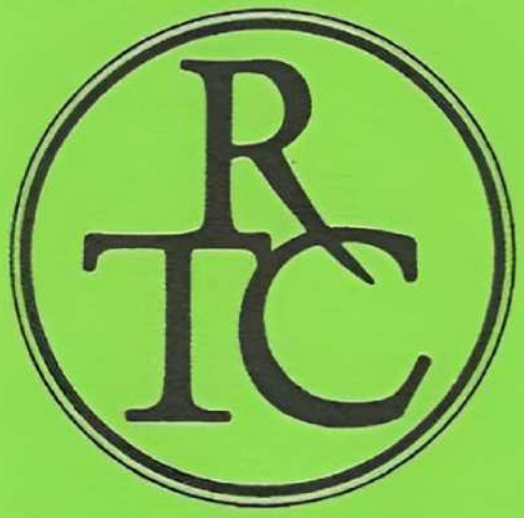

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SOLI DEO GLORIA

We do not apologize for producing an additional theological journal. It would be interesting to know how many such journals are now in circulation! Perhaps we should apologize for the fact that it has taken us so long to realize that we could and should issue a journal, since the theological school responsible for this new venture was founded in 1854! Many theological periodicals tend to be highly academic and technical. It is our aim to produce a scholarly journal which would benefit a wide readership — pastors, elders, and a large segment of the Church.

The Reformed Theological Journal is to be published annually, D.V., by the Faculty of the Reformed Theological College, Belfast, the theological seminary of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland (Covenanters). Consequently the ideals and insights of the Scottish Covenanters of the 17th century, which we have inherited and which we cherish, will find expression in these pages. However, we have set our sights on the world-wide Reformed family and in each issue we hope to have a contribution from without our denominational bounds and by a scholar of international repute. We wish for interaction and dialogue within the circle of those who are committed to the Reformed Faith, otherwise known as Calvinism.

Contributors to this Journal will enjoy reasonable liberty in the exposition of the Reformed Faith. We are, however, unwaveringly committed to the Biblical doctrines of grace as set forth in such historic confessions and catechisms as the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Westminster Larger and Shorter Catechisms, the Belgic Confession, the Canons of the Synod of Dordt and the Heidelberg Catechism.

We plan to include five major articles in each issue of the Journal and we intend to reflect different disciplines and to do so in a balanced way, stimulating interest in important issues in such areas as Biblical Theology, Systematic Theology, Apologetics, Ethics etc. There will be reviews of books which the Editors consider useful to pastors and church workers generally. We crave your prayers and practical support. May each contributor remember the saying of Augustine, "I count myself one of the number of those who write as they learn and learn as they write." And to God alone be the glory!

F.S.L.

PREACHING FROM THE BOOK OF JOSHUA

Hugh J. Blair

Hugh J. Blair is Professor of Hebrew and Old Testament in the Reformed Theological College, Belfast.

John Bright in his book, *The Authority of the Old Testament,* gives very vivid expression to the difficulty of preaching from the Book of Joshua when he writes —

> The book of Joshua is anything but the best-loved book in the Bible. It is a book with which many preachers feel that they cannot honestly operate; now and then one hears the wish expressed that it was not in the Bible at all. It tells a bloody tale of battle, violence, and wholesale slaughter, a slaughter in which God assists with his mighty acts; the smoke of burning towns and the stench of rotting flesh hangs over its pages. What is worse, not only did God assist in this slaughter; it is more than once stated that he expressly commanded it. It is a story of fanaticism, of holy war and wholesale sacrificial destruction (the herem) ..... And sensitive folk cry out, as they always have: What is such a story doing in the Bible? ..... You simply cannot preach from this book .....[1]

Bright dwells on this one aspect of the difficulty of preaching from the Book of Joshua. But the truth is that in some ways that is the easiest difficulty of all to surmount, if we use the key that somehow he seems to have missed: the fact of a holy God's inevitable judgment on sin. The people of Israel were the instrument by which God exercised judgment on the gross wickedness of the people of the land. Just as He had destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah for the same kind of unspeakable depravity, without the instrumentality of human hands, so He used the Israelites to punish and root out the evil cancer of the Canaanites. If there is a moral government of the world at all, such a dread possiblity of judgment and divine surgery, however exercised, cannot be excluded. Further, if the religion of the Hebrews was to be kept pure and untainted, all possibility of contamination by the abominations of the heathen must he removed. The means of

removing such possibility of contamination was drastic, but, in view of the revelation that the Hebrews were to transmit to the world, who will dare say that it was unjustified? For the sake of God's moral government of the world, for the sake of Israel, and for the sake of the message that Israel was to bring to the world, it was necessary that a corrupt nation should be utterly destroyed.[2] We cannot find an insurmountable difficulty in the fact of God's hatred of sin, a fact to which the whole Bible, and not least the Cross of Christ, bears witness.

The basic difficulty lies in making a *Christian* application of the history that we find in *Joshua,* and it should be said in fairness that Bright makes a very useful contribution in the solution that he offers to the problem.[3]

Fortunately, we are not left to our own devices when it comes to preaching from the Book of Joshua. The Epistle to the Hebrews, in chapters 3 and 4, gives very clear guidelines about the Christian application of the Old Testament, and with a specific application in chapter 4 to the Book of Joshua. These chapters in Hebrews serve as a guide for our study.

The Historical Significance

The 3rd Chapter of *Hebrews* makes it quite clear that the Old Testament has a historical and an exemplary significance. The writer uses the history of the people of Israel as a warning against unbelief. The later Old Testament itself had already used the historical fact of the Israelites' unbelief in the wilderness to give an urgent warning in Psalm 95. 7—11, quoted in Hebrews 3. 7ff: 'So, as the Holy Spirit says: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the desert ....." ' And now the writer to the Hebrews gives a contemporary application to the Christian community: "Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it ..... Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no-one will fall by following their example of disobedience" (Hebrews 4. 1, 11, NIV). There is surely clear guidance here about one Christian use of the Old Testament. These things occurred, as Paul says in I Corinthians 10. 6, "as examples, to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did." We cannot stop at an exemplary use of the Old Testament, but neither can we ignore the clear guidance of these chapters in *Hebrews* about the value of the Old

Testament and particularly the Book of Joshua in providing examples for our learning.

Joshua provides illustrations of basic truths that are still vital for the Christian preacher.

(a) One that stands out unmistakably is the truth of Divine judgment on unbelief.

The background to the Book of Joshua is the fact that because of unbelief the generation that perished in the wilderness had failed to enter into the salvation-rest that God had provided for them. Their failure to enter in was God's judgment on their sin of unbelief. Maybe we have grown too polite to preach the message of God's judgment on unbelief, and we need to heed words spoken by John Hutton many years ago: "There come times when we must look the natural man in the face and tell him that he is damned."

God's judgment on sin is seen in the history recorded in the Book of Joshua as well as in the history that preceded it. Where Israel failed, as, for example, at Ai, there had been not only the sin of Achan in taking for himself something that belonged to the Lord, but also Israel's trust in their own resources which was essentially a lack of trust in the Lord. "Not all the people will have to go up against Ai," they said. "Send two or three thousand men to take it and do not weary all the people."(7. 3). The whole disaster stemmed from unbelief, manifested in Achan's feeling that he had some claim on the fruits of God's victory; and, coupled with that, the people's trust in their own strength. Let *Joshua* remind us that unbelief can show itself not only in a refusal to enter into the inheritance that God has provided: it can show itself in trust in ourselves, and also in our making any claim for ourselves to anything that God's victory has gained. John Bright makes a telling application of this that must challenge all of us:

> The spoils of your victories too (converts won, good works done, advances made) belong wholly to God and his glory, and are not for your own aggrandisement.[4]

To take for ourselves what belongs to Him still smacks of unbelief, and must be judged.

(b) A second truth from the Book of Joshua underlined in *Hebrews* and with a message for us today is God's faithfulness.

God had promised 'rest' — in the sense of God's full salvation for His people — to Israel. Those to whom it was first promised did not enter into that rest because of their unbelief. But the promise was still

there — still there for Joshua and the people of Israel 40 years later: still there for Israel centuries later in the time of 95th Psalm: still there for the Christians to whom the epistle to the Hebrews was written: still there for us. God's promise does not fail. *Joshua* gives a significant illustration of that. The whole book is an account of the mighty acts of God wrought so that His promise might be fulfilled. Long years before the promise had been given that the people of Israel would possess the Promised Land. It had seemed that the divine purpose had been thwarted by man's unbelief and disobedience; but God's purpose could not be defeated, and *Joshua* gives the story of fulfilment in the conquest of Canaan. God is faithful and His purpose cannot fail.

(c) A third truth from the Book of Joshua which makes it exemplary for all ages is the necessity of faith. If for the writer to the Hebrews the essence of sin and the source of judgment is unbelief, the secret of Divine blessing is faith. In Hebrews 11 faith is seen as the secret of the casting down of the stronghold of Jericho: "By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the people had marched around them for seven days." But that faith is seen constantly for our learning and as our example throughout *Joshua.* It was faith that prompted the people of Israel to follow the ark, the symbol of the Divine presence, across the Jordan: it was faith that enabled Rahab to see behind the armies of Israel a power that could not be resisted, and to trust that power for herself: it was faith that claimed and measured out to the tribes a land that had not yet been wholly won: it was by faith that Caleb said, "Give me this hill country, that the Lord promised me ....." (14. 12). All through, the Book of Joshua preaches the necessity and the power of faith.

So the Book of Joshua in its historical significance shows us the judgment of God on unbelief, the faithfulness of God to His word, and the necessity and power of faith: in all these areas it gives examples for our learning, and for our preaching. Indeed, it gives us one superlative example of preaching, in chapter 24, where Joshua calls the people to commitment to the Lord: "Choose you this day whom you will serve." Something came before that call to commitment: before Joshua tells the people what they must do, he tells them what God has done. That is the right order in preaching: first the proclamation, then the appeal. Joshua 24 is an example of preaching at its best. In the sermon that Joshua preached to the people, there was a gospel to hear, the proclamation of the mighty

acts of God for His people's salvation; there was a choice to make: there was an action to take, for Joshua did not simply call his hearers to choose the Lord; he told them of the things that must be put away and of the commitment that must be made: there was a price to pay, for Joshua would not be satisfied with a glib and easy profession of faith: there was an example to follow, for Joshua would not call people to do what he was not prepared to do himself — "As for me and my house we will serve the Lord:" and there was a covenant of obedience to keep.

There is much more for us in the Book of Joshua than examples to follow. Indeed, there are many examples that we must not follow. The most obvious one is the one referred to by John Bright: we cannot go about today killing people on religious grounds, though I suppose many people think that we in Northern Ireland are doing that all the time! Nor are we to put a man to death, as Israel did in the case of Achan, for disobedience and dishonesty. Nor are we to pronounce a curse on those who have deceived us, as Joshua and the people did on the Gibeonites. Incidents like these, and many more, which are clearly not given as examples to be followed, compel us to go on to the theological significance of the Book of Joshua.

The Theological Significance

In Hebrews 4 the writer makes it very clear that for him the theme of the Book of Joshua is God's people, and that that 'rest' is to be taken in a theological sense, not simply referring to the cessation of conflict and the attainment of possession of the Promised Land, but to the deeper 'rest' which is equivalent to 'salvation.'

The varied applications of the word 'rest' in this chapter, with its theological emphasis, give us a definitive guide not only to the Christian application of the Book of Joshua but to the Christian application of the Old Testament.

At the heart of the passage is the historical fact that in some sense Joshua did bring the people into the 'rest' of the Promised Land, however incomplete that 'rest' may have proved. But something comes before that in the chapter, i.e. the reference to the 'rest' of God, something that is essentially part of Him — "My rest" — and therefore a spiritual concept, not only the rest that He gives but the rest that is part of His being. Then follows the literal, earthly expression of that rest as seen in the possession of the land of Canaan. But that, like all the Old Testament dispensation, was "only a shadow

of good things to come, and not the very image of the things" (Hebrews 10. 1). There is a spiritual rest symbolised by the outward, material rest, and it is that which we are called to enter, thereby sharing God's rest for God's people. That that rest is still to be entered into, even in the Old Testament, is proved by the reference to it in Psalm 95: if the rest that Joshua gave had been complete, then David "would not afterward have spoken of another day" (Hebrews 4. 8): that it is still to be entered into by the New Testament people of God is proved by the appeal in 4. 11: "Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest."

We have in Hebrews 4 the same kind of pattern as is more clearly set out in chapters 9, 10, with the key verse in 10. 1 -"the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things." The Old Testament dispensation was a shadowy copy of a perfect reality.

Thus the earthly tabernacle was a pale copy of the real Temple of God. The earthly sacrifices were a remote reflection of the one Sacrifice that could really be effective. The earthly priesthood was an inadequate shadow of the real priesthood. All the parts of the Old Testament dispensation pointed beyond themselves to the reality of which they were the shadows. So here in Hebrews 4 the spiritual reality is God's rest: the faint shadow of it is the 'rest' of Canaan: and that points forward to the spiritual rest — God's rest for God's people — that is yet to be attained.

Here then is abundant justification for 'spiritualising' the Old Testament, for in reality it is spiritual already. In preaching the Old Testament we must go beyond what is outward to the theological and spiritual significance behind it. Luther had the right way of it in his discussion of the relationship between the Old and New Testaments when he said that the physical and outward in the Old corresponds in the New to an inward and spiritual reality which is the object of faith: for example, in the Old Testament the Israelites ate literal bread from heaven; in the New Testament Christ is the believer's bread, partaken of by faith. And Calvin was right when he spoke of the Old Testament as given in the childhood of the Church, for children need pictures and symbols to make things real to them.

It is not only justifiable, therefore, but essential to see, for example, the warfare described in *Joshua* as the spiritual warfare so vividly described in Ephesians 6. 12: "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the

powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." The armour for such spiritual conflict must be spiritual armour, and the resources on which we rely must be spiritual resources. And, furthermore, since the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but spiritual, the pulling down of the strongholds of evil is sure, and the crown of victory is promised.

Seeking a theological principle in the story of Achan, we are reminded that in the warfare of the Spirit there can be no compromise with evil, and that when the victory is gained we must take nothing of its glory for ourselves.

The theological principle that is embedded in the story of the Gibeonites is not so apparent but it is one that takes us to the very heart of the gospel. Writing on "The Cursed Gibeonites," J. P. Struthers quoted the words in Joshua 9. 23: "Now therefore ye Gibeonites are cursed," and commented, "These are Joshua's words, not God's." "The treatment of the Gibeonites by God," Struthers declares, "is a story of God's tenderness to sinners that is not surpassed even in the New Testament." There was so much that was faulty in their approach. They came with lies in their mouth, lies in their hands, lies on their very feet. And yet God gave them a place in His house. That was the 'curse' that came on the Gibeonites — to be attached for ever to the congregation and to the altar of the Lord. Such is the marvellous grace of God. And their response was the only response that a sinner can make. At first they would have made a bargain with Joshua, but finally they came to this: "Behold, we are in thine hand: as it seemeth good and right unto thee to do unto us, do." So at the heart of this story of the "cursed" Gibeonites lie the truths at the heart of the gospel — God's unmerited grace, and man's unconditional surrender.

It is from a theological standpoint, therefore, that we must preach from the Book of Joshua. Here we have salvation-history set before us, and in that salvation-history the redemptive work of God's grace, ultimately to be fully revealed in Jesus Christ. The theological significance of the Book of Joshua and of the Old Testament is ultimately a Christological significance.

The Christological Significance

J. P. Struthers had a characteristic comment on the fact that 'Joshua' is the Hebrew for 'Jesus':

> God had spoken about the Lamb and the Anointed and the High

> Priest and the Prophet, but He longed to tell His secret and, if one may use a human simile reverently, as a man will sing a song because a *certain name* is in it, and people see afterwards why he was so fond of it, so Hoshea was changed into Joshua (quite a different name), because God, so to speak, wanted to get using His Son's name — the name that is above every name.[5]

It is understandable that Christian devotion has seen in Joshua a type of Christ, but, in the absence of any clear correspondence, apart from the name, it is perhaps better to see the whole book as having a Christological significance, foreshadowing the redemption, the life of victory and the possession that are ours in Him. It is the history rather than the person that is typical. To see Christ in the whole history of redemption rather than in a person is suggested by the fact that the writer to the Hebrews, dealing with this period in chapter 4, speaks of one gospel in the Old Testament and in the New Testament: "For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did." It is the good news of Christ, in type and in reality, that gives point to his linking the 'rest' of *Joshua* with the 'rest' of N.T. believers.

There is one place where Christ Himself appears not in type but in person, in the scene where Joshua, the Jordan safely crossed, was confronted by "a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand" ((5: 13). This must have been a time of special anxiety and suspense for Joshua. The Jordan was crossed: there could be no going back now. The burden of leadership lay heavily upon his shoulders. But just then, when he was anxiously reconnoitring the strong city of Jericho which lay directly in Israel's path, there appeared to him a visitant who called himself "commander of the army of the Lord." There can be no doubt that this was the Lord Himself appearing in human form. Ignoring the artificial break made by the beginning of a new chapter, it is correct to see 6. 2 as following on from 5. 15 in a continuous narrative, with 6. 1 as a parenthesis. 'The commander of the Lord's army replied, "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy." And Joshua did so ..... The Lord said to Joshua .....' The 'commander' of 5. 13 becomes 'the Lord' of 6. 2. The command to Joshua to remove his sandals is significantly parallel to the command given to Moses at the burning bush when the Angel of the Lord, identified immediately as the Lord, appeared to him. This was a pre-Incarnation appearance of the Son of God Himself.

Joshua's question to the Unknown Warrior reflects his anxiety about the outcome of the campaign which he was undertaking. "Are

you for us or for our enemies?" Joshua had been thinking of the conflict as being between two sets of opposing forces, Israelite and Canaanite, and he was anxious to know if this armed warrior was to be his ally or his foe. The answer was to the effect that he was not an ally but a commander to whose leadership and control Joshua himself must submit. This is a holy war in which his position is that of a servant from whom obedience and reverence are due.

The preaching value of this outstanding revelation of the presence of the Lord is obvious for the church militant and not least for the preacher himself. It is good to be reminded that not only is the church the church militant: the church's Commander is militant too, revealed as "a man with a drawn sword in his hand." And if the Commander is going forth to war, can His followers expect anything less than conflict? More than that, if He is at the head of the army of the Lord, can His followers ever question the certainty of victory?

The passage has a special message for those who are called to leadership in the church. Joshua's response to the vision that he received included two things that are imperative for the preacher — reverence and obedience. "Joshua fell face down to the ground in reverence," and the instinctive impulse to such reverence was confirmed by the command, "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy." The man who is going to lead men must first bow down in utter reverence and submission before the Lord. Before a preacher has a message for others, he must first hear the message himself: "The place where you are standing is holy."

Our acceptance of Christ's sovereignty over us as our Commander will of course be seen in our obedience to His commands. At the very outset the Lord had brought that message to Joshua when he was commissioned to succeed Moses: "Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you: do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go" (1. 7). And here again Joshua commits himself to obedience: "What message does my Lord have for his servant?" Chapter 6 records that Joshua carried out to the letter the commands given for the conquest of Jericho: that was to be his standard all the way through. Christ still looks for that kind of implicit obedience from all whom he has called to leadership.

There is more in this passage for the preacher than a call to reverence and obedience. There is the assurance of the Lord's mighty help given to His servant, and there is the assurance of His victory: "See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands, along with its king and

its fighting men" (6. 2). Many a time we will be daunted as we think of the warfare and the tasks that await us. But if Christ is leading us in that warfare and to those tasks, we can go forward with confidence. That implication of the Christological significance of the Book of Joshua can give us heart indeed.

There is one more aspect of preaching from the Book of Joshua that cannot be omitted. The 'rest' spoken of in Hebrews 4 had reference to the rest which is part of the nature of God: it had reference to the people of Israel as they were promised the rest of victory and possession in the Land of Promise: it had reference to the people of God in the New Testament. But it still awaits a full consummation. There still remains a rest for the people of God. The Book of Joshua has an eschatological significance.

The Eschatological Significance

There is a certain difficulty in defining the eschatological significance of the Book of Joshua. The *eschaton,* the 'last days' to which the rest of Canaan pointed forward, found fulfilment and reality in the coming of Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. That is why the writer of *Hebrews* confidently begins his epistle with the claim: "God who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets" — and *Joshua* is listed among the Former Prophets — "hath in these last days" — the *eschaton* of the days — "spoken unto us by his Son." The *eschaton* has become a reality in Christ. That is why we must interpret the Book of Joshua Christologically and eschatologically, and see in its 'rest' a picture of a life in Christ, the Captain of our salvation, a life not depending on our works, a life of victory and possession that are ours in Him. That life is not deferred till heaven: the eschatological significance is here and now. And yet it will find its perfect consummation only there. The "city which hath foundations whose builder and maker is God" (Hebrews 11. 10), and the better heavenly country (Hebrews 11. 16) are still in the future. There still remains a rest for the Christian. Here, there is still the journey to be made, the good fight of faith to be fought: there, the full victory will be known, and eternal rest in the sense of ceasing from conflict will be given. Then we will know the perfect fulfilment of the word in Joshua 21. 45: "Not one of all the Lord's good promises to the house of Israel failed; every one was fulfilled." And to all eternity His will be the glory.

References

1. John Bright, *The Authority of the Old Testament*, p 243.
2. I have dealt with this more fully in the Introduction to *Joshua* in *The New Bible Commentary Revised*, pp 233, 234.
3. John Bright, *op. cit.*, pp 247ff.
4. John Bright, *op. cit.*, p 250.
5. *Life and Letters of J. P. Struthers*, p 215.

THE FORM AND MESSAGE OF NAHUM: PREACHING FROM A PROPHET OF DOOM*

Tremper Longman III

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Nahum is a fascinating and difficult book which has attracted little attention in this century. Of course, as a short work of only three medium sized chapters, it is easily hidden away. Even when compared with its kindred minor prophets, it strikes one as minor. One has only to compare the thought and writing which have been devoted to Micah, Amos, Hosea, Habakkuk and even the others to see how little attention Nahum the Elkoshite has attracted. Even more amazing, I have never heard a single sermon from the book of Nahum. Perhaps only puny Obadiah can compare with Nahum for neglect.

There are reasons besides length for this fact. First, Nahum has as its subject matter the prophecy of the destruction of a nation which passed out of existence well over 2500 years ago. When Nineveh fell in 612 B.C., Assyria for all practical purposes was a non-entity. What possible continuing relevance could a war oracle against a non-existent nation have for us today?

A second reason for both scholarly and pulpit neglect of Nahum is related to the first. Most scholars, particularly liberal ones, find Nahum an especially repulsive example of religious nationalism, containing a theology of hate directed against Assyria by a Judahite prophet. What differentiates Nahum from prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel is that, even though these major prophets contain oracles of doom against the foreign nations, they also contain extensive admonitions and threats against Israel and/or Judah. Nahum contains not one word of criticism against Judah, leading some critical scholars to argue that Nahum was a 'false prophet' similar to those prophets against whom Jeremiah speaks.

In any case it is this supposed religious hatred which has repelled many as they encounter the prophet Nahum. To make this point concrete, let me quote from the most famous critical interpreter of

Nahum, J. M. P. Smith, who claims that Nahum is "a representative of the old, narrow and shallow prophetism."[1]

After careful study, I find such a viewpoint quite inaccurate. On the contrary, the message of Nahum is an important and vital contribution to Old Testament theology. Indeed the book is vital not only to the people of God in the seventh century B.C. but to those living in the latter half of the twentieth century A.D.

It is time to examine the message of Nahum to his contemporaries and then, as a second question, to discover the significance of the book for today. What we find particularly interesting is that to answer the first question we need to start at the beginning and read to the end, but for the second question, that of the abiding significance of Nahum, we will find ourselves drawn back from the end to the beginning. This statement will make sense as we proceed.

But first what is the message of Nahum? The first part of my title reads "the *form* and message" of Nahum, and indeed I believe we get a good insight into the message of Nahum as we follow his creative use of conventional forms through his book. Of course if we had unlimited space we should also do a careful reading of the words and sentences which make up the different paragraphs we will be examining,[2] but it will suffice for the purposes of this article to look at the structure as a whole.

I should point out before beginning that the one area in which Nahum has been given high marks by virtually everyone is in the area of literary style. His vivid and colourful language, particularly his metaphors, have been mentioned by most commentators. However the one area that has not been highlighted by scholars is the marvellous unity of form and message which may be discovered in this book.

The book begins with a song of praise directed to God, who, on the one hand, destroys his enemies and, on the other as still part of the same judging action, saves his people (1: 2 — 8). This section is formally and in content similar to a host of songs in the Psalter which I call Divine Warrior hymns.[3] There are, in fact, three different types of Divine Warrior hymns to be found in the Scripture: those which were sung before the battle to ask God to arise and come to the protection of his people (Ps. 7); those which were sung during the battle to ask God to protect his people as they are surrounded by enemies (Ps 91) and those which were sung after the battle either to lament defeat or else to give God the praise for the victory which he

provided. The beginning of Nahum is similar to the post-battle victory song (cf. Ex. 15; Judges 5; Ps. 98). This observation is of interest because Nahum 1: 2 — 8 was sung before the actual destruction of Assyria. Being a prophecy, though, the victory is assured and so God appropriately may be declared a victor at the beginning.

Like the psalms themselves, Nahum 1: 2 — 8 contains no specific historical references. Neither Judah nor Assyria is explicitly mentioned as yet. This both lends suspense to the book and provides the textual key for the further application of the book of Nahum as I will explain below.

The next section is difficult to unravel. Essentially what takes place in 1: 9 — 2: 3 is the application of the two-pronged message of the song to a particular concrete situation, though notice how the explicit mention of the two parties continues to be delayed, arousing heightened interest on the part of the reader.

The opening song praised God for punishing the wicked and protecting the oppressed. This is followed by the intertwining of a judgment oracle and a salvation oracle. I say intertwining because Nahum goes from the one to the other almost imperceptibly, making this a difficult passage to unpack. Also difficult in this section is Nahum's use of the second-person pronoun without a concrete antecedent, and further, his use of the same second-person reference for two different groups: God's enemies and God's people.

The history of exegesis of this section of Nahum is filled with attempts to unravel these two strands. Critics traditionally have argued that only the judgment oracle can be original and that the salvation oracle arose as a later gloss. On the contrary, however, it is much less speculative to admit a highly refined and unique use by Nahum of two traditional prophetic forms, the judgment oracle and the salvation oracle. These alternate, beginning with a judgment oracle against Nineveh (1: 9 — 11), followed by a salvation oracle of Judah (1: 12 — 13), followed by a judgment oracle against the king of Assyria (notice the change to a second-masculine singular suffix 1: 14), followed by a salvation oracle with the first explicit mention of Judah (1: 15), lastly comes a final judgment oracle (2: 1) and a final salvation oracle (2: 2).

At this point the twofold interest of Nahum ceases and the rest of the book concentrates on the judgment, the approaching destruction of Nineveh. Without a word of introduction, Nahum relates a vision,

a vision of the destruction of Nineveh (2: 3 — 10). The use of the vision form here communicates to us vividly the certainty of Assyria's destruction.

Following the vision comes a very intricate combination of taunts and oracles. The first is a lion taunt (2: 11 — 14). These verses can only be understood with a background in the Assyrian royal inscriptions. In these texts Assyria and her kings likened their power to that of a lion. Sargon II, for example, proclaims in his inscriptions "I marched (through Urartu) proudly, like a raging, terror-laden lion." Assur-nasir-apli II boasted "I am a lion and a warrior." A century before Nahum, Isaiah likened the Assyrians to a lion coming to devour Israel, but in Nahum the metaphor is used satirically to ridicule the Assyrians. After Assyria is identified as a lion who has no cave or land in which to hunt, Nahum addresses a judgment oracle against that country utilizing the same metaphoric language in 2: 14.

Jumping ahead to 3: 4, 5 we see a very similar text: a metaphorical taunt which is continued as a judgment oracle. Here, though, the metaphor is that of a whore, more specifically, a sorceress-harlot.

The image of a wicked woman representing a city or a nation has a long history in the Bible. Most often it is applied to the people of God themselves. For example, when she is faithful, Israel's relationship to God is likened to a marriage. More frequently, however, Israel is unfaithful, and the marriage relationship is broken — she is a whore (Hosea 1 — 3; Ezekiel 16 and 23 and the often encountered phrase "played the harlot").

Of course, Assyria was never in a covenant relationship with God. God used her military power to bring His judgment against Israel in 722 B.C. (Isa 10: 5ff.), but Assyria never entered into a marriage relationship with God. Nonetheless, the harlot image is appropriate here in Nahum, for it is appropriate for any evil city or state. A whore and an evil city are similar in that both are tempting and dangerous. They both exhibit pleasure and corruption. Since prostitution was as widespread in ancient cities as in modern, the image of the prostitute is a synecdoche (part for the whole) for the evil city of Assyria.

Also, as mentioned above, adultery is a frequent metaphor for idolatry. They are both alike in that they involve deceit and treachery in an intimate and exclusive relationship. Marriage and religion are both jealous relationships. To seek another woman or another God is to destroy the prior relationship.

In any case this, like the lion image, is a taunt thrown at Nineveh.

And like the lion taunt it is followed by a judgment oracle which continues the metaphor. God will take the harlot Nineveh and expose her and shame her before the nations. This act of exposure reflects an actual custom of the ancient Near East.

Between these two metaphorical taunts is found a woe or *hôy* oracle which is identical in its first part to many other sections of the prophets (3: lff.). The origin of this form is found in the mourning rites. As mourners followed a dead body toward the burial place they would take up the cry of *hôy, hôy.* But as the prophets picked up this form it was not simply used as a mourning cry — it is that in the sense that it anticipates the death of Nineveh — but mourning implies sympathy for the deceased and there is none of that here as we can see from the epithets applied to the city. The *hôy*-oracle has the force here and elsewhere in the prophets of a threat or curse. It is a proleptic or anticipatory mourning cry sung not in sadness but in glee. That death is certain for Nineveh may be seen in 3: 2 where we have another vision, which is described in short, staccato lines with no finite verbs and paints a vivid picture of carnage and destruction in our minds.

Nahum 3: 8ff. brings us another taunt against Assyria, this time citing a historical event rather than presenting a metaphor. This passage is significant because it cites an event which is well established in Near Eastern history, the capture of Thebes by Assyria. This event took place in 662 B.C. The historical downfall of Nineveh occurred in 612 B.C. Therefore, Nahum was written between these two dates.

The taunt is directed toward a complacent Nineveh, sitting in the security of her military might. The taunt reminds her of her own great defeat of Thebes, a city considered impregnable until that time. After this, Nahum hurls insult after insult at Nineveh — calling her soldiers "women" in 3: 13, saying that the city will fall with minimum effort in 3: 12, 13b and so forth.

The book concludes on a softer note. It is a dirge, a mourning song over the king of Assyria (read Nah 3: 18, 19). But notice that there is no real sympathy for Assyria among the mourners. Biting satire is explicit particularly in the rhetorical question at the end. Nahum rejoices because the one destroyed, Assyria, is one who has brought destruction to others including the people of God.

There are only two books in the entire Bible which end with a rhetorical question. Surprisingly, the other is Jonah, a prophet who also is concerned with Assyria. Note the contrast. In Jonah God concludes the book by proclaiming "Should I not be concerned about

that great city?" Mercy in Jonah, judgment in Nahum. Surely Nahum is consciously drawing a contrast between his book and Jonah's earlier prophecy, which is actually a contrast between God's redemptive purpose in two different time periods. God's purpose was furthered in Jonah's day by Nineveh's deliverance and in Nahum's day God was glorified by her destruction.

In conclusion to our reading of the prophecy we see that Nahum brings a word of judgment against Assyria. This word was fulfilled in 612 B.C. as the Median-Babylonian army destroyed Nineveh. Does this fulfilment render Nahum an obsolete or marginal book? Does Nahum do no more than bear witness to the power of God in the prophetic word? The answer is no, of course, but precisely how does the book relate to Old Testament and, more broadly, biblical theology?

We have observed the movement of the book of Nahum from general to specific, from singing the praises of God the judge and deliverer to an application of those truths to a particular historical situation. Thus the abiding significance of Nahum may be most readily seen by returning to 1: 2 — 8. At the fore of the book stands the great song of praise to God the Divine Warrior who both delivers his people and judges his enemies. When we refer to this image of God as Divine Warrior we are touching on something which we encounter with great frequency in the scriptures. Perhaps this is the key to the abiding significance of Nahum.

Firstly, what precisely do I mean when I refer to God as a Divine Warrior? From Deuteronomy 7 and 20 and from a host of historical texts we learn about the institution and ideology of Holy War. Certain wars of Israel, those commanded by God, were acts of worship. All kinds of cultic rites surrounded this warfare, but the centre of it all was the fact that Yahweh fought for Israel and provided the victory. That is why it did not matter that Gideon had only 300 men, that Jonathan and his armour bearer took on a whole Philistine army, or that puny David fought immense Goliath. The Divine Warrior, Yahweh, provided the victory.

The first explicit mention of God as a warrior is encountered at the time of the Red Sea crossing (Exodus 15: 1 — 3). Here we can see very graphically that, when Yahweh wars, his enemies are crushed and his people, Israel, are delivered.

All through the Old Testament, when Israel is faithful, God provides the victory. When Israel is disobedient, however, God wars

against his own people. We can see this clearly in the early chapters of Samuel. Eli's sons take the ark into battle (I Sam. 4) because they realise that God must be present to win. Since the ark represents God's presence they take it out of Shiloh and into the battle. But they learn that the ark is not a magical talisman when the Philistines beat them badly.

In any case, the principle is that God fights for Israel when she is obedient. And when Israel is disobedient he fights against her. This negative holy war comes to a climax at the time of the exile as God uses the Assyrians and then the Babylonians as the tool of his curse against Israel.

The Divine Warrior theme demonstrates a major way in which Nahum fits into Old Testament theology. Nahum receives a vision from God that he is going to wage war against his former tool Assyria. He is coming to judge Nineveh for her evil and thereby save Judah. But how does this fit in with the New Testament and what significance does this book have for Christians today? I believe that the answer to this question may be discovered as we continue to trace the Divine Warrior theme into the New Testament.

The apocalyptic writers of the Old Testament pave the way for the New Testament. These writers, mostly living in the late Old Testament period and under oppressed circumstances, threw the expectation of judgment and deliverance by the Divine Warrior into the future, not the future of the next few years like the book of Nahum but the far-flung future of the "latter days."

> A day of the Lord is coming when your plunder will be divided among you. I will gather all the nations to Jerusalem to fight against it; the city will be captured, the houses ransacked, and the women raped. Half of the city will go into exile, but the rest of the people will not be taken from the city. Then the Lord will go out and fight against those nations, as he fights in the day of battle ..... (Zech. 14: 1ff., NIV)

As we turn now to the pages of the New Testament we see that the theme of the Divine Warrior is frequently encountered. Our study of this theme may be divided into two parts:[4] Christ as Divine Warrior during his earthly ministry and in the consummation.

Jesus Christ as Divine Warrior during His Earthly Ministry

First of all we should notice how the gospel writers present Jesus as a warrior. Indeed the concept of Holy War provides a conceptual

background to Christ's death and resurrection as these events are presented in the gospels and are reflected upon by Paul.

John the Baptist and others apparently expected a Messiah who would come much like the Divine Warrior figure of the consummation. In Luke 3: 15ff. John explains to the masses that one is coming after him with a winnowing fork in his hand. However, when Jesus does come and minister, he does not fit into John's expectations. As a matter of fact, while in prison, John sends two of his disciples to question Jesus. "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" (Luke 7: 20). John seemingly has his doubts about Jesus as he sits in jail. Jesus responds to the question by healing and exorcising. Thus Jesus' first coming was not in the role of the Divine Warrior of the consummation as John expected. However, Jesus does wage war during his earthly ministry — a war which culminates on the cross.

Jesus' Holy War is different from the Holy War of Israel. While the latter, at the Lord's command, directed their warfare against earthly enemies, Jesus struggled with the forces, the powers and principalities, which stand behind sinful mankind (cf. his miracles and healings).

On the prohibitive side, Jesus explicitly cuts off from the church Holy War activity similar to that of the Israelites. At the moment of crisis, when the soldiers arrested him, Peter according to John 18: 11 drew his sword and struck the high priest's servant. Christ's response is "Put your sword away. Shall I not drink the cup the father has given me?" Thus on the basis of this and other passages as well, Jesus turns from the role of Divine Warrior directed toward the unbeliever. His command is not to slay but to convert (Matt. 28: 16ff.).

On the other side, Jesus, by drinking the cup, wages Holy War against the enemy, a war which he wins upon the cross. This is why his death and resurrection are frequently likened to military victory. Col. 2: 13ff.:

> When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having cancelled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

Notice the military language here. He "disarms" the powers and

principalities and indeed "triumphs" over them. This victory is associated by Paul with Christ's death on the cross.

His resurrection too proves him to be the conqueror of the powers, authorities and dominions — since by raising him God subjected all things to him (Eph 1: 19bff.). Furthermore, later in the book Paul quotes a well-known Divine Warrior psalm (68: 18) in 4: 7ff. His ascension is here seen as a military victory.

Thus Jesus' death resulted in the victory over and the capture of the powers behind the world. Yet there is an already/not yet quality about this victory. Jesus has won the victory on the cross, yet now everything is still not subject to him: "In putting everything under him, God left nothing that is not subject to him. Yet at present we do not see everything subject to him." (Heb. 2: 8.).

Thus, indeed, Jesus won the victory on the cross, but the fulness of that victory will only come at the consummation, only at the time when he comes again on the white horse, the Divine War Chariot, to purge the world of evil. Thus the argument connects here with what I will mention below concerning Jesus Christ the Divine Warrior in the book of Revelation.

In summary, Jesus Christ is pictured in some verses as waging war with the powers and principalities. His healing and exorcising may be seen as previews of the battle with the demonic hordes. On the cross, Paul tells us that Christ won a victory over the satanic powers. Note the reversal — Christ the Divine Warrior wins the war by being killed, not by killing.

Nevertheless, the victory has an already/not yet character to it. As Paul says in Rom. 16: 20, "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet." But the victory is assured. When Christ opens the seals in the book of Revelation, a new song, a victory shout, is able to be sung concerning Christ *before* the actual battle because the outcome is certain. And why is it certain?

> Because you were slain, and with your blood, you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. (Rev. 5: 9).

Jesus Christ as Divine Warrior in the Consummation

Much could be said on this subject, but in order to stimulate thinking on this aspect of Christ's ministry I would like to concentrate on Revelation 19: 11ff. Here we have a clear instance of a scripture

passage which describes Christ's second coming using Divine Warrior imagery.

Indeed, one finds here a description of Christ the Divine Warrior which, on the one hand, connects him with Yahweh the Divine Warrior in the Old Testament and, on the other hand, contrasts him and sets him in oppostion to the satanic warrior, the unholy warrior of Revelation 13.

Concerning the former, Jesus is described as wearing a robe dipped in blood (cf. Isa. 62: 2 — 3 which describes the bloodstained garments of Yahweh the Divine Warrior after waging war against Edom). Second, he is pictured as leading the heavenly army in battle, an image reminiscent of Yahweh Sebaot (the Lord of Hosts) in the Old Testament who led his army in battle against the historical enemies of Israel. He is further described as one with a rod in his mouth (Isa. 11: 4b, cf. 49: 2). The messianic Divine Warrior also rules with an iron rod, an allusion to Ps. 2: 9; further, he treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty (cf. 63: 3 and Joel 4: 13 — both Divine Warrior passages). Last, he is called King of Kings, Lord of Lords (Deut. 9: 17; Dan. 2: 17; Ps. 136: 2ff.).

Second, as mentioned above, Jesus Christ the Divine Warrior is also contrasted with the hellish warrior of Revelation 13, the beast. This becomes clear at that moment in which the beast emerges from the sea. The beast is described as "having ten horns and seven heads and on his horns were ten diadems." These ten diadems may be compared with the many diadems on Christ's head. Further, right after the mention of his diadems it is stated that "He (Christ) has a name written upon him which no one knows except himself" (Rev. 19: 12b), "His name is called the Word of God" (v. 13b), and lastly, "On his thigh he has a name written 'King of Kings and Lord of Lords" (v. 16b). This contrasts with the hellish warrior in 13: 1b on whose heads "were blasphemous names." There may also be a contrast between the beast and Christ in that the former has a number which conceals a name, and the latter has a name which conceals a number. P. W. Skehan argues that the beast has a number 666 which conceals his name and that Christ has a name (King of Kings and Lord of Lords) which when converted to Aramaic and added up results in 777.[5]

In short, Jesus is presented in scripture as coming again in the future as a judge, a judge who is also the executioner of the sentence. Often in these passages Jesus is described in language used of the warring God of the Old Testament.

Conclusion

The question addressed by this paper is the place of Nahum in redemptive-historical revelation. To answer this question is to begin to answer the all-important question concerning the application of the book to our congregations and societies.

As seen above, the book in its original setting is a war oracle prophesying and rejoicing over the impending doom of Assyria. The book, however, is not rendered obsolete by the historical destruction of Assyria. On the contrary, in its depiction of God as a mighty warrior it is related to one of the most fruitful themes in biblical revelation. The Bible speaks often of God as a warrior who protects his people and judges his enemies, but careful attention must be paid to the historical unfolding of the theme before the text is concretely applied to church and society.

As one reads the scripture with this theme in mind, three important historical periods may be discerned. First, during the period of the Old Testament, God wars for his people against their flesh-and-blood enemies. When Jesus Christ comes, he tells his followers to put their swords away. He calls on his people to convert their enemies, not slay them. The warfare of Christ and his people is directed against the powers and principalities which stand behind evil men and women (Eph. 6: 10ff.). We also read in the New Testament about a future shift, a shift which will take place at the time of the second coming of our Lord. Then Christ will wage victorious Holy War against all evil men and the powers which stand behind them.

This has critical implications for the concrete application of Nahum today. To simply replace Assyria and its king with some modern ungodly nation, group or individual is grossly to misapply the text. More generally, the scriptures teach that Holy War as righteously practiced by Israel is not the privilege of any modern nation or group. Positively, however, Nahum and the theme of the Divine Warrior speak much to support modern struggles against the powers and principalities of evil and their manifestation in the world. The detailed application of this must be left open because it has different implications in different societies. In America, it would surely be rightly applied to Christian struggles against abortion, legal and racial inequalities.

While not for a moment forgetting such present applications, the future hope which the scriptures present to us must not be neglected in our thinking or preaching. The joyous message is that the present

evils, fears, oppressions and guilt will not last forever. Jesus Christ will return again to complete the victory which he won on the cross. Evil is temporary, life with Jesus is forever.

References

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1. J. M. P. Smith, "Nahum," in *ICC* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1911) 281.
2. I am presently preparing a commentary on Nahum which will be included in the second volume of the *Commentary of the Minor Prophets* to be published by Baker sometime in 1988.
3. T. Longman, III, "Psalm 98: A Divine Warrior Hymn," *JETS* 27 (1984) 267 — 74.
4. The rest of the article may be found in part in my article, "The Divine Warrior: The New Testament Use of an Old Testament Motif," *WTJ* 44 (1982) 290 — 307. A much fuller expositon of the theme of the Divine Warrior may be found therein.
5. P. W. Skehan, "King of Kings, Lord of Lords," *CBQ* 10 (1948) 398.

THE TURBULENT CAREER OF DAVID HOUSTON

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The pages of history are adorned by the lives of men of distinguished character and outstanding godliness. There were great saints of the Covenant like Rutherford and Cargill who radiated the Spirit of Christ; great warriors like Balfour of Burleigh and Richard Cameron, the Lion of the Covenant; prophetic preachers like Alexander Peden and James Renwick, and pioneering stalwarts like John MacMillan of Balmaghie. But while the Church in general and the Covenanting Church in particular owes so much to these spiritual giants, her debt to her lesser sons and servants must never be overlooked.

It is a reasonable assessment of the value of the life and ministry of David Houston to assert that but for his fiery and turbulent career and his vigorous proclamation of the Gospel in a difficult day, there would probably have been no Reformed Presbyterian Church in Ireland as we know it today. If not its founder, he was certainly its first, and for many years, its only minister, and his zeal and devotion in trying circumstances laid a good foundation for continuing witness for Covenanting principles in Ireland. Even J. Seaton Reid, no admirer of Houston, admits his claim to be "one of the earliest witnesses to the peculiar opinions of the Covenanting or Reformed Presbyterian Church that appeared in the North of Ireland."[1]

The Early Years

David Houston was born near Paisley in the year 1633. It was a time of unusual disquiet in the Scottish Church. The Presbyterianism that Knox had established and that Melville had fostered was being threatened by pressures on every side. Attempts to foist an Episcopal system on the Church were being mounted by King Charles and his henchmen. He brought matters to a head by ordering the Scottish Church to adopt a Book of Canons that would have outlawed

meetings of Session and Presbytery and authorised all Church cases to be heard by the Bishops, and a Service Book or Liturgy that for many Scotsmen had ominous hints of the Roman Mass.

While nothing is known of Houston's parentage or of his early life, it may be assumed that a man with such a vigorous commitment to Reformed doctrine in later life had known the influence of godly parents. His name appears first on the pages of history when he enrolled as a matriculated student in Glasgow University in 1648.[2] He completed his education there by obtaining a master's Degree in 1654. The course he had followed included the study of Philosophy and Divinity, and, in the absence of specialist theological training schools, he was accepted as a qualified candidate for the Christian ministry.

There is speculation and a good deal of uncertainty regarding his licensure to preach the Gospel, — a specific requirement for entering the Presbyterian ministry. Some writers have referred to him as a licentiate of the Route Presbytery in North Antrim, but majority opinion suggests that, when he came to Ireland shortly after the Restoration in 1660, he had already been licensed by a Presbytery in Scotland. It is indicative of the confusion that reigned in Presbyterian circles at the time that no record exists of such an important event.

When David Houston came to Ireland he undertook the supply of preaching in some of the existing congregations in County Antrim. There were at that time twenty congregations in the Antrim Presbytery. In one of these, at Glenarm, on the coast nearest to his point of arrival from Scotland, David Houston began his ministry in Ireland in 1661. It was here that the celebrated Robert Blair landed on his arrival in Ireland before his settlement in Bangor, Co. Down. There had been Scots Presbyterians in this area from about 1610, but the first known minister that they had was a Scot, Alexander Gilbert, who was ordained in 1655. His stay was very brief and his successor, James Fleming, another Scot, had been ejected from office in 1661.[3] Although there was strong Episcopal opposition, Presbyterianism survived at Glenarm and David Houston, in spite of — perhaps even because of — his Covenanting sympathies was warmly received.

David Houston And The Route Presbytery

Owing to the scarcity of ministers in Ireland at that time, Houston itinerated for a time between Glenarm and Ballymoney, a congregation that had been established in 1646. This second appointment brought him within the bounds of the Route Presbytery

and into contact with men who had little sympathy for his strong Covenanting principles. He preached, among other things, the continuing obligation of the Solemn League and Covenant and among his colleagues were men of lesser convictions who were unwilling to risk their livelihood by supporting such an unpopular course. Presbytery remonstrated with him and appealed to him to avoid what they referred to as "an irregular carriage in preaching by way of opposition."[4] For a time Houston accepted the reproof and carried out a successful ministry, winning the support of many to his particular viewpoint and above all to the Kingdom of Christ, by his earnest preaching of the Gospel. He returned for a time to Glenarm and was accepted by the Presbytery of Antrim. But the peace was short lived and when he was admonished by Presbytery "for scandal and disorderliness, especially at Glenarm," he acepted the advice of his brethren "to withdraw awhile out of the country," and returned to Scotland.

It was about this time that he met and received encouragement from Alexander Peden, who began a series of visits to Ulster about 1670. He paid his first visit to Armagh to John and Mrs. Goodall before making Glenwherry in County Antrim the centre of his activities and haven for refuge from persecution in Scotland. Houston's association with Peden confirmed and strengthened his Covenanting convictions. He returned to Ballymoney, but his preaching is reported to have caused a rent in the parish. Presbytery advised him to leave its bounds, but he had so commended himself to the people that he ignored the advice and continued to preach at Ballymoney, Derrykeighan and Macosquin.

On the 23rd August, 1671 matters came to a head between Houston and the Presbytery of Route and he appeared before the Presbytery at Macosquin. The Minute of the proceedings reads as follows:

> Mr. David Houston compeared before the meeting, and being interrogated whether or not he was insensible of his irregular carriage in counteracting the Presbytery's advice and preaching in a way of opposition by fixing tent against tent to the bringing a reproach against our way and opening the mouths of the wicked. To which he answered he judged his carriage withal truly scandalous, and it had cost him many sad nights and rendered him 'salem insipidum,' and declares that he will give it under his hand that, through the Lord's strength, he will never act contrary to the presbyterial meeting's advice where his lot shall be.
>
> 'Sic subscribitur corum conventum, David Houston.'

David Houston agreed to carry out the directive of the Presbytery by reading a prepared statement of his regret and of his submission to the authority of the Court when he resumed his ministry among the people. It was a difficult task for him to make such an abject apology and it is possible that the Presbytery's wording of the statement was so severe that the exercise really did not improve the relations between them. An extract from the statement will suffice to illustrate the point:

> I, Mr. David Houston, after serious consideration of my way in this place and the offence it hath given to the officers of Christ's house, do now declare that I am really sorry and grieved in my heart for my scandalous opposition to the Presbyterian way: and I do declare that my resolution and purpose for the future is, to walk more regularly and to move in my public vocation only according to the advice of the reverend ministers of the Presbytery in the place where my lot shall be. Also I earnestly entreat all of you that have been engaged on any contest on my account, to lay aside all animosities and unanimously follow the advice and counsel of the reverend presbytery in order to the establishing of the Gospel amongst you, as the most probable ways of healing the breach.[5]

Houston returned to his ministry and for a period of five months all seemed to proceed in a satisfactory manner, and then the tension mounted again. There must surely have been a misunderstanding between Houston and the Presbytery as to the precise terms of his undertaking. He had been preaching in rotation in Macosquin, Ballymoney and Derrykeighan, apparently with the approval of the Presbytery, yet when Presbytery met on the 9th January, 1672, they forbade him to preach in any of these congregations. They stated that they considered his carriage to be insolent and contemptuous. The main problem was that in each congregation there were people with Covenanting sympathies and there were those, probably in a majority, who were anxious for an end to strife and who wished to accept the various indulgences that had been offered by the State. Houston's preaching undoubtedly fostered the tensions between the two parties and his presence was an embarrassment to the members of the Presbytery. Apparently there were angry scenes at the meeting and Houston stormed out refusing to listen further to what his brethren had to say. On the following Sabbath he preached at Ballymoney and Derrykeighan and in the next few days lectured several times in the parish of Macosquin. Presbytery met on the 27th February, 1672, and

having considered Houston's activities since their last meeting and expressed their disapproval, suspended him from preaching, in the following terms:

> Wherefore the meeting have unanimously suspended the said Mr. David Houston from all preaching and lecturing upon the Word publicly or privately as a probationer: As also the meeting does hereby advise and exhort all the Lord's people within the bounds, especially those of Ballymoney, Derrykeichan and Macosquin, no longer to hear the said Mr. David, with certification that if they continue henceforth to keep that sad and scandalous breach by adhering to and hearing of him, they will thereby deprive themselves of the benefit of the sealing ordinances and of marriage."[7]

The suspension caused a division in the Ballymoney congregation with a section giving their support to Mr. Houston. In 1673 Presbytery, in the interests of peace, withdrew their suspension, and, feeling that he had been vindicated, Houston agreed to return to Scotland. Classon Porter's comment on his departure adapted the words of Scripture with reference to Saul's conversion, "Then had the Churches rest throughout the regions of Antrim and The Route."

In 1675, David Houston returned to Ulster for a short time. The Presbyterian congregation of Glenavy discussed the possibility of issuing a Call to him. The minister had been removed from office by Presbytery and the interest of the people in Houston was as much to embarrass the Presbytery as to secure for themselves the services of a minister.

His Acceptance By The Covenanting Societies

The next four years of David Houston's life are marked by obscurity. The records of Irish Presbyteries make no reference to him and it is reasonable to suppose that he was in Scotland from 1675 until 1679. It is generally accepted that he took an active part in the battle of Bothwell Brig on June 22nd, 1679, which was an ummitigated disaster for the Covenanters. Many fugitives from the battlefield made their way to Ulster and David Houston arrived in County Antrim with Alexander Peden for his travelling companion.

Covenanting principles in the stormy days that followed Bothwell Brig were less acceptable than ever to many of the Moderates of Ulster. Ministers had accepted indulgences at the hands of the king and the Church had, in the eyes of many, compromised her position

by taking the 'Regium Donum'. A paper was prepared and sent to the Lord Lieutenant in Dublin giving renewed assurances of loyalty to the Stuart regime. A statement was issued by the Church that David Houston was "to be discountenanced as an inconvenient brother, and if necessary, disowned." Houston was not greatly upset by this token of rejection for he was unwilling to accept recognition from men who were obviously unfriendly to the Covenanting cause. He had, besides, the opportunity for fellowship with Alexander Peden, and it was Peden who urged him to concentrate his energies on the scattered remnant in the Covenanting Societies especially in County Antrim. Some of them undoubtedly remembered him and some knew him well, but were reluctant to acknowledge him openly because of his earlier association with those who had been partakers of the indulgences. Peden persuaded the people of Houston's integrity and commitment to the Covenanting cause and from then onwards he had an official standing with the Societies.

Houston's formal recognition by the Irish Societies soon led to renewed contracts with the brethren in Scotland. In 1686 the Scottish Covenanting Societies sent a Commissioner to Ireland to enquire into his character and conduct. The report brought back was a favourable one and on the 22nd December, 1686, he was accepted by them as an accredited minister. We note with interest the use of the term 'minister.' All earlier references had spoken of him as a probationer, but at this time he was able to produce for the satisfaction of the Scottish Societies certificates both of licence and ordination. With regard to his ordination, the certificate showed that "he had been settled in the meeting-house which he had kept in Ireland by the ministers on the call of the people." The possibility is that he was ordained sometime between 1680 and 1685 and since the Route Presbytery, which had previously suspended him and then removed the suspension, ultimately deposed him on the 7th February, 1687, he must have been a minister under their jurisdiction. It was their last judgment on a troublesome brother. But their action must have given him but little concern as he had virtually renounced his attachment to Irish Presbyterianism six weeks earlier when he was formally recognised by the Scottish Societies.

A Tribute From James Renwick

At this point it is of interest to note the opinion that James Renwick had of him, expressed in a letter dated the 11th January, 1687. It was

addressed to Robert Hamilton, one of the leaders in the United Societies in Scotland. It would appear that Houston's position had been discussed at an earlier meeting. Renwick writes:

> Considering the importance of what was done at the last General Meeting, I judge it necessary to give you a true account thereof. There came two ministers to the last meeting on December 22nd, 1686, viz. Mr. David Houston and Mr. Alexander Shields. But I shall first give you an account of our carrying toward the said Mr. David. When I was in England last summer, the General Meeting of our Societies being informed that Mr. David Houston refused concurrence with and submission to the ministers in Ireland because of their defections, and that he preached faithfully against the sins of the times, did send unto him Colin Alison and William Nairn to know the verity thereof.[8]

These two representatives expressed complete satisfaction with Houston's testimony and cordially recommended that he be accepted by the Scottish Societies. Before taking this step the Societies decided to interview as many of their friends as possible who had been to Ireland and who could give a first hand account of Houston's ministry. They gave a very favourable report on Houston's work and indicated that the accusations that had been made against him "were all personalia." These accusations were further investigated and some of his accusers confronted face to face. The result was that Houston's name was cleared of any accusation and it was agreed that he be invited to meet with the Societies at an early date.

David Houston came to Scotland to a General Meeting of the Societies on the 22nd December, 1686 accompanied by James Kinloch, who also testified to Houston's honesty and innocence of all the allegations that had been made against him. A statement, summarising the grounds on which the Societies separated from the main body of the Scottish Church and a declaration of the main points in their testimony was read in Houston's hearing, He was asked to give his reaction to it. He replied:

> As to some matters of fact he was ignorant; but he agreed with our judgment and principles in all that he had heard, adding that it was foretold by Luther, that before Christ's glorious appearance for His Church in the last days, the controversy should be stated and rid about ministry and magistracy.[9]

The Meeting then held a consultation about what steps should be taken to increase their satisfaction about his life and work. He

presented some papers in evidence of his licensure and ordination, which had taken place in the parish of Strastrie, a little before the Restoration. This claim and the supporting documentary evidence presents to us a very great difficulty. First of all it is impossible to identify a parish by the name of Strastrie. Then we have the repeated statements in the records of the Route Presbytery that he had the standing only of the probationer or licentiate right up until the time when he was first disciplined by them in 1672. It is possible, however, in the confused state of affairs in the Church following the restoration, that his ordination was not recognised in Ireland, and that the Route Presbytery did not ordain him after 1680 as has been suggested earlier in this article, but only accepted the validity of his ordination at that time.

Houston then presented to the General Meeting a paper which he had drawn up in Ireland and had presented to the ministers there, giving reasons why he could not be subordinate to them nor concur with them. One of his main objections to them was the fact that they were so opposed to the persecuted party in Scotland. A notable criticism from the people in Ireland was his refusal to baptise the children of some of the members. He gave as his reason the fact that they had "paid exactions to the enemy" and had thus compromised their testimony. The Meeting cordially approved his standing and commended him for his faithfulness. Renwick was very willing that he should soon have a settled ministry and added the following words of appreciation:

> I hear he preaches very zealously and faithfully wherever he goes, and carries strictly in the administration of the sacrament of baptism. For my own part, from his expressing himself at our correspondence, I thought he seemed to have a right state of the cause, and a right impression of the case of the Church, and to be tender-hearted and zealous in the frame of his spirit, particularly for the royalties of Christ and against the idol of the Lord's jealousy, the ecclesiastic supremacy and civil tyranny.[10]

Six months later, James Renwick holds the same high opinion of David Houston. In a letter to Robert Hamilton dated the 15th July, 1687, he makes the following comment:

> As for Mr. David Houston, he carries very straight. I think him both learned and zealous. He seems to have much of the spirit of our worthy professors; for he much opposes the passing from any part of our testimony, yea, and sticks close to every form and

> order whereunto we have attained; asserting, pertinently, that if we follow not even the method wherein God hath countenanced us, and keep not by every orderly form, we cannot but be jostled out of the matter. He hath authority with him which somehow dashes those who oppose themselves. He discovers the mystery of the working of the spirit of Antichrist more fully and clearly than ever I have heard it.[11]

In 1687 David Houston made several journeys between Scotland and Ireland. He was in Scotland in February 1688 when Renwick was arrested and executed. He fled to Ireland where he was arrested and sent as a prisoner to Dublin. In June he was ordered to appear for trial at Edinburgh and would undoubtedly have gained the distinction accorded to Renwick as the last martyr of the persecution, but for a gallant and audacious rescue from the hands of his military escort. A day of prayer and fasting had been ordered by the Societies for his deliverance, but before the appointed day, when he was on his way to Edinburgh, a band of Covenanters surprised his guard at Belton Path, Cumnock, in Ayrshire. In the ensuing skirmish, several of the guards were killed and Houston himself was seriously injured when his horse to which he had been bound became panic-stricken and dragged him for a long distance. His life was saved, but though an enquiry into the incident was ordered it never took place, for the Revolution was on its way and the tragic days of persecution were soon to be replaced by happier days.

The much vaunted Revolution and the settlement that followed it, while it signalled the end of persecution, was a bitter disappointment to the followers of Cameron and Renwick. Their hopes of a covenanted nation were blighted by the political expediency that held sway and David Houston found himself once more a central figure in bitter controversy. He and his followers in the Societies stood aloof, and so great was his disapproval of the Settlement that he refused to pray for the new King. He maintained a strong suspicion of any who were too enthusiastic for the new settlement.

Early in 1689 Houston seems to have been living at Newtownards in County Down. He entered into a 'Bond of Compliance' with Lord Mountalexander of the Ardes that he would use his influence for a peaceful settlement in the country, and, if need be, persuade his followers to provide a force for the defence of the country, on condition that they would be allowed to appoint their own officers.[12] From this Bond it would appear that his influence in Ulster was considerable since the authorities were so anxious to secure his

support.

The Presbyterian Synod of Ulster continued to show an interest in his career. Though he was not under their jurisdiction, Synod appointed a Committee consisting of Hugh Wilson of Castlereagh, Peter Orr of Clough and Patrick Adair of Cairncastle to investigate his supposed irregularities. They found little grounds for complaint apart from the fact that he had the ability to draw and hold support from members of the Presbyterian Church.

David Houston spent the last four years of his life at Armoy, County Antrim. There is no longer any trace of the meeting house that was built. One reference to his work at Armoy comes from the report of a Northern Bishop to the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland in 1694 which speaks of him as

> A clergyman that preaches up the Solemn League and Covenant, accusing the people of Scotland of not sticking to their league, and having a congregation of 500 resolute fellows that adhere to him.[13]

To quote Classon Porter on the closing days of his life:

> He went forth as his failing strength permitted him on frequent excursions through the Counties of Down, Antrim and Derry, confirming the Churches which he had built in those localities, and with undiminished boldness and unshrinking fidelity, testifying to his devoted followers what he believed to be the Gospel of the Grace of God. For his work he lived. In the discharge of his work he died.[14]

He was preaching at Kellswater when the end came suddenly — a peaceful ending to a stormy career. His mortal remains were buried at Connor, but even his last resting place was not free from disturbance. A headstone had been erected on his grave with the following inscription:

> Here lies the body of Mr. David Houston,
> A faithful minister of the Gospel of Christ,
> Who departed this present life the 8th December,
> In the year 1696, and of his age the 63rd year.

Fortunately a copy of the inscription was taken, for some years later his grave was desecrated and allocated to another, and the record obliterated from the tombstone. Many years later the inscription was incorporated above the door of a newly erected memorial Hall at Kellswater with the introductory words:

> Memorial Hall erected by Henry H. Houston of Philadelphia,

U.S.A. in honour of his Kinsman, the Rev. David Houston, M.A.

His Character

The record of his life portrays the outstanding features in his character. At first glance it might seem that he was a rash, irregular, turbulent troublemaker, But that would be far from the truth. We must take account of the fact that while many accusations were made against him, nothing derogatory was ever proved. If he was troublesome to his fellow-ministers it was because of their easy-going acceptance of conditions that were far from satisfactory and showed rather his own fidelity to principle. Like all Reformers and pioneers he suffered opposition and misunderstanding for doing the right as he saw it.

He was a man of great courage. Only in this spirit could he have stood so often and so long as the flag-bearer of the Covenant. It was his courage that enabled him to challenge and to question the aims and motives of the majority who accepted the 1690 settlement and to stand alone in trial. One who has written critically and not always sympathetically of his life sums up his character in the following words:

> As a probationer, as a minister, and as a man, he was brave, outspoken, honest and sincere.[15]

But for his courage and constancy in face of the greatest difficulties there might well have been no Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland as we know it today.

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CLEMENT, TERTULLIAN AND THE PRESENTATION OF THE GOSPEL

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We may not agree with Emil Brunner that 'the church exists by mission as fire exists by burning.'[1] Worship and holiness are as important as evangelism in the glorifying of God. Yet it is undeniable that the task of spreading the gospel lies at the heart of the church's responsibility. But in what way is the church to approach the lost? Should we emphasize our common ground with the world? By doing this we may make people ready to listen to us, but there is always the danger of becoming too like those we are seeking to win. Should the church, on the other hand, lay stress on its distinctiveness from the world? This will preserve its purity, but we may so antagonise the unbeliever that he is unwilling to hear the message of salvation. Both approaches might claim biblical warrant. The apostle Paul quotes from memory the Greek writers Aratus, Epimenides and Menander[2] and shows himself conversant with pagan thought and culture. He stresses his common ground with the Athenians by declaring: 'What you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you.'[3] Yet the same apostle can write of the divine absurdity of the preaching of the cross, by which God has made foolish all the wisdom of the world that did not know him.[4] Which approach is the correct one? Is the church to evangelize by assimilation or by confrontation?

This question may be examined through the lives of two great Christians who lived at the end of the 2nd century and the beginning of the 3rd. Both men were fired with missionary enthusiasm. Both devoted their lives to defending the gospel against heresy. In the sense that the core of their religion was faith in the person of Jesus, both were orthodox. Yet their views concerning the world and its culture were fundamentally opposed. One man sought to unite philosophy with religion, Athens with Jerusalem. The other declared total war against all merely human thinking. One set the course along which

Eastern Christianity was to develop. The other was 'the father of Latin theology' and one of the chief architects of the Western Church. We can learn much from their strengths and weaknesses, their successes and failures. Their names were Clement of Alexandria and Tertullian.

Titus Flavius Clemens was born around 150 A.D. into a pagan home, probably in Athens. The early years of his life were spent in travel and in a ceaseless search for truth. This truth he eventually found in Christianity as taught by Pantaenus, a converted Stoic who is said to have evangelized among the peoples of the East. Pantaenus settled in Alexandria, where, in what is often inaccurately described as a 'Catechetical School,' he gathered an informal group of disciples. Clement became one of these, was ordained a presbyter, and in 190 succeeded his mentor as chief instructor in the Christian faith. He continued teaching, mainly university students, until 202, when fierce persecution broke out under the emperor Septimius Severus and Clement left Egypt, never to return. It seems that he journeyed to Cappadocia, where he strengthened the local church, and from there travelled to Antioch in Syria, where he died around 214 at the age of 65.

If the maxim is true that 'geography is history,' then the phrase 'of Alexandria' tells us much about Clement. The greatest library in the world was situated there, attracting scholars and philosophers from many parts. It was at Alexandria that the Hebrew scriptures had been translated into the version called the Septuagint, as the religion of the Jews reached out to embrace those who spoke Greek. The writer Philo had re-interpreted Judaism in terms of Hellenic philosophy and the system of Neo-Platonism was to be developed there in the century after Clement. The city was a place of intellectual ferment and a rich, varied culture. Brilliant men speculated on the mysteries of life, and the world's religions and philosophies mingled and touted for custom in the market-place of the mind.

For Christians it was a situation of excitement, confusion and danger and they reacted to it in different ways. Some went completely on the defensive, retreating behind a negative barrier of deliberate ignorance. They had no time for learning or original thought, no sympathy with the questionings of their fellow-men. There is more than a grain of truth in the contemporary caricature by Celsus: 'Do not ask questions, just believe ... The wisdom in the world is an evil, and foolishness a good thing.'[5] Like ostriches they hid their heads in

the sand of a simple-minded fundamentalism. Some however went to the other extreme, becoming obsessed with philosophy and secular learning, and attracted in particular towards the heresy of Valentinian Gnosticism.

Clement, then, was faced with a difficult pastoral and missionary problem. He had to evangelise the intellectual élite and teach his confused fellow-believers, while sailing a narrow channel between the Scylla of obscurantism and the Charybdis of heresy. If Christians forsook philosophy altogether, the world would not listen to them. If, however, they followed it too enthusiastically, they might lose their faith. What was to be done?

He decided on a course which was bold, potentially effective and very dangerous. The church would mount a take-over bid. He would unite in marriage faith and philosophy. He would show that the gospel and secular learning were not opposed but complementary, that it was possible to be both an educated man and a Christian. He aimed at assimilating the world to the church, expressing the faith in the language of Greek philosophy, showing the unbeliever how close to Christianity he already was. In his three main works — the 'Protrepticos', the 'Paidagogos' and the 'Stromateis', this approach is developed in detail.

For Clement the doctrine of creation is basic. As Creator, God must be the fountain and source of all things, including philosophy. While Scripture reveals the truth in fulness, that same truth is partially revealed in the metaphysics of Plato, the ethics of the Stoics and the logic of Aristotle. Philosophy is from God. It is a divine gift to serve as a restraint on sin and to bring men to Christ. He writes:

> For God is the cause of all good things, but of some primarily, as of the old and new covenants, and of others consequentially, as of philosophy .... Philosophy educated the Greek world as the law did the Hebrews to bring them to Christ.[6]

Christians should not be afraid of science or scholarship 'like children who are frightened by the black man?'[7] They should see Greek philosophy as having value and revealing truth.

Having established the worth of worldly thinking, however, Clement goes on to expose its incompleteness. As Henry Chadwick writes: 'His reverence for the greatest and noblest achievements of Greek humanism is never unqualified. He loves Plato and Homer, but he does not read them on his knees.'[8] In the Protrepticos he attacks the crudity and superstition of paganism and lays bare the

incompleteness of human philosophy. Men speak of the Logos, the 'Word' or 'Reason' of God — but the true Logos, Jesus Christ, has come from Zion, revealed in the Bible. He has always been the source of all the intelligence and morality of the human race, the teacher of mankind everywhere — 'Our instructor is the holy God, Jesus, the Word who is the guide of all humanity.'[9] Men have been searching for Christ, they have been guided and helped by Christ, they have in a sense been following Christ without knowing it. To become a Christian is simply to grow, to advance in maturity, like a child who progresses from milk to solid food. And normal children do progress.

> Why do we no longer sputter into our parents' bosoms, nor still behave in other respects as we did when infants in our mothers' arms, making ourselves objects of laughter? Do we not rather correct ourselves, even if we did not happen to have good attendants for this purpose?[10]

The non-Christian is like the child and his philosophy is like mothers' milk. Good enough in its own way, but he now needs to move on to the stronger, richer food of the gospel. He does not need to abandon his past, simply to add to it and bring it to perfection.

Clement, then, faces the non-Christian world with a calm confidence. He is neither frightened nor repelled by what he finds. Paganism is immature rather than sinful. Conversion to Christianity must be seen as a development, an advance, rather than as a wrenching break with one's past life. He explains to the unbeliever that Christ is the goal towards which he has been already moving. Christianity is the only true philosophy, the only complete 'gnosis' —that to which the ancient classical world has long been pointing. With a generous optimism Clement sought to claim as Christian all that was best in the world and to bring it together to its home in the church.

The transition from Clement to Tertullian has been compared with that of a traveller 'hurried from a fair and smiling prospect to a rugged country under scowling skies.'[11] It is tempting to explain this difference of approach solely in terms of their differing personalities. Tertullian does seem to have been an Ishmaelite by nature, with his hand against every man and every man's hand against him. Born of pagan parents in Carthage around 160, he became one of the most brilliant lawyers in the city of Rome and was suddenly converted to Christianity when nearly 40. Another violent break occurred in his life about 10 years later when he repudiated the Catholic church and

joined the Montanists, an early sect of charismatic enthusiasts. Tradition has it that he was not content even here and that, before his death in Carthage some time after 220, he broke away again to found a sect of his own. All this suggests a man who was combative by nature, preferring argument and conflict to unity and co-operation. We could psycho-analyze Tertullian in this way and conclude that his approach to the presentation of the gospel was a reflection of his internal tensions.

To do so would, I think, be facile, for although they were more or less contemporary, Clement and Tertullian faced very different situations and Tertullian's apologetic was moulded just as much by the circumstances in which he lived as by his personality. His church faced two great threats — syncretism and persecution. People were saying that all religions were one and the same thing, that it did not matter to which faith a man belonged. Many religions had a saviour-myth and there were those who considered Jesus as simply on a par with Orpheus and Apollo, Hermes and Heracles, Asclepius and Mithras. Christ was only one title for the Saviour in whom all men believed. Christianity was only one brand-name for a particular commodity and the same product could be obtained equally well under different packaging.

Coinciding with this ecumenical spirit was, paradoxically enough, a fierce outbreak of anti-Christian feeling. Christians were the scapegoats of society, blamed for every kind of disaster. As Tertullian wrote:

> If the Tiber reaches the walls, if the Nile does not rise to the fields, if the sky doesn't move or the earth does, if there is famine, if there is plague, the cry is at once, Christians to the lion![12]

As already mentioned, a wave of persecution had broken out in 202. Scapula, the proconsul of Africa to whom Tertullian wrote in 212, threw Christians to the wild beasts and had them burnt alive. The church was being simultaneously infiltrated and persecuted and this double pressure caused intense strain. The contemporary African Christian faced death in the arena for holding to a distinctive faith, while at the same time siren voices were whispering that Christianity was not really so unique after all. The temptation to apostatize, to blend his faith into the common landscape, was almost irresistible.

But God had a man for the hour. 'Up through the confusion were thrust Tertullian's mighty shoulders, casting off the enemies of the Gospel upon every side.'[13] His strategy, in contradiction to that of

Clement, was to separate the church from the world, to confront rather than to assimilate, to conquer paganism by crushing it rather than by drawing it into an alliance. In the words of Hans von Campenhausen:

> Paganism is to Tertullian no foolishness to be enlightened, no prejudice or mistake to be dispelled or brought to reason. It is "the world", and as such a great demonic unity to be recognized in its entirety, and to be rejected and condemned.[14]

He accepts no linkage whatever between Christianity and secular philosophy or culture. In one of his most famous passages he asks:

> What has Athens to do with Jerusalem? What has the Academy to do with the Church? What have heretics to do with Christians? .... Away with those who bring forward a Stoic or Platonic or dialectic Christianity. We have no need of speculative enquiry after we have known Christ Jesus; nor of search for the truth after we have received the gospel.[15]

The Christian, whose eyes have been opened to the revelation of God, does not need to blur his vision with cloudy human speculation.

Tertullian is not anti-intellectual. He simply asks the human mind to admit its limitations. Reason cannot be superior to revelation. It must accept unconditionally what God has made known. The believer can, in fact, glory in the apparent unreasonableness of his faith, for this is a witness that it towers beyond the limits of his mind. Tertullian writes,

> I believe because it is absurd. God's Son was crucified — this is not a matter for shame, because it is a disgrace; and God's Son has died — this is credible, because it is a foolishness; and he was buried and is risen — this is certain, because it is impossible.[16]

If someone points out that the philosophers teach elements of truth, Tertullian does not disagree, for he admits for example that Seneca often speaks like a Christian. But they have stolen these truths from the Scriptures and can claim no credit for them. Nothing can be said in justification of worldly learning. The disciple of Hellas and the disciple of Heaven can have no common ground. And since the spirit of the world is so opposed to that of the gospel, the Christian should withdraw from the world as much as possible. He should not serve in the army, the civil service or the schools. He must never lose the sense of a conflict with diabolical forces, against which only the Church can provide a refuge.

The method of Tertullian has been described as a theology of

radical discontinuity. Men must be made to understand the blindness and folly of their past thinking. Human reason must bow in humility before the mystery of the cross. Paganism is confronted with a demand for total capitulation.

We have looked briefly at two very different approaches to Christian evangelism. What were their results? Can we decide, from an examination of the historical aftermath, whether Clement or Tertullian provides us with a safer model today? Clement's method of friendly assimilation was staggeringly effective. Many in his day were unwilling to turn their backs on the glorious classical culture which had shaped the Mediterranean world. The emerging middle classes, who were travelling, trading and breaking through ancient barriers at the end of the 2nd century, longed to be a respected part of Graeco-Roman society. At the same time, however, there was a widespread spiritual hunger and a recognition of the emptiness of the religions and philosophies of the day. Ideas of 'conversion' and 'rebirth' were common in contemporary writing, as men sought for spiritual reality, a direct link with the divine. Clement showed them how to have their cake and eat it, how to be both a classicist and a Christian, how to embrace the world and bring it, to some extent, into the church. His approach was continued by Origen and Eusebius of Caesarea, as the church proceeded to absorb the culture and civilization of the Mediterranean world in what has been called 'probably the most important aggiornamento in the history of the church.'[17] When Constantine converted to Christianity one hundred years later, he was embracing a religion which had itself been converted to the civilisation which he represented.

The church of Clement grew and expanded — but at a terrible price. It lost its purity, its uniqueness, its total dependence on God and his revelation. It attracted the humanist and the rationalist, the ambitious courtier, the power-seeking politican. Pagan philosophy was allowed to poison the wellsprings of truth. It was too easy to become a Christian. The decline of Eastern Christendom into spiritual deadness is due in a large measure to the course of compromise which Clement set. His motives were excellent, his successes substantial — but the cost was too great. Generally speaking, the resulting growth of the professing body of Christ was not healthy muscle and tissue, but the cancerous tumour which will prove fatal at the last.

Tertullian, on the other hand, certainly stressed the church's doctrinal purity. In a series of great works he attacked the heresies of

Marcion and the Gnostics, defended the reality of the Incarnation and the unity of the Godhead, gave the first extended Christian discussion of the soul and the clearest pre-Nicene statement of the doctrine of the Trinity. We are indebted to him for many of the theological terms we use today — words such as sacrament, Trinity, substance and person. Tertullian's church was in no danger of being swallowed up by the world. The city of God stood in splendid and defiant isolation against the Babylon of blinded humanity. It was a closed fortress in a hostile world, transmitting grace through its sacraments to the gathered faithful. Its doctrine was clear, its discipline strict, its organization and authority strong.

Ironically, this very strength was to prove a weakness. Tertullian made too great a gap between church and world. The church was considered the source of all knowledge and wisdom. It became the supreme authority — supreme eventually over Scripture itself. There could be no appeal against its judgments, no arguing against its pronouncements. No-one outside the church had insights of any value: grace and wisdom were to be found only within its walls. The logical conclusion of Tertullian's approach was mediaeval Rome. 'He is .... predominantly a man of law, of the divine command and of unconditional obedience. What he defends is the Catholic church and the Christian demand of faith in its inflexible reality.'[18] He underestimated the influence of common grace and ascribed to the visible church an unbearable weight of authority.

The ideas of the Alexandrian and the Carthaginian are still with us, and from them we may learn and take warning. With Clement we need to appreciate modern man, to understand what he is thinking, to read his novels and poems, look at his paintings and listen to his music. We need to feel the pain of his spiritual hunger so that we can speak sensitively of the Christ who alone can meet it. There is no place for the church to turn its back on the world. We must not close our eyes and ears to our fellow-men. They are God's creatures, made in his image, enabled and enlightened often by His common grace. In so far as Clement urges us not to be frightened, but to see God's hand in all creation and all providence, he is right. When he advises us to make strenuous efforts to preach the gospel to people in language which they can understand, we should heed that wise counsel.

We must learn also from his tragic error. There can be no gospel without the scandal of the cross, the preaching of that which the natural man calls 'foolishness' and hates with all his being. Proud man must kneel and recognize that God is God. He is a rotting

corpse, requiring the gift of new life. He is to be called, not to self-improvement, but to self-abandonment. Clement asked 'what gospel will be effective?' We must rather ask 'what gospel is true?' and leave it effectiveness to God.

As Reformed Christians we lean towards the approach of Tertullian. In the light of the Scripture his main line of approach is incontestably correct. Men are not to be reasoned by easy stages into the kingdom. Their very thinking is distorted by sin. They are to be summoned not to dialogue and encounter but to repentance and faith. The fact of arguing with the unbeliever about the validity of revealed truth may be in itself a concession to his point of view. Van Til's astringent and unyielding apologetic has contributed much of value in an age of watery evangelical rationalism.

Yet we must be careful lest we fall into the mistake of the centuries after Tertullian. Some of his descendants were mediaeval monks, ignorant, unlettered men, who swept away as worthless great works of art and intellect. Their authors were not Christians and so could have no knowledge and teach no truth. We do not need a new generation of Christian philistines. Man outside Christ is totally depraved, dead in sin, ignorant of saving truth. If he is to be saved he must hear the gospel and believe it like a little child. But by God's grace he does have insights which are valid. Just as a Christian may hold positions which are inconsistent with his basic, and biblical, presuppositions, so an unbeliever may, with a happier inconsistency, discover and assert what is true. We in the church are to teach him, but there are many aspects of God's world concerning which he is qualified to teach us.

Abraham Kuyper wrote,

> I assert and maintain that the one Aristotle knew more of the cosmos than all the church - fathers taken together; that under the dominion of Islam better cosmic science flourished than in the cathedral and monastic-schools of Europe.[19]

If we forget that our own thought processes are still partially distorted, we are in danger of creating an infallible church, outside which no truth is to be found. Tertullian wanted to safeguard the authority of God. The process ended with a church leader who claimed to hold the place of God on earth. May we take warning from that tragic blasphemy.

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THE GOSPEL AND HISTORY

Frederick S. Leahy

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Our English word 'gospel' means 'good news' or 'glad tidings.' It comes from the Anglo Saxon 'godspell,' which means 'good story,' or, better still, 'God-story.' The Gospel, then is the narration of certain events that happened on this planet nearly two thousand years ago — redemptive events in which God was active in all His grace and power. The Gospel is also the *proclamation* of what God has done in Christ for our salvation. As Dr. James S. Stewart puts it,

> Running right through the New Testament from start to finish, reappearing steadily through all the variations of Evangel and Epistle, Acts and Apocalypse, history and homily, pastoral and preaching, beating out like the deep recurring theme of a great symphony, there is the announcement — brief, trenchant and authoritative — of certain historic events of final and absolute significance, the mighty acts in which God had visited and redeemed His people![1]

Thus we have gospel and history, not as two distinct entities or concepts, but inseparably connected and interwoven.

The subject of gospel and history is topical and has been for some considerable time. There have been religious thinkers who have sought either to abstract the Gospel from the historical, and so discount the historical, or to use the historical in such a way as virtually to disembowel the Gospel! From time to time we have heard prominent churchmen deny the historicity and factuality of the virgin birth, miracles and resurrection of our Saviour. Today, such utterances from men who profess to be teachers of Christianity are assured of close attention by the mass media. The statements of such men are given the greatest publicity, which in turn leads to renewed and frequently confused controversy.

The Position of Historic Christianity

As Professor Fred. H. Klooster reminds us, the vital questions concerning Christ and His saving work are Who? What? Where? and When?[2] To these questions historic Christianity gives positive and emphatic answers, because it sees the Gospel firmly rooted in history and finds that history recorded in Scripture. *Who* was Jesus of Nazareth? He was the Son of God incarnate. *What* did He do? That question cannot be answered fully in one sentence, but the answer is historical. Much of the answer, though not all, is found in the Apostles' Creed. He was born of the Virgin Mary. He suffered and died in the stead of His people. He died on a cross. On the third day He rose from the dead. *Where?* The Bible refers us to certain villages, cities, provinces and rivers where He moved and taught and healed. *When?* We are given a specific point in history, during the reign of Caesar Augustus when Pontius Pilate was Roman Governor in Palestine. Luke the historian places our actual redemption in a definite historial framework (cf. Lk. 3: 1, 2). So the answer of historic Christianity to the questions Who? What? Where? and When? is positive and assured.

The Gospel is embedded in history. Our actual salvation is mediated historically. If the history is unreliable, if it can be discounted, then we have no gospel. Is not that what the Apostle Paul is saying in I Corinthians 15? He refers to those who witnessed the fact that Christ was risen. He had appeared to them, including five hundred at one time, most of whom were alive when the Apostle wrote — so they were quite young when they first believed! But, says the Apostle, if there is no such thing as the resurrection of the body, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, if after all we have been tricked and deluded, or just hallucinating, then our preaching has been in vain, empty, futile. Your faith has been empty. You are yet in your sins. And those who died trusting in Christ have perished. However the Apostle will have none of this. He is sure of the historical facts and so he thunders, 'But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept" (v. 20).

Consistently the writers of the New Testament see the Gospel in terms of history, events, narrative. To them doctrine and history cannot be torn apart. Professor J. G. Machen puts it thus:

> 'Christ died' — that is history; 'Christ died for our sins' — that is doctrine .... Without these two elements, joined in an indissoluble union, there is no Christianity.[3]

Machen adds:

> A gospel independent of history is a contradiction in terms.[4]

Historic Christianity not only recognized God's action in history, as confessed in the creeds, but also regarded history as basic and essential to the Gospel proclamation or *Kerygma.* From Nicaea to Chalcedon, and again at the Reformation, Christian dogma was seen to be rooted in history. The incarnation, life, ministry, crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ were all understood to be real events in history. Apart from some heretical sects, like the Ebionites, who denied Christ's virgin birth and deity, and the Gnostics, who denied His humanity, the Christian Church for centuries stood fast by the historic bedrock of the Faith. That was the position of the overwhelming majority of those who professed to follow Christ. However the situation was to change radically.

The Challenge of the Post-Enlightenment Schools

The Aufklärung, or Enlightenment, took place in Germany in the 18th century. Associated with such thinkers as Reimarus, Lessing and Herder, it was a thoroughly rationalistic movement and sought to secularize every department of life and thought. It was a revolt against religion as such, was hostile to belief in the supernatural and stressed the all-sufficiency of human reason. There was a fundamental belief in the goodness of human nature.

The philosopher most associated with this outlook was Immanuel Kant (1724 — 1804). In 1784, Kant asked the question, in a magazine article, "What is Enlightment?" Dr. Colin Brown sums up his argument thus:

> ..... enlightenment was man's emergence from his self-inflicted immaturity — from his reliance upon external authorities and his reluctance to use his own understanding. The motto of enlightenment was: Dare to use your own understanding. This applies especially to religion. No generation should be bound by the creeds and dogmas of bygone generations .... We do not yet, Kant admitted, live in an enlightened age. But we do live in the age of enlightenment, the age of Frederick the Great! Mankind is in the process of coming of age, refusing to take external authorities and judging everything by its own understanding.[5]

There are certain aspects of the Enlightenment which correspond to the Renaissance, a movement which surfaced in Europe in the 12th

century and blossomed in the 14th century and which included revolt against authority — in the existing situation an understandable revolt — and the development of individualism. It is true that the Renaissance was marked by a thirst for knowledge and a desire for freedom, and in a sense paved the way for the Reformation, yet, as Carl Henry reminds us,

> the Renaissance feasted on ancient writers who raised doubts about God and immortality, among them Pliny, Lucian, Plutarch and Lucretius.[6]

The bridge between the Renaissance and the Englightenment in Germany was the French Revolution (1789) in which the humanistic strands of the Renaissance became dominant. The French Revolution marked a turning-point in the history of Western society. As R. J. Rushdoony put it,

> The secularization of Western culture since the French Revolution has really been the separation of Western civilization from Christianity to humanism. It has been the steady disestablishment of Christianity and the establishment of humanism as the law of the State.[7]

In general terms, Rushdoony is right.

The philosophy of the Enlightment, with its roots in the French Revolution and the Renaissance, had a profound and serious effect upon the Protestant Churches. Presuppositions which excluded the supernatural were accepted. Rationalism seeped into theological colleges and the 'Higher Critical' movement applied rationalistic principles to Biblical studies. History was seen as a purely cause-and-effect process. Divine revelation and divine activity in history were excluded *a priori.* With the latest tools of the modern historian, Biblical scholars read the New Testament story and asked, 'What *really* happened?' No longer were theologians convinced that the Gospels give us absolutely reliable information about Jesus of Nazareth. The historical Jesus had become a problem. Thus began what was to become known as 'the search for the historical Jesus,' the *real* Jesus. Now the scholars would approach the subject without any presuppositions and, with complete objectivity, try to discover who this Jesus really was.

Behind this movement lay the Enlightenment philosophy of Immanuel Kant, who distinguished between the *noumenal* realm and the *phenomenal* realm The noumenal was the realm of God, immortality and suchlike The phenomenal was open to sense and

perception and it was only with *this* realm that the sciences were concerned. We related to the noumenal with faith (termed 'practical reason') and to the phenomenal with 'pure reason.' This Kantian philosophy was to have a profound effect on all the sciences, including historical science.

The quest for the historical Jesus was by no means as neutral and presuppositionless as it claimed. In fact it was loaded with the philosophy of the Enlightment. It was a bewildering quest, with different schools providing different answers. To begin with, Hermann Reimarus, (1694 — 1768), who taught in Wittenberg and Hamburg, and who was strongly influenced by English Deism, rejected outright the Jesus of traditional Christianity. Jesus, on his view, was a Jew who hoped to awaken his kinsmen to a popular political uprising which would sweep Him to power. His dream did not materialize. Jerusalem refused to rise in rebellion and Jesus' life ended in tragedy. His cry of despair on the cross, 'My God! my God! why hast Thou forsaken me?' indicated the total failure of His mission. At first His disciples were shattered and dispirited. However they had to live and find means of supporting themselves. According to Reimarus, they only way they knew was by preaching!! So they stole the body of Jesus, waited for some fifty days to give their story credence, and then announced that Jesus was risen from the dead and would soon return in power. However the years passed and Jesus did not return. Their hope was in vain and their story untrue. So much for the modern, objective, presuppositionless historical science! No one today — at least no one worth listening to — would take Reimarus' answer seriously.

The quest continued. Numerous 'lives' of Jesus were written, each author having his own particular axe to grind. There were 'lives' of Jesus by Lange, Neander, Renan, Stier, Strauss, and many more right down to the time of Albert Schweitzer and his book, "The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of Its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede."

The next notable approach from that of Reimarus was the mythical interpretation of David Friedrich Strauss (1808 — 1874), whose *Leben Jesu* went through several editions. Strauss emphasised ideas rather than events or personalities. Professor Klooster states Strauss's position thus:

> The seminal or creative force of history is idea. A person is usually necessary to bring the idea into history, but once it has

> been projected into history the person or the originator of the idea is no longer essential.[8]

Klooster compares this position to the current view of Santa Claus! The idea, (for what it is worth!), somehow or other has been thrust into history and now it does not really matter if there was a Santa Claus or not. We have the idea! So, for Strauss, it is only the ideas and not the person of Christ which provide the key to the Christian Faith. Jesus Himself is no longer essential. Thus the Gospels are seen as mythical in character rather than as sober history. Strauss was prepared to sacrifice the historical reality of the Gospels, yet he was anxious to retain their religious truth. With him the Gospel proclamation had lost all historical foundation. In this he was applying principles of another Enlightenment philosopher, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770 — 1831), who taught in Heidelberg and Berlin, and who made ideas and not the person of crucial importance. To Hegel, spirit/mind alone was reality. History was just one aspect of the Absolute Spirit, the victory of a Universal Principle.

The search for the historical Jesus continued and became increasingly diversified. Joachim Jeremias writes,

> The rationalists pictured Jesus as a preacher of morality; the idealists as the ideal Man; the aesthetes extolled him as the master of words and the socialists as the friend of the poor and as the social reformer; while innumerable pseudo-scholars made of him a fictional character.[9]

Jeremias further comments,

> Dogma had been replaced by psychology and fantasy.[10]

Carl Braaten says that the 19th century biographers of Jesus were

> like an artist who paints himself in the figures he creates. There was, in most cases, unmistakable resemblance between their portrayal of the religion of Jesus and their own personal religious stance .... the scholar usually found as much as he was looking for .... he found out as much about Jesus, allegedly on purely historical grounds, as he needed to prop up his own theology.[11]

Into this complex and confused situation stepped men like Barth, Bultmann and Pannenberg. Karl Barth (1886 — 1968), and his associates, took a totally new approach. Barth said, in effect, 'You men are wasting your time. Your are all up a theological gum tree. History can never provide a basis for faith. You should have paid more attention to Kant when he spoke about the noumenal and the phenomenal. So I will give you two terms which have the same

meaning — *Historie* (ordinary history) and *Geschichte* (super-history).'

These terms were first used in this way by Martin Kähler in 1892 when Barth was six years old! Now Barth popularised them. He and his friends took comfort from 2 Corinthians 5: 16, "Though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now we know HIM no more." So Barth declared all this historical research to discover the real Jesus to be a waste of time and not theologically worthy of consideration. Christ could not be found in history. Emil Brunner, Barth's contemporary, could write,

> Even the bare fact of the existence of Christ as an historical person is not assured.[12]

Barth's distinction between *Historie* and *Geschichte* — history as we know it and super-history which we cannot investigate — enabled him to keep the Gospel proclamation from being rooted in history as commonly understood. On Barth's view there just is no revelation in ordinary history. Scripture itself is not revelation, for that would mean that God was "bound in morocco." Scripture is only *witness* to revelation and the *vehicle* of God's Word to us. The only revelation we have comes by means of encounter, when man is directly confronted by God "straight down from above." That encounter Barth terms the "Christ-event." Jesus of Nazareth is not God incarnate in our history, for then God would not be free. The Jesus of Scripture is *illustrative* of the Christ-event, but not identical with it. Professor Klooster likens Barth's encounter-event to a flying saucer that supposedly hovers above the earth without really landing. Klooster points out that what looked like a flying saucer may in fact be no more than marsh gas![13] Klooster continues:

> For Barth there is only one revelation-event — the Christ-event, the nonhistorical, theophanic, ever-recurring yet always-the-same, event of God's self-revelation. God's revelatory act, according to Barth, leaves no tracks, no footprints on the sands of time.[14]

Barth did regard the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth as historical in the ordinary sense of the term, but there the historical ends. Virgin birth, resurrection and suchlike are pure saga, events in super-history. So the Christ of faith is completely divorced from the Jesus of history. Barth demolishes the fundamental character of the Christian Faith. Dr. Colin Brown writes:

> This indifference to history and the physical world is the Achilles'

> heel of Barthianism. The early Barth stressed the supernatural character of revelation to the point of denying any factual content. And the later Barth is more interested in theological interpretation than in the historicity of the events he interprets.[15]

In fairness to Barth it must be stressed that he was reacting against the old modernism in which he had been schooled and which seemed so impotent during the First World War. He wanted not an easy optimism, but a dynamic theology for the pulpit, a word about God's sovereignty and freedom and power — not mere moral essays. Disenchantment with the old liberalism was widespread and Barth proved to be the spokesman for what many felt and experienced. Suddenly he found himself famous! Referring to his own surprise at the hearing he had received, he likened himself to a man climbing a bell tower in the darkness. As he stumbled, he reached out for a handhold and inadvertently grasped the bell-rope and that rang the bell and brought out the whole village! But Barth went too far and, as has been said, in burning down the house of modernism, he burned down the house of orthodoxy as well.

Rudolf Bultmann (1884 — 1976), a New Testament scholar, moved increasingly to the left of Barth, taking the mythical approach of Strauss to its logical conclusion. He set out to 'demythologize' the New Testament, to throw away the allegedly historical envelope, the mythical packet, in which the Gospel comes and so reach the message within. The mythical garb of the New Testament with its current world-view was, to Bultmann, completely unacceptable to modern man. We must discard the meaningless husk of the mythical in order to obtain the kernel, the message, the *kerygma.* In this modern, scientific age, man could not be expected to believe in a devil, angels, demons etc. Bultmann applied his method ruthlessly and wrote

> We can now know almost nothing concerning the life and personality of Jesus.[16]

Bultmann saw the Resurrection as the rise of faith in the disciples, not a bodily resurrection. Bultmann's 'modern scientific' standards rule that out. The incarnation, on his view, is not a datable event of the past, but one that continually occurs in the context of preaching. The real Christ for Bultmann is the preached Christ. The historical Jesus is not essential to the message. Here he simply echoes Strauss. Yet inconsistently Bultmann insisted that the bare fact of Christ's historicity and death on the cross provided an historical basis for the Gospel proclamation! This was to become known as "the glaring

inconsistency of Bultmann" and led to many of his students becoming disenchanted with their mentor. To insist that the Gospel proclamation is independent of history and yet assert that in some way the fact of Jesus' existence and death is basic to that message is indeed a "glaring inconsistency."

In America, the philosophical theologian, Paul Tillich, propounded similar views to those of Barth and Bultmann so far as faith and history were concerned. He saw the quest for the historical Jesus as a failure. There was no picture of Jesus behind the Biblical one that could be considered scientifically probable. Our historical knowledge of this person was "fragmentary and hypothetical." Said Tillich,

> The search for the historical Jesus was an attempt to discover a minimum of reliable facts about the man Jesus of Nazareth, in order to provide a safe foundation for the Christian faith. This attempt was a failure. Historical research provided probabilities about Jesus of a higher or lower degree. On the basis of these probabilities, it sketched 'Lives of Jesus.' But they were more like novels than biographies; they certainly could not provide a safe foundation for the Christian faith. Christianity is not based on the acceptance of a historical novel; it is based on the witness to the messianic character of Jesus by people who were not interested at all in a biography of the Messiah.[17]

But was there ever such a person as Jesus? Says Tillich,

> Faith cannot guarantee the name 'Jesus' in respect to him who was the Christ. It must leave that to the incertitudes of our historical knowledge.[18]

So far in the study of the Gospels and the Christ of the Gospel, history had been largely devalued and even debunked. Then on to the stage strode the imposing figure of Wolfhart Pannenberg, born in 1928 in Stettin, then in Germany, now in Poland. As Professor of Systematic Theology in the University of Munich, he was soon to attract world-wide attention. Pannenberg had studied in Berlin, Göttingen and finally in Basel with Karl Barth. In 1951 he transferred to Heidelberg where he worked for seven years. There he met a number of graduate students who gathered weekly for study and discussion, a group soon to be known as "the Pannenberg circle"!

In sharp contrast to and strong reaction against Barth and Bultmann, Pannenberg proclaimed a new 'theology of history." An essay published in 1959 was regarded as ending the Barth-Bultmann epoch. His essay was entitled, "Redemptive Event and History."

Pannenberg called the theologians back to history and openly attacked the distinction between ordinary history and super-history. Pannenberg is a systematic theologian who approaches theology *as an historian,* insists on the historicity of the Resurrection and makes it the centre of his whole theological system. Not only does Pannenberg seek an "historical anchor" for the Gospel proclamation, but also he sees *all* history as revelation of God. However we cannot understand history until we have the whole of history: no part can be understood in isolation from the whole. We have the whole of history crystallised in the resurrection of Christ.

At first, many evangelicals felt like cheering. Hurray for Pannenberg! It seemed that a revival of evangelicalism was on the way. They were sadly mistaken. Pannenberg does not accept Scripture as the authoritative Word of God. That approach he sees as 'biblicistic.' His approach to Scripture is critical and liberal. The historical revelation, he says, is open to anyone who has eyes to see. It does not occur in some noumenal realm, or in some private I-Thou encounter. It is historical and open to rational observation. It can be known by historical investigation and the use of human reason. So while Pannenberg refreshingly insists that the Resurrection must be regarded as an authentic historical fact, he reaches this conclusion as an historian, stating as he does so that the Gospel accounts do contain legendary elements. Pannenberg applies the principles of historical science to the Gospel records and concludes that the Resurrection is historically credible. In this he follows his own conviction that reason precedes faith!

At heart, Pannenberg is a rationalist. He does not accept the Biblical revelation in faith, or believe in the infallibility and inerrancy of Scripture. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Biblical truths of atonement and salvation from sin are noticeably absent from Pannenberg's theology in spite of his new "theology of history." He stands within the circle of the Enlightenment.

We see, then, that for theological liberalism, the relation of history to the Gospel proclamation has been a great problem. Terms like 'myth,' 'symbol,' and 'saga' became commonplace when discussing such redemptive events as the virgin birth or the resurrection of Christ. Basically and consistently, the supernatural has been excluded. Modernism is really anti-supernaturalism.

Dr. J. G. Machen puts it succinctly:

> A supernatural person, according to modern historians, never

> existed. That is the fundamental principle of modern naturalism. The world, it is said, must be explained as absolutely unbroken development, obeying fixed laws. The supernatural Christ of the Gospels never existed.[19]

Says Dr. Klooster,

> The Enlightenment perspective permeates all of the positions .... in varying degrees .... The various 'quests' reflect man's autonomous attempts to create another faith and another avenue of certainty. The repeated failures and the repeated attempts at new ways to solve the old problems should be instructive for us.[20]

The Importance of a Biblical View of History

Professor Cornelius Van Til comments,

> At the heart of the Protestant Reformation, in its rediscovery of the true Christian approach, was the idea of the direct and clear revelation of God's grace in the historical Christ and the interpretation of all history in terms of that Christ.[21]

That is true. First of all, however, we must see history in terms of creation. The doctrine of creation sees the universe, time, history, man and all else as the handiwork of a sovereign, omnipotent God. Consequently and fundamentally all history must be understood in terms of that Triune God. As R. J. Rushdoony puts it, "The ground of history is not in time .... but in eternity."[22] The trouble with liberalism is that it is totally immersed in historical time, and that means that every event that it considers is completely isolated from any meaning or reality that might lie beyond historical time.

The Bible throughout sees history against the background of God's creation of all things and His sovereign and universal control. It sees Divine predestination undergirding history. It sees God's purpose being worked out in history. He is the Lord of history. Christians do not believe in evolutionary time that has come from some primeval past. They see the origin of time in eternity, in the God Who created time. History, then, is not the product of impersonal biological forces, as the evolutionists believe, but the outworking of God's eternal purpose.

The Christ of liberal theology is a Christ of human reconstruction within the framework of evolutionary philosophy whereby man sees himself as autonomous. And this Christ varies with the whims and fancies of contemporary man. The Unitarian writer O.B. Frothingham (1822 — 1895) stated the liberal case quite clearly:

> The interior spirit of the age is the spirit of God; and no faith can be living that has that spirit against it .... The life of the time appoints the creed of the time .... [23]

The Christ of Scripture and the false Christ of would-be autonomous man are to be seen, as Van Til puts it, "in mortal combat."[24]

It is imperative that, standing in line with historical Christianity, we stress the fact that our Gospel is grounded in history. The Scriptures see God's hand in everything that happens to His people. This idea is dominant in all of Scripture. Professor Eugene Osterhaven is right when he says,

> Christian theology needs a strong doctrine of God, and it is important today to maintain the doctrine of God's lordship over history .... God creates and sustains history, gives it meaning and enables us to understand it .... [25]

The wonderful thing is that the eternal God took our nature to Himself at Bethlehem nearly two thousand years ago and dwelt with us in our world and in our history and that on a cross outside Jerusalem the One born at Bethlehem died for our sins and then rose again a victorious Redeemer. We confess, in faith, the authentic Gospel which is rooted in history: "Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great: He appeared in a body, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen of angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory" (1 Tim. 3: 16 NIV). For us that is not myth or symbol or saga: that is history, and without that history we have no Gospel.

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BOOK REVIEWS

The Mediation of Christ, Thomas F. Torrance. The Paternoster Press, 1983. Pb. 108pp. £3.40

This book by Professor Torrance contains the Didsbury Lectures for 1982, given in the British Isle Nazarene College, Manchester. The author deals with the mediation of revelation, the mediation of reconciliation, the person of the Mediator and the mediation of Christ in our human response. Two aspects of the book are striking — its heavily incarnational theology and Torrance's distinctive position concerning the Jews.

Torrance sees the union of the divine and the human in Jesus Christ, the incarnational union, as "an atoning union, in and through which our lost and damned humanity is redeemed, healed and sanctified ...." (p 79). He speaks of "the Incarnation, and reconcilation that took place within it ...." (p. 74). This note dominates the book. Consequently the Cross becomes the completion and culmination of a redemption effected by the Incarnation. As a corollary of this position, Torrance logically rejects any forensic or legal theory of the atonement, or any kind of "transaction external to us or over our heads." (p 90). "A merely representative or a merely substitutionary concept of vicarious mediation," he writes, "is bereft of any actual saving significance" (p 90). Granted, Torrance is concerned lest we view Christ's atoning work as something detached from our human nature. He sees liberals rejecting the concept of substitution, yet losing the humanity of Christ as they tend to view it symbolically. And he sees conservatives (he uses the term 'Fundamentalists') as accepting the idea of substitution, but regarding the Incarnation as "merely instrumental and not internally related to the atonement" (p 91).

This is probably, on the whole, a valid criticism. However, it is possible to see the Incarnation as "internally related" to the atonement without making it the focal and crucial point of redemption.

Certainly, as R. L. Dabney has stated, the "hypostatic union is the

cornerstone of our redemption. The whole adaptation of the Mediatorial person to its work depends upon it ...." (*Lectures*). But Torrance is saying much more than this when he affirms that reconciliation took place 'within' the Incarnation.

Torrance presses his view of 'vicarious humanity' to the point where he say, "The Incarnation is to be understood as the coming of God to take upon himself our fallen human nature, our actual human existence laden with sin and guilt, our humanity diseased in mind and soul in its estrangement or alienation from the Creator" (p 49). He sees Paul as teaching "that in the very act of incarnational assumption of our fallen human nature he cleansed and sanctified it in Jesus Christ" (p 49). No textual evidence is offered. It is true that our Lord took to himself post-Fall human nature, *with the sole exception of sin.* But again, Torrance is saying much more than that and making the Incarnation the focal point of redemption from sin. He does speak of the Cross and Christ's atoning sacrifice (p 41), yet the whole of Christ's work is made to hinge on the Incarnation. That is where this author sees its fundamental accomplishment.

Concerning the Jew, Torrance sees him in a God-given vicarious role, Jesus Himself being a Jew. He writes, "In all our relations with the Jew, we must learn to appreciate that he is what he is for our sake, and that it is through what he has done, even in the rejection of Christ, that reconciliation has come upon us Gentiles also. But this means that we may look upon the Jew only in the light of Jesus, the Jew in whom the Son of God became man, and who in gathering up in himself the whole movement of God's reconciling love in and through Israel, gave himself in atoning sacrifice for us and all men. Our indebtedness to the Jew and our faith in Jesus Christ are inextricably woven together in the fulfilled mediation of reconciliation" (p 45). Torrance continues, "The Christian Church went out from the resurrection side of the Cross into history as the Church of the Lamb who had been slain but is for ever triumphantly alive; but the Jewish Church went out from the dark side of the Cross into history as the Church of the scapegoat, cast out and scattered over the earth under the shadow of the crucified Jesus. Each had its distinctive mission to fulfil in bearing witness to the nature of atoning reconciliation provided by God, but each the obverse of the other and thus mutely and unknowingly supporting each other. Both participate in the mediation of God's reconciling love through his Servant in whose vicarious passion the Holy One of Israel and the people of

Israel, the Redeemer of mankind and mankind itself, are internally bound together" (p 47). Jews and Christians, he insists, "must come together in the Messiah, if the world is to be reconciled" (p 55). We are mindful of what Paul has written in Romans about the Jews, but it seems that Torrance has gone far beyond and indeed is in conflict with what the New Testament has to say concerning the present spiritual condition of Israel and the predestinated future of Israel.

The dominant incarnational theology of Torrance is again evident in his treatment of evangelism. To him the Gospel can only be preached in a "genuinely evangelical way" when we speak to the sinner of "*the vicarious humanity of Jesus* as the all-sufficient human response to the saving love of God .... He has bound you to himself by his love in a way that he will never let you go, for even if you refuse him and damn yourself in hell his love will never cease. Therefore, repent and believe in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour" (p 103f). Then Torrance goes on to say this: "Jesus Christ .... has believed for you, fulfilled your human response to God, even made your personal decision for you" (p 104). There is a basic "fault" here, a self-contradiction, and in the opinion of this reviewer, this is the weakest part of a brilliantly written book. Incarnational theology does not produce convincing evangelism.

Torrance has many important insights in these lectures and there are times when he touches the very nerve of our conscience, as when he writes, "Sin has been so ingrained in our minds that we are unable to repent and have to repent of the kind of repentance we bring before God" (p 95). And again, "Such is the self-deception of our human heart and the depravity of our self-will that we seek to justify ourselves before God and our neighbours by a formal, impersonal fulfilment of the divine law in which we remain untouched in ourselves and uncommitted in our persons" (p 81).

Professor Torrance is a theologian who demands attention. He writes with passionate conviction. We have noted theological imbalance and, at times, distortion in this book, yet it deserves to be studied and carefully appraised.

Fred S. Leahy

Patterns in History, David Bebbington. Inter-Varsity Press, 1979. Pb. 211pp. £5.95.

In this relatively short book, David Bebbington examines beliefs about the meaning and course of history. He considers the problems confronting the historian — the selection and arrangement of evidence, which is inevitably influenced by his own political, religious and cultural views.

Five major interpretations of history are discussed. The cyclical view, that history repeats itself like a huge revolving wheel, has had great popularity world-wide, having been predominant in China, India and the Graeco-Roman world. Its attraction rests on the obvious parallel with nature and the life of the individual. "Perhaps not only the seasons, but everything else, social history included, moves in cycles" (Tacitus). As the author states, "no fully articulated cyclical theory is popular in the West today," nevertheless it has made considerable inroads into Western thought which can still be detected. The cyclical theory is dismissed on the grounds that the evidence for such a regular pattern simply is not there. The practical consequences of this theory are shown to be bleak in that people either give themselves up to pessimism or they cultivate an attitude of stern resignation. Both responses stand opposed to the Christian world-view.

The author next considers the Christian understanding of history which, he states, is based on three convictions: that God intervenes in it, that He guides it and that He will bring it to the conclusion that He has planned. A survey of the Christian attitude to history from the New Testament period to modern times is given, demonstrating how the three convictions have declined and increased at various stages. The Christian view is seen to answer the pessimism of the cyclical theory in that confidence in the future is its dominant theme.

During the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century, there was a secularization of the Christian view of history. This retained the confident expectation of the future, but based it on the "idea of progress" — that "human history is the account of the improvement of the human condition from barbarism to civilization." The author regards this view as untenable on the grounds that, while technical progress can be demonstrated, there is no evidence of cultural and moral progress. The theory introduces an even more sinister possibility in that it can lead to "a willingness to treat our

contemporaries as dispensable in the name of some greater good to be enjoyed by future generations."

The fourth major view to be considered is Historicism, particularly as expounded in Germany from the late eighteenth century to the recent past. This theory suggests that all cultures are moulded by history. Historicism had a major influence in the development of nineteenth century nationalism. The theory is questioned on several grounds — that it underestimates the extent to which human nature is constant, that its strange idea of how we obtain knowledge of the past (by 'intuition') is impossible to formulate or defend, and that it leads to an unhealthy and aggressive nationalism since it urges that particular nations are "singled out by their prowess for greatness." The great problem with Historicism, says Bebbington, is its "lack of foundations." It collapses into relativism, leaving society with no authoritative standard for its morality and judgments.

The Marxist view of history is also examined and the major elements of Marxist thought outlined. The practical starting point is that it is natural for men to engage in productive labour which then leads to the proposition that it is the particular mode of production which moulds society and relationships within it. Marx contended that when the mode of production outpaced the changes in the structure of society, a period of revolution was inevitable. Marxist theorists are summarized and the divergence of opinion between Western Marxism and recent Soviet Marxism is highlighted. Although Marxism claims to offer hope for the future, this hope is always a far-off dream. Marxism is shown to be incapable of explaining the strength of nationalism or the existence of human benevolence which might at times actually hinder economic progress as, for example, in the abolition of slavery. Marxism is without a fixed moral standard and is therefore incapable of assessing historical events.

In the concluding chapter, the author asserts that Divine Providence is the key to the meaning of history. History is a straight line which is moving according to God's plan. The author does acknowledge that "the perception of particular Providences, however real they may be, is no straightforward matter."

This book is written in a clear and direct manner and includes a substantial bibliography. It would benefit by being increased in length. Several of the summaries of the views of particular historians are necessarily brief and more detail would add considerably to the

value of the book. The attempt to unite the positivist and idealist schools of thought within a Christian world-view is not convincing. Both views, while apparently containing truths, are essentially erroneous. They are answered by the Christian world-view and not united in it. This is a valuable book, giving a useful outline of beliefs about the meaning and course of history. It will help to develop discernment in the reader of history and should above all strengthen the conviction that history is the outworking of the gracious plan of the sovereign God.

Knox Hyndman.

The Divine Revelation, Paul Helm. Marshall, Morgan & Scott 1982. 129pp. £5.25.

Philosophy since the early part of this century has been dominated, at least in Britain and America, by various forms of linguistic philosophy which often lead to the dismissal of theological statements as being devoid of content. During this period, however, more traditional concerns, such as the existence of God, the nature of religious experience and the relationship of faith and reason, have never entirely disappeared and in more recent years have been enjoying something of a revival.

It is noteworthy that evangelical and Reformed scholars have begun to make significant contributions in these areas. Most of this work, however, originates in America, where a scholar such as Alvin Plantinga is in the first rank of philosophers. One British philosopher does demand our attention — Paul Helm, Senior Lecturer in Philosophy at the University of Liverpool.

Helm's recent work *The Divine Revelation* is a thorough examination of the philosophical issues which are involved in claims that God reveals himself to men and women. Helm points out that revelation is central to Christianity which could not proceed without an appeal to it, yet "the idea of revelation bristles with philosophical issues" (p xi). Helm's approach is to deal with three areas: meaning (what is "revelation?"), justification (are we ever justified in thinking there has been a revelation?), and knowledge (does revelation convey knowledge?). It is important to remember the philosophical limits of Helm's task which is not to prove that there is a revelation but to

show that there is no convincing argument why there should not be.

The first chapter deals with Natural Revelation. Helm considers various ways in which God could possibly reveal himself in nature —for example by causing clouds to form words, or by other less dramatic means, and goes on to say that, although God could reveal himself by acting in nature, we must ask how this could be understood without the use of explanatory propositions. Helm shows clearly, both here and all through the book, that terms such as "natural revelation" can be used in very different ways by various theologians and philosophers.

Some consideration is then given to the matter of Natural Theology, in the course of which Helm shows that Natural Theology is in general not built on Natural Revelation since it is setting out to prove the existence of the Revealer whom Natural Revelation assumes. After examining carefully Biblical passages such as *Acts* 17 and *Romans* 1, Helm comes down in favour of a "minimal natural revelation" such as that found in Calvin and the Westminister Confession. (For more on Calvin's position see: P. Helm "Calvin and Natural Law," Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology, 1984).

The second chapter deals with The Concept of Special Revelation, and here Helm states that he will set out one concept from among the current diversity, aiming to show that it is biblical and to defend it against logical and philosophical objections. This task occupies chapters 2—4. Helm focuses on the concept of "Propositional Revelation," defining its meaning and countering standard objections that propositional revelation is "timeless and abstract" and that God does not reveal propositions but himself. He also asserts that revelation gives knowledge which is not otherwise obtainable, a position denied by Kant who has had a powerful influence on subsequent theology. Helm gives a brief critique of Kant's approach and concludes the chapter with a consideration of the relationship between act and interpretation in revelation.

Helm's discussion of the meaning of Special Revelation concludes in chapters 3 and 4. Chapter 3 ("Revelation and Objectivity") discusses the views of G. C. Berkouwer and Karl Barth and examines the issue of cultural relativity with regard to Scripture, which exercises so many minds in contemporary Biblical studies. Chapter 4 ("Infallibility") considers what "infallible" may mean when applied to God and to Scripture, what arguments have been used to support identification of the Bible with God's special revelation, and the

careful distinctions that must be made between senses of the term "reveal."

At this point it becomes clear that the book ought to have been rather longer. (Others in this series "Foundations for Faith" have been up to twice as long). The result is that the second and third areas of discussion have been confined to one third of the space available, although Helm's treatment maintains the high standard of the first part. Chapter 5 ("Certainty") considers how one might justify acceptance of the Bible as God's special revelation, looking at the possibilities and limitations of external and internal evidence, and asking what the witness of the Spirit might mean in this context.

The difficult issue of the relationship between the special revelation and doctrinal statements is broached in chapter 6 ("Evolution, Tradition and Development"). This includes an examination of Newman's ideas on doctrinal development and discussions of controls on the doctrinal statements, of Kant's interpretation of revelation in terms of morality and of the hermeneutical significance of the intention of the authors of Scripture. The final chapter ("Special Revelation and the Unity of Knowledge") considers how knowledge derived from special revelation is related to that derived from other sources. Helm constructs a skilful defence of the view that the principle of unity of contingent truths is the decree of God.

Paul Helm has produced a clear, well-written book dealing with vital, basic issues which are often neglected in the heat of the inerrancy debate today. We look forward to reading more from this very able Reformed scholar.

W. D. J. McKay.

A Vision For Missions, Tom Wells. Banner of Truth Trust, 1985 Pb. 157pp. £1.95.

As the title suggests, the goal of this book is to demonstrate what gives people a vision for missions. In the space of fourteen brief chapters the author in clearly reasoned and well presented arguments, states his case.

From the outset Wells expresses his disagreement with those who assert that a careful presentation of the need will give people a vision of missions. In fact he suggests that the overwhelming need in many

parts of the world can often be a source of frustration. To have a vision for missions, the author argues, it is essential to have a vision of God. By a vision of God he does not mean some ecstatic experience but rather an understanding of the character of God as revealed in the Bible.

The Book has a two-fold thesis:
(a) God is worthy to be known and proclaimed for who He is, and that fact is an important part of the missionary motive and message.
(b) Those who know the most about God are the most responsible and best equipped to tell of Him.

Seven chapters are devoted to explaining some of the attributes of God. The need for such extensive treatment of the divine attributes is illustrated by the fact that many people have a false view of God and that these views have tainted the thinking of many Christians. The book does not consider all the divine attributes, but makes a selection. In a very interesting and colourful manner we are led to consider the self-sufficiency, the sovereign power, the wisdom, the righteousness, the graciousness and the faithfulness of God. These chapters are brought to a climax by a chapter which shows that God is best known in Jesus Christ. "For God .... hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4: 6). In each of these chapters we have not only a clear biblical presentation of the divine attributes, but their application to and relevance for world missions are also discussed. For example, after explaining the wisdom of God the author introduces the application by stating:

> It is exhilarating to apply all this to missions! Why is mission work meaningful? Here is the reason: it is work that arises from the wisdom of God. The God who knows all sends us to it. God has chosen this way to bring the knowledge of Himself to the world. His choice was wise. We know that, not because we are keenly intellectual, but because He is 'the only wise God', to whom 'be honour and glory for ever and ever' (1 Timothy 1: 17).

As a conclusion to the chapters on the divine attributes we have one entitled, 'God's glory and human need.' In this chapter the question is asked, "Is it possible to be God-centred and to ignore the needs of men?" In support of a dogmatic negative reply the author states that to be God-centred means, in part, to think as God thinks. He reminds us what God thinks of human need when he writes:

> God is so intensely concerned for needy men that He has sent His

> Son to die for them. The heart of God towards poor, distressed sinners is fully unveiled at the cross. For us to be God-centred means to have this same compassionate heart!

In the concluding chapters we are introduced to three great missionary pioneers of a former generation, William Carey, David Brainerd and Henry Martyn. Detailed references to their goals and aspirations in the work of mission elucidate the principles established in the earlier chapters.

In many respects this is an excellent book. The opening chapters are particularly challenging. It must be said, however, that the second half of the book is less helpful, especially in the area of practical implementation of principles that are earlier enunciated by the author. Wells does end on an arresting note when he writes:

> If we love our Saviour let us seek to make Him known. Let us carry His character, His person, to 'the regions beyond.' Let us work the works of Him who sends us while it is day. Let us say on His behalf, 'Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else!'

This book is essential reading for every minister and missionary, and is to be commended to every Christian.

Robert McCollum