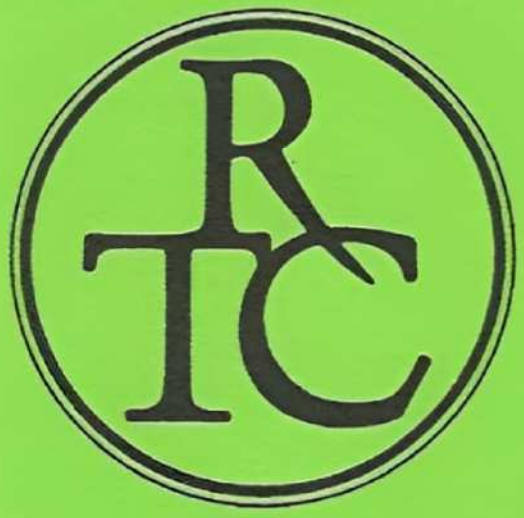

NOVEMBER 1987

REFORMED THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL

REFORMED THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE
FOUNDED 1854

Theological Seminary of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland
98 Lisburn Road, Belfast, Northern Ireland BT9 6AG

November 1987

REFORMED THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL

Edited for the Faculty of the

REFORMED THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE

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Editorial Policy:
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Editorial Address:
MSS., Books for Review, Correspondence and Subscriptions should be addressed to: Reformed Theological Journal, 98 Lisburn Road, Belfast, Northern Ireland, BT9 6AG.

Subscriptions:
£2.50 plus postage U.K. £0.25. Overseas £0.65. In common with most periodicals, subscriptions run until cancelled.

ISSN 0268 — 4772

CONTENTS

THE RELEVANCE OF TRUTH

'Relevance' is a catchword of our age. To be considered irrelevant is the most odious of accusations, the nightmare of every communicator. A fast-paced culture, surfeited with information, has neither time nor attention for those whose concerns or terminology are outmoded. The implications for the church are obvious.

Yet it may be asked whether much of the current obsession with relevance is not simply a childish lust for novelty. Like the Athens of Paul's day, our society seems to value ideas for their newness rather than their truth. But today's fad may be tomorrow's foolishness and those who aim above all at being up-to-date are condemning themselves to a frantic and never-ending pursuit of the superficial. God's Word abides, unchanged and unchanging. Basic human needs are unaltered since the Fall. While Christians must speak in the language and to the issues of their time, their message is the same in every age. Eternal truth is always timely.

Such is the conviction which undergirds the *Reformed Theological Journal* and we hope that this issue will be found to be both contemporary and truly relevant. Two articles, on Contextualization and Karl Barth, deal from a Reformed perspective with matters which are at the forefront of current debate and study. The exposition of Scripture is emphasized in a consideration of how the Song of Solomon may be preached and in a detailed study of part of Matthew 4. John Knox, supremely relevant to the society of his day, is shown to have been first and foremost a preacher of the Word.

It is a special pleasure to welcome two new contributors to the Journal. Fred H. Klooster, Professor of Systematic Theology at Calvin Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids and J. Douglas MacMillan, Professor of Church History and Church Principles at the Free Church College, Edinburgh are known widely as lecturers, writers and preachers. Sharing with us a commitment to historic Christianity, their presence in these pages is a practical token of that Biblical ecumenism which is based on fidelity to truth. For increasing co-operation among all who love the Reformed faith we pray continually and this third issue is offered to our readership as a contribution towards that end.

E.D.

JOHN KNOX — PREACHER OF THE WORD

by J. Douglas MacMillan

J. Douglas MacMillan is Professor of Church History and Church Principles in The College of the Free Church of Scotland, Edinburgh.

There is little doubt that John Knox was best known to his own generation as a preacher. There is equally little doubt that in his own view preaching was his divine calling in life and for that reason had primacy of place in his order of priorities. A high view of the proclamation of the Gospel has characterised all the great preachers of the Christian era. No matter how they may differ in other respects they have all, without exception, been convinced that, under God, the preaching of His Word is the most influential and dynamic factor in the spiritual transformation of men and their times. Knox had that essential ingredient for a preacher from the time he first set foot in a pulpit and it never seemed to forsake him.

Two flashes of his thought have come down to us which illustrate how other things, important enough in themselves, were always subordinated to his preaching. The first is in the preface of one of the few sermons he actually had printed himself:

> Considering myself rather called of my God to instruct the ignorant, comfort the sorrowful, confirm the weak, and rebuke the proud, by tongue and lively voice in those most corrupt days, than to compose books for the age to come; seeing that so much is written (and by men of most singular erudition) and yet so little well observed, I decreed to contain myself within the bounds of that vocation, whereunto I found myself specially called.[1]

The other is a little phrase which was constantly on his lips and came frequently from his pen and betrays, in a quite unselfconscious way, how preaching was a passion that mastered this man; it also inspired the happily chosen title of one of the best biographies of Knox to appear in recent years, W. Stanford Reid's, *Trumpeter of God.* The phrase? "I love tae blaw my Maister's Trumpet". In a very real sense this tells us everything about Knox's view of preaching. Like another great preacher called John, he regarded himself as just a "voice crying". He was merely the instrument of vocalising,

sounding forth, trumpeting the message entrusted to him by God.

Commenting on Knox's strong sense of calling and linking it into this theme, Stanford Reid writes:

> It runs throughout his life and work from the time he entered the ministry at the insistence of the congregation in St. Andrews until his death some twenty-five years later. He believed that he was called in the same way Jeremiah and Amos, his two favourite prophets, were commissioned to bring God's word to Israel. He was to blow the trumpet in Zion, summoning men back to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. This was his chief purpose in life. [2]

The thesis of this short study, and what it seeks to illustrate, is that this attitude, this passionate attachment and total commitment to preaching and to what preaching alone can achieve provides the real key to understanding Knox as a man, a Christian and a Reformer. To underestimate this aspect of Knox's life, his work, his character or even just to ignore it, is to get all the other events and achievements completely out of focus. Knox of course, as we are being continually reminded by writers of this century, was only human. But he was also regenerate. And while regenerate humanity is not yet perfect, we believe that his regeneration and his conversion to a lively faith in Christ was the main factor in his magnificent achievements in various fields and to all of these his preaching and his passion for it made the single greatest contribution.

Something else is worth noting on the threshold of our study. When we stand back from the theories and the themes, the misconceptions and the distortions that have gathered around this great man — who has been spoken of as vain, inconsistent, uxorious, and a jackal (see, for example, G. Donaldson, "Knox the Man" in *John Knox: A Quarter-Century Reappraisal,* ed. Duncan Shaw, pp. 18 ff.) on the one hand, and on the other, described as "the one person as 'God's trumpeter' who seemed capable of maintaining and strengthening the morale of the forces which were seeking to make the Reformation (in Scotland) successful" (*Trumpeter of God,* p. 289), when historical events are allowed to speak for themselves, then Knox's preaching gifts must be acknowledged as equally impressive with those of any of the great preachers of history. What he accomplished by preaching testifies that he was superbly equipped for the great task to which his Master called him.

A final factor to bear in mind as we go into our theme is that it was in the role of preacher that Knox emerged as one of the key figures in

the Reformation process, not merely in the narrow focus of obscure little Scotland but on the wide spectrum of a much broader scene. His greatness as a preacher has to be estimated not only within a Scottish but a European context. And right across that broader front it is quite clear that his preaching left a strong impress upon the people and the events of his time. It was as a preacher that his many hundreds of converts and his various congregations admired him, and it was as a preacher that his enemies and opponents feared him most. And the fervour with which he was either admired or feared attests one thing; the preaching of Knox was a power to be reckoned with!

A Neglected Field

Over against what has been said so far, it seems strangely anomalous that Knox's preaching is the very thing with which, today, we are least familiar and to which even his best biographers have paid but scanty attention. Why should this be so?

While there may be very complex reasons behind this anomaly those which immediately strike one are, in fact, very simple and straightforward. The first to mention is that any detailed study or analysis of Knox's preaching power and his splendid gifts of evangelism labours under the disadvantage that there are very few of his sermons in print. The writer who would study Knox's exegetical techniques, or his expository flair, or his sermonic structures has little to work with. The difficulty this poses is not small, and it has daunted many.

The fact is, though, that this difficulty is not insurmountable. We are aware that in the study of any of the great preachers of the past the influence exercised, to a very large degree, belonged only to the transitory moment and, from one point of view, evaporated when the preacher's voice was stilled. All students of the subject would acknowledge that even verbatim reporting seldom captures the power and the thrill that accompany the hearing of truly great preaching. That kind of preaching has a dimension to it, a chemistry in it, which cannot be transferred to the permanence of writing. Yet, what has been written about such preaching, and especially its spiritual and moral effects upon men and power to uplift and ennoble life has reached down through time and impressed its reality upon following ages. So too, with John Knox. True, it is not now possible to recapture what is spoken of as a marvellously deep, melodious voice, nor the clarity of tone in its constantly changing

register, nor the flow and fire of felt emotion and conviction, the energy of a lively delivery that drew eye as well as ear; all the factors that made his preaching a crowd-puller and a life-transforming power on the European scene of his day — these are all things we can only guess at now. But the effects and fruits assure us that they were there and that they were there in singular and unusual measure. Indeed it is all the greater tribute to Knox that, isolated from the eloquence which loomed so large with his contemporaries and of which we have but an echo, the memoranda which we do have of his sermons mark him as a man rarely gifted in the use of language and a preacher with the gift of making the truth he was handling relevant and practical to people in their present need. He was a masterly expositor and adept in the use of lively metaphor and luminous illustration.

Another factor making for difficulty in the study of Knox as preacher is just the spread of his interests and the scope of his work. He was richly and variously gifted and he influenced so many spheres of life that they have clamoured for, and claimed, the attention of many of his biographers. For example, he was a statesman of no mean order and has been described by one of his better biographers, Jasper Ridley, as a "consummate politician". In this area, his interaction with Mary Queen of Scots, while it has been grossly overworked by hacks and historians alike, is a testimony to his influence in matters of State as well as the Church. His administrative abilities were of a high order and his comprehensive grasp of biblical principles — as well as his experiences in Geneva and France — help us pinpoint him as the man who laid down the lines along which the Presbyterian polity of the Scottish Reformed Church was to be developed. His thought and even his language are clearly reflected in the *Scots Confession* as well as in the *First Book of Discipline.*

Earlier writers on Knox clearly felt that preaching was the real place of his strength, his pulpit his throne, his biblical message the sceptre of his power. He has a central place in the Scottish Reformation, for example, in the thought of Dr. Thomas McCrie, and in that place his preaching power is paramount. Speaking of Knox's return to Scotland in May 1559, McCrie writes:

> He arrived... at a period when his presence was much required, and at a crisis for which his character was admirably adapted. Possessing firm and high-toned principle, the foundations of which were deeply laid in sincere piety and profound acquaintance with the Scriptures; endowed

> with talents of no common order, and an *eloquence popular and overwhelming* (italics ours!); ardent in his feelings, indefatigable in his exertions, daring and dauntless in his resolutions, John Knox was the man, and almost the only man of his time, who seemed to be expressly designed by the hand of Providence for achieving the lofty and adventurous enterprise to which he now consecrated himself, spirit, and soul, and body. [3]

This is a side of the Reformer that has been largely lost sight of and it is good to recapture the perspective that this great student of Knox had. But at the same time it illustrates that, for men like McCrie, Knox's pulpit power was a self-evident truth which required no special or lengthy exposition or defence.

A great shift has taken place since McCrie's day. Preaching as such, and even the Gospel that is preached, have all been thrown into the melting pot and in the absence of the framework of Biblical authority within which Knox operated and his work for more than two centuries was evaluated, subjective rationalism and unbelief have been unable to do much but shunt it aside as unimportant or irrelevant. This has meant that the basic criteria for a just estimate of the man, his character and his achievements have been left out of the picture. Not only so, but a positive element of distortion has inevitably crept into the process. Writers who have been deeply, sometimes bitterly, prejudiced against Knox's views of Scripture and his doctrines of sin and salvation have allowed that bitterness to spill over into attack on the man himself.

Any interpretation of Knox which fails to come to grips with his preaching does the man an injustice. It was preaching that was the source of his power among men and that preaching was based upon the conviction that the Bible was God's Word and the Gospel of Christ was a message of good news for men to hear. These are the elements in Knox which, under God, brought great crowds of his fellow-sinners out of gross darkness and into the marvellous light of the Gospel. This man's preaching reshaped the beliefs of the Scottish Church along the lines of Biblical Christianity. It transformed the faith of his nation and did so because it transformed the lives of so many individuals in that nation. We must not lose sight of the fact that he is at the centre, not merely of a reforming of doctrine and belief, but of a powerful spiritual revival. And revivals that have had lasting influences on the spiritual life of a nation or people, as this one did, have always had great preachers at the heart of the movement.

The Evidence of Contemporary Events

If the material for a detailed analysis of Knox's preaching is sparse, there is still a field of evidence available to us from which we can assess his preaching power by its effects. While all that we know of great moments and achievements related to his preaching cannot be looked at here, we can turn to one or two specific instances which illustrate the more general pattern.

(a) The First Public Sermon

This was preached, probably about the end of April 1547 (cf *Trumpeter of God,* p. 47), in the Parish Church of St. Andrews. High views on the calling of a preacher left him, like many other great preachers, slow to mount the pulpit steps. He was long in coming to his kingdom in the matter of preaching. Dating his birth at 1513-14 (cf *Knox,* Jasper Ridley, Appendix 1, pp. 531 ff., W. Stanford Reid, *op. cit.,* p. 15) he was over thirty before he or anyone else — and he less than others! — suspected that preaching God's Word was his true vocation in life. Two leaders of the castilians at St. Andrews, John Rough and Henry Balnaves, privately asked Knox to help the Reformed cause by taking a share of the preaching. His first reaction warms us to him; this is how he tells the story:

> But he utterly refused, alleging "That he would not run where God had not called him"; meaning, that he would do nothing without a lawful vocation. [4]

The leaders then took fairly drastic steps. They arranged that Knox be called to the office of preaching at the close of a public service at which Rough preached on the election of ministers (cf *History*, i, p. 81 ff., *Trumpeter of God,* pp. 47 ff.). The result of this must have been as surprising to Rough and the congregation as it was embarrassing to Knox himself:

> Whereat the said John, abashed, burst forth in most abundant tears and withdrew himself to his chamber. His countenance and behaviour, from that day till the day he was compelled to present himself to the public place of preaching, did sufficiently declare the grief and trouble of his heart; for no man saw any sign of mirth of him, neither yet had he pleasure to accompany any man, many days together. [5]

This reflects the spiritual awe with which Knox regarded the work of preaching and to read into it as some writers have done (cf, for example, Stanford Reid's mention of G. L. Warr's view, *op. cit.*, p.

47; and G. Donaldson, *op. cit.*) evidences of physical fear or cowardice betrays a woeful ignorance of what the preaching of God's Word involves for those who accept it as divine revelation. Great and solemn issues hang upon faithful declaration; the glory of God and the destiny of men are not matters to be taken lightly. To enter the pulpit, open the book, and speak to men in the Name of Christ was for Knox, as for every great preacher, a painful and costly business. Bautain speaks for such men when he writes:

> There is an oppression of the respiration, a weight on the chest, and a man experiences, in a fashion sometimes very burdensome, what has been felt by the bravest at the first cannon-shot. Many a time do I remember having found myself in this state at the moment for mounting the pulpit, and while waiting for my summons. Could I have fled away without shame, most assuredly I should have done so. [6]

The truth of the matter is that Knox, like Moses before him, shrank from a task that he never sought; it sought him. The writings of men like Augustine and Calvin, Luther and Latimer, Whitefield and Spurgeon, all illustrate for us the sort of doubts and fears which must have crowded Knox through those days. Even an Apostle of Christ, appalled at the task to which God called him as preacher, had to say, "Who is sufficient for these things?" (2 Corinthians 2 : 16). But Knox was to know, from the outset, the fact that Paul also proved: the preacher's sufficiency is "of God" (2 Corinthians 3 : 5).

Preaching from Daniel 7 : 24, 25, Knox excelled even in his first sermon. Preached before the University faculty — which included John Major, his fellow townsman and former Professor of Theology — as well as the castilians, the sermon seems to have had a quite electrifying effect:

> Of this sermon... were there diverse bruits (reports; rumours). Some said, "Other sned (lopped) the branches of the Papistry, but he strikes at the root, to destroy the whole". Others said, "If the doctors, and the MAGISTRI NOSTRI, defend not now the Pope and his authority, which in their own presence is so manifestly impugned, the Devil have my part of him, and his laws both". Others said, "Master George Wishart spake never so plainly, and yet was he burnt: even so will he be". [7]

The sermon and the reaction to it both shed light on Knox, the preacher. He refuted error directly from the Bible and his ultimate reliance on that authority gave his sermon a great ring of conviction

and himself the assurance that he spoke truth. He stressed the doctrine of Justification by Faith in Christ alone and maintained Christ as Saviour of God's people and spoke confidently as one who had, himself, trusted in Christ and who regarded Him as the true shepherd of the Church. Above all, his time in the pulpit and the reception given his preaching stilled all his initial misgivings and never again, as Laing notes (cf Knox's *Works,* III, 14), did he seem to question his calling. He had put his hand to the plough and not once did he look back.

He never forgot the months of preaching in St. Andrews. The love of his calling had captivated his heart even then. The oft-quoted remark, made when ill and chained to the oar of a French galley as it lay off the Fife coast, gives another insight into his view of what preaching is. Asked by a companion if he knew the place, the weak Knox replied:

> Yes: I know it well; for I see the steeple of that place where God first in public opened my mouth to his glory, and I am fully persuaded, how weak that ever I now appear, that I shall not depart this life, till that my tongue shall glorify his godly name in the same place. [8]

(b) A Visit To Scotland

In 1555-56 Knox paid a visit to Scotland from Geneva, coming as a fugitive, with a price on his head. He found shelter in the homes of some of the nobles who had backed the Protestant cause, Erskine of Dun, the Earl of Argyll and some others. He found he says a situation he had never seen in Scotland before, a general thirst for the Gospel. The power of the Spirit was at work and Knox moved from Lothian through to Angus in the East and Kyle in the West finding everywhere people willing to risk their lives in order to hear the Gospel. Many must have been converted. He gives a touching account of one woman, Elizabeth Adamson, converted when she came to hear Knox preaching what he calls the " Evangel of Jesus Christ" in East Lothian. He was giving an exposition of Psalm 103 when, as she expressed it later, "Began my troubled soul first effectually to taste of the mercy of my God". Shortly afterwards, an illness from which she did not recover overtook her. As she lay dying in Edinburgh, she was visited by priests with their ceremonies and superstitions and all ready to administer the last rites. "Depart from me, ye sergents of Satan", she said, as she began to testify what Christ had done for her soul. The priests departed, "alleging that she raved and wist not what she said. And she shortly thereafter

slept in the Lord Jesus, to no small comfort of those that saw her blessed departing. This we could not omit of this worthy woman." [9]

This narrative assures us of a fact that is seldom brought out in the literature on Knox and which, even when his preaching power is recognised, we allow to drop out of sight. This man was an evangelist. He had a burden to see people converted and, when they were, he rejoiced with them. His preaching aimed at instruction in the truths and doctrines of Scripture, and that instruction was given so that, God working with him, men might be delivered from consciences burdened with the guilt of sin. In other words, Knox preached for informed decision and intelligent commitment to the claims of Christ and he was thrilled when he saw men and women turning away from unwarranted ceremonies of an outward and empty kind, that did dishonour to Christ and a disservice to men, to find inward peace and spiritual reality through faith in the finished work of Christ.

(c) The Famous Sermon Of Stirling

Knox finally returned to Scotland in May 1559 and things immediately began to prosper for the Reformers. However, in the autumn of that year there was a period when, forced out of Edinburgh by the superior number of French troops, they had to retreat to Stirling, a dejected and depressed group. Here we see Knox at his very best as a preacher. As a number of historians have remarked, "he never showed up so well as when in the midst of defeat, for he could point to the Congregation's (i.e. the Reformed Church which was emerging) complete dependence on God for victory."

That was his theme when he arrived to preach in Stirling on the 8th November 1559, to this dispirited group, and took his text from Psalm 80 : 4-8. Let us listen to Dr. A. M. Renwick as he describes what must have been a stirring scene:

> It was a sermon for that dismal day. Its effect was notable and was spoken of for long afterwards. Knox assured his depressed audience that, although they were being punished for former sins, if they turned sincerely to God their sorrow would be changed into joy, and their fear to boldness. Whatever became of them and their carcases, the cause of God would finally prevail in Scotland. Under the burning words of the preacher each man became heroic. Of a similar sermon, Randolph, the English ambassador, wrote to Cecil: 'The voice of one man is able in one hour to put more life in us than five hundred trumpets continually

> blustering in our ears'. Although darker times were still to come the sermon at Stirling was a turning point in the history of the Reformation. [10]

The upshot of this powerfully uplifting sermon was that the lords promptly met and, after inviting Knox to lead them in prayer, they authorised William Maitland of Lethington, who had just recently joined the congregation from the side of the Queen Regent, to go to London immediately to inform the English Queen and Council of the rather desperate state of affairs in Scotland. Knox himself tells us that this sermon picked up the unfinished exposition of Psalm 80 which he had begun preaching in St. Giles and he felt that there was a Providential purpose to be seen in the fact that he was, in any case, next due to preach at verse 4 of the Psalm. This exposition of portions of Scripture in ongoing sequence was habitual with Knox, as with Calvin, and it was part of the preaching pattern and usage of Scripture that he bequeathed to the Scottish Church. The sermon is well structured as we can see from the fairly full account he gives of it (cf *History*, i, pp. 265 ff.).

It is worth mentioning, in passing, that George Buchanan, in his *History* writes of the same occasion:

> There John Knox delivered to them a splendid address and stirred in the minds of many a certain expectation of soon emerging from these troubles. [11]

It is worth noting, in fact, that Buchanan, on each of the four occasions on which he mentions Knox in his history, does so in connection with his preaching and about explicit sermons. The great scholar and historian of the day had felt the power and sway of Knox's eloquence and regarded him as the power of the Scottish pulpit. In each case when he touches on the subject Buchanan used the complimentary, if somewhat vague, description, "luculenta concio" (sparkling address).

General Effects Of His Preaching Power

One of the most critical elements in the evaluation of preaching is the kind of Gospel it proclaims. That, in turn hinges on personal faith and personal experience. Here, there is no doubt where Knox is to be placed. From his conversion to Christ onwards he seems to have enjoyed a rich assurance of his own salvation and his standing "in Christ". His servant, Richard Bannatyne, revered Knox for his

godliness, and servants get to know people well! His description of John Knox's deathbed scene (again, a stern test of godliness!) helps us estimate the powerful, experimental Christianity out of which the passionate Gospel message flowed. When asked what Scripture he would have read as the end drew near he asked for John, chapter 17, where, he said, "I first cast my anchor."

That anchor had held the soul of this man firmly through great storms and his soul must have found rest in its great truths throughout his life as well as in death. It provides proof that Knox did not drift into a merely intellectual acceptance of Reformed doctrine but that there was a definitive spiritual experience, a definite decision that was linked into a particularly luminous part of Gospel teaching. Its stress on the Deity of Christ, His Priesthood, and salvation through faith in His name — the themes of this chapter inform Knox's doctrine and his message and were continually sounded out in his letters as well as his preaching. From the moment he came to know Christ as Saviour, John Knox was a "man with a message". Every great preacher has been. It is one of the prerequisites of great Gospel preaching.

His Recognition As A Preacher

John Knox cared about people as well as doctrine.[12] This concern must have found warm expression in his pulpit work and it made him a preacher sought out by 'troubled believers' as well as 'seeking sinners'. One simple, but highly significant, fact is frequently overlooked by his detractors in this very connection. Christian congregations just do not ask men who do nothing but harangue, or scold them endlessly, to be their regular preachers or permanent pastors. Knox, even when hunted from his own land, never lacked a pulpit of his own. Christians seldom become warmly attached to preaching that does not help them live out their faith. His preaching did that and he was never in any danger of becoming what in his own land is still known as a "sticket minister," one who never gets a call to a Pastorate.

In his wanderings as a fugitive in other lands Knox was eagerly sought after and held congregations in Berwick, Newcastle, Frankfurt and Geneva and his preaching was always highly acceptable and useful. He was for part of his time in England one of only six Royal chaplains when the English scene boasted some notable preachers. And back home in Scotland, once the Reformation was established in 1560, he filled the principal pulpit in the Capital where he exercised the most influential spiritual ministry of his decade.

Preparation And Practice In Preaching

All his days Knox was a diligent student. In his letters he sometimes describes himself as 'sitting at his books' and as studying the Gospels by the help of the Fathers 'and among the rest Chrysostom.' He had a competent knowledge of Greek and learned Hebrew during his years in Geneva. He never wrote out his sermons but obviously studied them very carefully, as is witnessed by the fact that he could reproduce their substance days and even years after they had been preached. We learn from an incidental remark in his 'Admonition to England' (cf Laing's *Knox*, iii, pp. 257-330) that his method was to speak from a few notes made on the margin of his Bible. The framework of his sermon was thought out beforehand and, from his own memoranda as well as the reports of others, he clearly had premeditated the precise words by which he would express his thoughts.

The one sermon he did print was written out thirteen days after it had actually been preached. Relations between the Reformers and Mary had been strained by her marriage to Darnley. Knox was preaching one day on Isaiah 26 : 13-20, and his application of the truth angered Darnley considerably. Gossip exaggerated Knox's comments and twisted his meaning (as it does still!) and to show that Darnley's objections and the Council's talk of treason were all unjustified the sermon was printed. It provides standing proof that Knox was not a "rabble rouser" but a careful, if vivid, preacher of Biblical truth.

As minister of St. Giles he regularly preached twice every Lord's Day and gave three 'lectures', as they were called, on weekdays. He met with his elders every week for the oversight of the flock and also met with the other city ministers every week for what he called 'the exercise on the Scriptures.' Add to all this the fact that there were constant demands for his preaching in other parts of the country and it is clear that he was a busy man. Little wonder that his people gave him a colleague to help him in 1563.

It was, perhaps, his time as a slave in the French galley 'Nostre Dame' that left his French fluent enough to use as a medium for the powerful preaching of his Gospel. His remarkable work in Dieppe for the weeks he waited there in the Spring of 1559 would, in itself, mark the man as a preacher on whom God had His hand in a very special way. The work of G. and J. Daval, [13] published in 1878, sheds

light on this episode of a brilliant preaching career:

> On February 19th (1559) there arrived in Dieppe the Sieur Jean Knox, Scotsman, a very learned man who had been received as a pastor in England in the time of Edward VI... and preached at Dieppe for the space of six or seven weeks. He achieved a great result, and the number of the faithful (believers, converts) grew in such degree that they dared to preach in full day; whereas till this time they had only dared to go (to sermon) during the night. [14]

The astonishing blessing of this visit comes home to us when we learn that a month after his departure from six to eight hundred people celebrated the Lord's Supper in the Reformed way and that, in 1562, no fewer than twelve pastors were being requested from Geneva for the needs of the Protestant cause in Dieppe.

As well as preaching in French, Knox preached in *English!* It is eloquent of his view of the importance of the Gospel, and of the unity of the Church that he preached and wrote, not in his own broad, Scottish accents but in the English of his day. He was even twitted with this fact by Winram and others but it speaks volumes for his basic, spiritual concern for men of all nations that he used language as a means of communication for winning them to Christ, refusing to let it become a barrier to the work he had so much at heart. Preaching was paramount.

Let the final picture in our study of Knox, the Preacher, be taken from the sphere in which he most frequently and wonderfully exercised his consecrated talents and the influence with which they filled his preaching days, the pulpit. It comes to us from the very scene of his first preaching, a pulpit in the University town of St. Andrews, and from the pen of a student who, himself, was to make a mark on the Scottish religious scene, James, nephew of the more famous Andrew Melville. The picture belongs to 1571, the year before Knox's death. Knox was not old, just around fifty-eight. But he was worn, and ill, and getting so frail in body that he had to be helped into the pulpit. But frail and ill though he was, the maestro could still sound his 'Master's Trumpet' with its bugle-notes of warning, its stern call to battle and its silvery, winsome melody of salvation through faith in Christ. He sounded it that day with powerful and dramatic effect. This is the quaint, but lively and vivid

description of Melville:

> I haid my pen and my little book, and took away sic things as I could apprehend. In the opening up of his text he was moderate the space of an half-hour; but when he enterit to application, he made me sa to grew (shudder) and tremble that I could nocht hold a pen to write... or he haid done with his sermont, he was sa active and vigorous that he was like to ding (strike) that pulpit in blads and fly out of it. [15]

This is a picture of a man who has been mastered by the Gospel he is preaching. It fires his mind, moves his heart and animates his whole body. Let another great preacher of our own era, who knew the same Gospel and had a similar passionate commitment to it, impress upon us what is really happening here:

> His great characteristic as a preacher was vehemency. Great preachers are generally vehement; and we should all be vehement. This is not the result of nature only; it arises from the feeling of the power of the gospel. Vehemence is, of course, characterised by power; and John Knox was a most powerful preacher, with the result that he was a most influential preacher. [16]

On 14 February 1570 Knox preached the Regent Moray's funeral sermon from the text: Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord (Rev. 14 : 13). "He moved," writes Calderwood, "three thousand people to tears". Whether he mentioned the closing phrase of that text the great historian does not tell us. But, without doubt they, also are true of this man — Scotland's greatest preacher — "Yea saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them."

References

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2. W. Stanford Reid, *Trumpeter of God*, 1982 ed. by Baker, Preface xiv.
3. *Sketches of Church History*, Edin., ed. 1846, Vol. 1, pp. 55-56.
4. *History*, i, p. 82.
5. *History*, i. p. 83.

6. *Art of Extempore Speaking*, Eng. trans., p. 204.
7. *History*, i. p. 86.
8. *History*, i. p. 109.
9. *History*, i. p. 120.
10. A. M. Renwick, *The Story of the Scottish Reformation,* IVF, 1960, p.83.
11. *Rer. Scot. Historia,* Bk. XVI, c. 49.
12. cf 'John Knox Pastor of Souls', *Westminister Theological Journal*; Vol. XL. No. 1, p. 1 ff. A fine study of this aspect of Knox's work by Stanford Reid.
13. *Histoire de la Reformation a Dieppe.*
14. cf P. Hume Brown, i, pp. 218-219.
15. *Melville's Diary.* pp. 26, 33.
16. *The Puritans. Their Origins and Successors,* D. M. Lloyd-Jones. Banner of Truth, 1987, p. 266.

CHRIST AND THE TEMPTER

An Exegesis of Matthew 4 : 1 - 11

by Edward Donnelly

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The reminder in Hebrews 4 : 15 that "we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet was without sin" is full of encouragement for the Christian. For thirty years Christ had been constantly assailed by the devil and had as constantly overcome. Such is, in part, the significance of the events surrounding his baptism.[1] But there is something unique about the incident recorded at the beginning of Matthew 4, unusual enough to justify its customary description as "The Temptation of Jesus". Here is temptation unparalleled, different from all other. The narrative has an epic quality, as, in the bleak wilderness, the two great protagonists close in mortal combat — the Son of God face to face with Satan, fallen leader of the hosts of darkness. The record is given not just to demonstrate the sinlessness of the Saviour nor to provide help for believers against the attacks of the enemy, but to describe a decisive stage in the history of redemption. Leaving aside questions which properly belong to the field of dogmatics, our study will concentrate on the narrative in Matthew, together with its necessary background and present application.

Basic Themes

In order to appreciate the meaning of the encounter between Christ and the tempter, it is important to take notice of basic themes which underlie and illuminate the narrative. The following are especially significant:

(a) The Last Adam

As in some of Paul's writings, there are obvious parallels in this passage between Adam and Christ. The fact of the temptation itself and the presence and voice of the devil remind us of Eden. The

attraction of the forbidden fruit had three aspects: "good for food... pleasing to the eye... desirable for gaining wisdom" (Genesis 3 : 6), just as Jesus faced three main assaults. [2] Luke makes the connection very plain in his genealogy of Jesus which occurs in chapter 3, just before the temptation. It is given in the reverse order to that of Matthew and goes further back to "the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God. Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit... was led by the Spirit in the desert" (Luke 3 : 38, 4 : 1). We are to understand this tempted figure as another son of God, another Adam.

(b) The True Israel

He is also Israel. The wilderness was pre-eminently the scene of Israel's wanderings and Jesus' sojourn of forty days is strongly reminiscent of the forty years during which the Israelites were tested. Chapters 6 to 8 of Deuteronomy have particular reference to their experiences in the desert, set in the context of the *Shema* (Deuteronomy 6 : 4, 5), God's authoritative claim upon His people's worship and loyalty. It is therefore significant that all Christ's answers to the devil are quotations from precisely this portion of Scripture. [3]

(c) The Divine Initiative

One of the first features to strike us is the place given to the Holy Spirit. "Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert" (Matthew 4 : 1), or, as Mark more forcibly puts it, "The Spirit sent him out [4]into the desert" (Mark 4 : 1). He has just come from the Jordan, [5]having been baptised by John, anointed with the Spirit and proclaimed beloved Son by the Father. His public career as Messiah is about to begin. Filled with the Spirit, officially ordained and equipped, He undertakes His first Messianic act — a single combat with Satan. We are accustomed to think of Satan as being on the attack, but here it is God who takes the offensive. It is of the utmost importance to keep the divine initiative in the forefront of all study of this incident. Satan approached the first Adam in paradise, but the last Adam seeks out Satan in the wilderness. The devil is forced to fight. If he could have avoided this conflict, he would have done so. The Spirit leads Jesus to be tempted because it is in the purpose and plan of God that the temptation should take place. [6] This Adam will overcome. What has been lost will be restored. The Fall is, in a very real sense, being reversed. It was a true instinct which led John

Milton to take this passage as the theme of his *Paradise Regained:*

> I who erewhile the happy garden sung,
> By one man's disobedience lost, now sing
> Recovered Paradise to all mankind,
> By one man's firm obedience fully tried
> Through all temptation, and the Tempter foiled
> In all his wiles, defeated and repulsed,
> And Eden raised in the waste wilderness.

Satan tempts, fiercely, maliciously, with all his power. He longs to entice into sin. Yet he himself is only the instrument of a higher and purer testing. For, while the devil tempts Adam, the Father tests Israel. [7] Deuteronomy 8 : 2 expresses the theology of the wilderness wanderings: "Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands." Israel had failed that test, but it is now to be repeated and on this occasion God's Son will stand firm in the wilderness, obedient and faithful.

It is a mistake therefore to interpret the passage pietistically, as offering no more than a picture of how the believer can overcome temptation. We find ourselves here on the stage of redemptive history, in the midst of the climactic events of our salvation.

(d) The Exegetical Key

Much commentary has given insufficient attention to the answers given by Jesus — their original context and meaning and their application to His own situation. Yet these are the correct answers, the ideal answers to Satan's attacks and so they illuminate for us the precise import of the attacks themselves. In the words of Geerhardus Vos:

> It is fortunate that in interpreting the individual temptations we have available the answer of our Lord to work our way from to the inner design of the temptation, for we may safely assume that He meant to answer the tempter to the point. The meaning of the answer supplies the meaning of the Satanic suggestion.[8]

(e) The Central Issue

The impetus behind Satan's temptations is to be found in the prophecy of his doom through the Messiah in Genesis 3 : 15: "He will crush your head and you will strike his heel." The reference here

is to a supreme encounter in which the seed of the woman takes the initiative, stamping down on Satan's head at the cost of pain to Himself. The devil is placed in a position of intolerable tension. He longs to hurt the Christ, yet knows that the moment of contact means his ruin. So here he seeks to escape from the direct encounter. He urges Jesus to avoid being bruised, to overleap the humiliation by seeking a crossless Messiahship. "Do not stand on me" cries the serpent. "Why suffer the pain of my fangs?" But the Servant of the Lord insists on the bruising and, despising the pain, drives down His foot.

The First Temptation

Luke's account makes it plain that Jesus was tested throughout the whole period of forty days. [9] It seems therefore that the three temptations recorded formed a final great attack at the end. Having fasted for forty days, Jesus is hungry and exhausted. "The tempter came to him and said, 'If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.' " The devil is not at this point casting doubt, as is often alleged, on the Sonship of Christ. His approach is far more subtle. The Greek word *ei* can have the meaning "since" as well as "if", implying cause rather than condition. [10] As Donald Guthrie remarks, "The Greek makes clear that there is no casting of doubt on the Sonship of Jesus." [11] Still ringing in the ears of the Saviour are the words "This is my Son, whom I love" (Matthew 3 : 17). His consciousness is aflame with the joyful awareness of His status. On this the devil seeks to capitalize. Since He is the Son of God, a fact on which they both agree, why not use the privileges and authority of His Sonship? Why not act like the Son of God? He has the power to change the small, round stones of the wilderness into bread. Why not employ that power to satisfy His hunger?

The answer comes on several levels. "It is written" replies Christ — a perfect passive verb, referring to something which took place in the past but with momentous present consequences, a word which "once written, now stands forever" (Lenski). This is more than a quotation from Scripture. The speaker is deliberately placing Himself under the authority of the Word. "It stands written and therefore I am bound." He answers also as "Man", and in this one word is the repulse of the whole attack. He is in the wilderness as a man and as man's representative. He will behave as a man and suffer as a man, for that is His mission. Satan may urge Him, as he did the

first Adam, to be like God, but this man repudiates such self-assertion.

"Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God." These words are commonly understood to mean that Jesus was claiming to be able to live without food, contrasting "spiritual" with "physical" nourishment to the detriment of the latter. It has today become proverbial as referring to man's non-material needs, a useful phrase for the politician opening a new theatre or leisure centre.

Jesus did, on occasion, make such an emphasis (e.g., John 4 : 34). But in the passage before us there is no contrast whatever between physical and spiritual food. The answer is a quotation from Deuteronomy 8 : 3. After reminding Israel of the forty years of testing, Moses continues:

> He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord... Know then in your heart that, as a man disciplines his son, so the Lord your God disciplines you.

The contrast is between "bread" and "manna". Both are physical food, with carbohydrates and calories, providing nourishment for the body. But, while the Israelites can provide bread from their own resources and by their own endeavours, in a sense, manna is supernaturally provided by the creative "word that comes from the mouth of the Lord." The purpose of the hunger was to teach them to depend on God, to wait for His provision for their bodies, to receive His fatherly discipline that they might appreciate. His fatherly care.

Jesus is saying: "I will not provide for myself. I will not act in independent sovereignty, for I am a man under God's testing." God has sent Him to the wilderness to suffer and He will not shortcut that purpose by working autonomously. He stands before God as a servant, and accepts the divine humbling and proving. When God so wills He can, by a creative word, provide manna — a bread from heaven for the hunger of His Son. Until that time, the man will wait for the working of the Father who, if His Son asks for bread, will not give him a stone. To be hungry in the wilderness is not, as Satan implies, a contradiction of His mission but of its very essence.

The Second Temptation, verses 5 - 7 [12]

Jesus is standing on the highest point of the temple, [13] probably "the pinnacle... where Solomon's Porch and the Royal Porch met. There was a sheer drop of 450 feet down into the Kedron Valley below." [14] It was for Him a place of sacred associations, "the holy city", centre of the nation's deepest life. "The temple" was at the heart of Israel's capital and Israel's faith, the location above all of God's revelation and protection. All the surroundings evoked trust and worship. Here, if anywhere, the presence of the Father might be known and experienced. It is into this charged environment that Satan comes with a suggestion of the greatest subtlety.

"If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down." Satan accepts that Jesus is the Son and that He trusts the Father implicitly. He appeals to that trust. He urges that it be exercised even more steadfastly and spectacularly than hitherto. Let the Son demonstrate His faith not simply by facing a possible lingering death through starvation but by hurling Himself towards certain and instant destruction.

Since this Servant has placed Himself under the authority of God's Word, the devil has a convenient Scripture to hand: "For it is written: 'He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.' " The citation is from Psalm 91, associated by the rabbis with both the temple and the wilderness wanderings. [15] The servant of God who "dwells in the shelter of the Most High" can be confident of the protection of the Almighty. [16] Let Him obey what is written and, in a literal "leap of faith", find renewed assurance of His Sonship.

Passing over Satan's partial quotation of the Scripture, which may or may not be significant, [17] Jesus answers with another quotation. [18] "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.' " The quotation, from Deuteronomy 6 : 16 — "Do not test the Lord your God as you did at Maasah" — refers back to Exodus 17 : 7: "And he called the place Maasah (testing) and Meribah (quarrelling) because the Israelites quarrelled and because they tested the Lord, saying 'Is the Lord among us or not?' " The people, thirsty in the wilderness, began in their discontent and need to doubt God's caring presence. Was He still with them? If so, why then were they suffering in a barren desert? Let Him prove Himself. They forgot that God had promised to be with them and had acted in power to redeem them from slavery. Let Him by a miracle reassure them of His continuing love.

Here is the heart of the temptation. Jesus is being urged to proved God's love by experiment. Like Israel, suffering in the wilderness, He is being invited to escape the suffering by repeating the sin of Maasah — "Is God with me or not?" God's Word — "This is my Son, whom I love" — is alleged to be insufficient and to need reinforcement by a miracle. But Jesus needs no miracle to assure Him of sonship. It is not for Him to test God, to ask the Father to prove Himself by a spectacular performance which will satisfy the demands of faith. God is the one who is doing the testing. What is presented as an exercise of faith is in fact its negation, for, as G. Campbell Morgan remarks: "It is when we doubt a person that we make experiments to discover how far they are to be trusted. To make experiments with God is to reveal the fact that one is not quite sure of Him." [19] The comment by Vos is helpful:

> While a momentary abandon to faith, the venture would have been inspired by a shrinking from a protracted life of faith. Our Lord would have been led on in His ministry, not by an ever-renewed forth-putting of the same act of trust, that God would preserve Him, but by the remembrance of this one supreme experiment, which rendered further trust superfluous. [20]

The Third Temptation, verses 8 - 10

"Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour." As Moses was taken by the Lord to the top of Mount Nebo and saw spread out before him the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 34 : 1-4), so Jesus sees His Promised Land, not Palestine only, but the whole earth. What a prospect lies before Him! To our astonishment, the devil seems to be working in harmony with God. He wants Jesus to be King. He professes that he desires the day when all on earth shall bow before Him. It is the most magnificent bribe ever offered, an indirect testimony to Satan's estimate of Christ's greatness. Judas can be bought for a mere thirty pieces of silver, but God's Son is offered the "profit" of being able to "gain the whole world". " 'All this I will give you,' he said, 'if you will bow down and worship me.' "

The first point to note is that Satan's claim to ownership of the world [21] is false, for "the earth is the Lord's, and everything in it" (Psalm 24 : 1). All that he could offer Christ was a share in the evil influence which he exercises over the lives of all those who acknowledge him as their master, [22] something infinitely less than that to which our Lord was already entitled. G. E. Ladd is mistaken

when he accepts Satan's claim to rule because of the fact that "he claims a power over the world that Jesus does not question." [23] No reply from Jesus was necessary. Calvin writes:

> So the devil displayed sacrilegious audacity, snatching God's earthly dominion to himself as usurper. All these are mine, he says, and can only be gained by my favour. That we daily must fight this same imposture is the experience of individual Christians. [24]

A liar and the father of lies, he is here making a promise which he cannot fulfil.

His offer is also blasphemous and it provides a glimpse into the heart of his unholy arrogance. What he covets above all is to be like the Most High, to receive to himself what is exclusively God's, namely, worship. That which appals the holy angels (Revelation 22 : 8, 9) is the very object of this fallen spirit's lust, one which he will pay any price to satisfy.

But his offer is, finally, futile, for it comes too late. Christ has already been promised all the kingdoms of the world. He is the One like a son of man, seen in vision by Daniel, to whom "was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshipped him" (Daniel 7 : 14). He will ask for the kingdom, He will be King of all the earth, but His kingship does not come from the hand of Satan. He receives it, rather, from the hand of Him who said: "Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession" (Psalm 2 : 8).

Satan is attempting to concentrate the mind of Jesus, as he had the minds of many of the Jews, upon the kingdom per se, as an end in and of itself, ignoring the fact that it was "the kingdom of God". "You have come to establish the kingdom", he says. "The kingdom is important above all. Think of its magnificence and glory. Does it matter very much, then, in what particular way you gain it? The end justifies the means, especially if the means suggested offer an escape from infinite humiliation and suffering." What is on offer is a crown without a cross.

Jesus answers from Deuteronomy 6 : 13: "It is written, 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.' " The words refer to Israel after entry into the Promised Land. The people are enjoying its fertility and prosperity. But they are reminded that Canaan is not an end in itself. It is rather the environment for the service, worship and enjoyment of God. It has meaning, value and permanence only as God's land. Apart from Him it is nothing, easily lost, a curse instead

of a blessing. "When you eat and are satisfied be careful that you do not forget the Lord... Fear the Lord your God, serve him only and take your oaths in his name. Do not follow other gods..." (Deuteronomy 6 : 12-14).

The point of the reply is obvious. Christ wants no Promised Land without its Lord, no dominion apart from God. Nothing could compensate for the absence of His Father, without whom any kingdom would be a hell. He will be King, but God's King, in God's way — the path which leads to a cross.

The rejection of this final temptation is marked also by the first words spoken by Jesus which are not from the Old Testament: "Away from me, Satan!" It is a statement of fierce rebuke and tremendous authority. It is a word to arouse in our hearts profound thanksgiving and exultant joy. Whipped and silent, a beaten cur, the devil crawls away. He will attack again, but in that Judaean desert he has met his Master.

Present Application

Though, as we have said, these temptations of Christ are Messianic and unique, it is also true that similar forms of temptation come to every believer. We find ourselves in a wilderness of testing, some place of real and urgent need. There may be a sin to which we wish to yield, a relationship which we want to begin or continue, a difficulty or discouragement from which we long to escape. We feel the pressure of frustration or loneliness, fear or appetite. Do we wait for God's answer or opt for do-it yourself? "Tell these stones to become bread", whispers the devil. "Use your own initiative and resources to meet the need which pains you." How appetising those loaves seem and how easy to obtain! But faith will refuse the bait. If God has caused us to hunger, He has a purpose in so doing. He will feed us, but in His own time and way. We will not reach outside the bounds of our duty, for it is better to be left with a God-sent problem than with a man-made solution.

Again, the challenge comes to faith to leap down from the temple. It is often disguised as an exercise of greater faith, a "claiming of the promises." If He is God, let Him prove Himself by reviving that congregation, healing that illness or restoring joy to that troubled soul. He is the God of miracles, certainly. But He is God apart from His miracles and the highest reach of faith is to stand on the Word alone, in a wilderness of disappointment, and rejoice in an unseen love. It was mighty trust in miracle when the three Hebrews said: "If

we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it..." But surely their faith shone even more gloriously as they prepared to burn believing: "But even if he does not... we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up" (Daniel 3 : 17, 18).

Finally, how often are we tempted to believe that the end justifies the means? We see the "kingdom" spread out before us in all its splendour. What a blessing to be possessed! But what would it be worth, if obtained through unworthy means? What is any so-called "kingdom work", apart from the goodness and love of the kingdom? Can there be true or lasting enjoyment of anyone or anything apart from the Father's smile? "Save yourself" is at the heart of the Satanic appeal. But it is yet another of his lies, for, like our Master, we know that "whoever wants to save his life will lose it" (Matthew 16 : 25). How relevant we find the prayer He gave us: "Our Father in heaven... your kingdom come, your will be done on earth... Give us today our daily bread... And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one" (Matthew 6 : 9-13).

The Aftermath, verse 11

"Then the devil left him." It was not a permanent relief, for Luke writes: "When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time" (*achri kairou* Luke 4 : 13). He would return with the same temptation (Matthew 16 : 23; 27 : 40-43), only to meet with further defeat. This victory was, nevertheless, decisive. Jesus was later to speak of His authority over demons as evidence of the presence of the kingdom and to continue: "How can anyone enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man? Then he can rob his house" (Matthew 12 : 28, 29). Satan is the strong man. His possessions are being taken from him because he has previously been overpowered and tied up.

"Angels came and attended him." He who declined Satan's suggestion about bread is now provided with food. [25] Having refused to leap from the temple in the hope of angelic assistance, He whose name is superior to theirs is now served by angels. The kingdom advances, not through the worship of Satan, but by the declaration of the gospel: "From that time on, Jesus began to preach, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near' " (Matthew 4 : 17). "He was with the wild animals", writes Mark (1 : 13). It is paradise, with the Son of man ruler over the beasts of the field. But

paradise in the wilderness, already present but not yet consummated, for ahead lies Calvary.

> Blessed Saviour, look upon our tempted condition here below; and what time the enemy cometh in upon us like a flood, by Thy good Spirit help us to tread in thy footsteps; so shall we be more than conquerors through Him that loved us. [26]

References

1. "The opened heavens, the descending Dove, the Divine voice are each and all significant of the perfections of the thirty years" (G. Campbell Morgan, *The Crises of the Christ*, p. 109).
2. Is there a parallel here with I John 2 : 16?
3. C. H. Spurgeon, writing when the inspiration of Deuteronomy was under attack, comments: "The past few years have proved that the devil does not like Deuteronomy: he would fain avenge himself for the wounds it caused him on this most memorable occasion"! (*The Gospel of the Kingdom*, ad loc.).
4. The verb is *ekballei* — "impelled Him, filled Him with an inner urge" (Hendriksen).
5. Matthew uses "then" (4 : 1), Mark his favourite "immediately" (1 : 12).
6. An aorist passive infinitive (*peirasthenai*) is used to express both purpose and completeness — "to be tested to the finish" (Lenski).
7. *Peirazo* is used not only of enticement to sin, but "in a good sense of God or Christ, who put men to the test so that they may prove themselves true", Arndt-Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, ad loc.
8. *Biblical Theology*, p. 361.
9. Luke 4 : 2 — "where for forty days he was tested (peirazomenos, present continuous participle) by the devil."
10. For the causal use of *ei* with the indicative cf. Matthew 6 : 30; 7 : 11; Luke 11 : 13; 12 : 28; John 10 : 35, etc.
11. *New Testament Theology*, p. 309.
12. Although Matthew and Luke give the second and third temptations in a different order, it is clear that Matthew records the chronological sequence. He uses the sequential *tote* in verse 5, and again in verse 11 at the close of the third temptation — "Then the devil left him." Luke makes no claim to chronological order and has perhaps made the change to end with the climax of the temptation at the temple, particularly prominent in his gospel as the place of revelation.

13. Commentators differ as to whether Jesus was physically transported to the temple and mountain or whether the scenes were caused to pass vividly before His mind. Though respected exegetes have argued on both sides, there seems to be no compelling reason why the account should not be understood literally.
14. William Barclay, Daily Study Bible, *The Gospel of Luke*, ad loc.
15. Midrash Teh. 91, cited in *Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Vol. 3, p. 805.
16. "There is probably a play on words between the 'wing' (*pterygion*) of the temple and the clause 'under his wings (*pterygas*) you will find refuge' ", ibid.
17. Satan omits "to guard you in all your ways" (Psalm 91 : 11). Is this a reference to the ways of duty and obedience, the path ordained by God, and does its omission signify that what is being suggested is not the way of obedience and is therefore outside the promise of protection? Possibly, though Jesus does not correct the omission.
18. "Every false teacher who has divided the Church, has had an "it is written" on which to hang his doctrine. If only against the isolated passage there had been recognition of the fact that 'again it is written', how much the Church would have been saved." (G. Campbell Morgan, op. cit. p. 131).
19. Op. cit., p. 132.
20. Op. cit., p. 363.
21. Made more specific in Luke 4 : 6.
22. See e.g., Ephesians 2 : 2; 6 : 12; I John 5 : 19.
23. *A Theology of the New Testament,* p.50.
24. *A Harmony of the Gospels,* ad. loc.
25. For *diakoneo* used in connection with food cf. Matthew 8 : 15; 25 : 44; 27 : 55; Acts 6 : 2.
26. David Brown, *The Four Gospels,* ad. loc.

KARL BARTH, EVANGELICALS, AND REVELATION

by Fred H. Klooster

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The widely celebrated centennial of Karl Barth's birth (May 10, 1886) has sparked new interest in his theology. Barth made a tremendous impact on 20th century theology; no responsible theologian can ignore him. More than two centuries of liberalism ended with the First World War and the rise of Barth's neo-orthodoxy. The three decades between the two great wars were dominated by Barth's theology. His influence declined during the 1950s as Bultmann's increased. Bultmann's neoliberalism and demythologizing was joined by several theological fads during the 60s — death-of-God, secular, and political theologies. By the early 70s the more enduring, historically rooted theologies of Moltmann and Pannenberg were gaining ground. This theological pluralism has now been joined by process thought and a variety of liberation theologies. Yet each of these diverse theologies has had to stake out its position somehow in relation to Barth's neo-orthodoxy.

Renewed Interest in Barth

A new interest in Barth by some evangelical theologians has been one of the surprising features of the recent centennial celebrations. *The Reformed Journal,* long concerned with Barthian themes, observed that the year 1986 was "relatively free from the negative criticisms" which Barth's theology often evoked in the past. And, it added, "even in the conservative-evangelical world, where some of Barth's sharpest critics have resided... public comment during the year of commemorative activities was almost uniformly appreciative." [1] Those observations were part of an editorial introduction to three short articles by members of the faculty of Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California. Founded in 1947, Fuller Seminary was to be the stronghold of conservative evangelicalism. During the enthusiastic Barth celebrations there last year, these three faculty members felt compelled to maintain "a polite public silence." Now by means of these brief articles the three

"intend their dissenting comments to be as polite as their earlier silence" was. [2]

Forty years earlier, in 1946, Cornelius Van Til of Westminster Theological Seminary published his critique of Barth's theology under the provocative title, *The New Modernism.*[3] A leading evangelical scholar, Bernard Ramm, noted recently that Van Til's book became "the official evangelical interpretation of neo-orthodoxy," an interpretation carried on by Carl Henry, Gordon Clark, and Francis Schaeffer.[4] But Ramm laments the "bad press" evangelicals gave Barth as a result. His book appeared three years before the Barth centennial. Its title, *After Fundamentalism: The Future of Evangelical Theology,* gave no hint that it was mainly devoted to a sympathetic overview of Barth's thought with a view to recommending it as a model or paradigm for evangelicals doing responsible theology after the Enlightenment.

Relevant theology today must come to grips with the challenges of the Enlightenment; Ramm is right about that. He is also right in noting that many evangelicals ignored the impact of the Enlightenment on modern thought. But has Barth really provided the model by which to challenge the Enlightenment? What would happen to evangelical theology if it were to follow Ramm's recommendation? I see only disastrous consequences. [5] The problem is complicated by what I am convinced is Ramm's very unreliable interpretation of Barth's theology. Despite the implication of the title, *After Fundamentalism,* Ramm surprisingly insists that "one may *be* and *remain* a five-point Calvinist, a five-point Arminian, a five-point fundamentalist, and a seven-point dispensationalist and yet learn from Barth how to write Christian theology in the twentieth century." [6]

As a leading evangelical theologian and now a *public* admirer of Barthian theology, Ramm could have significant influence on the future of evangelical theology. The fact that a paperback edition was issued a year after the hardbound publication indicates its appeal and potential. The Theological Students Fellowship, a division of Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship, presented excerpts from Ramm's book in its *TSF Bulletin.* [7] A later issue carried response from three theologians. Two of the respondents, George Hunsinger and John B. Cobb, Jr., were mainly appreciative and approving. The third, Carl F. H. Henry, was understandably critical. He concluded with this challenge: "In light of such concessions which Ramm would make to Barth and to the Enlightenment, it would be useful if Ramm were now to provide a

constructive exposition of theology from his neo-evangelical quasi-Barthian perspective." [8]

A few years before issuing Ramm's book, Harper and Row published a provocative *Agenda for Theology* by Thomas C. Oden. [9] Oden comes with no evangelical credentials; he personally moved through many of the radical theologies of the 60s in his search for "relevance." Although he grants that we can still learn much from Barth, Oden contends that Barth never fully entered into the categories of modernity and remained more premodern or anti-modern. Therefore Oden does not recommend Barth's theology for today's agenda. He recommends the abandonment of the ideology of "modernity" and a return to the ecumenical consensus of the patristic church as expressed in Scripture and the Ecumenical Councils. [10] The contrast between the proposals of Oden and Ramm is striking. The ecumenical consensus of the patristic church was rooted in an authoritative Scripture, an ontic Trinity, and both the ontic deity and humanity of the incarnate Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ. Yet Ramm argues that Barth's views of Scripture, Trinity, and christology are as solid as any evangelical could desire.

Orthodox or Neo-orthodox?

Ramm contends that "Barth's method of coming to terms with modern learning and historical Reformed theology is the most consistent paradigm for evangelical theology" today. [11] He recommends this option to evangelicals because *"Barth's theology is a restatement of Reformed theology written in the aftermath of the Enlightenment but not capitulating to it."* [12] What Ramm likes is what he calls Barth's "dualistic or split-ticket approach" to the Enlightenment; he is "both a child and a critic of the Enlightenment." [13] Ramm objects both to evangelical "caricatures" and to liberal criticisms of Barth's theology. He contends that such critics have not read all of Barth as he has, have read only superficially, or simply engage in "spot-reading" while spying for unorthodox opinions. [14] Many Barth specialists will be surprised to read Ramm's confident claims that Barth's "statement on the authority of Scripture would satisfy the most stringent orthodox theologian" and that Barth defends "the ancient Christology of the church fathers as well as their doctrine of the Trinity." [15] Ramm also insists that Barth "defends the virgin birth, the bodily resurrection, and the cosmic, visible return of Christ." [16] According to Ramm, what Tillich regards as symbolic and Reinhold Niebuhr interprets as

"mythological and existential, Barth interprets as literal and historical (for example, the deity of Christ, the bodily resurrection, and the second coming)." [17] Ramm's claims are really incredible. Does he understand Barth's references to *Saga* and his crucial distinction between ordinary history (*Historie*) and special history (*Geschichte*) and similar complexities in Barth's theology?

After Ramm devotes eighteen chapters and two hundred pages to these and other facets of Barth's supposedly "conservative evangelical theology", one is surprised to discover Ramm's "reservations about Barth's theology" relegated to an appendix. There he is no longer so confident of his conservative interpretation of Barth. He admits that he has given Barth "the best interpretation" and has "attempted to be as objective about Barth as I am approving." The appendix is meant to indicate that he has not been "blinded by him." [18] In that context Ramm confesses that his "major apprehension" is that Van Til may be right in claiming "that in recasting the older doctrines Barth has actually destroyed them." [19] Yet Ramm thinks that "the reassessment of Barth cannot take place until tempers cool and prejudices dissipate." [20] That is surprising since Ramm himself has given a "reassessment" of Barth's theology and recommends it for the evangelical agenda! He ought to be confident of his interpretation of Barth and accountable for that interpretation before recommending it as a paradigm.

Since I am convinced that Ramm has given a superficial, untenable interpretation of Barth's thought, I will devote the rest of this article to an exposition of Barth's view of revelation as set forth in his *Church Dogmatics*. The problem of revelation and the authority of Scripture was at the heart of the Enlightenment attack on historic Christianity. Ramm also recognizes this as the central problem created by the Enlightenment. Therefore this is a good subject with which to put Ramm's interpretation to the test. Besides, I am convinced that an authentic understanding of Barth, one true to his own words and intentions, is not possible without a clear understanding of his view of the threefold form of the Word of God since this perspective controls the entire *Church Dogmatics*.

Barth's View of Revelation

In challenging liberal theology, Barth insisted that one can not read the Bible without recognizing that it has something to do with *revelation*. The problem of revelation became a primary concern in his theology; Paul Althaus referred to the inflation of revelation in

neoorthodoxy. Barth thought the Enlightenment was right in some ways; it was not possible to go back to the earlier views of an inspired, infallible, authoritative Scripture. Historical criticism of the Bible also has its legitimate place but one must move beyond it to understand Scripture. [21]

By the early 1930s Barth knew what he wanted to say theologically and the massive *Church Dogmatics* gradually developed. Its first chapter addressed "The Doctrine of the Word of God." [22] Paragraph 4 discusses "The Word of God in its Threefold Form" (88 - 124), the three forms being proclamation, Scripture, and revelation. To understand Barth's intended meaning one must carefully note the important distinctions he makes between revelation, between direct and indirect identification, and between ordinary history (*Historie*) and special history (*Geschichte*). [23]

Barth begins his discussion of the three forms of the Word of God with "proclamation" (*Verkündigung*) or "the Word of God preached." He is not presenting a theory of preaching in the ordinary sense, as Ramm thinks, nor is this one of the easiest subjects to discuss, as Ramm also suggests. [24] Barth is presenting a theory of *revelation* and it is a very complex subject because Barth considers proclamation the only way by which God reveals himself. Paragraph 4 presupposes Barth's description of church proclamation in the preceding one (47-87). There he distinguishes five kinds of talk about God in the church, only one of which is proclamation. The church's speech or language is distinguished by the direction of its address: from God to humans (↓), from the church to God (↑), from the church to other humans (↔).

First we note the four which are *not* proclamation. Speech addressed to God by the church in prayer, song, or confession is not proclamation since it is the response of those to whom proclamation has come (↑). Speech addressed to fellow-men and women in the church's social work is not proclamation because it is also a response to God (↔). Church language used in its education of youth in catechism is not proclamation either; Barth considers it "a kind of technical sub-structure for understanding of proclamation" (49f.). The fourth type of church language which is not proclamation is theology. It is "instruction of youth on a higher grade" aimed at reflecting on proclamation and testing it.

In contrast to these, church proclamation is human speech in the church addressed to men and women in the name of God (↓). In Barth's carefully crafted words "talk about God in the Church seeks

to be proclamation to the extent that in the form of preaching (and sacrament) [25] it is directed to man with the claim and expectation that in accordance with its commission it has to speak to him the Word of God to be heard in faith" (47). Proclamation then is human speech which comes with the claim and expectation that God will actually speak through it, that revelation will occur. The preacher is like a herald who speaks in the name of the king (52). This happens only when God is pleased to reveal himself; it does not depend on the preacher's preparation or biblical faithfulness. Revelation depends entirely on God's sovereignty and grace. In the fourth paragraph Barth describes the event of revelation in the context of proclamation by means of four concentric circles (89-95). We can better reserve these for our summary of the third form of the Word of God, namely revelation. Since "church proclamation must be ventured in *recollection* of past revelation and in *expectation* of coming revelation" (99; italics added), Barth turns next to Scripture because it is the *witness* to past revelation.

Scripture is the second form (*Gestalt*) of the Word of God. Proclamation and Scripture are in "a single genus" (102) because they are similar as temporal, phenomenal entities (101). Scripture is past proclamation in writing; it is "the deposit of what was once proclamation by human lips" (102). Their "similarity as phenomena" is evident in that Scripture is "the commencement" and present-day preaching is "the continuation of one and the same event, Jeremiah and Paul at the beginning and the modern preacher of the Gospel at the end of one and the same series" (102). Yet there is "dissimilarity in order" (102) because proclamation today must be based on Scripture. In terms of the freedom of God Barth states that "God may speak to us through Russian Communism, a flute concerto, a blossoming shrub, or a dead dog" (55), but even if something so unlikely were to happen, proclamation may not be based on it. God commissions Scripture alone as the basis for proclamation.

Why Scripture has this unique role in proclamation is difficult to answer for Barth. The Bible "is the Canon because it imposed itself upon the Church as such, and continually does so... The Bible is the Canon just because it is so" (107). Barth appears to be personally satisfied with this factual, pragmatic answer. Yet he presses himself to explain why the Bible imposes itself as the canon. "Afterwards" and "exegetically" (107) one can say that "Scripture imposes itself in virtue of this its content" (108), namely, that it witnesses to Jesus

Christ (107). By "Jesus Christ" Barth refers to the event of revelation, the Jesus-Christ Event. Evangelicals must be careful not to pour their meaning into Barth's terms. He does not accept the classic doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture. There is a great difference between saying that the entire Scripture is the *inspired revelational witness* to *Jesus Christ* (John 5 : 39) and Barth's view of Scripture as a human, fallible *witness* to *revelation.*

The Bible as God's Word

Barth moves on to try to describe the precise sense in which he understands Scripture as the Word of God. In other words, how does this temporal, phenomenal entity called "Scripture" become revelation, that is, the Word of God? How does that which is witness to revelation actually become revelation? He answers that "the Bible is God's Word to the extent that God causes it to be His Word, to the extent that he speaks through it" (109). Hence Scripture is the Word of God "in exactly the same sense in which we have said this of the event of *real* proclamation" (109; italics added). The addition of the adjective "real" is Barth's way of saying "revelation." When proclamation becomes *real* proclamation, revelation occurs. When Scripture becomes the Word of God, it is because proclaimed Scripture becomes revelation.

Evangelicals may be inclined to think that Barth is addressing the subjective question of how one arrives at a believing response to Scripture. Barth states clearly, however, that he is not describing "our experience of the Bible," the event of revelation in which the Bible becomes the Word of God is "a description of God's action in the Bible, whatever may be the experiences we have or do not have in this connection" (110). Barth then adds this crucial statement: "The Bible, then, becomes God's Word in this event, and in the statement that the Bible is God's Word the little word 'is' refers to its being in this becoming" (110). Therefore when Barth says that the Bible *is* God's Word, *is* refers to its *being* in this *event* of its *becoming revelation.* Unless one understands that statement, one cannot grasp Barth's complex doctrine of revelation. Every secondary source on Barth's doctrine of Scripture and revelation will be unreliable if this quotation is ignored. Bernard Ramm's book fails to reckon with it. Barth follows that key statement with another warning against misunderstanding: "It does not become God's Word because we accord it faith but in the fact that it becomes revelation to us" (110).

Barth now turns to the most important third form of the Word of God, that which proclamation and Scripture must become, revelation. By its very nature the revelational event defies description; it can really only happen and then be witnessed to. The revelation event is a form of theophany, [26] it is an I-Thou encounter (304) between the speaking God and a specific person at a specific time and place. In contrast to the temporal, phenomenal features of proclamation and Scripture, Barth's language implies that revelation is a timeless, noumenal event. Revelation as the third form of the Word of God is clearly the most difficult one to describe and Barth spends most of his time distinguishing it from Scripture as witness to revelation.

Barth thus begins his discussion of revelation with the reminder that the Bible "is not in itself and as such God's past revelation, just as Church proclamation is not in itself and as such the expected future revelation" (111). Like the "prodigious index finger" of John the Baptist in Grünewald's famous Crucifixion, [27] the Bible "bears witness to past revelation" (111). Proclamation "promises future revelation" (111), but neither proclamation nor Scripture is directly identical with revelation. "Revelation... is to be distinguished from the word of the witnesses in exactly the same way as an event is to be distinguished from even the best and most faithful account of it" (113). "The direct identification between revelation and the Bible" cannot be presupposed or anticipated. "It takes place as an event when and where the biblical word becomes God's Word" (113). Yet when that event occurs, "revelation and the Bible are indeed one, and literally so" (113).

Revelation is "God's own Word spoken by God Himself" and that happens "literally" and "really directly" (113). Revelation (*Deus dixit*) and Scripture (*Paulus dixit*) are "two different things," but they "become one and the same thing in the event of the Word of God" (113). In spite of this unity in the event, revelation is to be understood as "primarily the superior principle" and the Bible "primarily as the subordinate principle" (114). Revelation is therefore "originally and directly what the Bible and Church proclamation are derivatively and indirectly, i.e., God's Word" (117). Barth reemphasizes that proclamation and Scripture "must continually become God's Word" and again insists that his reference to "continually" becoming does not refer to "human experience"; "the reference is to the freedom of God's Word" (117). Therefore in contrast to proclamation and Scripture *becoming* the

Word of God, "the exact opposite" must be said of revelation: "it *is* this Word in itself" (118). Revelation "denotes the Word of God itself in the act of its being spoken in time" (118). And Barth adds, "revelation in fact does not differ from the person of Jesus Christ nor from the reconciliation accomplished in Him. To say revelation is to say 'The Word became flesh' " (119).

Again an evangelical must avoid reading his own meaning into those last words of Barth. According to Barth every event of revelation is the Jesus-Christ event, the event of incarnation. In the event of revelation God is personally present to a specific human person so that the divine and human are joined and so that the gulf between them is in that moment bridged. Several pages would be required to explain that carefully and that would require another article.

At this point Barth's earlier reference to four concentric circles is particularly appropriate. As we have now seen, proclamation in the church is essential because it is the avenue by which God has promised to reveal himself today as in the past. When that event of revelation occurs, the mutual relations between proclamation and the Word of God are like four concentric circles involving the commission, the theme or object, the judgment, and the event. Beginning with the outer circle, this proclamation has become *real* proclamation, that is, revelation, because God specifically commissioned it (89). Revelation "simply takes place, and has to be acknowledged, as a fact" on the "basis of God's own direction, which fundamentally transcends all human causation" (90). Second, when this event of revelation occurs through human proclamation, God has made himself the "theme" or "object" of this speech. He has "self-objectified" himself and made himself "the object of this talk... according to His good-pleasure" (92). In this human speech of proclamation God is the actual speaker. Third, only God himself can be the judge of the truth of the event of revelation. The only criterion for the truth of proclamation is "God's own judgment" and therefore it is "talk which has to be listened to and which rightly demands obedience" (93). Finally, the innermost circle depicts the "decisive point" that "the Word of God is the event itself in which proclamation becomes real proclamation" (93). "The Word of God preached means in this fourth and innermost circle man's talk about God in which and through which God speaks about Himself" (95). Real proclamation, that is, *revelation* is the "actualisation of proclamation" when "God commands, God comes on the scene, God judges" (93).

One can describe the event of revelation only in a formal way, as we have seen. Barth does that in greater detail in paragraph 5 on "The Nature of the Word of God" (125-186). It may be helpful to think of the classic Reformed description of the "attributes of Scripture" to understand what Barth is doing here. He describes the event of revelation with three terms: speech, act, and mystery. Revelation is always God's *speech* to man; it is always God's *act* on man; and it always happens in the *mystery* of God. Each of these three terms also has three additional descriptive terms, some of which duplicate the materials already summarized.

The Content of Revelation

Invariably the question now arises as to the content of this revelational event. What precisely does God reveal? Barth does not like that question although he recognizes it as a "very natural and popular question, also found not infrequently on the lips of theologians" (132). The question generally presupposes some kind of information, some sort of revelation that can be expressed in sentences or propositions. But, as I have shown, according to Barth the revelational event is a sort of theophany in which God himself speaks, in which God confronts someone in an "I-Thou" relationship. The gulf between the infinite, "Wholly-Other," eternal God and the finite, temporal human person has been bridged. That is what is revealed; God has revealed himself. What more can one ask?

I have not discovered a clear answer nor a detailed discussion of the above questions in Barth's writings. H. E. Hatt's book *Encountering Truth* specifically addresses the question of "how revelation as encounter yields doctrine."[29] He refers to Martin Buber's writings to help understand neoorthodox writers on this score. "That which is confronted in the I-Thou relation is incommunicable. We intuit rather than reason discursively in the I-Thou realm." Then Hatt quotes from Buber; if one replaces the "it" by "God" in the quotation, it may help in understanding Barth's view of the revelational event:

> it (God) says something to me, but what it (God) says to me cannot be revealed by any esoteric information; for it has never been said before nor is it composed of sounds that have ever been said. It can neither be interpreted nor translated, I can have it neither explained nor displayed; it is not a *what* at all, it is said into my very life; it is no experience that can be remembered independently of the situation, it remains the address of that moment and cannot be isolated, it remains the question of a questioner and will have its answer.

Hatt goes on to observe that "at first glance this may seem like a pathetic situation," and then moves on to present Buber's interesting answer:

> What, then, do we know of *Thou*?
> Just everything. For we know nothing isolated
> about it (God) any more.

Something like this seems to apply also to Barth's view of revelation. He repeatedly stated in seminars that one revelation event experienced by a theologian would occasion an entire *Church Dogmatics* as a comprehensive witness to that event.

Barth concludes his discussion of the threefold form of the Word of God with a brief section on "the unity of the Word of God" (120-124). As we have seen, the event of revelation occurs only through proclamation based on Scripture. Hence "revelation is the form that underlies the other two," but revelation "never meets us anywhere in abstract form." We know revelation "indirectly from Scripture and proclamation," but "the direct Word of God meets us only in this twofold mediacy" (121). This unity is referred to as certain "dynamics of the mutual relationships of the three forms" of the Word of God. That is what Barth considers absent "in the theory of inspiration, which implies a freezing... of the relation between Scripture and revelation" (124), a weakness Barth notes also in Calvin who "approximated revelation and Scripture much more closely than Augustine did" (114) or other Reformers did. In the main Barth claims the support of the Reformers for his doctrine of the threefold form of the Word of God. He does acknowledge, however, what he labels "a fatal slide into the doctrine of inspiredness" later "in the orthodoxy of the following age" (114). Yet the "inspiredness" of the entire Scripture, based on such passages as 2 Tim. 3 : 16, was basic to the doctrine of the Reformers as well as that of the historic Christian church. Barth has introduced a radically new view of revelation and Scripture.

Revelation and the Trinity

Barth suggests that his doctrine of the threefold form of the Word of God provides the only analogy to the doctrine of the Trinity (121). "We can substitute for revelation, Scripture and proclamation the names of the divine persons Father, Son and Holy Spirit and *vice versa*" (121). Further, "in the one case as in the other we shall

encounter the same basic determinations and mutual relationships" and also "the decisive difficulty and also the decisive clarity is the same in both" (121). We have seen something of these relations above: Scripture and proclamation are in the same genus as temporal and phenomenal entities; revelation is "the superior principle" and the Bible "the subordinate principle" (114). When one reflects on those relations and applies them to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit new difficulties appear. Barth's doctrine of the Trinity is developed in Chapter 2 on "The Revelation of God" (295ff.) There he sets forth an ingenious "analytical" (306) doctrine of the Trinity based on an analysis of the event of revelation. The revealer is Father, revelation is Son, and revealedness is Holy Spirit (332). I am convinced that this involves a new and complex form of modalism. Barth objects to Sabellian modalism because it involves three modes of revelation and he insists on a single mode of revelation, as we have seen. He also objects to the term "person" in dealing with the doctrine of the Trinity and chooses to speak of "modes of existence." In the one mode of revelation, there are three "modes of existence": the hidden, veiled mode of existence is named "Father," the revealed, unveiled, existence form is named "Son," and the "self-unveiling imparted to men" (324) is named "Holy Spirit." But it is the whole God present in each form of existence. In fact there would be no doctrine of the Trinity and apparently no triune God if God did not engage in the action of revelation, of self-unveiling. I can not understand how evangelical theologians can seriously work with these pages of the *Church Dogmatics* and conclude that Barth maintains the ontic trinity doctrine of the historic Christian Church. But that calls for another article. Here my concern is simply to follow Barth's lead in showing the link between his doctrine of revelation and his doctrine of the Trinity.

In light of this exposition of Barth's doctrine of revelation, I must conclude with a few brief comments. Barth approaches the question of revelation from the perspective of the great gulf between God and humans, between the infinite and the finite, eternity and time. The revelational event is the way in which that gulf is bridged. Hence the revelational event is also the basis for Barth's view of the Trinity as well as of creation, reconciliation (*Versöhnung*), and redemption and thus for the structure of volumes III, IV and V of the *Church Dogmatics.* The doctrine of revelation is indeed a comprehensive one.

After his disillusionment with liberalism, Barth consistently

worked at overcoming the twin dangers of historical relativism and psychological subjectivism. He did that in a very creative way, but at great cost to historic Christianity. His concept of revelation involves a real happening, a real act of God (*Geschichte*), but one that does not become part of ordinary history (*Historie*). Revelation is a noumenal, timeless event that leaves no tracks in history, that makes no footprints on the sands of time. In his entire discussion of revelation Barth never refers to progressive redemptive history or to a variety of original modes of revelation leading to an inspired Scripture as do A. Kuyper, H. Bavinck, or B. B. Warfield. Barth has developed a docetic concept of revelation as well as a docetic christology in his reaction to the Old Quest of the historical Jesus. [30] This docetism proclaimed in the name of "the freedom of God" led Barth to reject a general revelation in creation and history as well as a revelation directly provided by the inspired Scripture. Similarly a once-for-all incarnation of the Son of God, second *person* of the Trinity, who is Jesus of Nazareth would, in Barth's view, restrict the freedom of God. Every revelational event is the event of incarnation, "God with us." The *Saga* of the virgin birth is witness to the divine initiative in every incarnation-event, an event that according to Barth has nothing to do with anything biological. Barth has been a creative theologian; he had a tremendous influence on 20th century theology. But his is a new theology, a very complex neoorthodoxy. There remains a great gulf between Barth's theology and historic Christianity, between Barth and evangelical theology. One does no service to evangelicalism or to Barth to minimize its breadth and depth.

References

1. "Now That the Party's Over: Was Karl Barth That Good?", *The Reformed Journal*, 37, 3 (March 1987), p. 16.
2. Ibid. The contributors are Richard A. Muller, Colin Brown, and Richard J. Mouw. See three letters of response to "Barth bashing" in *The Reformed Journal*, 37, 5 (May 1987), pp. 6-8.
3. (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1946). See also Van Til's *Christianity and Barthianism* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1962). A decade prior to *The New Modernism*, G. C. Berkouwer published his critical study *Karl Barth* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1936) and a decade after Van Til's first book, Berkouwer's revised interpretation of Barth appeared in English translation, *The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1956).

4. *After Fundamentalism: The Future of Evangelical Theology* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983; Paper, 1984), pp. 23 & 26.
5. See my review article of Ramm's book titled "Barth and the Future of Evangelical Theology," *Westminster Theological Journal* 47 (1985) 301-317.
6. Op. cit., p. 49. Italics added. Repeated in almost identical words on pp. 28 and 31.
7. *TSF Bulletin* 6, 3 (Jan. - Feb. 1983) 2 - 5.
8. *TSF Bulletin* 6, 5 (May-June 1983) 14-16.
9. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979), pp. 54-57 on Barth.
10. Ibid., pp. 26 ff. See Gerald Bray, *Creeds, Councils, and Christ* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1984) who contributes to that agenda. See also Colin Gunton, *Enlightenment and Alienation: An Essay Towards a Trinitarian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1985).
11. Op. cit., p. 18.
12. Ibid., p. 14. Italics in original.
13. Ibid., pp. 79, 108, 120.
14. Ibid., pp. 23 ff.
15. Ibid., p. 11 Surprisingly, Klaas Runia makes the same claim in *The Present-day Christological Debate* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1984) pp. 13 & 16-21).
16. Ibid., p. 12. See F. H. Klooster, "Karl Barth's Doctrine of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ," *Westminster Theological Journal* 24 (1961/62) 137-172.
17. Ibid., p. 25.
18. Ibid., p. 204.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
21. See the various prefaces in Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans, trs. E. C. Hoskyns (London: Oxford University Press, 6th ed., 1960), pp. v-x, 1-26.*
22. *Church Dogmatics* I/1, trs. G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1975). Hereafter page references from I/1 are given in the text.
23. This distinction does not become clear in English translation. Barth's fullest discussion of these two kinds of history is found in I/1, pp. 326-329. I have discussed the differences in some detail in the WTJ article mentioned in note 16 above.
24. Op. cit., pp. 50-56.
25. The entire quotation forms the bold print summary for this paragraph 3. The words "and sacrament" are placed in brackets because by the time Barth was lecturing on IV/4 in 1959-60, he had moved to a Zwinglian position so that the sacraments are no longer to be considered "proclamation," since they are a human response to revelation. Although Barth never mentioned that change in the lectures I heard during that sabbatical year in Basel, nor did he add it to the published text, I have a letter from Barth to confirm this change in his views.

26. W. Pannenberg's first thesis on revelation reflects this interpretation and his thesis also shows that his position is a direct reaction to Barth (and Bultmann). The entire thesis reads: "The self-revelation of God in the biblical witnesses is not of a direct type in the sense of a theophany, but is indirect and brought about by means of the historical acts of God." *Revelation as History*, ed. W. Pannenberg (London: Macmillan Co., 1968/69), p. 125.
27. Barth indicated in a seminar during 1959/60 that this famous painting, a gift from the church when he was confirmed, hung above his desk as he wrote his *Romerbrief*.
28. See Barth's discussion in I/2, pp. 514 ff. He distinguishes inspiration (*Inspiration*) from inspiredness (*Inspiritheit*). The latter he always rejects as in conflict with God's freedom; the former he approves, but it occurs in the hearer in the context of the revelational event.
29. (New York: Abingdon Press, 1966). My quotations come from pp. 60 and 61. Reviewed in *Calvin Theological Journal 3, 1 (April 1968) 81-85.*
30. I discuss this in *Quests for the Historical Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977), esp. pp. 29-46.

PREACHING FROM THE SONG OF SOLOMON

by Hugh J. Blair

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The learned Divines of the Westminster Assembly were very much aware of the difficulties and varieties of interpretation of the Song of Solomon. In the *Annotations upon all the Books of the Old and New Testaments* they had this to say:

> It is not unknown to the learned, what the obscurity and darkness of this Book hath ever been accounted, and what great variety of Interpreters and Interpretations have endeavoured to clear it, but with so ill success many times, that they have rather increased than removed the cloud. [1]

In short, interpreters and interpretations have done little to dispel the obscurity of the book. And yet we must attempt to interpret it and apply it, for it is God's Word, God-breathed for our need. If it is, as the Holy Spirit declares it to be, "The Song of Songs", that is, The Superlative Song, the best of all songs, just as the "Holy of holies" means "the holiest place of all", then we must give ourselves to the study of it with our best endeavour, seeking that the Holy Spirit, who inspired the book, may lead us into all its truth, and reveal the message that it has for our need. Since *all* is God-breathed, and is profitable, we cannot go as far as Rabbi Akiba went in the first century A.D., when he said, "No day in the whole history of the world is of so much worth as the one in which the Song of Songs was given to Israel; for all the Scriptures are holy, but the Song of Songs is most holy." [2] But neither can we ignore it, and turn to other portions of Scripture which are easier to interpret and apply.

Some difficulties to be faced

It is necessary to look at the difficulties of this book if we are to interpret and apply it, and the variety of interpretations show that the interpreters have been very conscious of those difficulties. But there is one criterion that we must always keep before us in view of the subject that we are considering — *Preaching* from the Song of

Solomon. How can this be preached? Whatever interpretation we are led to adopt — and some of the interpretations are not mutually exclusive — our concern is with preaching the Word. What message from God, what proclamation, what teaching has this book, first for the preacher and then for his people?

One difficulty arises from the linking of the Song with Solomon. Is the book *by* Solomon, or *for* Solomon, or *concerning* Solomon — the Hebrew preposition attached to his name in the first verse is capable of all these meanings? Or is it even for another "Solomon" than the king of Israel?

Is it *by* Solomon? It is hard to believe that this poem about the purity and joy of married love could have been written by a lascivious king with 700 wives and 300 concubines. Had he possibly come to see the folly and emptiness of his sensuality and to recognise that true fulfilment lay in pure and faithful love for one partner? Delitzsch argues from 6.8 that the reference there to 60 queens and 80 concubines suggests that the Song refers to an early period in his reign. If that is so, the later multiplication of wives and concubines is a denial of any real repentance. Is it possible, then, that Solomon in the Song, as in Proverbs, is preaching what he did not practise himself? Derek Kidner suggests that "his words — like many a preacher's — put his deeds to shame." [3] It still is difficult to see Solomon as the author.

Is the book *for* Solomon, to call him (and his people) back to a purity of life that had been lost? Solomon's taking of foreign wives had led not only to a growing permissiveness in Israel; it had introduced foreign cults into Israel, and had led the people as well as their king away from undivided loyalty to the Lord. Is this book for Solomon, rebuking his lasciviousness by the pure love of the Shulammite; and for his people, to call them back to pure love and undivided loyalty to their one Lord? Certainly our contemporary permissive and apostate age needs such a recall today.

Is the book *about* Solomon, king of Israel, compared and contrasted with a true lover, whose purity and faithfulness are a rebuke to him? Or perhaps about a bridegroom — "Solomon" for the day of his wedding — whose true love is a challenge to all false love, and a pointer to the love of God in Christ?

The question, "Is the book about Solomon?" leads on to another difficult question: How many main characters are there in the book? One of the problems of the song is the fact that it is difficult to distinguish between the speakers. One interpretation is that we have

two main characters throughout — Solomon and the Shulammite (though she is not so named until 6.13) — with comments by the "daughters of Jerusalem", possibly the women of Solomon's court. The conversations between Solomon and the Shulammite picture their love for each other, their courtship and marriage, and their delight in each other. The Shulammite, a country maiden from the north, raised to the rank of queen by Solomon, teaches him the joy of pure, wedded love, in marked contrast to the luxury and sensuality of the court life that he had known. This interpretation must face certain queries. Does Solomon fit the picture of a shepherd, pasturing his flocks? Would the bride, with her lofty view of love, be satisfied to be one among Solomon's multiplicity of wives and concubines? Would that be the fulfilment of which she speaks in such ecstatic terms? Solomon, as we have already seen, can hardly be taken as an example of true love and faithfulness in marriage.

Such queries have led to an interpretation, very widely adopted, which sees three main characters — Solomon, the Shulammite, and a rustic shepherd, with whom she is in love. The Shulammite, going out one day to her garden in a sheltered valley to inspect its growth, suddenly finds herself in the midst of the king's retinue, and is carried off to Solomon's court, where the king attempts to win her affection with flattery and with all the splendours of his palace. But she remains true to her betrothed, sometimes in a dream of reverie thinking of him, though it is Solomon who is before her. Solomon finally admits defeat, and the story ends with the Shulammite united with her own true love.

This interpretation has been worked out in different ways. The Amplified Bible gives a useful example, as does J. Barton Payne in his *Theology of the Older Testament,* and J. A. Balchin in *The New Bible Commentary Revised.* While there is variation in details, this 'shepherd-hypothesis' follows largely the lines set out by one of its earliest proponents, Ewald in 1826, and adopted by many scholars since then.

One attraction of this interpretation is that it gets rid of the difficulty of Solomon's being seen as a worthy example of true love between a man and a woman; here, quite rightly, he is the villain of the piece! But, more important, given our postulate that this is a book for preaching, this interpretation, with its picture of competing loves, does give ample material for preaching. William Still, of Aberdeen, for example, has published a series of eleven sermons on

the Song of Solomon, giving an allegorical application based on this interpretation.

But this interpretation has difficulties to face, too. It assumes that the book is a drama with clearly defined characters. But we have no indication in the Old Testament that drama of this kind was ever known or used for instruction among the Jews, however popular it may be in some quarters today! A practical difficulty is that considerable ingenuity is needed to identify the different speakers. Thus, for example, Barton Payne (who makes an unwarranted identification of the Shulammite with Abishag the Shunammite) reads 7. 1-9a as the words with which Solomon flatters the Shulammite, ending with, "Thy mouth is like the best wine." 'He may,' says Payne, 'have been building up for a kiss, and she breaks in, "reserved for my Shepherd. I am his." ' That kind of ingenuity in identifying different speakers is required again and again if the 'shepherd-hypothesis' is to be maintained. And that leaves us with an interpretation that may be largely subjective.

A third possibility, which has a good deal to commend it, is that there are only two characters, the Shulamite and her shepherd lover, who is sometimes compared with Solomon — a king on his wedding-day — and sometimes contrasted with him in the simplicity of his rustic life. This makes the identity of the speakers less baffling, and gives a more credible picture of true married love than Solomon could ever provide. It has implications, too, for our interpretation of the book as a whole. Sufficient attention has not been given to the possibility that the use of the name Solomon for the bridegroom and the name Shulammite (more accurately than the translation, 'the Shulammite') for the bride has a special significance. It is recognised that the name Solomon is linked with the Hebrew root from which the noun 'shalom', meaning 'peace' comes. The basic verb means in the Piel 'to make complete', 'to fulfil'. Solomon is the peace-giver in the sense that he gives completeness, fulfilment. Shulammith may be derived from the Pual (passive) of the same verb which in the Piel means 'to complete, fulfil,' and so she may be considered as the one who is fulfilled, who finds fulfilment. She herself says in 8. 10, "I was in his eye as one that found *shalom*, fulfilment." Each of them, Solomon and Shulammith, finds fulfilment in the other. [4]

Interpretation — Allegorical, Literal, or Typical?

Is the Song of Solomon to be taken as allegorical, literal, or typical? If we are to assess accurately the respective merits of these

three interpretations, the terms used need to be carefully defined. "Allegorical' and 'typical' in particular need to be clearly distinguished.

Allegorical

Perhaps the best way to explain an allegory is to think of a well-known one, John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress.* Here is the story of the journey of a Christian from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City. The story has no basis in literal fact; no man ever made such a journey literally, though it is interesting to note that John Bunyan made use of many locations and some people that were known to him in Bedfordshire. (One wonders what he would have made of the current proposal to dump nuclear waste at Elstow, where he was born: it might not be too difficult to find an allegorical significance in that, with a direct link to the City of Destruction!) *Pilgrim's Progress* is simply a story to illustrate spiritual truths: it is an allegory.

The Jewish commentators saw in the Song of Solomon an allegory of the love of God for Israel; and Christian commentators followed their lead in taking it as an allegory of the love of Christ for the Church or for the individual believer. That Christian interpretation comes out very clearly in the chapter headings or page headings of many editions of the Authorised Version. It is of interest to note that there is little uniformity, though there is general agreement, in the wording of the headings used in different editions: even different editions by the same publishers have different headings. But the import of them all is the same, summarised in a Collins edition as "the mutual love of Christ and his church."

This interpretation is supported by the frequent use of married love as a picture in the Old Testament of the relationship between God and Israel, and in the New Testament of the relationship between Christ and the Church. In the Old Testament, for example, Israel is warned again and again not "to go a-whoring after other gods"; Hosea 2. 14 - 23 pictures the relationship between the Lord and His people in the tender terms of courtship and betrothal, and elsewhere in chapters 1 and 3 Israel's apostasy is seen in terms of marital unfaithfulness; Isaiah 54.5 speaks of God's relationship with His people in these terms: "Thy Maker is thine husband; the Lord of hosts is his name"; Isaiah 62. 4, 5 says that the land shall be called "Beulah," that is, "Married", for "as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee";

Jeremiah (2.2 and 3.1) and Ezekiel (16.8 - 14) use the same figure for God's relationship with Israel.

In the New Testament, as well as passing references to Christ as a bridegroom (John 3.29 and II Corinthians 11.2), Paul explicitly in Ephesians 5. 22-33 applies the relationship between husband and wife to Christ and the church; and John in Revelation 19. 7-9 and 21. 2 refers to the Church as the bride of Christ. In the New Testament as in the Old, married love is taken as a picture of the relationship between the Lord and His people.

If the significance of the names Solomon and Shulammith suggested above is accepted, it is easy to see in Solomon, the fulfiller, the peace-giver, a picture of Christ, the Prince of peace; and in Shulammith, the fulfilled, the peace-receiver, a picture of His Church.

There are, however, certain possible objections to an interpretation which takes the Song as purely allegorical with no basis in fact, ignoring any literal or historical situation, referring it to Christ and His Church and nothing else. One is that no hint is given that it is an allegory. Real places are mentioned — Jerusalem, En-gedi, Tirzah, Lebanon — and real people are involved. Where similar comparisons are made elsewhere, the point that this is allegory is specifically made. E.g., Isaiah 62. 5: "As the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee." (cf. Jeremiah 2, 2, 3; Ezekiel 16. 2ff). Paul makes it quite explicit in Ephesians 5. 32: "I speak concerning Christ and the church."

Another possible objection is that to take the Song as referring only to Christ and His Church might suggest that it had no meaning and no application to the age when it was first written. That might be met by saying that the allegorical significance for that day was God's covenant love for His people and the response required from them to Him.

But the greatest difficulty lies in the detailed descriptions of the lover and his beloved for which allegorical significance has to be found if the allegorical interpretation is to be maintained throughout. John Gill and Matthew Henry, for example, who both give a heart-warming application of the Song to Christ and His people, have to resort to fanciful speculations when they come to the detailed description of the Shulammite's body in 4. 1-7. What is the allegorical significance of her eyes, hair, teeth, temples, lips, neck, and breasts? Both of these expositors have in many instances to suggest various alternatives, some of them unconvincing. It was that

kind of fanciful speculation which moved John Murray, as quoted in the *Monthly Record* of the Free Church of Scotland, of March 1983, to say:

> I cannot endorse the allegorical interpretation of the Song of Solomon. I think the vagaries of interpretation given in terms of the allegorical principle indicate that there are no well defined hermeneutical canons to guide us in determining the precise meaning and application if we adopt the allegorical view.

He then went on to say:

> However, I also think that in terms of biblical analogy the Song can be used to illustrate the relation of Christ to His church.

The difficulty is that since no guidance is given as to how to apply the details of the allegory, the way is opened for fanciful and extravagant applications which stem from the imagination of the allegoriser. Luther called allegorical interpretation "a nose of wax", since the interpreter can mould it into any shape he chooses. Certainly it was the multiplicity of fanciful allegorisations that turned people towards a more literal interpretation, which we will examine now.

Literal

The literal approach to the Song sees its purpose as the sanctifying of love between a man and a woman in marriage. This view has been well expressed by E. J. Young in his *Introduction to the Old Testament*, though he makes it clear that that does not exhaust the purpose of the book. He writes:

> The Song does celebrate the dignity and purity of human love... It comes to us in this world of sin, where lust and passion are on every hand, where fierce temptations assail us and try to turn us aside from the God-given standard of marriage. And it reminds us, in particularly beautiful fashion, how pure and noble true love is... God has placed this Song in the Canon in order to teach us the purity and sanctity of that estate of marriage which He Himself has established... So long as there is impurity in the world, we need and need badly the Song of Solomon. [5]

The Song is, as it reads at first sight, a love poem. It makes much of the human body, and is not ashamed of the physical aspects of

human love. So it has a message for a society today that is obsessed with mere sexuality. It sets the seal of the Bible's approval on pure love within marriage.

But can we stop with the literal interpretation? If we do, how are we to preach from the Song of Solomon? The literal interpretation alone gives us very little to preach. Taking the 'two-character' interpretation, it is good that we should be reminded of the beauty and purity and tenderness of human love, and realise that God has made husband and wife each to be a help fitting for the other. Or, taking the 'three-character' interpretation, it is good that we should learn the importance of faithfulness in marriage in face of the seductions that may threaten it. But, having said that, what more, on the basis of the literal interpretation, is there left to say? What is said is vitally important, but is that all? I cannot believe so.

The recently-published Tyndale Commentary on the Song of Solomon by G. Lloyd Carr argues throughout for a literal interpretation, and indeed often suggests an erotic significance in some references that is certainly not evident on the surface. But in the end one is left asking: What is there here to preach? One sermon, maybe, which might have been derived almost as readily from a marriage manual!

The Song certainly has its source in the historical situation of a real marriage — perhaps between two ordinary people. That gives significance to the chapters which give detailed expression of the lovers' delight in each other, and which have a message still about love between husband and wife. But we must go on from that to the much deeper typical significance.

Typical

Perhaps 'typical' is not the best word to use, for the bridegroom in the Song is not strictly a 'type' of Christ. What the Song gives us is an illustration or an analogy of Christ's relationship to His church.

Writing on Psalm 45, Derek Kidner uses the parallel between the Psalm and the Song of Songs — both of them 'love songs' — to suggest that as the Psalm is seen in the New Testament (Hebrews 1. 8) to speak of a King greater than Solomon, so the Song speaks of Christ as well. He writes:

> The Psalm is Messianic. The royal compliments suddenly blossom into Divine honours (6f), and the New Testament will take them at their full value. This last point has possible implications for another example of wedding poetry, the Song of Songs, since by its language and its title, '*a*

> *love song'*, the psalm comes as clearly into the category of literal wedding verse as does the Song, yet speaks undoubtedly of Christ. It is proof enough that the one level of meaning need not exclude the other. [6]

The song has a literal, historical reference to the love of a bridegroom and his bride; we take it literally as a Divinely-inspired declaration of the sanctity of the love of husband and wife. But we must go on, as the Bible so often does, from human love to the Divine love of which human love is a reflection. And so the Song, with its wholesome picture of pure love between a man and a woman, is our schoolmaster to lead us to Christ and to His love for His people. What we have in the Song is the fulfilment and the glory of true love within marriage, and, as well, a compelling picture of the love of Christ for His people and of their answering love for Him.

The 'typical' interpretation derives added depth and has a contemporary application to the age in which it was first written if we see it first as typical of the Lord's relationship with Israel and of the response that He looks for from His people. It has a special message for days when physical adultery and spiritual apostasy were united in destroying Israel. That Old Testament application to Israel enriches our thought of the Church as the Bride of Christ, with all that that means for His people in a day when physical adultery and spiritual apostasy are again threatening the people of God.

The conclusion reached by our study is that preaching from the Song of Solomon will apply its message to the relationship of love between a man and a woman, and will go on from that to see that love as an analogy of the love of Christ for His people and theirs for Him. It remains to give some examples of both a literal and typical application of the Song of Solomon.

Some examples of a double application of the Song of Solomon

The Song's picture of love between man and woman can be used to help young people particularly who are facing strong sexual temptation today, by underlining the refrain that recurs in the Song: "Daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you.. Do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires" (NIV, 2. 7; 3.5; 8.4). The frivolous 'daughters of Jerusalem', like the permissive society of today, encouraged the stimulation of sexual desires prematurely. That is the purpose and the preoccupation of so much that confronts young people today, in

films on television and in the cinema, in advertising, in erotic words of pop music — if you can hear the words! — all insidiously and persistently suggesting that sexual experimentation is all right for young people. This repeated word from the Song gives the answer of God's Word to that: "Do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires." There is a time for the stimulation of physical love, but it is on the further side of marriage: there are intimacies which must be reserved for marriage, and Christian courtship must always stop far short of them.

There is a spiritual application of "Do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires." Is the physical excitement aroused by "gospel" pop music, for example, an attempt to stir up a profession of love of Christ apart from the working of the Holy Spirit? Or are we being warned against any attempt to force a profession of love for Christ that does not wait for the Spirit's work of arousing conviction of sin and awakening faith in the Saviour? True love for Christ is not something that can be artificially stimulated.

In the last chapter of the book there is a glance back to the girlhood of the Shulammite (8. 8-12). In her adolescence her elder brothers had a protective concern for her, lest anyone should take advantage of her. Their attitude was that if she were chaste and pure, "a wall", they would consider that she should be beautified as with a battlement of silver — beautiful and protected. But if she were "a door", promiscuous, too open to those who would take advantage of her, then they would see to it that she was protected in spite of herself, enclosed "with panels of cedar." Sometimes young people are resentful when their parents or older Christian friends, knowing more about the perils that menace them than they do, try to protect them from the threat of evil. Let the Song remind them of what is at stake, and let them thank God for the concern that will do anything to guard them from impurity.

It is possible to find a spiritual analogy for the contrast between a wall and a door in chapter 8 in the restraints that keep a Christian from sin. We can be kept from sin by the restraint of the law: God's "Thou shalt not" sometimes has to shut us in with panels of cedar. Or we can be kept from sin by an indwelling beauty of holiness, with Christ's love as a wall around us.

The Shulammite herself has proved to be a wall (8. 10), and because of that in marriage she brought fulfilment to her husband. NIV translates 8. 10b: "Thus I have become in his eyes like one bringing contentment." But the Hebrew word ***shalom***, often

translated 'peace', and here in NIV 'contentment' means far more than either translation, or indeed any single translation. It means wholeness, completeness, fulfilment. The girl who has kept herself virginal for her husband, and the man who has kept himself for his wife, will in marriage bring 'shalom', perfect fulfilment to each other.

The spiritual analogy to the fulfilment that pure married love brings gives an added dimension to Christ's words, "My peace I give unto you." The peace that He gives is completion, fulfilment beyond all that we can ask or think, and it comes from full surrender to Him, the Lover of our soul.

The position tentatively reached in this study of the Song of Solomon is that there are two main characters in the story, a bridegroom, "Solomon" and his bride, "Shulammith". If the widely-held alternative interpretation which sees three main characters in the Song — Solomon, the Shulammite, and her shepherd lover — is adopted, it is easy to find a spiritual application of this story of competing loves. Solomon, as the agent of Satan, does his best (or his worst) to woo away the allegiance of the Shulammite from her shepherd lover, but she remains true to him in spite of all the royal blandishments. She does it by concentrating her thoughts on her absent lover instead of the lascivious king. Her true lover has taken her for himself, and she is his alone: "My beloved is mine, and I am his" (2. 16). She is "a garden enclosed" (4. 12), and kept for him alone, a vineyard belonging to no one else. Here is the Christian's safety in a seductive world: "My Beloved is mine, and I am His."

On any interpretation which sees in pure human love a picture of Christ's love for His people and theirs for Him, there are numerous applications of the Song to Christian experience. The love of the Heavenly Bridegroom is seen in His provision for His beloved: "He brought me to His banqueting house, and His banner over me was love" (2. 4). The Heavenly Bridegroom sees His beloved as without spot: "Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee" (4. 7), for He has made her so. There may be times when, through self-centredness, the sense of the Lover's presence is lost, as in the bride's dream (5. 2-8), but even that can lead to a greater appreciation of Him, and a surer witness to Him (5. 9-26), that will lead others to seek Him, too (6. 1). When evil is most threatening, the Christian who is trusting His Beloved need have no fear. "Terrible as an army with banners" (6. 10) is what those who are trusting Christ appear to the Enemy. Evil may seem strong and seductive, but evil has no

power against those who take refuge in Christ and who can say, "I am my Beloved's, and my Beloved is mine" (6. 3).

Only a lover can understand a love song, and only a Christian, beloved by Christ and loving Him, can appreciate the picture of Christ's love that fulfilled human love provides in this Song of Songs, ending with the yearning for the Bridegroom's coming: "Make haste, my Beloved." "Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

References

1. Cited, H. H. Rowley, The Interpretation of the Song of Songs, in *The Servant of the Lord,* p. 197.
2. Cited, W. T. Davison, *The Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament,* p. 275.
3. Derek Kidner, *Wisdom to Live By,* p. 51.
4. Lexicographers are not agreed that *Shulammith* is linked with the verb *shalem* from which the noun *shalom* is derived. Brown, Driver and Briggs list it apart from *shalem* and equate it with Shunammite. Gesenius, on the other hand, gives it as a derivative of *shalem* in one place (Lexicon, p. 1075), then lists it elsewhere, with the note that the Vulgate translates it *pacifica*, but prefers to take it as an alternative for Shunammite, on the evidence of Eusebius who claimed in the 4th century A.D. that Shunem was also called Sulem.
5. E. J. Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament,* pp. 327, 8.
6. Derek Kidner, *Psalms,* p. 170.

CONTEXTUALIZATION AND THE INTEGRITY OF THE GOSPEL

by Robert L. W. McCollum

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Jesus Christ, before He ascended to His Father, commanded His followers to "... go and make disciples of all nations... " (Matt 28 : 19). On the day of Pentecost the apostles embarked on the great task of world evangelisation and, until our Lord returns, the Church must continue proclaiming the gospel to the nations of the world. The followers of Christ have encountered many difficulties in this work, not the least of which has been the problem of communicating the message to peoples of diverse cultural and ethnic background. On the day of Pentecost this problem was overcome in a supernatural way by the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2 : 4-7). This was a unique situation and so today it is incumbent upon the Church to learn not only the language of the receptor peoples, but also their cultural distinctiveness, if effective communication is to take place. Professor John Murray, focusing upon this duty, writes:

> ... without question, communication of the gospel to a world whose patterns of thought are so alien is one of the most challenging tasks confronting the church. [1]

Travel, education, mass media, commerce and politics highlight both the opportunities and difficulties of cross-cultural communication. For Christians, who are committed to communicate the gospel to people in rapidly changing cultural situations, the task is demanding. The difficulties are accentuated by the fact that at least three cultures are involved: that of the Bible, the missionary and the people to whom the gospel is proclaimed.

Throughout the modern missionary movement the Church has always been aware of cultural distinctions and the need to identify with receptor peoples. Henry Venn and others in the 19th century expressed this concern in their writings by emphasizing that the

mission of the Church should be understood in terms of indigenization. The indigenous church was to be self-propagating, self-governing, and self-supporting. Though this was considered as a brilliant concept when first formulated, on reflection it has not fully overcome cultural problems. This three-self concept could be in operation and yet still result in a Western Church in a Third World setting in terms of leadership and unrelatedness to the local culture.

At the 1982 Willingen Conference of the International Missionary Conference there was a new call for the "indigenization" of the Church. The missionary church was to make elements of the local cultures captive to Christ and to adequately train a ministry adapted to local requirements.

This paved the way for the introduction of a new word in missionary terminology — contextualization.

Contextualization

The term first came to the forefront of missionary and theological thinking in 1972 in a book entitled 'Ministry in Context' published by the Theological Education Fund. The director of this Fund, Shoki Coe, explains that:

> ... in using the word contextualization we try to convey all that is implied in the familiar term indigenization, yet seek to press beyond for a more dynamic concept which is open to change and which is future oriented. [2]

After an analysis of the concepts behind the term contextualization, Professor Harvie Conn sees it fundamentally as addressing two questions to the Church.

> (1) How are the divine commands of the gospel of the kingdom communicated in cultural thought forms meaningful to the real issues and needs of the person and his society in that point of cultural time?
> (2) How shall the man of God, as a member of the body of Christ and the fellowship of the Spirit, respond meaningfully and with integrity to the Scriptures and his culture so that he may live a full-orbed kingdom lifestyle in covenant obedience with the covenant community? [3]

Contextualization, therefore, differs fundamentally from indigenization. The two terms reflect two different understandings of culture: indigenization reflects a view of culture which regards it as static and unchanging; contextualization takes a more dynamic view, taking seriously the contemporary factors in cultural change. It

takes into account contemporary social, economic and political issues of class struggle, riches and poverty, bribery and corruption, power politics, privileges and oppression. It considers seriously all the factors which constitute society and the relationships between one community and another.

Al Krass illustrates his awareness of the distinction in his graphic statement:

> Indigenizing concerns traditional culture, the kind of thing you read about in National Geographic. Contextualizing, on the other hand, concerns more of the kind of thing you read about in Time. It relates to the current history of the world's culture. [4]

Harvie Conn indicates this shift of emphasis when he writes:

> Indigenization, even in its most refined usage, focuses on what might be called the cultic accoutrements of the church — the acculturation of patterns of worship, the practices of the church in isolation from more abstracted theological formulations. Contextualization focuses on the acculturation of the Gospel itself. [5]

Christians today who are sincere in their commitment to obey the Great Commission (Matt. 28 : 19, 20) will be sensitive to the context in which the receptor is found. This sensitivity to context, however, has led some to approach contextualization in a way that affects the integrity of the gospel. This approach has been called existential contextualization. [6]

Existential Contextualization

The approach of existential contextualization assumes that text and context are culturally conditioned and relative to each other. So much emphasis is placed upon this principle that the advocates of this approach argue that truth cannot be fully known outside of the context in which the truth is to be presented. In other words there is a dialectical method adopted in the search for truth. Truth can only be discovered as text and context interact with each other. These theologians therefore speak about the Text behind the text, and of the Text which transcends all interpreted texts. In other words we must look for the Gospel behind the gospels. We must strip away all the first century context to get to the Gospel. In fact, on this view, we cannot be sure what the Gospel was then, and we cannot state

definitively what it is now; we must be open to the future. Shoki Coe defines this approach,

> Contextuality... is that critical assessment of what makes the context really significant in the light of the Missio Dei. It is the missiological discernment of the signs of the times, seeing where God is at work and calling us to participate in it. [7]

It takes place at the point, say Coe

> where the Church, whether in the global or the local sense 'walks on the water' in faith, heeding the signs which are God's way of talking to us in our time and context. [8]

The logical outcome of existential contextualization is to deny any possibility of a single biblical theology. This dialectical approach means that there can be no Africanization or contextualization of an existing theology but as one of its advocates Daniel Von Allmen of Switzerland argues

> Any authentic theology must start ever anew from the focal point of faith, which is the confession of the Lord Jesus Christ who died and was raised for us: and it must be built or rebuilt (whether in Africa or in Europe) in a way which is both faithful to the inner thrust of Christian revelation and also in harmony with the mentality of the person who formulates it. [9]

Von Allmen concludes that the flowering of a truly African theology will presuppose a fresh beginning — a theological framework stripped of existing and especially Western theologies. He urges Africans to become aware of the value of their culture "in its own right, and not only its relative value," if a true African theology is to be brought to birth. Therefore the approach of existential contextualization speaks of plural biblical theologies, each conditioned by the writer's own community of faith.

In evaluating such an approach to contextualization we immediately see a threat to the integrity of the gospel. The 'gospel' that is accepted in any given situation is by the interaction of revealed Gospel and the particular historical context. This means that what is the Gospel (God-breathed Scripture) is swallowed up and lost in the contexts and man becomes his own authority, his own Text. Relativism and human autonomy reign supreme.

This situation arises because existential contextualization begins from two false premises. In the first place it rejects the Bible as the fully inspired Word of God, without error, and the only rule of faith and practice. Generally speaking the Bible is viewed as time-bound, culture-bound, containing errors and therefore unable to speak authoritatively to us today.

Secondly, this approach raises culture to a position that is unwarranted in the light of the Fall. The proponents of existential contextualization apparently do not accept the implications of man's sin for the culture in which he finds himself. [10] Harvie Conn makes this point well

> The Theological Education Fund concept of the Missio Dei does not do justice to the fallen broken character of human culture since the fall. [11]

Edmund Clowney strikes the same note

> The structure of every culture reflects the world as created reality and man as God's image-bearer in that world. Yet every culture also manifests apostacy. [12]

A further aspect of culture which cannot be overlooked in this debate is the fact that in most contexts religion and culture are interwined. In his contribution to the Consultation on Gospel and Culture held at Willowbank in Bermuda, in January 1978, Stephen C. Neill stated

> Throughout human history, religion and culture have been inextricably connected. There has never yet been a great religion which did not find its expression in a great culture. There has never yet been a great culture which did not have deep roots in a religion. [13]

This perceptive observation by Neill, a veteran missionary and respected missiologist, accords with the experience of Bassam Madany in his work among Muslims.

> There is hardly an aspect of Islamic life and culture which has not been infused with the Muslim faith. It is impossible to separate between Islam as culture and Islam as a religious faith. Islam has shaped a uniquely Muslim world view. [14]

Cultures therefore cannot be considered morally neutral in their essence, nor can they be regarded as having only some sinful

components. Rather every culture, save a Christian counter-culture, must be viewed as sinful in itself.

With such faulty presuppositions, as we have described, built into the fabric and structure of existential contextualization, we can come to no other conclusion than that it affects the integrity of the gospel. Those who follow this approach to contextualization will inevitably lose their way in the labyrinth of a pluralism which effectively obscures the way of salvation.

Some, in reacting against the existential approach, which is the most popular one, have rejected contextualization completely and do not accept that it has a place in the communication of the gospel. There is another approach, however, which is radically different and which preserves the integrity of the gospel. It is termed dogmatic contextualization. [15]

Dogmatic Contextualization

This approach to contextualization adopts as its presuppositions the fallen nature of every culture and the classical Reformed position regarding the inerrancy of Scripture. It does, however, seek to communicate the demands of the gospel of the kingdom in cultural thought forms meaningful to the real issues and needs of the receptor and his society in that point of cultural time. It also seeks to show how a convert to Christianity should respond meaningfully and with integrity to the Scriptures and his culture so that he may live a full-orbed kingdom lifestyle in covenant obedience within the covenant community.

This attention to the receptor and his cultural context is not a new phenomenon. It finds expression at the very beginning of history when God the Father communicated His will to men. God, in seeking to reveal Himself to us, does so within the human frame of reference. In ascribing to Himself human parts and passions, God communicates that we might hear and understand. In fact the whole process of God's revelation, known as the history of special revelation, is divinely adapted to the ability of Adam and his sons and daughters to understand. As Harvie Conn states

> The revelation of God does not burst the bonds of creation; it mediates itself to the cosmos through man's consciousness. Revelation has a history because God respects our creaturely existence. Revelation honours it without capitulating to it, adjusts to it without compromising its own truth filled character. It bends down without being distorted. [16]

An illustration from the Bible is found in the gospels. Matthew, writing with a Jewish audience in mind, refers to the gospel as the message of the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 4 : 17). Mark, oriented more to the Gentile world, refers to the gospel as the kingdom of God.

The supreme revelation of the Father's will is in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ. He came to this earth and dwelt among men. He interacted with human beings in their frame of reference. He learned to sympathize with human beings by permitting Himself to be subjected to their temptations and sufferings.[17]

A good example of what we have called dogmatic contextualization is found in the ministry of the apostle Paul. He often testifies to his calling to preach the gospel. In fact he informs his readers in I Corinthians 9 : 16 that he is under orders to preach the gospel. Notwithstanding this we must note that Paul has a sense of solidarity with a wide spectrum of hearers (I Cor. 9 : 19-23). When Paul says, "I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some", he is not suggesting that the context modifies the gospel he has been called to preach. Paul was not engaged in any form of homiletical cutting and paring. Rather in the words of Harvie Conn

> In the light of the coming of the kingdom he is exhorting us to circumcise our half-Jewish Timothys (Acts 16 : 3), to take our temple vows (Acts 18 : 18), to participate in our purification ceremonies for suburban Nazirites (Acts 21 : 17-26). [18]

Paul's solidarity with ethnic communities is evidenced by the different approaches he adopts on his missionary journeys. At Pisidian Antioch he could assume his Jewish congregation had a basic understanding of Jehovah, something he could not assume regarding his Athenian audience on Mars Hill, who had a polytheistic view of deity. As a native of the Mediterranean world, Paul was at home in several cultural milieus. He spoke the language of the people and sought to present the gospel in culturally adapted thought patterns understandable by the recipients. He was always sensitive to the context in which the gospel was presented.

The Offence of the Cross

This flexibility never led Paul to compromise the gospel he was called to preach. Though concerned to avoid any unnecessary

offence, Paul never watered down the gospel. He proclaimed it boldly even though he knew that it, in and of itself, was offensive to the natural man. In I Corinthians 1 : 22, 23 Paul declares, "Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles."

The Jews were offended by the concept that salvation centred around the cross for, to them, death on a cross was accursed by God. The Greeks were offended by the concept that, by dying, a man could save others. The offence of the cross is still the stumbling block for those who do not believe. The Muslim is offended by the cross because the Koranic doctrine of God takes care of the acknowledged need for forgiveness. Allah is both merciful and compassionate and he forgives sins without recourse to the death of the Messiah. The Buddhist will not be offended by the idea of Jesus suffering, only by the concept of Jesus' cross as the only way of suffering to salvation. The Roman Catholic is offended by the sufficiency of the cross as the way of salvation. While not denying that missionaries in the past have sometimes been guilty of cultural insensitivities, the real barrier to faith in many cases is the "offence of the cross'. "... 'See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.' " (Romans 9 : 33)

Bassam Madany, in the midst of an active ministry among Muslims, understands perfectly the offence of the gospel in the context of his work.

> No matter how much we contextualize the gospel message, the stumbling block remains. ... We cannot avoid the offence of the word of the cross. The contextualization which the Muslims require of us to make the message really acceptable to them is nothing less than unconditional surrender. [19]

Paul was perfectly aware that the unbelieving hearers in Corinth regarded his message as foolish. But he did not attempt to impress people with any other message than that entrusted to him. He knew that it was through the proclamation of his God-given message that sinners would be saved. "For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe." (I Cor. 1 : 21). Furthermore, Paul accepted that the outcome of his preaching did not ultimately depend on human means and methods

of communication, but upon the sovereign purpose of God. His confidence lay not in his own wisdom or ingenuity but in the message of the gospel and the power of the Spirit to apply it. "When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power." (I Cor. 2 : 1-5).

The Means of Salvation

Paul's confidence in the message is illustrated in Romans 10 : 17 "Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ." We are saved through faith. Saving faith is a gift from God and on the basis of this verse we can assert that the context in which God grants faith is where Christ is preached.

The apostle's dependence upon the Holy Spirit is clearly expressed in I Corinthians 2 : 13, 14. "This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit, for they are foolishness to him and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned." Unless and until the Spirit of God touches the hearts of those listening to the proclamation of the gospel, the words of the missionary remain fruitless. The Holy Spirit alone is the author of conversion. Regardless of the cultural or ethnic background of any human being, and no matter how hard we try to bring the message to his attention, the work of the Holy Spirit remains indispensable for conversion. The unique role of the Holy Spirit must be maintained in any teaching about missions.

Conversion and Culture

Having stated earlier that culture in essence is not neutral, but part of a fallen world, it is important to consider how a convert is to relate to his native culture. Herman Bavinck suggests the term 'Possessio' (to take in possession) to describe how Christianity

ought to affect culture.

> The Christian life does not accommodate or adapt itself to heathen forms of life, but it takes the latter in possession and thereby makes them new. [20]

It is obvious that Bavinck has in mind II Corinthians 5 : 17 "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come". Incorporation in Christ means a new creation, a new culture, as it were. Thus, even though in external form there is much that resembles cultural practices of the past, in reality everything has become new. Bavinck expressed this when he wrote

> Christ takes the life of a people in his hands, he renews and re-establishes the distorted and the deteriorated; he fills each thing, each word, and each practice with a new meaning and gives it a new direction. [21]

Culture and the Kingdom

It is helpful to relate culture to the rule of King Jesus. The governing principle of the converted life is that it is lived under the lordship of Christ. Jesus Christ is Lord of all, hence everything in the cultural context must come under His scrutiny. This applies to every culture, not just to Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim or animistic cultures, but also to the increasingly materialistic culture of the West. Jesus is the redeemer of culture and the refashioner of its world views. Conversion to Christ does not involve a transfer into another cultural milieu. It involves a commitment by every believer to bring his culture under the authority of the King and thus to bring it into conformity with the laws of His Kingdom. Such a commitment to Christ and the authority of His Word will transform the convert's world-and-life-view. From being humanistic or paganistic in its direction and outlook, it will be changed by the means of grace to become biblical in every aspect. This dogmatic approach to contextualization is the only model that maintains the integrity of the gospel and yet reaches across the cultural divides of this world in an attempt to show to the many peoples of the world the relevance of the gospel to their situation.

The Mission of the Church

As we seek to be faithful to the Great Commission, communicating the gospel to the peoples of twentieth century Belfast,

Bristol or Bangkok, we must follow the example of the heavenly Father, the Lord Jesus Christ, the apostles and all the great communicators of the gospel through the centuries and be receptor-oriented and culture specific. An outstanding example of such a communicator in our own century was Martyn Lloyd-Jones. Of him Peter Lewis writes,

> He preached to bring the truth to men and to bring men to the truth. His sermons were therefore Christ-centred and people-oriented. He never presented the truth before his hearers (much less out of their reach) with a 'take it or leave it' attitude, but he began where man and women were, that he might bring them where they ought to be. [22]

In order to develop these skills of communication we must acquire the art of listening. Dietrich Bonhoeffer puts it this way:

> The first service that one owes to others ... consists in listening to them ... Many people are looking for an ear that will listen. They do not find it among Christians, because these Christians are talking when they should be listening.. Christians have forgotten that the ministry of listening has been committed to them by Him who is Himself the great listener and whose work they would share. [23]

The challenge of dogmatic contextualization not only affects preachers and missionaries but the Church itself as the body of Christ. Frequently the local church has been disappointed by the response that has come from its witness to the local community. This response may not be due to the rejection of the gospel itself, but a rejection of the cultural baggage which has become so intertwined with the gospel which that church presents. David Bronnet made this point at the Evangelical Anglican Congress when he said

> If the church is middle class and intellectual in the language of the services, in the music employed, in the lifestyle expected of Christians, in its leadership, and in the methods of presenting the gospel, then the whole atmosphere is such as to repel those who are not middle class and intellectual. [24]

The call to mission is therefore a call to contextualize according to the Scriptural pattern. Having accepted this as part of human responsibility we can go forth with the gospel of Christ having a great sense of expectancy, for the gospel is "the power of God for salvation" (Rom. 1 : 16). At the same time, we do not forget our

Lord's warnings of opposition and suffering. Human hearts are hard. People do not always embrace the gospel, even when the communication is flawless and the communicator upright in character. Our Lord Himself was fully at home in the culture in which He preached, yet He and His message were despised and rejected, and His Parable of the Sower warns us that much of the good seed we sow will not bear fruit. "The Spirit blows where he wills" (John 3 : 8). While seeking to communicate the gospel with care, faithfulness and zeal, we leave the results to God in humility.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Created in God's Image, Anthony A. Hoekema, Eerdmans/Paternoster, 1986. 264pp. £12.95.

This latest book by a well-known author is a companion volume to his previous work, *The Bible and the Future.* As its title suggests, it is a study in Christian anthropology, the Biblical doctrine of man. Dr. Hoekema, in the opening chapter, rightly stresses the importance of this subject in view of current humanistic theories of man. Hoekema then proceeds to consider man as both a creature and a person — totally dependent on God, yet constantly choosing. Man is not an automaton, but a responsible being. The implications of this in terms of redemption are noted. God respects the personality that He has created. "Man is not saved like a robot whose activities have been programmed by some celestial computer, but like a person" (p. 7). Consequently man has a responsibility in the process of salvation. Hoekema is not saying that man contributes anything to his salvation. When he states in this connection that "God must regenerate and man must believe" and "these two must always be kept together" (p. 8), he is correct, for only the regenerate person can believe. Possibly at this point it might have helped if it had been shown briefly, that the faith in question is not native to man, but is God's gift.

There follows a thorough study of Biblical teaching on the image of God in man. Ninety pages are devoted to this theme. This includes an examination of relevant Old Testament and New Testament passages, an historical survey and a theological summary. This arrangement of material is useful, although it does make for some repetition.

Dr. Hoekema is a careful exegete, constantly seeking to be faithful to Scripture, and his review of Scriptural passages germane to his subject is valuable. He shares with the reader insights that he has gained in a life-time of teaching theology. For example, in dealing with the plural of Genesis 1 : 26, "Let us make man," he comments, "Though we cannot say that we have here clear teaching about the Trinity, we do learn that God exists as a 'plurality.' What is here hinted at is further developed in the New Testament into the

doctrine of the Trinity" (p. 12). His preference for the translation "little less than God" in Psalm 8 : 5 is also noteworthy.

In his historical review, Hoekema considers the views of Thomas Aquinas, John Calvin, Karl Barth, Emil Brunner and G. C. Berkouwer. For pastors and students in divinity, this is a useful section, but in what is generally a popular presentation it is of necessity more academic.

With reference to the *imago Dei*, Hoekema's own position is largely found in his theological summary (chp. 5). Here he defines the image of God in terms of its structural and functional aspects, shows that Christ is the true image of God (Col. 1 : 15) and discusses man in his threefold relationship — to God, to his fellows and to nature. This same chapter also includes a discussion of the Image before the Fall, after the Fall and as renewed by grace and finally perfected. There is much excellent material in this section and it is marked by a richly devotional spirit.

Hoekema devotes a chapter to 'the question of the self-image' or how the Christian should see himself. Those who have read his *The Christian looks at Himself* will know that this is one of the author's favourite topics! He insists on a positive self-image. The Christian is not partly 'old man' and partly 'new man'. "The Christian," he says, "should look upon himself or herself as someone who in the strength of the Spirit has decisively taken off the old self and just as decisively put on the new self — which new self, however, is still being progressively renewed" (p. 108). Hoekema is unhappy about the way many Christians keep their continuing sinfulness and inadequacy "in the centre of their field of vision" (p. 107). This results in a negative self-image. He is quite right in this contention. However he would doubtless agree that we must never forget our constant need of God's mercy (Psl. 23 : 6a), for as the Scottish Covenanter, Samuel Rutherford, put it neatly, "The more sense of sin the less sin" (Letter 106).

There follows a ninety-page study of sin — its origin, spread, nature and restraint. In this section (chapters 7 - 10), the author defends the orthodox position regarding Adam as an historical person and the historicity of Genesis 3. He acknowledges "the riddle of sin," the fact that the human mind is incapable of accounting for the origin of sin in a sinless universe. Hoekema then grapples with the difficult question of the transmission of sin from Adam to his descendants, and chooses a combination of two theories — that of *direct imputation* (which sees Adam not only as

our physical head, but also as our federal head and representative) and that of *realism* (which sees one generic human nature in Adam, so that when he sinned, all human nature sinned). While he sees some difficulties in both positions, his final judgment is that they do greater justice to the Biblical data than other views — e.g., those of Pelagius.

Dealing with the restraints of sin, Dr. Hoekema defends a moderate statement of common grace, conscious as he does so of the controversy in his own denomination, the Christian Reformed Church, in 1924, when this doctrine was denied by Herman Hoeksema and Henry Danhof. Hoekema has no difficulty in proving from Scripture that God in His mercy restrains sin, but the use of the controversial passage, 2 Thessalonians 2 : 6, 7, does little for his argument, except in the most indirect way.

In the last two chapters the author discusses such issues as trichotomy and dichotomy (making a convincing case for the latter), psychosomatic unity, the intermediate state and the question of human freedom. In all these areas he strikes a clear Biblical and Reformed note.

By way of constructive criticism — and it is always easier to criticize a book than to write one! — we note several 'loose ends' or apparent (if not real) contradictions. We are told that "man's having been created male and female" (Gen. 1 : 27) is an "aspect" of the image of God (p. 14) and later this is termed "the very heart of the image of God" (p. 97). "Man," we read, "is not the image of God by himself,... woman cannot be the image of God by herself. Man and woman can only image God through fellowship with each other..." (p. 97). On the next page we are exhorted to "look upon every person whoever he or she may be... whether Christian or non-Christian as a person who is in the image of God"! It is stated that "man can only be fully human in fellowship and partnership with woman; woman complements and completes man, as man complements and completes woman" (p. 97). Earlier we read that we must not think that "only a married person can experience what it means to be fully human... Jesus himself, the ideal man, was never married" (p. 77).

With reference to the structural and functional aspects of the Image, it is stated that "one cannot function without a certain structure" (p. 69). The illustration of an eagle in flight is used. It could not fly unless it had wings — "one of its structures." So, it is said, we cannot worship God, love our neighbours etc., unless we

have been "endowed by God with the structural capacities" to enable us to do so. Later we read that the "structure" of man is to be seen as "secondary" and his "functioning" as "primary"! (p. 73).

Dr. Hoekema is unhappy about the term "covenant of works," seeing the word "covenant' used in Scripture always in the context of redemption, with the possible exception of Hosea 6 : 7 (where 'men' can be translated 'Adam.'). However he does accept the probationary theory which has come to be associated with the concept of such a covenant (p. 121). While he refers to Herman Hoeksema at this point, he does not interact with Hoeksema's arguments. Hoeksema and some others see a covenant bond of loving loyalty within the Godhead and man standing in a covenant relationship to God from the moment of his creation. The point was made by Louis Berkhof when he wrote, "The archetype of all covenant life is found in the trinitarian being of God, and what is seen among men is but a faint copy (ectype) of this" (*Systematics,* p. 263, 1946 ed.). Berkhof rightly sees "the covenant relationship between God and man" existing "from the very beginning..."

In all his major statements, with one exception, Dr. Hoekema is careful to produce unassailable evidence. The exception is his exposition of the probationary theory — that had man not sinned, God would have rewarded him by advancing him to a higher stage of existence in which his sinlessness would have been unlosable, a position virtually the same as that which we now have in Christ. This position is taken to its logical conclusion by Dr. Charles Hodge in his exposition of 1 Corinthians 15 : 45. Hoekema can state that our first parents, when created, "were not yet fully developed image-bearers of God..." (p. 82). Yet in Genesis 1 : 27 we read, "God created man in his (own) image..." It is significant that not one passage of Scripture is cited in support of the probationary theory. In the opinion of this reviewer, no such passage exists. Genesis 2 : 16, 17 is termed a "probationary command," (p. 83); but there is nothing about probation in these verses. When the Westminster Larger and Shorter Catechisms speak about a "covenant of life," a much happier term is used. Man enjoyed life while he remained loyal to his Creator-King. There is nothing in Scripture, however, to suggest that if Adam had remained obedient for ten thousand years, his status of covenant life in Eden would have been altered in any way. For some considerable time, Reformed theologians have tended to follow each other, domino fashion, in propounding the probationary theory. Thus they have, at this point,

overlooked the fact that the God who created man decreed that he should fall and that in Christ a new humanity would enjoy a state of security and glory unknown to man before the Fall. It should be borne in mind that there is no place for speculation in a discipline which is totally dependent upon what is revealed in Holy Scripture.

In discussing man as originally created, Dr. Hoekema does not consider the dimension of the Kingdom as S. G. de Graaf does so well in *Promise and Deliverance,* Vol. 1. In his treatment of the *imago Dei,* it would have helped if there had been a brief consideration of the "communicable attributes" of God. This would have served to sharpen his definition of what is central in the Image, which he sees as "love for God and love for man" (p. 22). His stance here, which seems less than satisfactory, is consistent with the position which prefers an 'analogy of love' to an 'analogy of being', the latter being regarded as scholastic and static. This reviewer would not concede that the analogy of being, which relates to certain divine attributes, is static. Besides, such a definition should indicate what man *is* and not merely what he *does:* without structure there can be no function.

In this readable work all Hebrew and Greek words have been transliterated and all technical terms defined. There is an extensive bibliography as well as indexes of subjects, names and Scripture references. Hoekema's style is very much that of the class room. He often writes in the first person singular, changing repeatedly to the first person plural. In such a text-book, there is much to be said for the consistent use of the first person plural or the impersonal. These criticisms aside, there is a wealth of useful material in this book which must be regarded as a timely contribution to a discussion of cardinal importance. This title should be included in any list of recommended reading for students.

Fred. S. Leahy

Pressing Towards The Mark, Essays Commemorating Fifty Years of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Edited by Charles G. Dennison and Richard C. Gamble.
Published by the Committee for the Historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Box 48, Coraopolis, Pennsylvania 15108. 489 pp. £19.95.

The editors describe this book as an offering of thanksgiving to God for the Orthodox Presbyterian Church on her fiftieth birthday (1986). The book consists of a collection of thirty essays by a variety of contributors, not all of whom are members of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. The editors have endeavoured to draw on a wide spectrum of gifts and they acknowledge that contributors include "lay persons, ruling elders, scholars, missionaries and pastors who belong to a variety of Presbyterian and Reformed Churches."

The book is in five parts dealing with: The Foundations of Historic Presbyterianism, The American Presbyterian Experience, Perspectives on the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and The Mission of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. The fifth part is a Bibliography of the writings of J. Gresham Machen.

We can of necessity consider only selected aspects of the overall work.

In Part 1 there is a helpful essay on 'Presbyterianism and the Ancient Church' written by Richard C. Gamble, Associate Professor of Church History at Westminster Theological Seminary. Professor Gamble deals with the widely accepted view that 'monarchical episcopacy' provides a foundation for a continuous heritage in the development of Church government. Having considered briefly the rise of the Papacy, the author then looks at the question 'How was the Early Church governed?' His contention is that the government of the early Church, following the pattern of the New Testament, was truly Presbyterian. This thesis is supported by quotations from the Church Fathers: Clement of Rome, Polycarp, Cyprian and Ambrose. The writings of Ignatius and the particular problems which they present are considered. The author accepts the epistles of Ignatius as genuine and acknowledges that they support three different offices of ministry. This, he says, 'could be interpreted as a first step towards monarchical episcopacy'. Such a conclusion however is not inevitable, and is dismissed by the author on the grounds that there is no evidence that monarchical episcopacy was

present anywhere else in the Church at that time. The letters of Ignatius then, may merely indicate the 'beginning of a new system developing in a limited area'.

This is a subject in which the evidence itself is controversial. We are nevertheless encouraged by his conclusion that 'the early Church attempted to remain true to the Scriptures and, because she did, she governed herself in a Presbyterian manner.'

Part II contains seven illuminating essays on 'The American Presbyterian Experience'. The opening essay entitled 'Transition to the New World' is written by Samuel T. Logan, Professor of Church History at Westminster Theological Seminary.

Charles Hodge admitted that 'the early history of the Presbyterian Church in the United States is involved in great obscurity.' Samuel Logan deals with the two elements which he identifies as of paramount importance in the growth of the Presbyterian Church in North America i.e. the Puritan settlements of New England and the settlement of 'Scotch-Irish Presbyterians' in the middle colonies during the mid seventeenth century.

The Puritans, influenced by one of their leaders John Winthrop, 'from the very beginning thought in corporate terms.' The author concludes that 'this made them Presbyterian even if they did not realize it themselves.' It is not strange, then, to find that when considerable numbers of Puritans left New England (following the annulment of their Charter in 1684) and migrated to the middle colonies, they were particularly amenable to the Presbyterianism which they found there. The first Presbytery was set up in 1706 and contained both elements. It was a marriage which built on the strengths of both partners. The 'Scotch Irish' brought a rigorous commitment to doctrinal orthodoxy, while the New Englanders brought a particularly strong emphasis on experimental religion. The author concludes that 'these perspectives represent the best of American Presbyteriansim as it arises out of the distinct strands that produced it.'

Part IV deals with The Mission of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

In the opening chapter on 'Current Issues in Mission' Laurence Vail considers four questions on mission work which are faced by all Reformed Churches — Proclamation or Dialogue? Salvation or Liberation? Mission or Missions? and Church or Parachurch?

John P. Galbraith deals with 'The Ecumenical Vision of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church'. He asserts that, from the very

beginning, the Church has maintained a clear ecumenical vision. This has been manifested in several practical ways and has led the Church to give serious thought to union with other branches of Christ's Church. Inter-Church relations is a question of great importance and a constant matter of concern for Reformed Churches world-wide. All will identify with Mr. Galbraith's observation that 'our ecumenical vision has required us to seek a balance between two paths of duty: to endeavour to effect the unity of the true body of Christ, and to do so without compromising the Biblical system of truth which we believe is the faith that we confess.'

The penultimate essay in the book, 'Church and Harvest', is a warm exhortation by James D. Phillips, an elder of the church of Florida. This provides a timely challenge and a strong encouragement to all those who are engaged in proclaiming the Gospel of God's grace. He asserts, 'We have almost all the tools a good harvester needs. We have a knowledge of the Scripture and an awareness of God's primary role in salvation. Often lacking seems to be a basic expectation that God will use *us* as the final link in the chain of events that lead to a person's salvation.'

This book of almost 500 pages is attractively bound and has a pleasant format. It has the limitation of any collection of essays, being somewhat disjointed. A few of the contributors have assumed too much background knowledge on the part of readers. Although details of the history and growth of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church can be learned from the volume, a brief introductory chapter on that history would have been helpful. The book provides us with rich insights into the history and practice of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, and therefore increases our knowledge of those who are brethren in Christ and whom we are to know and love in the Lord.

There is also much in this volume to encourage and challenge those who adhere to the same confessional standards as the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. With our brethren we acknowledge the authority and sufficiency of the Word of God as our only guide in faith and practice. We join in their thanksgiving that 'the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, like the Church of Christ as a whole, in working out her salvation with fear and trembling, gives glory to Him who is at work in her to will and to do of His good pleasure'.

C. Knox Hyndman

The Christ of the Covenants, O. Palmer Robertson. Baker Book House, 1980. Pb. 300 pp. £5.50.

In these days when the question of the role of the covenants in Scripture holds a prominent, if controversial, place in critical Biblical scholarship, it is a joy to recommend this conservative study which stands in the Reformed tradition of covenant theology, builds on the Biblical-theological approach of Geerhardus Vos and incorporates fresh insights, while interacting with this critical scholarship. For Robertson, no period in the history of redemption stands outside the realm of God's covenantal dealings with His people: indeed they determine Biblical history.

From his discussion of the Scriptural data, he defines a covenant as "a bond in blood (i.e., a life and death bond, a pledge to death) sovereignly administered." He goes on ably to demonstrate that the series of covenants established by God displays both a structural and thematic unity at the heart of which is Christ, since each shadowy administration is fulfilled in Him, the personal embodiment of the new covenant reality. However, while the covenants relate organically to and expand on each other, there is a diversity of covenant administration that progressively emerges. This leads the author to a very interesting and positive discussion of traditional Reformed terminology. He opts for the distinction 'covenant of creation' versus 'covenant of Redemption,' instead of 'covenant of works' versus 'covenant of grace'.

In this discussion of the covenant of creation, Robertson stresses that while it has a focal aspect in the probation-test, it also has a broader aspect relating to the wide range of man's responsibilities to his Creator. It was a total life involvement making man aware of his obligations to the totality of God's creation. This reminds us that redemption affects the total life-style of man and not just his 'soul'. There follows a valuable discussion of the three creation ordinances of the Sabbath, marriage and work.

The ultimate purpose of the covenant of creation, however, finds realization in the covenant of redemption, which takes up the main body of the work. Under each of the six administrations he not only discusses the texts in question, but also provides very valuable insights into traditional questions of Old Testament theology and ethics into which they lead (e.g., man-woman relationships, Israel's 'curse', warfare and imprecatory Psalms, capital punishment, the spiritual import of circumcision, the function of the Law etc.) His

discussion of the Mosaic and Davidic administrations is especially valuable in the light of the attempt by modern critics to drive a wedge between them in terms of conditionality versus unconditionality.

The book comes to its climax in its discussion of the new covenant spoken of by Jeremiah and Ezekiel, which brings to realization the strands of covenant promise. In a valuable excursus (which might have come more profitably at the end of the discussion of the covenant of redemption, rather than the middle), Robertson offers a basic critique of Dispensationalism and the problems it has led to in much American fundamentalist thinking.

This book is to be commended for the way it builds on careful, scholarly exegesis; for its trenchant interaction not just with the critical school, but with progressive Reformed thinkers like Kline, and for its Biblical-theological breadth that ties together the whole range of Scripture while illuminating its parts. While the style of writing tends to be a little woodenly academic, if not prolix, and rather lacks the popular touch which might warmly engage the average reader, it remains a convincing demonstration that the covenant concept is the organizing principle of Scripture and of human history itself. Indeed this book could well become a Reformed text-book of Old Testament theology! The definition and organizational neatness of its terminology is attractive. At the very least it should serve as a starting point to anchor discussion of an absolutely crucial subject. As it takes us back to our very roots to stimulate, instruct and encourage, it also demonstrates how a covenantal understanding of the Scriptures could put real beef and bones into much of modern evangelicalism!

Norris Wilson

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