wish . . . .<sup>6</sup> I very much doubt if even the most Neoplatonically inclined among us would posit two souls in the Godhead, yet that would have to be done if we are to adhere to the concept of impassibility and at the same time do justice to the text of Scripture.

The I Sam.15:29 reference ('. . . the Glory of Israel will not lie or repent; for he is not a man that he should repent') is particularly interesting because it is both preceded (11) and followed (35) by the assertion that God does, in fact, repent or change his mind. If v.29 gave the general controlling principle we would expect to find it at verse 11. Taking the passage as it stands, we can only conclude that it does *not* teach that God does not really repent, but that he really *does*, with the specific exception of the decision about Saul, thus making Saul's rejection all the more awesome. Numbers 23:19 is, again, about a very specific decision - God's decision to bless Israel. Balaam realises that God cannot be manipulated. The same is true of the Messianic promise in Psalm 110:4.

It is not surprising that the concept of impassibility has had an influence on the interpretation of Exodus 3:14, 'God said to Moses, "*I am who I am*". And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel, *I am* has sent me to you". The purpose of this revelation was not to proclaim God as a timeless, eternal, unchangeable being, but as one who is active in relationship on behalf of his people. He is the one who has just been revealing himself to Moses as 'the angel of the Lord' 'in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush' (2). This is highly suggestive. The fire probably symbolizes the holiness of God, but if so, it is strange that the bush was unaffected. It was surely a visual parable of the grace of God in his dealings with his people. It speaks, too, of his presence on this earthly scene. Notice how he does not deliver his people by remote control. He not only sends Moses as his representative, but prior to giving the commission he declares his personal involvement with his people in their sufferings. 'I have seen the affliction of my people . . . and have heard their cry . . . I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them . . . and to bring them up out of that land . . . And now, behold the cry of the people of Israel has come to me, and I have seen

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5. R. T. Wallis, *Neoplatonism*, 1972, p. 26.

6. *Ibid.*, p 70.

the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring forth my people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt.' (7-10). And when Moses protested, God said, 'But I will be with you . . .' (12). Moses again tries to decline and the Lord speaks of himself as '*I am*' and adds, 'Go and gather the elders of Israel together, and say to them that the Lord says . . . I have observed you and what has been done to you in Egypt; and I promise that I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt.' (16,17). This is eloquent testimony to a God who feels for his people, who not only sends Moses as his visible representative, but who also himself comes among his people to deliver them.

We can hold to the concept of impassibility only by treating thousands of passages as anthropomorphic, but even that cannot save the concept which is shattered by the fact of the Incarnation. Individual texts of Scripture are only anthropomorphic in the sense that every word from Genesis to Revelation is anthropomorphic. All Scripture is revelation from God to men in terms that are intelligible to us.

As an apologetic tool, Neoplatonic thought commended itself far better than gnosticism, but in the absence of a developed biblical theology it came to control the interpretation of Scripture. It seemed to offer the highest concept of God. To reject it and especially to reject the concept of impassibility, as Moltmann has noted,<sup>7</sup> seemed to leave us with a victim, trapped by his own creatures. The Scripture witness to God, however, is of one who really interacts with his creatures, making himself vulnerable, but does so as one who at all times is in complete control of every changing situation. 'In him, according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his will, we who first hoped in Christ have been destined and appointed to live for the praise of his glory.' (Eph. 1:11,12).

When God was thought of as Trinity, the concept of impassibility was readily applied to the Son and the Holy Spirit as well as the Father, One might have expected that the New Testament data would have made it impossible to apply the concept to the Incarnate Son. Selectivity operated.

Passages such as Matthew 27:14 ('But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge; so that the governor wondered greatly') and I Pet.2:23 ('When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but trusted to him who judges justly') could easily be marshalled to portray Jesus as impassible. This leaves us, however, with a very inconsistent Jesus when other evidence is considered, for example, Matt.26:37,38 ('. . . he began to be sorrowful and

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7. *The Trinity and the kingdom of God*, London, 1981, pp 21ff.

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troubled. Then he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death" . . .) or Hebrews 5:7 ('In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard for his godly fear').

The pastoral consequences of holding to the concept of the impassibility of God are disastrous, not only in as much as it fuels a tendency towards a destructive unbiblical asceticism, as we shall see, but also, because an impassible God cannot really feel for us. Our theology may speak differently, but in times of crisis we become consistent and our instinct is to doubt the real compassion and love of God. If we may be permitted to play with words when such a serious matter is at stake, we could say that an apathetic God has apathetic and fatalistic offspring. One of the biggest pastoral challenges we face today is how to help the not insignificant number of those who started out well but have now virtually dropped out of the spiritual race.

### Asceticism

Our concept of God determines our lifestyle. If we seek to be like God and to live in union with him we will become increasingly dissatisfied with ourselves and will take steps to deal with the rogue elements in our life.

If our God is impassible and our Lord Jesus Christ untouched by what afflicts us, then our sympathies should be drawn to Anoub the Monk (late 4th and early 5th century). 'They stayed in an old temple several days. Then Abba Anoub said to Abba Poemen, "For love's sake do this: let each of us live in quietness, each one by himself, without meeting one another the whole week." Abba Poemen replied, "We will do as you wish." So they did this. Now there was in the temple a statue of stone. When he woke up in the morning, Abba Anoub threw stones at the face of the statue and in the evening he said to it, "Forgive me." During the whole week he did this. On Saturday they came together and Abba Poemen said to Abba Anoub, "Abba, I have seen you during the whole week throwing stones at the face of the statue and kneeling to ask it to forgive you. Does a believer act thus?" The old man answered him, "I did it for your sake. When you saw me throwing stones at the face of the statue, did it speak, or did it become angry?" Abba Poemen said, "No." "Or again, when I bent down in penitence, was it moved, and did it say, 'I will not forgive you?'" Again Abba Poemen answered "No." Then the old man resumed, "Now we are seven brethren; if you wish us to live together, let us be like this statue, which is not moved whether one beats it or whether one flatters it. If you do not wish to become like this, there are four doors here in the temple, let each one go where he will." One was made housekeeper 'and all that he brought them, they ate and none of them had the authority to say, "Bring us

something else another time," or perhaps, "We do not want to eat this." Thus they passed all their time in quietness and peace.<sup>8</sup>

We may smile at this cultivation of the Stoic spirit, but we have a modern parallel in what is termed 'alienation', and unfortunately, many Christians are prone to the despair this breeds. The almost subconscious permeation of the concept of the 'impassibility of God' can make even the most resistant vulnerable. We walk a tight-rope when we pursue the *via negativa* and the non-emotional or rather, the desensitized, 'dark night of the soul' of the mystics. Both of these can be fruitful and liberating but it is only too easy to lose balance. Calvin is, perhaps, our best guide. Considering II Cor.4:8f ('We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed'), he says, 'You see that to bear the cross patiently is not to have your feelings altogether blunted, and to be absolutely insensible to pain, according to the absurd description which the Stoics of old gave of their hero as one who, divested of humanity, was affected in the same way by adversity and prosperity, grief and joy; or rather, like a stone, was not affected by anything. . . . Now also we have among Christians a new kind of Stoics, who hold it vicious not only to groan and weep, but even to be sad and anxious. These paradoxes are usually started by indolent men . . . But we have nothing to do with that iron philosophy which our Lord and Master condemned - not only in word, but also by his own example. . . . If every kind of fear is a mark of unbelief, what place shall we assign to the dread which, it is said, in no slight degree amazed him; if all sadness is condemned, how shall we justify him when he confesses, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death"?' (*Institutes* III:8:9)

We may recoil with horror from the extremes of asceticism and wonder what relevance this all has to our time. Yet few are untouched by the disease. Many Christians are unable to enjoy the good gifts with which God so richly endows them (I Tim.6:17) without a feeling of guilt, while others over-react by throwing off restraint and attempting to cultivate a lifestyle of worldliness with the blessing of God, vainly imagining that they are well-balanced Christians avoiding fanatical excess, whereas all the time they are at the other extreme from asceticism at its worst.

Calvin got the balance right. He knew how to renounce and how to affirm the blessings of God. We might call his path the way of true Christian asceticism, were it not for the fact that 'asceticism' no longer carries its original meaning of 'training'. We are all called to a life of moderation and the cultivation of a peaceable gentle spirit (Psalm 131, 1

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8. *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, trans. B. Ward, revised edit., 1981.

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Thess. 4:11, Jas.3:17f, Heb.12:11, Phil.4:5 (*epieikes*), Gal.5:23 (*enkrateia*), 2 Thess.3:12 (*hesuchia*).

### The Vision of God

In view of its historical association with a defective doctrine of God which encouraged abnormal lifestyles, we might be tempted to reject the concept of the vision of God, project it into the future life or make it in effect irrelevant by regarding it as merely a literary convention.

Undoubtedly, there is Scriptural warrant for an eschatological understanding. 'For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face' (I Cor.13:12; ' . . . when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is,' I John 3:2). Yet there are many references that speak about the possibility of 'seeing God' in this life. The tendency to project the vision of God completely into the life beyond is prominent in Roman Catholic thought (although there are exceptions), because the phrase 'we shall see him as he is' is taken to mean 'we shall see him as he is in himself', i.e. in his essence. This was the position of Aquinas and the Western Church and was stated officially by Pope Benedict XII: 'The soul of the just see the divine essence by an intuitive, face-to-face vision, with no creature as a medium of vision, but with the divine essence immediately manifesting itself to them, clearly and openly'<sup>9</sup> and in a Council of Florence decree (1438-45): 'Souls immediately upon entrance into heaven see clearly the one and triune God as he is.'<sup>10</sup> Aquinas argued that 'To say that God is seen through some likeness is to say that God is not seen at all.'<sup>11</sup> Scripture, however, gives us no encouragement to believe that we will ever see God in his essence. Palamas (1296-1359) and the East denied that God could be seen in his essence and distinguished between God's essence and his energies. Berkouwer,<sup>12</sup> noting that I John 3:2 does not speak of God's essence, feels we do not need to choose between Aquinas and Palamas, yet he inclines to favour Aquinas, asserting that Palamas divides the indivisible. There is, however, much to be said for the view of Palamas.

We might regard passages such as Psalm 24:6 ('Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob') or Psalm 63, ('So I have gazed upon thee in the sanctuary to behold thy might and glory') or 2 Cor.3:18 ('And we all, with unveiled face, beholding and reflecting the glory of the Lord . . .') etc. as examples of poetic license. Yet we must surely admit, that with all the reserve there present, Exodus 24:9-11 is sober narrative. 'Then Moses and

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9. *Benedictus Deus*, (1336), trans. in *Spiritual Theology*, J. Aumann, 1979, p. 42.

10. *Ibid.*

11. *Ibid.*, p 43.

12. *The Return of Christ*, ET, Grand Rapids, 1972, p 383.

Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel went up, and they saw the God of Israel; and there was under his feet as it were a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness. And he did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel; they beheld God, and ate and drank.' The same conclusion is irresistible in other passages, such as Judges 13:22 ('And Manoah said to his wife, "We shall surely die, for we have seen God.") or Isaiah 6:5 ('And I said, "Woe is me! for I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts!").

In the light of such passages as Exod.33:20; John 1:18, 6:46; I Tim.1:17 and I John 4:12 which assert that no one can see God, it is understandable that the concept of 'seeing God' has been adulterated. Yet there are a number of passages that clearly teach that in this life it is possible to 'see God', albeit imperfectly, and these greatly outnumber the others, e.g. Gen.16:13, 32:30; Exod.24:9-11, 33:11; Num.12:6-8; Deut.34:10; 1 Kings 22:19; Job 42:5f; Ps.27:4, 42:2, 84:7; Is.6:1,5; Ezek.10:18f, 11:22f, 43:4,7; Dan.7:9f; Amos 7:7, 9:1; 1 Cor.13:12; 2 Cor.3:7,18, 12:1; Heb.11:27; 1 John 3:1f. We allow that some of these texts may be using a convention with minimal content, but it is surely difficult to believe that all these references can be dismissed. And these are only a small selection.

It is only on a *a priori* grounds, for which there is no biblical justification, that the texts which speak of the impossibility of seeing God are taken as normative and as determining the content we put into those in the other group. Both groups must be held together and given equal weight. In short, although 'seeing God' is not crassly physical, it is still a very real 'seeing' - one that could produce dread.

We have already mentioned the growing encroachment of Greek philosophy. This has become a controlling factor in much theology which, on the doctrine of God, speaks first in categories of Greek origin before treating of the Trinity. Moltmann<sup>13</sup> is so refreshingly liberating in his reversal, a reversal which corrects theological aberration. If we start with a definable God, definable in terms of self-existence, immutability, infinity, etc., we reduce theology to a science and, even worse, we reduce the Lord of glory to an idol. The true ground of religious experience is cut away from under our feet, with encounter with God becoming subjective, and despite our theology of grace we are continually being drawn into the legalistic web.

If we begin with the full revelation in Scripture of God as Trinity, theology becomes an act of worship, God is sensed to be truly ineffable.

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13. *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God.*

## IMPASSIBILITY, ASCETICISM AND THE VISION OF GOD

True religious experience is objective, and the vision of God overwhelms the believer as and when God chooses to reveal himself. It is not a reward for works done. It is all of grace.

In the pagan religions of the time the concept of 'seeing the god' was prominent and this may well explain why the concept figures more prominently in post-apostolic Christian literature than in the New Testament. This serves to highlight the importance of keeping the doctrine of the Trinity central.

In rabbinic theology, to avoid the use of the divine name 'Yahweh', the three pre-eminent periphrases used were 'Word', 'Glory' and 'Shekinah' (or 'Presence'). In the Targums, 'Word' was used for the invisible presence of God and 'Glory' for his visible presence. The most popular term was 'Shekinah' which stood for both the visible and invisible presence of God.

John begins his prologue, 'In the beginning was the Word'. He goes on, not only to make a distinction between the Word and God by saying 'with God' twice, but in the same breath to identify the Word and God, 'The Word was God' (John 1:1f). This Word 'became flesh' - the invisible One makes himself visible - 'and dwelt among us' ('pitched his tent' - an allusion which surely includes a hint, at least, of the Shekinah). 'We have beheld his glory (the word for the visible presence of God), 'glory as of the only Son from the Father.' (1:14). And notice that this was no impoverished revelation. He was 'full of grace and truth'. Doubtless there is a reference here to the Transfiguration, but it may include more besides, as Jn.14:9f seems to suggest, since Philip was not present at the Transfiguration but yet was privileged to have 'seen' Jesus in a way that revealed God the Father. 'Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and we shall be satisfied". Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you do not know me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father; how can you say 'Show us the Father'?"' Passages which point to a post-ascension 'seeing of Jesus' include Acts 7:55; 1 Cor.9:1, 15:8; 2 Cor.3:18, 4:6 and Col.1:15. Notice again that it is never of human origin. It is a divine gift.

In the Son we 'see' the Father, Jn1:18, 14:7ff,12:45; Col.1:15; Heb.1:3. This vision transcends an intellectual awareness of his presence. The Holy Spirit not only reveals the Lord Jesus in us (cf. Gal:1:16) but he also makes himself visible in his gifts which are 'the manifestation of the Spirit' (I Cor.12:7). Indeed, when he chooses, he can manifest the Triune God. (I Cor.14:25) 'the secrets of his (i.e. the unbeliever's) heart are disclosed; and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you.' The Holy Spirit who, at the baptism of Jesus, 'descended upon him in bodily form, as a dove' (Luke 3:22), descended on the day of Pentecost on the believers with visible 'tongues as of fire' (Acts 2:1-3).

Historically, the objectivity of the manifestation of God has been threatened by the tendency to think of the vision of God in terms of the experience of the recipient with two categories being distinguished - the ecstatic moment and the continuous experience of love for the Lord. Valid as this is, if given too much preponderance, it can lessen the objective control of the inscripturated word and lead to a morass of subjectivism.

Granted that the vision of God is in some real, though very imperfect sense, attainable in this life, and granted that it is much more than a sense of assurance, how then should we live?

We might be tempted to think that the ideal place to experience the vision of God is the hermit's cell, away from all distraction. Although the vision is usually experienced by individuals, it is generally in Scripture, given in a corporate setting. In John 1:14 it is the community, 'we', which 'beheld his glory'. Even the Transfiguration took place in the presence of a community. Note that the 'manifestation of the Spirit' is for the common good (1 Cor.12:7) and the context of chapters 11 to 14 of 1 Corinthians is the church.(cf. especially 14:24f). Paul was not alone on the Damascus road although the revelation was to him alone. Note the first person plural in 1 Cor.13:12a, 'For now *we* see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face' - all the more striking since v.11 and v.12b are in the first person singular. Exod.24:9ff witnesses to a corporate experience. The Lord dealt with Moses face to face, and although he was marked out by this fact as unique - a type of Christ, we might say - yet, even so, he was the representative of the whole people of God. It is possible that Isaiah was alone in the temple when he 'saw the Lord', but it is not likely. Even at night, as Psalm 134 informs us, some of the servants of the Lord were to be found in his house.

Psalm 63 is instructive. Verse 1 tells of the flesh that faints for God in a dry and weary land. The RSV tries to improve on the verse by inserting the word 'as' but if the writer is saying that his flesh faints for God as in a dry and weary land, then for many of us the verse will have very limited relevance, because our experience is different. What the psalmist is saying is that when we are cut off from civilization with its comforts and distractions, we become aware of our longing and only the Lord is left to satisfy it. Yet it was not in the physical wilderness that he saw God. That was the experience of the sanctuary (v.2) where the Lord meets with his people. If our lives are to be healthy spiritually we need times of withdrawal but these are not an end in themselves, nor should we expect the fulness of God's blessing there. It is in the fellowship of the saints that we should normally expect to 'see God'. Times of withdrawal should prepare us, whetting our appetites for the corporate worship.

## IMPASSIBILITY, ASCETICISM AND THE VISION OF GOD

The beatitude, 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God' (Matt.5:8), so often understood in an individualistic way, alludes to Psalm 24:3ff: 'Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false, and does not swear deceitfully. He will receive blessings from the Lord, and vindication from the God of his salvation. Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob.' It is the individual as part of the worshipping community who is addressed. Dealing with sin is an individual matter but the issue is corporate. Gregory the Great, Bernard of Clairvaux, John of the Cross, John Calvin and many other outstanding Christians who have taken the vision of God seriously have known the importance of interaction with others.

Not simply the individual, but humankind in sexual differentiation was created by God 'in his image', 'after his likeness' (Gen. 2:6ff, 5:1f), 'entrusted with dominion, made little less than God, crowned with glory and honour' (Ps. 8:5). Yet, although the image of God was not obliterated by sin (Gen. 9:6; Jas. 3:9), 'we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. But we see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, crowned with glory and honour, because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.' Note the corporate dimension. 'For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through suffering', etc. (Heb.2:8ff). The Lord Jesus is, *par excellence*, 'the image of God' and so 'he reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature' (Heb1:3). And note, it is the one who 'is the image of the invisible God' (Col. 1:15) who is 'the head of the body, the church' (Col.1:18). The church is the new humanity which bodies forth Christ Jesus the Lord.

Psalm 24 also alerts us to the relationship between the vision of God and Torah. Compare Psalm 11:7, 'For the Lord is righteous, he loves righteous deeds; the upright shall behold his face,' or Psalm 17:15, 'As for me, I shall behold thy face in right doing (or, when vindicated); when I awake, I shall be satisfied with beholding thy form,' and also 1 John 3:2f '... we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.'

We are not called to a narrow legalistic obedience to the Law. One of the striking things about the list in Psalm 24 is its brevity. It is Law as revelation - a gift of grace to be received and lived out by faith. The Spirit and the Word must never be divorced, as I Cor. 2:7-16 and Eph. 5:18-20 taken with Col. 3:16f make clear. On this subject we paddle at

**THE SCOTTISH BULLETIN OF EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY**

**the shore virtually unaware of the vastness of the ocean that lies beyond us.**

## REVIEWS

### Calvin's Old Testament Commentaries

T. H. L. Parker

T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1986; 239pp., £14.95, hardback;

ISBN 0 567 09365 4.

The title of Dr Parker's latest book invites comparison with his earlier work on Calvin's New Testament Commentaries. As the author himself explains, the scope of this book differs from the former in that it is less concerned with technical matters and is more concerned with 'the substance' of Calvin's exposition.

The first chapter is the most technical, describing Calvin's three forms of exposition - Commentaries, Lectures and Sermons. Dr Parker points out their different characteristics and tells us how they came to be recorded. Much has been written on Calvin's Commentaries and Sermons, but 'Calvin's lecturing is an aspect of his activity which has largely escaped study.' Dr Parker's account will doubtless go a long way to fill the gap.

Chapter Two deals with Calvin's doctrine of the relationship between the Old Testament and the New. There is an outline of *Institutes* II:ix-xi, setting out Calvin's view of the similarity and differences between the two testaments and his conviction that the testaments are one in substance and differ only in their outward form or administration. The various images Calvin uses when speaking of the differences between the testaments are also explained. Calvin's concept of the law as a schoolmaster to Christ is also illustrated. The whole chapter is drawn together by a section examining some of Calvin's principles of interpretation as seen in the light of his understanding of the two testaments. Dr Parker deals with Calvin's attitude to allegory, his use of anagogical and typological forms of interpretation and his aim to understand the intention (*consilium*) of the author. This section I found somewhat disappointing. In my opinion Calvin's repudiation of the allegorical method in favour of the literal-historical and unitary sense is much more radical and has greater significance than Dr Parker's account would seem to imply.

The remainder of the book goes on to describe the way Calvin interprets the three major genres of Old Testament literature covered by his Commentaries, that is history, law and prophecy.

Chapter Three, 'The Exposition of History', describes Calvin's expositions of Old Testament history in terms of his favourite theme of the childhood of the Church. Other topics dealt with are Calvin's aptitude for reconstructing the actual course of events behind the biblical text, and his attitude to Old Testament miracles, visions and angels. Brief mention is made of his use of the principle of accommodation in the explanation of Old Testament problems. The chapter closes with extended quotations from Calvin's commentaries illustrating his use of individual stories and character studies as a basis for moral teaching and exhortation.

Chapter Four on 'The Law' deals, not with Calvin's concept of law, but his method of expounding and arranging the legal material in his Pentateuchal Harmony. The whole chapter is simply a description of the way Calvin has arranged and grouped the various moral, political and ceremonial laws around the

Decalogue, as expositions of it, and repeats Calvin's comments (abridged) as found in his *Harmony*. Dr Parker singles out Calvin's exposition of the first and the eighth commandments; the others are dealt with in outline form in an appendix. For those unfamiliar with Calvin's *Harmony*, this chapter will give some idea of Calvin's procedure, but no critical assessment is attempted.

Chapter Five is entitled 'The Exposition of Prophecy'. Such themes as Calvin's ideas of the prophets as interpreters of the law, covenant and election, prophetic visions and Calvin's historical exegesis of the prophets are treated. Calvin's doctrine of inspiration, a thorny problem touched on earlier (p. 65), receives fuller treatment here. Dr Parker, as elsewhere, rejects the idea that Calvin should be thought of as holding a doctrine of verbal inspiration and inerrancy. However, he also warns against 'watering down Calvin's doctrine of Scripture as the complete Word of God' (p. 188). Dr Parker does not tell us what this means, but he thinks it not inconsistent with the admission of errors in Scripture on Calvin's part (p. 192). This whole treatment I found somewhat inadequate and confusing. The question of verbal inspiration is dismissed far too summarily and on very weak grounds. It is most puzzling when Dr Parker, at the close of this section, writes, 'The solution of the problem posed by Calvin's doctrine is of purely academic interest' (p. 193f). It would seem to me that Calvin's doctrine of inspiration is extremely important for understanding his Old Testament commentaries as well as his method of interpretation.

Another theme dealt with in this chapter is Christ in the prophets. Dr Parker observes that '... even when there is no Christological interpretation, this is precisely what he is thinking of' (p. 194). Finally Dr Parker gives an account of Calvin's application of the prophets to the needs of the Church in his own time. We are reminded that Calvin, even as an Old Testament scholar, never lost sight of the fact that he was a servant of the Church and that for him biblical exposition must always serve the Church's needs.

All in all I found this book rather disappointing, more so as one expects so much from the pen of one who has such high status in Calvin scholarship as Dr Parker. This book lacks the excitement of some of his earlier books. More importantly it lacks their depth. Apart from the first chapter there is little that the reader of Calvin's commentaries could not gather for himself. Perhaps this is because it attempts too much in too brief a space, and so tends to be rather sketchy in its treatment of important issues. Next to no attempt is made to assess the significance of Calvin's expositions. No doubt, because of Dr Parker's high status in the realm of Calvin studies, future scholarly work on Calvin's Old Testament Commentaries will have to refer this book. However, its usefulness for the more scholarly reader is severely limited by the almost total absence of any references to secondary material. With only one or two exceptions, the footnotes are confined to references within Calvin's own writings. Moreover no bibliography of secondary material is given. On the other hand, there are many fully referenced quotations from Calvin's commentaries which make it a handy source book. For the reader with a less scholarly interest in Calvin and who is unfamiliar with Calvin's Old Testament expositions it will give some introduction.

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## **A Commentary on the Minor Prophets, Volume 2: Joel, Amos and Obadiah**

John Calvin

Geneva Series of Commentaries, The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1986; 513pp., £6.95, hardback; ISBN 0 85151 474.

This is a reprint of Volume 2 of the Calvin Translation Society edition of Calvin's Commentaries on the Minor Prophets in five volumes originally published in 1846. The body of the Commentary is divided up as follows: Joel, 128 pages; Amos, 266 pages; Obadiah, 39 pages. The biblical text (AV/KJV) is supplied at the head of Calvin's comments and in a parallel column Calvin's own Latin translation is given. A translation of Calvin's Latin version (as modified by his comments on the text) is also given towards the rear of the book.

The CTS editors saw fit to supplement Calvin's comments by the addition of copious footnotes, and there is also an addendum at the rear of the book in which longer supplementary comments of difficult texts can be found. These footnotes serve various purposes. Sometimes they give alternative renderings of Calvin's Latin, at other times they either add to Calvin's comments where the editor thought them lacking, for example in the meaning of Hebrew words and the historical or geographical background to the text, or support Calvin's interpretation from later scholarship. These footnotes have been criticised, but I have often found them useful. They sometimes throw light on Calvin's own comments which at times can be obscure. They naturally reflect the concerns and scholarship of the mid-nineteenth century, and should be used with care. There is no index to this volume, as the index to the Minor Prophets set is found in the fifth volume.

Although Calvin's Old Testament expositions are usually referred to as Commentaries, many of them are in fact transcriptions of Calvin's expository lectures delivered originally in the Academy of Geneva. Calvin lectured in Latin, but since many of his audience were not too skilled in the tongue, his language is very simple, though it always retains the elegance characteristic of his other writings. This brings me to my major criticism of the book which concerns the quality of the translation itself. It is very literal and inelegant, in places so literal that it makes bad English which reads very awkwardly. Here are a couple of sentences taken at random, 'Taken away shall not be the sceptre from Judah ...'; 'Since God then had raised up this intestine putridity, ought you not to have been at length seriously affected, and to have returned to a right mind?' Such a translation does little justice to the elegance and simplicity of Calvin's Latin style. Apart from the translation, the language itself is now somewhat dated.

However, this criticism aside, Calvin's brilliance as a commentator still shines through, and we can only repeat what C. H. Spurgeon said of Calvin's commentaries, that 'they are worth their weight in gold'. Calvin's praises as a commentator have been frequently sung, but can never be sung enough. Calvin always seeks to understand his text, in the first place, according to its literal-grammatical meaning. However, he does not stop there, for, having got to the meaning of the text, he then seeks to draw out its meaning and implications for the Church and for Christian living. As one scholar put it, 'Calvin's Commentaries are written with one foot in the first and the other in the sixteenth cen-

ture.' Though this does not mean that his applications have no relevance for us today. Some of these applications, it is true, are related specifically to the times of the Reformation and the struggles of the Church at Geneva (for example, Amos' clash with the priest Amaziah becomes a picture of the Reformers' contest with the papacy). But even then they provide us with fascinating glimpses and lessons into how Calvin applied the Old Testament as the Word of God to the needs and problems of his own times. Even in such cases Calvin never strays from the literal meaning of the text, and his applications always arise out of it.

Calvin's exposition of the first and second chapters of Joel is interesting for his rejection of the allegorical interpretation which understood the locusts in chapter one as four kingdoms. His interpretation Joel 2:28-3:21 provides us with a good example of his Christological exposition of the prophets. According to Calvin, to limit these predictions to the return from exile, as Jewish expositors do, or to the coming of Christ, as Christians do, is to misunderstand them. The prophet speaks of both, for 'the Jewish restoration is but a prelude of that true and real redemption afterwards effected by Christ' (p. 113f). Thus Calvin is able to give a Christological interpretation while retaining the literal-historical sense. Calvin's exposition of Amos 9:11ff is an admirable example of the way he found Christ in the Old Testament. The commentaries on Obadiah show Calvin's critical acumen in exercise. In his introduction he recognises the similarity between Obadiah and Jeremiah 49. Far from shaking his faith in the verbal inspiration of scripture, he finds confirmation. 'The Holy Spirit could, no doubt, have expressed the same things in different words; but he was pleased to join together these two testimonies, that they might obtain more credit.' Having noted this similarity Calvin goes on to make use of it in the body of the commentary for resolving difficulties of interpretation and grammar (*c.f.* for

Thus the great strength of these Commentaries is their exegetical tact and their warm, personal application to the people of God. Hence it will be pastors and Bible teachers who profit most from them. Many of those who attended the original lectures were men who were preparing for the pastoral ministry. Calvin adapted many of his comments to their needs. Again private bible students will also find them useful for grappling with the biblical text and its application to their lives. If further testimony to the value of Calvin's commentaries is required perhaps that of Arminius will be sufficient: 'Next to the study of the scriptures, which I earnestly inculcate, I exhort my students to read Calvin's commentaries. ... for I affirm that he excels beyond comparison in the interpretation of scripture ...'

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**A Commentary on the Minor Prophets, Volume 4: Habakkuk, Zephaniah and Haggai**

John Calvin

Geneva Series of Commentaries, The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1986; 411pp., £5.95, hardback; ISBN 0 85151 477 4.

The general comments made above on the second volume of this series are applicable to the present volume. The commentary is distributed as follows: Habakkuk, 145 pages; Zephaniah, 131 pages; Haggai, 73 pages.

In my opinion, Calvin's commentary on Habakkuk is among the best on the Minor Prophets. Calvin penetrates deeply into the prophet's spiritual experience and maps it out for us. His deep anxieties over the condition of the nation, God's seeming indifference and his eventual triumph of faith, provide Calvin with much material for warm spiritual application. There are many valuable lessons on prayer and the spiritual conflict with temptations, doubt and unbelief. Almost an entire lecture is devoted to the exposition of the doctrine of justification in Habakkuk 2:4, reminding us that Calvin's dogmatic work is not confined to the *Institutes*.

The commentary on Zephaniah shows the fundamental place that scriptural exegesis occupies in Calvin's idea of Reformation. For Calvin it is the exegesis of scripture that must uphold the Church through the storm and guide it along the way to restoration. What Karl Barth said with respect to Calvin's New Testament commentaries is appropriate here: 'How energetically Calvin, having first established what stands in the text, sets himself to re-think the whole material and to wrestle with it, till the walls which separate the sixteenth century from the first become transparent! Paul speaks (Zephaniah too!), and the man of the sixteenth century hears.'

The commentary on Haggai is the first on the post-exilic prophets. It is evident that Calvin had a particular love for these prophets. He sees in their situation many parallels with the state and progress of the Reformation. In describing the worldliness, slothfulness, loss of zeal and frustrated hopes of the post-exilic Church, he is describing a parallel situation in his own day. To quote Calvin, this whole history is 'a mirror' and 'the prophet not only spoke to the men of his age, but was also destined, through God's wonderful purpose, to be a preacher to us, so that his doctrine sounds at this day in our ears, and reproves our torpor and ungrateful indifference . . .' (p. 326).

As with all Banner of Truth books, these volumes are very handsomely bound.

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**A Commentary on the Minor Prophets, Volume 5: Zechariah and Malachi**

John Calvin,

Geneva Series of Commentaries, The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1986; 712 pp., £8.95; ISBN 0 85151 476 6.

This is the final volume of the Banner of Truth's reprint of the Calvin Translation Society's (CTS) edition of Calvin's commentaries on the Minor Prophets. The Commentary is divided as follows: Zechariah, 440 pages; Malachi, 173 pages.

The general remarks on Calvin's method of commentating etc. made above in my review of the second volume of this series, are applicable here. This volume, since it completes the series, contains the three indices to the set, to Hebrew words, to passages of Scripture, and to topics. As were all the indices in the CTS edition of Calvin's Commentaries, they are detailed and useful. It is a shame that there is not the same detail in the indices to the Torrance translation of Calvin's New Testament Commentaries, which by comparison are rather scanty.

There is little room in a review of this size to say much about the actual contents of these commentaries. Zechariah gives full scope to show Calvin's soberness as an exegete. He refuses to be carried away by undue allegorisation - unless the text demands it - and consistently avoids speculative interpretations. Malachi, on the other hand, gives scope for him to develop some of the great themes of his theology of grace. Thus he spends almost two lectures, about 20 pages, expounding the themes of election and reprobation in Malachi 1:2-5. Both these commentaries - especially Zechariah - provide good examples of Calvin's principles of prophetic interpretation.

Suffice it to say that these commentaries will be found invaluable to pastors and all those seeking to grapple with the theological and spiritual import of God's Word.

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**The Psalms**

David Dickson

The Geneva Series of Commentaries, The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1985; xxv + 1026 pp., £9.95.

The second reprint of this volume of the Geneva series of commentaries is to be welcomed. Combining as it does two volumes in one (in fact, originally published as three), it is remarkably concise in appearance, and not at all difficult to handle.

Dickson's commentary, which appeared first in the 1650's, is a devotional classic. The archaisms of the language may be daunting to some, but these should not discourage the reader, since the style is neat and not at all ponderous to read. One leaves the book feeling uplifted rather than exhausted.

The Psalms are unapologetically interpreted as referring to Christ and the Church, and are applied to the life of the Christian believer. Although this means that many questions are overlooked, such as their original setting and

purpose, it does give them a relevance for today which is immediately apparent. The author's style, of making a list of points to be learned from each section of the psalm, is helpful. Comments are also made on the Psalm headings; quite correctly so, since they are a part of the text and have something to teach us. This is in welcome contrast to some recent scholarship (and translations) which has tended to ignore them. Unfortunately, however, the writer gives us only one brief page of general introduction to the Psalms.

The tendency of the commentator to spiritualise the message of the Psalter can be devotionally helpful, though at times it does verge on ignoring what the text says. Such a propensity to read Christian truths and experience into the text has its limitations. For example, the God who gives good to the hungry (Ps. 146:7) is seen as a reference to God supplying *believers* with the needs of body *and soul*. This may be a Christian truth (perhaps inspired in this case by the Sermon on the Mount?), but I am not sure that this is what the Psalm is saying.

In recent years, the Psalms have been the object of a great deal of scholarly research and interest. While not all the conclusions of this work have been helpful, a great deal of it has. In particular, it lets us understand the original, living context of Israel's hymn book. Some modern commentaries can be dry and technical, however, and lose the rich devotional spirit of the book. A combination of both aspects is needed, for both student and preacher alike, and if this commentary was used in conjunction with one offering more of the results of modern scholarship, the reader would find it of great benefit.

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### **On The Thirty Nine Articles: A Conversation With Tudor Christianity**

Oliver O'Donovan

Paternoster Press (for Latimer House, Oxford), Exeter, 1986, 160pp., £5.95, paperback, ISBN 0 85364 435 7

The challenge of coming to terms with a confessional basis laid down in an earlier and very different age is not confined to Churches in the Reformed tradition. All who seek to do justice both to a sixteenth- or seventeenth-century formulary and to a modern biblical faith will find it instructive to accompany the Professor of Moral Theology at Oxford as he converses with the Thirty Nine Articles. It is a book devoid of the apparatus of scholarship (no annotation, bibliography or index - although a useful appendix prints the Forty Two Articles of 1553 and the Thirty Nine in their original orthography), but rich in theological wisdom and insight. The method, which is organized without being systematic, grouping the Thirty Nine under ten heads for discussion, is well suited to retain the reader's interest.

I particularly appreciated the recurrent strain of reflection on the identity and genius of Anglican belief. 'It ... has never been ... the genius of the Church of England to grow its own theological nourishment, but only to prepare what was provided from elsewhere and to set it decently upon the table .... There was nothing particularly 'middle' about most of the English Reformers' theological positions - even if one could decide between what poles the middle way was supposed

to lie. Their moderation consisted rather in a determined policy of separating the essentials of faith and order from adiaphora.'

Professor O'Donovan is fond of 'tension' and 'dialectic', which help to produce a balanced evaluation. He is also fond of 'mystery', and occasionally (*e.g.*, on justification and on universalism) the clarity of the Articles is obscured by over-sophistication. At one or two points the obvious is overlooked (*e.g.*, the lack of reference to ordination in Article 23), and attempts to improve the Articles unconvincing. This is most noticeable on Article 17 ('Of predestination and election'), which cannot be made to speak of the election of 'a community, but not its individual members' (*cf.* 'those whom ... out of mankynde'). The Westminster Confession's chapter is misinterpreted by reading a temporal 'first ... then' distinction into it, and is apparently credited with speaking of the predestination of 'named individuals'! The predestinarian ghost that animated all the magisterial Reformers will not be exorcized in this fashion.

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### **Created in God's Image**

**Anthony A. Hoekema**

Paternoster Press, Exeter, 1986, 264 pp., £12.95 hardback.

ISBN 0 85364 446 2.

The Psalmist's cry, 'What is man?' has been an unanswerable question for the godless thinkers of the ages. It is an ever-relevant question. Existentialism in the twentieth century has recognised that man's existence is more important than his essence, but still cannot find a satisfactory answer. Rather it has tended to despair.

*Created in God's Image* is a welcome affirmation of the Christian position and a carefully argued defence of the biblical truth. In his preface, Hoekema, Emeritus Professor of Systematic Theology at Calvin Theological Seminary, outlines his thesis. 'Central to the biblical understanding of man is the teaching that men and women were created in the image of God. I will present the image of God as having structural and functional aspects, as involving man in his threefold relationships - to God, to others, and to nature - and as going through four stages - the original image, the perverted image, the renewed image, and the perfected image.'

After a chapter on the importance of our doctrine of man, he discusses man as a 'created person', recognising this as a paradox. Man is a 'creature' totally dependant upon God but yet is a 'person' with the power of self-determination and self-direction. Scripture shows both these facts to be true. Even in salvation 'God must regenerate but man must believe'.

Hoekema then makes a careful study of the biblical teaching on this 'imageness' and gives a historical survey of the views on the subject of such figures as Irenaeus, Aquinas, Calvin, Barth, Brunner and Berkouwer. In a theological summary he shows how man was meant both to mirror and to represent God. 'Since the image of God includes the whole person, it must include man's structure and man's functioning.' After a short, illuminating chapter on 'self-image', there is a full discussion of the Fall. This deals with the origin, spread, nature and

restraint of sin. In arguing for a historical Fall, Hoekema points out that while the garden may be symbolic that does not mean it is not real. Sin he defines as 'a perverse way of using God given and God reflecting power'. This means, of course, that all sin is against God himself. But the Fall did not destroy the image of God that is man; it affected his function rather than structure. The book concludes with chapters on the 'Whole Person' - a psychosomatic unity - and on 'The Question of Freedom.' Both are helpful discussions.

I found this an interesting, stimulating and illuminating book. It is a work of scholarship but very readable, since all theological and philosophical terms are clearly explained. It is also a practical book. Professor Hoekema continually emphasises the practical importance of the doctrines he is discussing.

A comprehensive bibliography, general index and index of Scriptures used, make it an ideal textbook and reference work. It is of value to preachers, students and thinking laymen.

*John Wilson  
Motherwell*

### **A Karl Barth Reader**

Rolf Joachim Eiler and Reiner Marquard (eds.)

T. & T. Clark Ltd., Edinburgh, 1986; 117pp., £4.95, paperback;  
ISBN 0 567 29131 6.

'Prepared for the Barth centennial, this selection from Barth's writings serves admirably as an introduction to his thinking for those who have neither the time nor perhaps the desire to plunge into his bulky output for themselves' (Geoffrey W. Bromiley, 'Translator's Preface', p. vii). Most readers will perhaps fall into both categories! This book could well be used as a kind of 'Day by Day with Karl Barth'. Some 'days' will be more inspiring than others!

The reader who would never dream of calling himself a 'Barthian' will be interested to hear Barth say: 'I myself am not a "Barthian" ... Make as little use of my name as possible. There is only one relevant name' (p. 112). The reader may not agree with the precise manner in which Barth developed his Christology. He will, however, learn from Barth as he respects Barth's intention of being Christ centred: 'Jesus Christ ... my own concern in my long life has been increasingly to emphasize this name' (p. 114). Similarly, the reader with misgivings about Barth's doctrine of Scripture will learn from Barth as he recognises Barth's concern with letting the Bible speak: 'The Bible speaks only when we let it speak the first word' (p. 9).

The preacher can learn from Barth's concern 'that not so much my sermon but the text it follows may really sink in and go with you' (p. 3). The theologian should never forget that 'Christian theology is good ... when ... it is ... service in which one learns constantly: "He must increase, but I must decrease" (Jn. 3:30)' (p. 16). We must all heed Barth's warning that our day 'cannot be a good age if the gospel of Jesus Christ ... is silent and no longer to be heard in it' (p. 82).

The book contains a 'Karl Barth Chronology' (pp. 115-116) and a list of 'English Translations of Barth's Works' (p. 117).

*Charles M. Cameron  
Dunfermline*

**Clinical Theology: A Theological and Psychological Basis to Clinical Pastoral Care**

Frank Lake, abridged by Martin H. Yeomans

Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 245 pp., £12.95, paperback;

ISBN 0 232 51676 6

This is a careful, radical abridgement of Frank Lane's vast book of 1282 pages first published in 1966. Martin Yeoman's, a Methodist minister, has been a Clinical Theology seminar tutor for over 20 years. He has sought to retain the particular aspects of the original work which have been of most value to pastoral counsellors over the years.

For those of us who knew Dr Lake in person and profited from the training offered in the seminars, this book still breathes the personality of its author, with his rich use of language and his amazing perceptiveness into the heart of a problem and a person. Above all, his warmth and Christian compassion for those who hurt in any way shine through.

In the first chapter on 'The Christian Service of Listening' he introduces us to the key to all his understanding of the synthesis between theology and psychological theory. Even if people grasp little else from his writings, they will gain much from the stress on the sufficiency of the Lord Jesus Christ to understand and enter into our deepest emotional pain. He points to the resources made available to us through the humanity of Jesus, especially his experience of dereliction, and through his death for us, so that he can write: 'Christ, as Redeemer in the week of his passion bore upon his own person and in his own spirit every form of anxiety known to man or borne by him' (p. 13). In addition the Christian has the resources of prayer, Holy Communion and the preaching of the Word. Preachers may be encouraged by Dr Lake's assertion that 'there is a genre of preaching which can reach down to the heart of the psychoneurotic and psychotic problems and open them up to the resources of God' (p.16).

Both in his writing and in his therapeutic work, Dr Lake was a man who relied on the Holy spirit to make real the liberating truth of justification by faith, without which the pastoral counsellor cannot function.

Martin Yeomans has helpfully separated off into a new chapter Dr Lake's understanding of the dynamic cycle as a model in theology and psychodynamics. He described the normal pattern of interpersonal relationships as consisting of four factors, in dynamic relation to one another and in sequence. They are: (1) acceptance, which ensures our very sense of 'being'; (2) sustenance of the personality which results in the degree of 'well-being' experienced. These two input dependency phases of personality development are followed by two output ones of: (3) status, which implies motivation to care for others as one has been cared for; and (4) achievement of the task appropriate to the person. This model was fundamentally divergent from those used in classical psychology and psychiatry and was derived from Dr Lake's study of the 'spiritual dynamics' of our Lord, especially in John's Gospel. Thus Christ is the 'norm' for the study of the 'normal' man.

The remainder of the abridged edition selects from the voluminous recording of case studies sufficient content to highlight Dr Lake's understanding of personality disorders or psychiatric illness, *viz.* depression; hysterical, schizoid

and paranoid personalities; and anxiety and related defensive reactions. (Mr Yeomans has omitted the chapter in the original on homosexuality). Pastors will find the Appendix on Pastoral Recording of a case history of practical help in the task of discerning, with the Holy Spirit's aid, the real needs of those who seek them out to talk.

Those who buy this book may be grateful that Martin Yeomans has included the original Glossary and may also wish to have a dictionary at hand in places! Dr Lake's unique conception of 'figures and charts' may only confuse and irritate some readers, who will be glad to find the number included in the abridged edition reduced very considerably. I am glad that this book has been published in a more readable abridgement. It should be weighed against the current spate of books on 'inner healing' and counselling.

*Shirley A. Fraser  
Edinburgh*

### **The Power of the Pulpit**

Gardiner Spring

The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1986. £5.95.

Gardiner Spring was ordained pastor of the Brick Presbyterian Church, New York City in 1810 and remained there for sixty two years. Only a man of profound conviction and with a lively sense of the treasures of God's Word could have sustained a ministry in one place that long. In this volume he affirms that 'the pulpit has power'; and he proposes to show 'the constituent elements which invest it with this moral influence', by pointing out 'the duties of ministers ... to make full proof of the power with which it is invested, (and by specifying 'the obligations which rest on the church of God to give it its due place and importance'.

The author almost apologises for obtruding himself as he neared the thirty-eight years of preaching in one place, but he went on to preach other twenty-four years there after that! Looking at the date of the book's first publication, 1848, it is difficult to think it was written so long ago; it dates remarkably little.

The first five chapters are devoted to discussing the fact that the pulpit has power, and chapters six to nine to the constituent elements of the pulpit's power, namely truth, uttered by a living teacher, in the name and by the authority of God, and accompanied with his mighty power. He asserts that ear-gate goes far deeper than eye-gate; which is surely true, and wonderfully confirmatory to a preacher. 'Preaching', he says, 'is the most economical method of spreading the Gospel, and the work of the living teacher is more impressive and affecting than other forms of communication.' He compares Whitefield's sermons read, with Whitefield's sermons preached, and emphasises the necessity of the supreme assurance of God's authority, since preachers are ambassadors for Christ. 'The pulpit is associated with the mighty power of God in the conviction and conversion of men.'

The duty of preachers to make full proof of the power of the pulpit is that of preserving a single eye to the task, and he warns of the dangers of popularity. It is not the favour of the people we seek; we seek not yours, but you,' and he quotes Charles II expressing surprise that John Owen listened to the tinker John Bunyan

preaching. Owen replied, 'Had I the tinker's ability, please Your Majesty, I would most gladly relinquish my learning.' A diligent ministry is a happy one, but calls for unwearied diligence, 'it grows as it goes' (Lucretius). 'We are not responsible for our talents, but for the diligent use of them.' Everything therefore must be subservient to the pulpit, taking pre-eminence over every other department of ministerial labour.

The preacher's personal life is discussed, and the need to concentrate on the immediate subject in hand, and to work hard at it, biblical themes being capable of sustaining a high degree of interest, as to the preacher, so to his hearers. Let the preacher *feel* his subject! Every minister loves to preach to an attentive audience, and the best remedy for an inattentive audience is to give them something to attend to.

Ministers must be men of prayer. The law of the pulpit is that we are 'labourers together with God.' And we need guidance as to the choice of subjects. As to preparation 'there is no preparation like that of the closet.' Piety of life in private will tell in the pulpit. The Earl of Bath spoke of the 'goodness' of Mr Whitefield. Some defects depend on natural temperament, and those with fewest imperfections are not always the best men, whereas the reverse can be true also! He instances the foibles of Martin Luther, but traits of character are to be looked for, which carry conviction to the public that preachers are men of God. Jesus is our model. 'All things are lawful but all things are not convenient.' It was said of Basil Nazianzen that 'his words were thunder, his life lightning.'

The remaining chapters deal with, The Responsibility of Ministers, A Competent Ministry to be Procured, Ministry Compared with other Professions, Fitting Education for the Ministry, The Pecuniary Support of Ministers, Prayers for Ministers, The Consideration due to the Christian Ministry, The Responsibility of Enjoying Christian Ministry.

The book contains a wealth of epigrams and allusions, but beyond these there is this great burden to preach the Word, which is seen as the greatest task in the world, an opinion which the reviewer fervently shares. Practically all Christian fruitfulness flows from the ministry of the Word, much of it from the pulpit, so that the preacher in these days needs an enhanced estimation of his task. This book provides it.

*William Still  
Aberdeen*

The SCOTTISH BULLETIN OF EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY is published jointly by Rutherford House and the Scottish Evangelical Theology Society, continuing the *Scottish Tyndale Bulletin* and *Bulletin of the Scottish Evangelical Theology Society*.

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