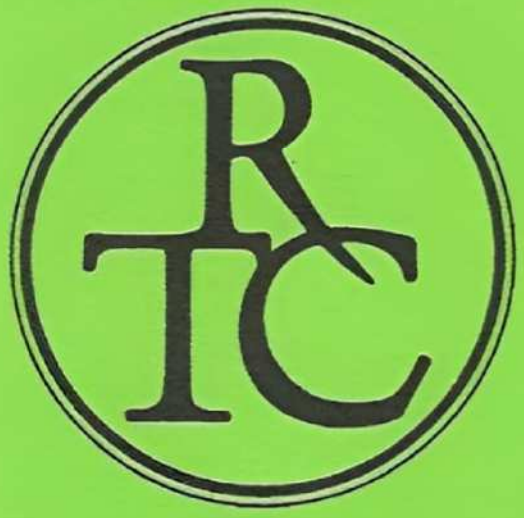

NOVEMBER 1995

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

Vol. 11 **NOVEMBER 1995**

REFORMED THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL

Editorial Policy:
Contributors enjoy reasonable liberty in the exposition of the Reformed Faith.

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:
£3.50 plus postage U.K. 65 pence. U.S. $9.00 post paid. In common with most periodicals, subscriptions run until cancelled.

ISSN 0268 - 4772

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CREEPING RATIONALISM

"Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty to perfection?" The question of Zophar the Naamathite is as pertinent as ever. Isaiah gives the answer: "There is no searching of his understanding" (Job 11:7; Isa. 40:28b). The distance between God and the creature is infinite. Alec Motyer puts it so well, "His ways belong to eternity, we to time; his vision is for the world, we are local; his ceaselessness keeps him always ahead of the point we have reached." In short, we cannot fathom his understanding or comprehend his ways.

This truth is often forgotten, even in Reformed circles, as attempts are made to bridge the gap between revealed truths and our reason, to remove the paradox and explain everything rationally. Yet the paradox remains - God's sovereignty and man's responsibility; God's goodness to all, even blessing and prospering the unregenerate in accordance with his purpose (Gen. 39:5; Isa. 44:28), and his wrath resting on all unbelievers; the universal and sincere Gospel call and the fact of reprobation. To our finite minds these are like parallel lines that never meet. To seek to make them meet inevitably results in serious distortion of the truth. It is not for us to rationalise them, but to believe and proclaim them.

Loving the Lord with all one's mind should not lead to mere scholasticism. An intelligent faith is not to be equated with intellectualism, the enthronement of human reason. When mind and heart bow in worship before the glory and majesty of God, pride of intellect is laid low. Only then can the believer say, when confronted by the inscrutable ways of God, "Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight."

We must seek to avoid the insidious tendency to creeping rationalism. This is particularly the case in evangelism. Our duty here relates not to the divine decree, but to the great commission (Mt. 28:19, 20). The divine decree is God's business; the responsibility to urge all without exception to repent and to seek the Lord is ours. The Psalmist could say, "Neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me"(131:1). That spirit of humility and submission should pervade all our study of God's truth.

F.S.L.

JAMES DENNEY: SERMON NOTES ON 'HEBREWS'

By Edward Donnelly

Edward Donnelly is Professor of New Testament Language and Literature in the Reformed Theological College, Belfast.

Shortly after my appointment, in 1979, to the chair of New Testament in the Reformed Theological College, I received a gift of several books from one of my teachers of theology. Rev W J Gilmour had recently retired after almost 30 years in the pastorate of the Cullybackey congregation and was taking steps, doubtless at the frantic urging of Mrs Gilmour, to reduce his legendary personal library, certainly one of the most comprehensive in Ireland. More than that, the gift was an entirely typical act of kindness from a lecturer whom his students not only respected but loved.

Like any minister worthy of the name, I fell upon these volumes with great delight and have ever since derived from them much profit. To my shame, however, there was a nondescript packet of papers which I neglected to examine. It lay on a bookshelf undisturbed until a few months ago, when I came across it and decided to investigate the contents. On one reused brown envelope Mr Gilmour had written the following two lines which made me feel like Keats' 'watcher of the skies, when a new planet swims into his ken': 'Mss. Notes on "Hebrews" by Rev. James Denney, D.D. (Given to me by Rev. A.C.Gregg, B.D. during my ministry in Scotland)'.

James Denney (1856-1917) was an eminent Scottish theologian, who served in the chairs of Systematic Theology and, from 1900, New Testament studies in the United Free Church College, Glasgow. Works such as *The Death of Christ*, *Studies in Theology*, *The Atonement and The Modern Mind* and the *Christian Doctrine of Reconciliation*, together with commentaries on Romans, Thessalonians and Second Corinthians, have secured for him considerable, though not uncritical, evangelical esteem. A book of sermons, *The Way Everlasting*, was published in 1911 and proved very popular. The discovery of a series of, as far as I am aware, previously unknown sermon notes on 'Hebrews' is an event of some significance.

There are twelve sermons, on Hebrews 2:9; 2:11-13; 4:1-13; 4:14-5:10; 5:2; 6:12; 7:24,25; chapter 8; 8:6; 11:6; 11:16; 13:8. The notes, in Denney's neat and legible hand, vary from fairly full manuscripts to outline sketches. Several have an order of service written on the back page. The only indication of date which I have been able to discover is a note on the back of the third sermon - 'Charles Alex. Rutherford Frazer: born 1st June, 1894. Sunday morning, 4th August'. This seems to be the record of the baptism of a covenant child, which would mean that the series was preached in the East Church, Broughty Ferry, where Denney served as pastor from 1886 until 1897. The sermons would thus follow his work on Thessalonians and Second Corinthians, yet antedate his major theological work, with the memorable *Studies in Theology* appearing in 1895, the following year.

By what route did these papers reach Northern Ireland? We can, at best, conjecture, but with perhaps a reasonable degree of plausibility. Before coming to Cullybackey in County Antrim, W J Gilmour served two pastorates in the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland, from 1932 until 1946. He tells us that the sermons were given to him by Rev A C Gregg, a senior minister of that denomination. Mr Gregg had been a close friend of another Covenanting pastor, J P Struthers of Greenock. It was he, indeed, who was asked by Mrs Struthers to write the biographical note on her deceased husband for the final edition of 'The Morning Watch', a unique literary and spiritual gem of a magazine which Struthers had edited for many years.

We are now coming very close to James Denney, another contributor to the above memorial volume. Himself born into the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Denney knew Struthers well, describing him as the only man of genius he was ever intimately acquainted with. The two men shared an intense, stimulating and lifelong friendship. It is at least a fascinating possibility that these sermon notes came from Denney to Struthers to Gregg.

The constraints of space in this edition of the Journal prevent us from publishing more than the first three sermons. It is hoped that the complete series, together with a brief assessment, will be made available soon in a separate volume. Editorial changes have been kept to a minimum. Occasional phrases have been added in order to supply lacunae, minor changes made in word order, Greek words translated. What follows, therefore, is what the thirty-eight year old minister took with him into the pulpit at Broughty Ferry.

But now it is time to let him preach to us.

Sermon 1

Hebrews 2:9: 'But now we see not yet all things put under him. But we see Jesus... crowned with glory and honour'.

The subject of this passage is the destiny of man. It goes back to Psalm 8 and to Genesis 1. The scientific study of man has concerned itself with his beginnings. To God, the end is present in the beginning, and is presented to man from the beginning. Theologians have tried to describe his original state, scientific men to reconstruct it; the really important thing is not the original state of man, but his calling and destiny. God said to him, Have dominion - he put all things under his feet - he crowned him with glory and honour - made him king of the world.

This sovereignty is part of the divine image. Other creatures are, so to speak, parts of nature - man is more, in destiny. He is not only in the world, but over it - not only its crown, but its King. He is not to be lost in it, but to stand above it, and rule over it. It is not to subdue him, he is to master and to use it.

Familiar as we are with the idea of the conquest of nature, it is one of the boasts of many in modern times that man has done wonderfully in fulfilling his destiny.

1. *In a merely natural sense, this has its truth.* Man as a species of animal has prevailed over others. This is seen in his geographical distribution - whatever the primeval home, no species has spread like man. He has replenished the earth and subdued it. He has taken it as his inheritance - he has extirpated many animals, domesticated some, protected himself against all. From the purely physical point of view, it is not the lion, but man, that is king of beasts.

2. *In a scientific sense - the naturalist's meaning does not carry us far - not force, but intelligence is the sceptre of man's authority, the title and the instrument of his sovereignty.* Man studies nature, gets his knowledge of its laws, uses them for his own purposes. His science becomes applied science. The world is under his feet, its resources at his service.

The heavens are a timepiece, a chart. His knowledge of suns and stars directs the course of his ships. The mightiest forces, steam and electricity,

do his bidding, run his errands. It might almost be said of him, as of God, 'He maketh his messengers winds, his ministers a flame of fire'. When the Lord answers Job out of the whirlwind, and confounds his pride, one of his questions is, 'Canst thou send lightnings, that they may go, and say unto thee, Here we are?' Job had no answer, but now there are men who might say, Yes, we do it every day and every hour. The lightning is under our feet. We can produce it, store it, and use it as we please.

True, even thus, we see not yet all things put under man. We are encompassed by necessity. We cannot control the weather, though the barometer helps us to anticipate it. We cannot counteract that dissipation of energy which is reducing and equalising the temperature of the globe, and must end in stagnation and immobility. We cannot be sure of our real sovereignty, even when our apparent sovereignty is most unquestionable. How many men are slaves to steam and electricity, compelled by them to live at a pace to which neither bodily nor mental strength is equal, to run a losing race till they fall down dead. No: we see not yet all things put under him.

And what of death?

3. *In a spiritual sense, man's true life is a life toward God.* Are all things under his feet here? Is man sovereign and free, so that he can use all things for the furtherance and help of his soul? An apostle in a moment of enthusiasm can cry 'All things are yours - the world, or life, or death': but is it so of man in general?

Look round - 'We see not yet'. Only on Thursday we had a great meeting in Dundee on Licensing Reform. Is strong drink one of the things man has under his feet? We see it not yet. Instead we see many who are under its feet, helpless victims, where they should be kings. Drink is only one of the powers which man has not subdued. Gold is another. Who can say that he has put money under his feet - that he possesses it, and is not possessed by it - uses it freely, easily, generously, as a power all in his control?

But these are things, drink and gold, and we may be easily superior to them, while far from the sovereignty for which man was destined. Everyone knows what it is to be thwarted, checked, disappointed, defeated. The chances of life go against us. Our freedom is practically taken away. We

are compelled to accept situations in which we think our souls cannot thrive, and thrive, accordingly, they do not. Circumstances, as we say, are too much for us. It is absurd to say that all things are under our feet. Things have got us under their feet, and we are doomed to lie there. We once had the dream of sovereignty, of spiritual freedom and lordship, of all things working together for our good; but either God's promises have been illusory, or we have read them in a wrong sense. We see not yet what once our hearts were set on.

This is a mournful line of reflection, but it is prompted by the Bible, and I think sustained by experience. Man, however it be, has not visibly fulfilled his destiny. The crown of universal dominion, his part in the divine sovereignty, held out to him at creation, is not yet on his head - at least, we see it not. How then are we to believe in the divine promise at all? How are we to believe it will ever be fulfilled? How are we, with all the disasters of humanity, all its defeats, all its shame and degradation and slavery before our eyes, to hope still to see all things under man's feet?

The answer is given in the positive part of the text - 'We see Jesus'. Jesus is considered in this place as the Son of Man, in whom man's destiny has been fulfilled. When we look abroad in the world, we do indeed see signs of sovereignty, but chequered, darkened, sometimes overwhelmed by signs of defeat. In Jesus alone do we see a sovereignty over all things which no check has impaired. He has all things under him.

'We see Jesus' - is this true? It is true, certainly, that he is visible. People talk about the uncertainty of the gospel narratives, but that is a mere phrase. It is easier to see Jesus than to see any other person who ever lived. Of all who have ever worn our human nature, he is the best known. We know his character better than we know the character of Caesar or Napoleon; of Plato or Shakespeare; of Newton or Darwin, or any of the world's greatest men. We know him better than we know the person sitting beside us, for we all have something to hide, and he had nothing. Perhaps we know him better than ourselves. 'We see Jesus': and in him, what do we see? We see man supreme over all things, in all circumstances sovereign, under no circumstances slave or victim.

This requires to be expanded, and shown in detail.

I. The Life of Jesus on Earth

1. Nature is under his feet. He uses it in his parables to teach, he controls it in his miracles to bless. It is full of lessons from God, full of resources which he controls. The poet, the artist, the man of science who discovers nature's laws, the practical man who applies them, are all at work on his line. He never worshipped nature, nor was enslaved by its beauty. He did not minister to it, but it to him. It helped him often, its solitude, its beauty - a strength for our souls here we too little use.

2. Circumstances are under his feet. He never complains of want of opportunity, nor is cabined, cribbed, confined. He is poor, low in station, with no pedestal, no ground of vantage for his work - yet he is always royal. Nazareth, Capernaum, the Galilean lake and its shores, the synagogue and the Temple: he is the same everywhere. All circumstances suit him, for he can master and use all.

3. The flesh is under his feet. Our nature enslaves us. The body rules the spirit - its sloth, its appetites, its fear of pain. In him, the body was the spirit's instrument. It was absolutely at his command. He compelled it to toil, to hunger, to suffer, to die in the exercise of his sovereignty over it. With us, the body is often the great hindrance - with him, it was the great instrument - 'a body hast thou prepared me'. He offered that body to God with every breath he drew, and at last on the Cross once for all. All that hindered others was so accepted and used as to help him. His sufferings only made him perfect in sympathy; his death, freely accepted, put away sin and won for him the devotion of all believers.

II. The Exaltation of Jesus in Heaven

'We see Jesus' at the right hand of God - having all power in heaven and on earth - above nature, above temptation, above sin, or pain, or shame, in glory everlasting. It illustrates the last element in his sovereignty: death is under his feet.

The reason why our hearts fail: we do NOT see Jesus.

Not as he lived, and then the life of sovereignty seems impossible. Keep the picture of his life in mind, or dominion over all things will seem a phrase

without meaning. It does not imply wealth, or knowledge, or power; it implies the mind that was in him.

Not as he lives, and then, though we see the Jesus of the gospels, it is only to provoke despair. He lives, who has done what we are to do. He can help us from his throne, when necessity comes upon us that we would never have chosen, when we are tempted, when we have to renounce things, to suffer, to forgo pleasures, to crucify the flesh. He can help us to reign in him over nature, over circumstances, over our own flesh and blood, over sin, death, fear, hell. He helps by strengthening in us, through his own Spirit, his own spiritual and sovereign life. He gives us a part in his own victory and kingdom.

Do not despair of mankind or of yourself. Look at our Leader, our Forerunner, our Representative: that is what man is destined to be - that is what our Lord will make all who commit themselves to him.

Sermon 2

Hebrews 2:11-13

There is a great difference between Christ and us - 'sanctifier' and 'sanctified'. Further expressions of it are Redeemer and redeemed, good shepherd and lost sheep, great physician and sick soul. In virtue of this, we worship him as Lord of all, our Lord and Saviour. (The uses of this difference).

The identities are also important and the writer is conscious of them. He knows them as a brother and only illustrates them from the Old Testament. Objections to the quotations are inept. The words used by a New Testament writer become New Testament words ipso facto - they are applied to Christ because they are true of him.

Christ is not ashamed to call us brethren - 'Your Father in heaven', 'my Father in heaven' - 'one of the least of these' - 'Go and tell my brethren' - 'the same is my brother' - 'the first born among many brethren'. The proof is given in three respects:

I. Christ is our Fellow-Worshipper

'I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee'. To declare God's name is his vocation - here it means, to do so out of his experience. He knew God's fatherly love and leads the Church's praise.

Every meeting should be a testimony meeting. Jesus set the example. The things he said about God were the things he found true in his human life. He proved the love of the Father and thankfully acknowledged it. The hairs of our head, the sparrows, etc - how insistently he proclaimed the Fatherhood of God. The thanksgiving before the Supper - Jesus uttering this in the presence of the twelve. The hymn afterwards - the great Psalm of praise - identification of himself with the pious Israelites, with all past generations, with all who should ever make mention of God's mercies with praise, confessing him as God of salvation.

Christ demands confession. He only asks what he gave. Criticisms on worship, on the kind of men who worshipped. Christ joined his voice with that of common men, weak and sinful all, some probably deeply bad. One pure strain of holy praise. Include this in the imitatio Christi.

II. Christ is our Fellow-Believer

'I will put my trust in him' - the very words are found three times in the Old Testament (Isaiah 8:17, 2 Samuel 22:3, Isaiah 12:2). This emphasises the commonness of the experience, but in Isaiah 8:17 the context is striking - 'I will wait upon the Lord that hideth his face... and I will look for him'.

He knew the Father, but in our life in the world this is not all. There are times and seasons the Father keeps in his own power and the children are in suspense. The trial of Jesus' faith in waiting - at twelve his knowledge of God was remarkable - hidden in Nazareth till thirty - no opening, no sphere - conscious of being uniquely related to God, uniquely gifted, wise above man's wisdom, but no summons, no path divinely prepared. HE in the carpenter's shop! Doing what? Waiting for God.

Faith is needed to come through this rightly. Men soon get impatient, grasp at anything hastily, fret and perhaps accuse God - no opening comes.

Or they are baffled, disappointed, full of sorrow. Consider Christ again here - when his time came, how short it was: brief and vain its promise - his sun went down while it was yet noon - the cross at 33. Yet the impression made on his enemies - 'he trusted in God'. His very last prayer - 'Father into thy hands', etc. The Finisher of our faith.

He was not disappointed. His work was done, his reward was sure. Do not be too exacting to trust God and wait like him - strenuous, diligent. He has plans, and our part includes looking for him. Learn of Jesus.

III. Christ shares our natural affection

'I and the children'. Explain Isaiah. Jesus was like us in not loving to be alone. Who are his children? 'The travail of his soul', those whom he has brought to glory. He rejoices in appearing before God with them. 'The ones whom thou gavest me'.

A direct word to parents: ministers: all interested in bringing to God those to whom they are attached by natural affection. Christ sympathises with this and will further help those who give their hearts to it. 'Here am I' is the word of a willing servant of God; 'Behold I and the children' the word of the willing servant who has entered into the spirit and the joy of his Lord.

Sermon 3

Hebrews 4:1-13: The Rest of God

A perplexed passage - the rest of God is that into which God entered after the creation of the world - that into which he called Israel at the Exodus. Canaan was a stage of it, where they were to abide with him and he with them. This was forfeited by disobedience, yet God's purpose was not forfeited nor frustrated, for, long after, the promise was renewed - 'Today, if ye shall hear his voice'. That 'today' means now, in the Christian era. The promise has been renewed through Christ, who is elsewhere called 'he that speaketh'. The rest is the Christian salvation, and all that it contains, especially in the future. The Word of God is that which calls us to this, and it has a great critical power. All God's own power is in it. Nothing searches men, analyses them, shows them as they are, like the call to salvation. Their

very soul comes out in the way they respond to it - 'let us fear, therefore' etc.

I. God is calling us to his Rest

God is not weary with his work, has not ceased from his work, yet has a satisfaction, a repose in his work, as all very good. This would mean God is calling us in his Son to a blessedness which consists in seeing our life's work well done.

Rest implies work - we only can rest after labour. Not to labour is no rest, but the most tiresome of tasks. Work deserves rest and finds in it its reward. The idea is involved that God knows what our life is, and values its toils and pains and efforts. 'Who can estimate the fruit of any life?' - the years through which duty has been patiently done, temptation bravely faced, discouragements beaten down, high purposes, if not already achieved, yet never renounced? All these are seen, counted, appreciated by God, and he holds out the promise of a rest.

II. This means not a cessation from labour as a vain and exhausting thing, but an enjoyment of it as a fruitful thing

Often it seems vain - ends in nothing - labour thrown away. The labour of God's people is not vain any more than God's own work in creating the world. Our work is really part of his, and if it is what he requires, we will get the good of it some day. 'They rest from their labours, and their works do follow them'. All they have done is gathered up and is there to meet them - nothing is lost. God is infinitely careful: not even the cup of cold water is overlooked.

The rest of God in this sense accompanies work too. At every stage in creation, God saw that it was good. The world was not finished, nor perfect, but God viewed it with approval, for what it was and what it promised. There was an anticipation of the Sabbath rest when all was finished. And to this rest, by the way, especially, he calls us in His Son - 'Take my yoke upon you and learn of me.. and ye shall find rest for your souls'. Underneath the toil, a present compensation, a present relief and repose is found, in fellowship with Jesus. His rest was consistent with labour - 'My Father worketh hitherto, and I work' - labour unceasing, exhausting, sometimes discouraging, but this under all. O rest in the the Lord. It is a privilege to

do this, believing in his fatherly love.

But especially it lies beyond. What the promised land above can be, eye hath not seen, etc., but it is a place where there is a glad and holy rest, in which God and men together enjoy a Sabbatic repose. Canaan is only a figure of it, so is our church, so is our Sabbath. The reality goes beyond any words to express it but 'rest'.

III. Entering into his Rest depends on Faith

It is lost by disobedience. This explains the relation of these two words. Israel foreited Canaan by refusing to obey God when he spoke by Moses. We may forfeit the heavenly rest by refusing to hear him when he speaks by Christ.

The moral earnestness of the New Testament sometimes strikes us, and then we are astonished. 'Let us fear' - it is a thing to be dreaded. There is so great a thing within our reach by the gospel - 'a heavenly calling'. Who can help remembering the Israelites at Kadesh? - feet on the borders of Canaan - God had given it - 'we are well able' - the alarm about the giants - the fenced cities, etc.. God swore in his wrath: 'Not they!' A real analogy - the rest is given, yet it has to be won. Who is able to follow the Lamb into that rest?

This is the meaning of verses 12ff. The Word of God is like a call for volunteers. It shows men's hearts - those that are intent on by-ends, those that are undivided, those ready to go wherever the Captain of Salvation leads, those who in spite of appearances are cowardly. Every situation, every voice tries men - but the gospel, with all God's promises in it, is their decisive trial. If there is love at the bottom of them, courage, patience, obedience, it will be shown. If there is cowardice, indecision, instability, wilfulness, it will be shown also.

The promise of entrance into the rest of God really judges and exposes men. Some count all things loss to gain this: some throw this lightly away to gain anything else.

'Let us fear'

'Let us labour'

THE PROMINENCE OF THE PSALMS IN THE EARLY IRISH CHURCH

by Raymond Blair

Raymond Blair is a minister of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland. He is working with the church's "Covenant Fellowship" in Galway.

The aim of this short survey of liturgical patterns within the early Irish Church (c.400 - 800 A.D.) is to highlight the prominence of the psalms during this early stage of the development of Christianity in Ireland. Arising from this, some lessons for the worship practices of modern Irish evangelicalism will then be mentioned. However, it is first of all necessary to place the development of Christian worship in Ireland within the broader context of the Western Church as a whole.

The universal prominence of the Psalms in the Western Church

In fact, the evidence for exclusive Psalm singing in the early post-apostolic church is very strong. One historian has concluded that, those who contend for the exclusive use of the Scripture Psalter in the direct and formal praise of God find in the history of the early church signal confirmation of their position.[1]

A more recent authority, who does not favour the exclusive singing of the Psalms, rather relunctantly accepts that,

> In the Western Church, the hymn was slower in winning its way because of the prejudice against non-Scriptural praise, and not until nearly the end of the 4th century was hymn singing beginning to be practised in the churches.[2]

Although the evidence is complex and arguments continue to rage on this issue, Rowland Ward sums up the matter well when he concludes,

> Whatever the private devotional practices of the early Christians, the singing of the Psalter and a few additional Bible passages is characteristic of the ordered worship of the Church until 300-350

> A.D. During the next 100-150 years uninspired compositions come to more public view, but relatively few are used in public worship.[3]

The general character of the early Irish Church

It is against this background that we need to consider the worship practices of the early Irish Church. It is generally accepted that Ireland received Christianity from Western Gaul and Britain in the fourth and early fifth century. However, there is much debate over the extent to which the Irish Church (and other Celtic churches in the British isles) differed in character from the Western Church which was coming increasingly under the control of Rome. In the past, evangelicals have been eager to assert that the Irish Church developed in isolation from the Western Church. Along similar lines is the romantic nationalist interpretation based upon a contrast between the Celts and the other races of Western Europe.

Modern historical scholarship has tended to highlight external influences and the European context as the key to the development of Christianity in Ireland. The respected ecclesiastical historian, the late Kathleen Hughes, for example, persuasively argued that although the mission of Patrick may have been criticised by outsiders,

> ... we may conclude that the church established in Ireland was similar in its main features to the churches of the western provinces of the empire,[4]

On the other hand, the Roman Catholic tradition of writing about the history of the early Irish Church emphasises its links with Roman practices. However, the Roman Catholic scholar, Brendan Bradshaw, has admitted that these links "were in reality tenuous and tension-ridden". He argues persuasively that in looking at the history of the early Irish Church two errors must be avoided: the one which forces early Irish Christianity into the Roman mould and the one which presents it as a pure forerunner of Protestantism.[5]

The subject is complicated by the fact that most of the source documents for the history of the early Irish church belong to the era subsequent to the adoption of Roman usages. Indeed, it is necessary to emphasise the paucity and inadequacy of the source material that is available for the study of the

Church in general and its worship practices in particular. Thus it is all too easy for the researcher to twist the little evidence that is available into a mould to suit himself. An example of this is found in recent New Age interpretations of the Celtic Churches. One of these writers, Charles Toulson, argues that the religion which flourished in the island of Britain during the dark ages had more in common with Buddhism than with the institutional Christianity of the West. He links practices of the Celtic churches culturally and spiritually with the religion of the druids. Another such writer claims that Irish Christianity came "out of a people who were not afraid to carry over their earlier pagan pre-christian beliefs into Christianity and fuse the old with the new".[6]

While some of these writers carry their case too far, their claims do serve to highlight the potentially complex character of the investigation upon which we have embarked. It has also been perceptively noted that,

> The Celtic Church was united in its doctrine, but it had no uniform method of government, liturgical practice or standardof asceticism. Practices varied from church to church...and there was recognition and tolerance of diversity.[7]

This diversity must be borne in mind lest we over-generalise about the worship practices in the early Irish Church. Indeed, in light of all the above considerations, our conclusions can at best be only tentative and preliminary.

Comments on the place of the Psalms in the early Irish Church

The important role which the Psalms had in the life of the Irish Church first came to my attention through the writing of Peadar Kirby. In discussing the resources that are available for the renewal of Irish spirituality, he makes the observation that,

> The 'three-fifties' as the one hundred and fifty psalms were called, were also the staple prayer book of the Irish for many centuries. Sadly, few Irish Catholics over the past century have had as deep a grounding in the Bible as their ancestors had.[8]

One need not agree with Kirby's interpretation of the Psalms from the standpoint of liberation theology, yet still recognise the significance of his insight. Recognised authorities on the worship of the Celtic churches

would endorse Kirby's view on the prominence of the Psalter. In the authoritative study, "The Liturgy and Ritual of the Celtic Church", it is stated that,

> Initially, the Psalms and Canticles provided the main musical (or poetic) element in the early Western Church, the singing of the Psalter being ultimately based on synagogue practice.

The same study goes on to assert that, "The Psalter was the single most studied book in the early Irish Church, and probably in the other Celtic Churches also".[9]

Apparently, it was customary to learn the Psalter by heart, as is shown by the behaviour of the Anglo-Saxon bishop, Wilfrid. On discovering that he had committed the wrong Psalter to memory during his early training at Lindisfarne, he put himself to the trouble of relearning it in the Roman version. This ties in well with a later directive issued by the Second Council of Nicaea in 787 that no man could become a bishop unless he knew the Psalter by heart and was examined by the metropolitan.

Studies of Irish monasticism also point to the centrality of the Psalter in the life and devotion of the church. John T. McNeill observes that "as with monasticism everywhere, it made large use of psalmody".[10] This reached its greatest extent in the uninterrupted chanting of psalms which became a feature of some of the continental Irish monasteries. Psalm-singing was a central aspect of the eight canonical hours of monastic worship. At each of the first four of these, 3 psalms were sung; at the next three, 12 psalms each; and at the last service from 24 to 36 psalms were sung on Mondays to Fridays and from 36 to 75 on Saturday and Sunday. Every psalm was sung slowly and with great gravity and at the end of each a prayer was said. The Psalms were to be sung clearly without cough or stutter. Any young monk who tried to save time by rushing through a psalm was soon brought to a standstill. At a sign from the senior who presided all rose to pray as if the psalm had ended but when the prayer was over the hurrying brother had to begin again at the point where he was interrupted!

It is also interesting to notice that in the Rule of Columbanus the Psalms were divided into three fifties of which the first two were sung straight through and the third antiphonally. This practice of antiphonal singing seems to have been fairly common in the early Irish Church and raises

thought-provoking questions about the proper manner in which the psalms should be sung. At Iona, unison singing seems to have been the practice for his biographer recorded how Columba's voice rose above all others. On a much less happy note, Psalm-singing on an extensive scale was assigned to monks as a penance even for minor infringements of the monastic rules.

As regards the interpretation of the psalms in the early Irish church, the dominant approach was historical and literal. There is plenty of evidence of this in the commentary material both in Latin and Irish, from c.650 right down to 1100. Thus a good part of the Irish commentary material on the Psalter is concerned with interpreting the Psalms as referring to events in the history of Israel. This approach differed from the more allegorical approach to the interpretation of the psalms that was popular in the rest of Europe at this time. This leads Martin McNamara to make the overly bold claim that the Irish did not appear "to have felt the need to nourish their religious lives by fanciful interpretations of the psalms".[11] Nevertheless, as McNamara acknowledges, the Irish Church did also adopt a spiritual interpretation of the psalms. It used a special series of psalm headings as an aid to this. This series lays special emphasis (and rightly so) on interpreting the psalms of Christ. It is found in the psalter (known as the Cathach) supposedly written by Columba and is generally referred to as the St. Columba series.

One other significant fact concerning the general prominence of the Psalter in the Irish church should not be ignored. In the earlier period at least, most of the literate laity would have had a knowledge of the psalms, since reading and writing were learned from the Psalter. One can infer from this that the Psalter must have had a crucial role in shaping the religious and devotional outlook of early Irish Christians.

The Psalms in the lives of individual Irish Churchmen

It can be established from a study of their writings and biographies that all the great churchmen of Celtic Christianity - Patrick, Gildas, Columba, etc- were steeped in the Scriptures and this included the Psalter. The case of Patrick is especially important in this regard. This is because two of his own writings, the *Confession* and the *Letter to the Soldiers of Coroticus* are extant. In these, there are very few paragraphs in which he does not quote the Scriptures. It would appear that biblical words and phrases came naturally to him although sometimes they are no more than half sentences,

Occasionally, however, he gives a long series of quotations. Now the significant thing is that the book from which he quotes most often is the book of Psalms. There can be no doubt therefore that the Psalter lay at the heart of the devotional life of the first major Christian missionary in Ireland.

In relation to Columba, legend has it (and the legend may have a sound historical basis) that he was guilty of making a copy of a Psalter belonging to Finnian. Some regard the Cathach as being that copy. It probably dates from the time of Columba and is the oldest surviving Irish manuscript. It was the valued possession of the O'Donnell clan of Co. Donegal and was taken by them, as a mascot, into their numerous battles. In this lavishly produced manuscript, each psalm begins with a large capital letter, the succeeding letters of the first word becoming smaller until they merge into the main text. In addition, there are fish motifs and tiny crosses in the book.

There is an interesting reference to the influence of the psalms in the account of the last hours of Columbanus. The account reads,

> ...after these words, he descended from that little hill, and sat in the hut, writing a psalter. And when he came to that verse of the thirty-third psalm (Psalm 34 in modern translations) where it is written "But they that seek the Lord shall not want for anything that is good" he said "here at the end of the page I must stop. Let Baithne (his successor) write what follows.[12]

Moreover, his biographer tells us that Columbanus had laid up so great a store of Holy Scripture in his heart that in early manhood he composed a commentary on the psalms. Several other old Irish treatises on the psalms are known about and some are still extant. These striking examples should suffice to show how important the Psalter was in the lives of prominent individuals in the early Irish church. Given the acknowledged reliability of the source material in the case of Patrick, his example is a particularly compelling one.

The Introduction of Hymns

The exact stage at which hymns were first introduced into the public worship of the Irish church is impossible to establish with any degree of certainty. There are two main collections of hymns used in early Ireland. The first of these is the Antiphonary of Bangor of the late 7th century which

contains many canticles and hymns. The second is the Liber Hymnorum which is preserved in two manuscripts of the late 11th century.

Columbanus allows for the singing of a hymn on Sundays and at Easter only. It would appear that Columba allowed a larger place for hymn singing than did Columbanus. However, the famous Lorica (Breastplate) of St. Patrick can best be dated to the 8th century although Celtic scholars have identified some features of the poem as being considerably more archaic. Ludwig Bieler. a leading Patrician scholar, concludes that,

> the thesis that it was actually composed by St. Patrick would be very difficult to maintain.[13]

More controversial is the Latin hymn 'Audite Omnes' which is ascribed by some scholars to Secundinus, one of the earliest missionaries to Ireland. Again, this view is very difficult to sustain. Another notable feature is the development of a religious lyric poetry which displays great sensitivity to the world of nature.

Although the chronology is difficult to establish, there seems to be little doubt that hymns began to infiltrate the worship of the Irish church at an early stage. It is rather disturbing to note that many of these hymns were composed in honour of individuals such as St. Martin and the Virgin Mary. The biographer of Columba speaks of Irish hymns in honour of Columba as though it were a well established custom. Perhaps, we have in these instances more examples of the link that has frequently been made between the development of hymnody and the rise of theological heterodoxy.

On the other hand, the influence of the Psalter can be detected in the pattern adopted in several of the hymns. Thus one of the most important religious poems of early Ireland, the 'Saltair na Rann', or Psalter of the verses, is so-called because it is divided, like the Psalter, into one hundred and fifty verses.

Conclusion

Notwithstanding the apparently early infiltration of hymns, the psalms had for many years the predominant place in the worship and devotion of

the Irish church. Of course, the rule of our faith is not church history but the written Word of God alone.

Nevertheless, modern evangelicalism in Ireland (and elsewhere) can learn a valuable lesson from the early Irish church. Sadly, in many churches today the Psalter finds little or no place in the public worship of God. Man-centred hymns and little choruses have largely displaced the God-centred praise that is a glorious feature of the Psalms. There is a need to listen to the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer when he wrote,

> A Christian community without the Psalter has lost an incomparable treasure, and by taking it back into use will recover resources it never dreamed it had.[14]

There was also a popular saying in Gaelic concerning the Irish church which sums up the lesson that we can learn from this study - "Ba bhinn le Gaeil a chanaid Sailm" (The singing of Psalms was sweet to the Irish). May it become so again and may the glory redound to the One who is worthy of all our praise.

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THE MEDIATOR OF THE COVENANT

By Clement Graham

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Our title is question-begging. We are bound to face the questions, What do we mean by covenant? And what is the function of a covenant mediator? In discovering the biblical answer to these questions we shall have to discard many of the ideas that cluster around the words "covenant" and "mediator" in everyday speech. In normal usage a covenant represents a negotiated settlement and agreement more or less freely entered into by all parties and the mediator is the person who has as it were held the balance between the negotiating parties, persuaded each to yield here and there and highlighted the reciprocal benefits to be achieved. The mediator then is one who brings the erstwhile differing parties together, secures their agreement and witnesses their signatures. He may have a continuing work of interpretation and persuasion to ensure that the covenant holds.

That is a totally different picture from what confronts us in the Bible in its story of the covenant relationship between God and man. Many researchers tell us also that it is totally different from the varied notions of covenants between nations. In that context covenants articulated the conditions on which a conquering monarch was prepared to recognise the continued existence of a conquered state. The covenant was his prescription of the terms of the ongoing relationship. It is not my purpose to enter into details about this or to enquire to what extent biblical examples of covenant replicate the structure of these ancient secular documents. Nor indeed do I intend to explore the different kinds of covenants which the Scriptures exhibit or to wander in the labyrinthine discussion of the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. What I want to assert is that the Bible shows us that God's relationship with people, his creatures, has always been and is still in terms of a covenanted declaration, "I will be your God and you will be my people". This is not not the outcome of negotiation or argument or discussion. This is descriptive of reality. Reality exhibits the difference between God and man, the Creator and the creature and the covenant tells how God and man will relate to one another. God will be God and accept the responsibilities of Godhead: man will be man and recognise God as God

and offer the service of obedience which this implies and receive in return subsistence, protection and benediction from a complacent Deity.

There is then, a sense in which God's covenant with man has always expounded the grace of God - in that God cannot be thought of as obligated to inform man as to the conditions in which he will live in fellowship with his maker. There is, too, a sense in which man's proper response to God's covenant has always involved faith and the obedience of faith. No matter how direct the access of man to God is considered to be the mystery of the Divine Being is such as can be apprehended only by faith.

Given the biblical emphasis upon the trinitarian nature of God with the second Person, the Son, as the Word of God the conclusion is certain that God's spokesman in the revelation of his covenant to unfallen man was the Son. The spokesman is the mediator, the revealer of the will of God for man's continued felicity.

That the first formulation of the covenant was denounced by man upon the foundering of his faith and his consequent disobedience is early recounted in Scripture. Man declared in effect that he would be his own god, he would for himself determine what is good and what is evil. No longer would he be a dependent creature but an independent sovereign originating his own thoughts and not thinking God's thoughts after him. God had, in his thinking, become at best unnecessary and at worst a hostile power. The covenant was a dead letter. A new formula of living was adopted. Each man said "I will be my own god. People will do their own thing".

But to repudiate God is to repudiate life itself. Man's asserted autonomy is a self-projection into the abyss. That was part of the meaning of God's warning concerning the forbidden fruit. "When you eat of it you will surely die", and man was not long in discovering how psychologically disintegrating, socially disrupting and spiritually fatal his supposed freedom really was.

That was the situation that came about very early in human history. The terms of man's co-existence with God had been repudiated. The original covenant was a dead letter, and man had no right to expect anything other than the outworking of the sentence of death. Nothing he could do could remedy the situation. Man had neither the means nor the will to be restored

to fellowship with God, "I will be your God: you will be my people" no longer had content, for God was known only in superstitious dread and no bond of trust and friendship remained.

What then? Was the history of mankind to be brief and inglorious as in the psalmist's phrase "like a stillborn child not seeing the sun" (Ps 58:8) Indeed not!" The light shone in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it". With God's denunciation of the serpent came also his announcement of a redemptive purpose. The alliance between mankind and Satan would not be allowed to continue, God resolved to inject enmity that would disrupt the ungodly alliance. This enmity would be personalised in a promised "Seed of the Woman" who would crush the head of the serpent. There would be a new beginning for mankind - a fresh start would be made by a humanity renouncing its fatal alliance with Satan and rallying to the new covenant Head and Representative. Man would receive and know the truth and the truth would make him free. The obligations of the divine covenant would be met and once more the terms of God's covenant would apply "I will be your God: you will be my people". A new covenant? with respect to the different conditions to which it applies, with respect to the new energy by which it is to be realised, with respect to the new revelation of God's love and grace which it articulates. A new covenant indeed, but still a covenant capable of being summed up in the original formulation - "I will be your God: you will be my people".

The reconstitutive and recreative element in the New Covenant needs to be stressed. In the conditions obtaining originally it was not unreasonable and impossible to envisage its terms being fully honoured. Man was capable of the faith and obedience necessary to the covenant's fulfilment. He had been so endowed by God as to make this possible. It was by deliberate choice that he had reneged on the first covenant and sold himself to "the spirit who is at work in those who are disobedient". Then there was no way back for him that he himself would or could devise. To republish the covenant in terms of "I will be your God: you will be my people" with its insistence on faith and obedience would, by itself, be a work of futility - for now man is incapable of meeting those conditions. A new mankind must be brought into being - capable of discharging the obligations of the first covenant and of meeting the conditons of the new. In this situation the mediatior of the covenant is all-important, for he is the one upon whom, primarily the conditions of the new covenant devolve, by whom the debt of the old must be paid, and in union with whom the conditions of the new are

realisable. This is the Son of God become man for us men and our salvation. In this perspective we recognise the necessity of personal union with Christ, experience of the new birth and the indwelling of the Spirit of God as all expressive of the new covenant. This new covenant repairs the damage of the broken, and recreates. In place of alienation it procures communion, in place of brokenness it achieves integrity and in all of this it is dependent upon the Person and work of the mediator.

Emphasis must again be laid on the fact that the mediator is not a bargainer or compromiser or a seeker after common ground as between rebellious men and the Soverign Creator. Throughout the mediator is the spokesman for God. He accepts God's prescription for the life of man, honours its terms, proclaims its conditions and offers its benefits. He is a fit mediator because he is God, the Son, and man also in the perpetual union of the two natures. He fulfills for man representatively the obligations of creaturehood and discharges the debt of the disobedient. There is a sense in which the Bible is throughout the story of the mediator, of the situation he came to remedy: of the promise of his coming, its actualisation and its achievement. We want now to consider some biblical perspectives on the Person of the mediator.

There is a gradual progressiveness in the disclosure of the Person and work of the Mediator. The statement just made - that the Mediator is both God and man - reflects total biblical and specifically New Testament testimony. It could not be read off from the earliest intimations of a coming Saviour. The initial promise about the seed of the woman clearly conveyed that God's redemptive action would be through human agency, and the gradual in-fill of detail as the various lines of prophecy converged brought even more clearly to view the lineaments of the coming Redeemer. But not until the magnitude of the task had been definitively described and the world shown to be "without strength", was there clear and unmistakable disclosure of the Deity of the human agent of redemption. To be sure, from far off times Abraham saw and was gladdened by the day of the Saviour, but we are not entitled to declare on the basis of this assurance that Abraham could provide a New Testament description of the One whose day he saw. The Old Testament revelation has nothing inconsistent with, but neither does it assert in such terms as contemporary recipients would be bound to understand that God himself in the Person of the Son would realise the promise of salvation.

Bearing in mind that the features, the character and the work of the Messiah were described "line upon line" in the Old Testament in such a way that the full and definitive disclosure when it came would be both surprising and fulfilling we shall now attempt to construct from the Old Testament a character profile of the promised saviour and an outline of the task he should undertake. Then we shall review the New Testament witness in the light of this profile and outline to see if it asserts that this is the very Christ.

I. The Old Testament

(1) The Character in Profile
(2) The Task in Outline.

1. In many respects the Old Testament presents a sorry picture of mankind. From noble beginnings man descends to almost unlimited degrees of wickedness. Pride breeds dishonesty and cruelty and aggressiveness. Every generation is disfigured by these features and even the heroes of Old Testament story betray the blemishes of fallen nature. There is a stark factuality about the record, no false idealisation, no cover-up, no pretence. But there is something that relieves the gloom: something, too, that constitutes in itself a message of hope and points onward to a time when wickedness will be eradicated and God and man will be on terms of perfect and unbroken friendship. For in the various stories that the Old Testament records, and in the various heroes whose doings and sayings it recalls, there is presented the different lineaments and features of the man of God. Not all the perfections of the man of God are ever seen in the one person. But always - set over against the vanity of the common man, there is the dignity of the man of God. And he is, in a very real sense, mankind's link with God. He is God's spokesperson to man and man's to God. Not always is he welcomed by man. Indeed rejection is most often his lot and the sadness of rejection well nigh breaks his heart. There are times when the tensions of the situation make him almost wish to hide from God, when he seems rejected by God as well as man. But always there is recovery from the rejection and God dwells with man on the earth.

What I want to suggest now is that in the Old Testament delineation of the man of God - a delineation given with different emphases from time to time and situation to situation - we have a composite picture of the Messiah of promise. If we are to test the claims advanced for Christ in the New Testament it must be, as Christ himself indicated, by showing how the facts

of his Person and work verify and realise the varied, and sometimes apparently contradictory expectations aroused by the Old testament delineation. In looking at the Old Testament picture, then, we are not going to try to identify any one as a type of Christ. Rather we are going to extrapolate from many different accounts the features of the ideal man who in the age of fulfilment would, as God's agent, accomplish the promised redemption. We shall do this by developing a few propostions such as:

1. 1 The Perfect Man is Totally God's Man: The fundamental principle of the man of God is that God is true, wise and good. There can be no impugning the truth, justice or goodness of God. Whatever befalls that seems to call these attributes in question, the man of God holds to his fundamental principle. Even when he himself appears to be the victim of some failure or mistake in the divine control of things, he will insist that the mistake is on the part of the interpreter and that the judge of all the earth will do right. He is quick to defend the honour of God against all human misrepresentation.

Total obedience to the will of God is therefore the endeavour of this man. No character portrayed in the Old Testament achieves this - but the ideal is clearly stated and illustrated. Failure of obedience reveals a flaw in the character which will not appear in God's ideal servant. Obedience will be maintained even when common sense and universal experience suggest that another way would be better. God makes no mistakes and breaks no promises. Ask Abraham! For that matter ask any of those whose names appear in the 11th chapter of Hebrews. Obedience to God's will was a common characteristic of all. Whatever ridicule opposition or persecution they endured, their common testimony was that God must be obeyed.

1. 2 Reference to the 11th chapter of Hebrews reminds us that in the Old Testament presentation the Perfect Man lives by faith. His assertion of the absolute perfection of God and his right to total obedience is not a matter of fancy or obstinancy but a given perception of the truth of things - not an end of argument discovery or demonstration, but a beginning of argument and revelation. He has been given a perception of ultimate truth and this truth must rule life and conduct. The just man lives by faith. His is a faith that even the last enemy cannot overcome.

Worth recalling is the fact that it was by the foundering of faith, the acceptance of a lie and the consequent overt disobedience that the first

covenant was destroyed. So it is no wonder that the efforts to destroy the new covenant should be concentrated upon assaulting the faith of the man of God. Faith exists in tension. It is challenged every day by every sort of experience and it has its most severe examination when God himself appears to be its opponent. Small wonder that the psalmist, just after asserting "Surely God is good to Israel" admits that he felt the severity of the testing - "As for me my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold." From the 11th of Hebrews we observe how the faith of everyone named was vigorously opposed and the claim to fame of each one is that he kept the faith.

1. 3 As God's man the Perfect Man is informed as to the will of God. He is not exhaustively informed in every situation but he knows and takes delight in the precepts and commands of God. The very first psalm gives us a picture of a perfectly happy man. His delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. The way of faith is the path of the just that is ever-lightening until one comes to the light of the perfect day. As God's man, the ideal man wishes to communicate to others the knowledge of God's way. He is not only a perceiver of the truth but a teacher too. God's goodwill to man is not knowledge for hoarding but for sharing. But more of that when we consider the second outstanding feature of the perfect man.

2. This second outstanding feature I want to express in these terms: The Perfect Man is tirelessly caring for people. He is God's representative among men. He is the bridge and the link between God and people. He wants to communicate God's truth to people who have been deceived by alien propoganda. He wants to communicate God's truth to people who want to believe untruth. He is God's spokesman to man. But is also man's spokesman to God. He cares for people. He is heartbroken by the ignorance and wickedness that abounds. He knows that this wickedness deserves God's wrath. But he is persuaded of God's goodwill, of God's willingness to listen to pleading on behalf of man. Indeed he knows that God has published a way of reconciliation and that reconciliation he wishes to promote. For this cause, indeed he had been raised up, to be God's agent among men telling of and, in his own circumstances illustrating, God's caring attitude to people alienated from him.

Two of the offices of the Mediator are specially operative here, that of the prophet and that of the king.

The prophet proclaims God's reconciling word. It is hard for people to believe that God really has a goodwill toward them. What have they done to deserve it? Only shallow thinkers and people morally ignorant or indifferent lack the reaction of surprise when told that God is ready to forgive and to receive rebels back into his peace. How can it be? How can the apparently opposing claims of justice and mercy be harmonised? The prophet has a message to proclaim of one to come upon whom God lays the iniquity of us all. How eager the prophet is that people should hear and respond to his word. How tirelessley he proclaims it and how sad he is when no-one seems to believe his report. Nevertheless he will persist in proclamation for people must hear. They must be persuaded to listen. Tireless zeal and persistence mark the propagandist for God.

Another Old Testament figure illustrates the caring attitude of the man of God. He is the shepherd-king. David was not a perfect man but he did portray the features of the perfect king as one who provides for, protects and leads his people. A little reflection upon some of the psalms reminds us of how the ideal king who is also a just judge inspires hope in otherwise victimised people. The ideal king is a dispenser of justice and justice does not menace but reassures. It is the hope of those whose daily experience is of the miscarriage of justice. The ideal king is one who cannot be bribed so the poor man longs for his intervention. He is a rescuer of the needy, a liberator of the oppressed and encourager of the faithful, a destroyer of the enemy. In all of this he reflects God's concern for people who have been duped, enslaved, impoverished and oppressed, a people who have exhausted every possibility of self-deliverance and whose help if it is to come must come from God alone. That there are features in the divine deliverance that cannot be illustrated in the activities of the Shepherd-King belongs to the magnitude of the task to be undertaken to which we shall advert in a moment.

3. Meantime let us draw together the two outstanding features of the Perfect Man as exhibited in the Old Testament. They are that he is wholly God's man - on God's side, defending God's honour, upholding God's rectitude and goodness: and also he is man's man, understanding man's situation and sharing man's struggle and agony; caring, leading, protecting, defending. In no one character of Old Testament story are these features blended in perfection, but their recurrence over the centuries anticipates the coming of the One in whom they will be demonstrated to the very life. One asks if this can be achieved by a mere man? The Old Testament will not

answer unequivocally. It will assure us that the coming one will be raised up by God from among the people. Truly man, and true man he will be. Commissioned, inspired, upheld and vindicated by God he will be. But who will he be? The Mediator of the Covenant must belong to God and to man in perfection. How the anticipating prophets of the Old Testament must have held their breath in sheer surprise at the possibility, could it be, will it be God himself? But will God dwell with man on the earth?

The Task in Outline

The character profile of the perfect man of God has given us more than a hint of the enterprise he must undertake if the covenant situation, "I will be your God, you will be my people" is to be realised. Fallen man lives in a haze of ignorance of God. He is radically prejudiced against God, assertive of his own will and against the revealed will of God. He is not eager to listen to what God has to say. He has antecedently concluded that God will not have anything attractive or pleasant or comforting to say to him. In that frame of mind, how can he be addressed? The divine strategy, as exhibited in the Old Testament was to raise up among the people men of God, people who enduring the common lot like their neighbours, were yet in close touch with God so as to be his spokesmen. This strategy was, indeed, expounded in the choice of a specific race to be under the special care and tutelage of God's goodwill among the nations. In a way the whole nation of Israel prefigured the Messiah and Mediator who was to act for all nations. That, very likely, is how so many of the Rabbis interpreted Old Testament passages foretelling the experience of Messiah as relating only to experience of Israel as a whole. So, at many times and in various ways "God spoke to people in the past". But that speech was always anticipitatory. Each prophet looked forward to One who would not only be the bearer of God's message to mankind but would, in his own Person, be the message. This would be the Mediator by whom the terms of God's covenant would be republished and in whom these terms would be fully realised.

But though the function of the man of God to be God's communicator and, in his kingly function, the demonstator of God's concern, tells us a good deal about the nature of his work, something of critical importance has yet to be said. For man's dread of God is not ill-founded. It arises from the knowledge that he had offended God. Of course the offence is rationalised and excused in man's various attempts at self-justification but man has

never wholly succeeded in convincing himself that he is right and God is wrong and that therefore he has nothing to fear from God. Sooner or later as God's spokesman argues and urges that God wants friendship, not enmity, the question is bound to be asked, How can this be? How can a man be just with God? Is it in God's nature to pretend that there never was offence? Is man to be persuaded that his fright is just a matter of his own overwrought imagination, and that God doesn't care about his defiance of his law; that in fact God is as morally indifferent as man himself? Such assurances would carry no conviction. What must be demonstrated if conscience is to be appeased is a way of dealing honestly with man's offence so as to obliterate the offence and lay a sure basis of peace and friendship? How can this be done?

The Old Testament answer to this question involves a framework of discourse and activity to which we have not as yet referred. Yet it is part of the warp and weft of the experience of the perfect man of God. This is the system of sacrifice which spells out the conditions of man's approach to and acceptance by God. It is foundational to the peace which the man of God enjoys and to the message of reconciliation which he communicates to his followers.

Essential to the system of sacrifice is the priest who acts for his followers in presenting the offering to God: who on the basis of the offering intercedes with God for his clients and who having assurance of God's acceptance of the sacrifice returns to his people with the benediction of God.

Implicit in the system of sacrifice also is the concept of substitution and transference or imputation. The offerer recognises that his life is forfeit: he says that God would be just in condemning him. But as he lays his hand upon the head of the offered victim he believes that his guilt is transferred and the victim's life will be taken instead of his. He will be set free to serve God happily and gratefully.

What this highlights is that Mediator must in his person and activity combine not only the perfection of the ideal man of God inclusive of prophetic and kingly functions, but also those of the priest. He must be able to demonstrate that the message of goodwill and pardon that he brings in God's name, is well founded, without moral flaw. The message must have no element in it that would contradict the "I am your God" part of the basic covenant declaration. The message, that is, must demonstrate the consistency

of God as the God of holiness, wisdom, justice, goodness and truth. The prophet must proclaim what the priest has ascertained and the king must defend the liberty which the prophet announces.

As one would expect there is an overlap in the concepts of the perfect man and of the acceptable priest. It is more than an overlap: it is coalescence. Just as the Perfect Man is God's man and man's man so the priest must be representative of the people and acceptable to God. He is chosen from among men to act for men in things pertaining to God. And the choice is God's. Without God's commission he may not act: without solidarity with his people he cannot act effectively. Our conclusion, then, is that the various lines of Old Testament teaching show that the real Mediator of God's covenant of salvation will combine in himself the features and activities of prophet, priest and king. But a question remains with regard to an essential part of these activities.

The priest, we have noted, presides over the ritual of sacrifice. He examines and pronounces upon the fitness of the victim to be offered. He sprinkles the blood as directed and declares the blessing of God. Our remaining question concerns the sacrifice itself. Whatever the feelings of the pious in Old Testament times, it is obvious that the actual sacrifices offered were of limited virtue. A New Testament commentator freely admits that the offering of these sacrifices could not render the offerer perfect. The sacrifice was essentially inadequate and this inadequacy could not be made good just by frequency or repetition. The great lesson of the sacrifice was "without shedding of blood there is no remission of sins". But to the question, But whose blood? the Old Testament worshipper would hardly give a definite and confident answer. The Lord would provide. That was sure. God would raise up a priest and provide a sacrifice that would, not just ritually and symbolically, meet all the needs of the situation but really, definitively and actually. But who could be sure that priest and sacrifice would be the one person? Did even Isaiah himself fully understand his own dictum? "He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before his shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. . . . He was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was stricken". To be priest and sacrifice in one's own person, to be not just the main actor in a symbolic ritual, but the actual agent in a real bearing of the iniquity of offenders so that they can be declared free of offence in God's eyes, is not this a superhuman task? This is the role the Mediator of the Covenant must

fulfil. Who will he be? we asked already, reflecting that he must belong to God and to man in perfection. Now we have had some further insight into what this belonging involves we are bound to ask, Can anyone other than God himself do this? And again we ask, But will God dwell with man on the earth? To this question the New Testament gives an unequivocal answer in its disclosure of Immanuel, the Word made flesh and tabernacling amongst us.

But before we look at the New Testament disclosure there is one feature of general interest that bears upon the identification of the Servant of God as exhibited in the Old Testament. It is a recurring theme highlighted in the experience of many outstanding figures like Noah, Joseph, Moses and David. It is the theme of divine appointment, popular rejection, Divine vindication and reinstatement. In each of these we have named this pattern of experience is clearly seen. Noah was a preacher of righteousness, rejected, ridiculed, scoffed at by his contemporaies. But God proved him right and renewed his covenant with him. Joseph, too, knew divine appointment, rejection by his brothers and later vindication by God. So it was also with Moses and David. It's a pattern to which Stephen referred in his defence before the Sanhedrin and a pattern which we shall discover was replicated also in the experience of Jesus, only that the claims of Jesus were more far-reaching and breath-taking than any claims made by Old Testament heroes. For Jesus made the ultimate claim to be God come in human nature among men to fulfil and realise the terms of God's covenant with man - to be, in fact, the Mediator of God's covenant. What we have to do now is scrutinise the record of this ministry to see whether it measures up to all that the Old Testament has led us to expect and to see if, in spite of people's rejection, God has set the seal of his approval upon the ministry of Jesus.

II. The New Testament - The Character and Task in Actuality

In the New Testament we meet with the historic figure of Jesus of Nazareth the son of Mary who was born in Bethlehem, grew up in Nazareth, was baptised in Jordan by John, entered upon a public ministry in Galilee and Judea which culminated in Jerusalem where he was tried and condemned and crucified. These are bare facts but the facts in the New Testament are not presented as bare facts. They are meaningful. They teli of the life and activity of the One who made the stupendous claim to be God, God the Son come in human nature to redeem mankind. They present the representative

man, the Son of Man: they present the unique God-man come to act for God in procuring the reconciliation of God and man. They present the Messiah, the Mediator of the New Covenant, as the one who has brought in an everlasting salvation. What we have to do now is to compare the New Testament account of the actual person and ministry and see if it perfectly answers to the profile presented in the Old Testament. Like Jesus as he spoke to the two on the way to Emmaus, like Philip as he enlightened the Ethiopian eunuch, like Apollos as he contended with the Jews we are to "prove from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ". In doing so we shall ask a few questions which our Old Testament review suggests.

1. We ask first, Does the actual presentation of Jesus in the New Testament measure up to the Old Testament profile in showing him to be God's man? In fact there are two questions here, the first is, Is he a real man? and the second, Is he the man for God?

The history of the Christological debate shows that it is not idle to ask if Jesus was really human. There have not been wanting those who assert that his was a pretended humanity and so he was not really one of us. It is that sort of contention that gives extra weight to the New Testament testimony about his birth from the womb of the Virgin Mary. His body was prepared within her in the same way as every foetus grows within the mother's womb. Only at the point of conception was there difference. From birth he grew "in wisdom and stature" in the normal course of development. He grew up in Nazareth, in the eyes of the people there no different from Mary's subsequent children. Indeed, when he claimed to be different they concluded that he was giving himself airs and they were offended.

Throughout the life of Jesus, most who met him took him to be a mere man. Whatever there was about him of unusual power and attraction did not shake that conviction. Indeed when Peter acknowledged him to be the Son of God, Jesus himself declared that this perception was not "of flesh and blood" but from God himself. He obviously felt as everyone else feels in heat and cold and thirst and hunger. His emotions were stirred as ours are by things that make for joy and sorrow or anger or pity. In certain situations he would weep, grow faint, groan in spirit. None who encountered him doubted the reality of his humanity.

Is he God's man? we asked and meant is he true man and also the man for God? The record is as positive in its response to our second question as it is to our first. Even when a lad of 12 years of age he showed an astonishing awareness of the priority of "his Father's business". When John expostulated as he offered himself for baptism his reply indicates a consciouseness of being God's man: "It is proper for us to do this to fulfil all righteousness". When in discussion with the disciples he finally declared, "My food, is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work". He told the disciples, on another occasion, what he would suffer at the hands of men, and upon Peter's horrified: "It must not be so": he sharply accused Peter of being the spokesman of Satan. At whatever cost he would do God's will.

The tone of his general teaching too, showed him to be the man for God. Who knew so much about the kingdom of God as he? and who could match his skill in presenting its different aspects in such homely and familiar pictures? And who understood so thoroughly the demands of the law of God? With surgical skill he cut through the excuses and subterfuges with which people rationalised their failures to fulfil God's law. Obedience to God, he showed is not just a matter of outward conformity, but of the inner state of the heart. Friendly and receptive of man as he was, friendship was never allowed to compromise truth as Nicodemus learned when he came to examine Jesus and was himself examined and found wanting. The consciousness of being God's spokesman he demonstrated even in the crisis of his trial before Pilate. "My kingdom", he said, "is not of this world": and again when Pilate challenged him, "Don't you realise I have either to free you or to crucify you", his answer was, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above". There can be no shadow of doubt in our answer to the question, Is Jesus God's man? He is both real man and the man for God.

2. A second question must now be asked - Was Jesus a perfect man? We recall how the Old Testament in a way struggled to present the picture of perfection. In its many heroes we caught the delineation of perfection but there was no single exemplar. Every one of them was flawed in some way. Every one of them was a sinner. Abraham the friend of God was not perfect: Moses the meekest of men was denied entry to the promised land because of breach of good conduct: David, the king after God's own heart, was publicly shamed. Yet the Old Testament did portray the character of the truly godly man; indeeed the Book of Psalms begins with such a portrayal. But so far as Old Testament characters go, the portrayal is an unrealised

idealisation. When, where and in whom will this perfection be actualised?

The claim which the New Testament presents is that the ideal of perfection was realised in Jesus of Nazareth. It is not only that negatively he could not be charged with fault: He himself could challenge his questioners, "Which of you convinces me of sin"? but positively he demonstrated perfection in action. If the fulfilment of the law is to love God with all the heart and soul and strength and mind and to love one's neighbour as oneself then he fulfilled the law and made it honourable. Right up to the agony of the cross this love for the other was demonstrated - in his charge to John to care for Mary His mother, and in his assurance to the conscience-sticken and penitent thief on the cross "Today you will be with me in paradise".

Bear in mind that the conduct of Jesus was under constant hostile scrutiny. There were those who would have given a great deal to be able to demonstrate a flaw in his character or misconduct in his behaviour. They set traps for him. But in the end of the day they had to bribe people to bear false witness against him. The picture of the perfect man presented is such as could only be drawn from reality. This is Jesus as he actually was. To be God's man perfectly he must be perfect as a man.

3. The next question we have to ask is - Did Jesus live by faith? We recall that the Old Testament assertion was that "the just shall live by faith" and that what set off its heroes from the commonality was their exercise of faith in God even when the outward evidence seemed hostile. The writer to the Hebrews listed many of them, beginning the account of each with the statement "by faith. . . . " What the Old Testament showed, too, was that faith persevered in the tension of outward contradiction. Things did not happen according to expectation. But the man of faith held on, sure that appearances were not the actuality.

So look at the life of Jesus. There is evidence that the constant hostile pressure to which he was subjected was intended to discover the breaking-point of faith. At some extreme, faith must give way. So it had been thought long ago in the case of Job. But now one making greater claims than Job is present and the trial will be all the more severe. He will be subjected to the ultimate test. Then will faith survive?

Just reflect in short summary upon the various ways in which the faith

of Jesus was put on trial. The summary begins very early. There seems to be a note of accusation in the statement by Mary when he was found in the temple - "Son why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you". It's a question of priority and precedence in personal loyalty. And God must have precedence in all things in the behaviour of the man of faith.

We recall the baptism and the public testimony given: "You are my Son whom I love: with you I am well pleased" - but just a few weeks later in an unfriendly environment the question is posed - "Do you believe that testimony"? Are you the Son of God or just a man? Prove it! The proof is in the obedience of faith, the faith that lives by every word of God.

We have referred already to Peter's horror when the Lord showed what he must endure. Peter's horror is natural and expressive of love. Love is sure there must be a better way. But he who lives by faith in God knows that there can be no better way than God decrees. But the full horror of what God decrees begins to grip Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane. So much so that he is constrained to ask "Is it possible that this cup should pass from me?" But even then faith is obedience - literally nothing else. "Not my will but thine" is the response.

We have seen that Jesus was to be subjected to the ultimate test. That is to the demand that he suffer death in the full and dire sense of banishment from God. Bungling friends obstructed but did not frustrate faith: contemptuous adversaries taunted him to renounce faith's obedience: and the arch-enemy used friends and foes alike to make the way of faith seem unacceptable. But more trying than any device of man or devil was the confrontation with his God and Father. Could it be his Father who put into his hands the fatal cup he must drink? Could it be his Father who pronounced the ultimate sentence of death upon him? But then he remembers that he had a commandment from his father to lay down his life. He must say "Amen" to the sentenece of death. How can he do it except that he remembers and believes the divine word - "You will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay"? It is as one who staked all on that word that he gave up his spirit saying, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit". Long before Abraham, at God's command, had raised the knife against the son of whom it had been said "In Isaac shall your seed be called" believing that God was able to raise Isaac from the dead. In the same spirit of faith did Jesus lay down his life, believing that God would

raise him from the dead according to promise. In sore experience he earned the title "the author and perfecter of faith".

So far, then, we have seen that Jesus fills out the Old Testament profile as real man and God's man, the perfect man the man of faith. We have just hinted at the task he himself showed he had come to fulfil - to reconcile God and man: to seek and save the lost: to give his life a ransom for many. What becomes ever more clear is the perfect man, the man of faith is no mere man. The task is beyond human strength to accomplish. He is the Son of God: God the Son. So he claimed and so he acted and in his actions validated the claim. What the Old Testament had shown of the necessity of the prophet to communicate the will of God is filled out to perfection in the One who is the eternal Word. Now there is no need of the formula - "Thus says the Lord" for now God himself addresses people directly and needs only 'Verily, Verily, I say unto you'.

But can he be a King - the King? Is it just derision or is there something of awe in Pilate's voice as he says to the people "Behold your King"! But what sort of king is he? Nature acknowledged his authority when the wind and the waves obeyed him and when diseases disappeared at his word or touch. Demons submitted to his authority when they left their victims at his command. And even those who came to arrest him were overcome by the majesty of his presence when in reply to their "We seek Jesus of Nazareth - he answered "I am he". Then "they drew back and fell to the ground".

But what sort of king is he? Not the earthly stereotype, for sure. For his kingdom is not of this world, as he told Pilate. He is the King - Protector of his people - the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep. This is what Nathaniel saw when he made his ecstatic declaration "You are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel".

And what of the other office of the Mediator, the priest raised from among the people, appointed by God to do business with him on behalf of the people? This office is central to the whole enterprise of the Mediator and yet it seems to have been the one to which the contemporaries of the Jesus' ministry were most blind. They failed to appreciate the drift of the Baptist's early intimation, "Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world". They did not weigh the significance of Jesus' declarations about giving his life, laying down his life, yielding to death to be raised up again. Someone indeed has drawn attention to the fact that in his climactic anguish Jesus was mocked as a prophet: "Prophesy", the soldiers said,

"Who is it that smote you?" He was mocked as King; in letters of Hebrew, Greek and Latin the superscription on the cross read "This is Jesus the King of the Jews". But nobody noticed the Priest. Nobody was aware of the sacrifice. Yet here was the true Priest. Better than a priest of the Levitical order, a Priest of the order of Melchisedec, as the writer to the Hebrews reminds us. Here was the sacrifice "once for all offered" to seal and fulfil all sacrifice. Here was the Priest with a true and perfect absolution to pronounce. Here was the real blood of sprinkling that would cleanse the conscience of sinners and set them free to serve God. Only the Son of God himself could combine those three offices in perfection. Only the Son of God could be the Mediator of the New Covenant that would achieve what others had failed to do, the reconciliation of God and man in terms of the original proclamation, "I will be your God: you will be my people".

In Jesus Christ the Son of God became man for our salvation. Humanity is given a new beginning, a continuing godly experience and a heavenly hope and consummation. He is the One who gathers to himself a people from North and South and East and West and, with ecstatic joy, presents them before God. "Behold" he says, "Behold I and the children whom thou has given me". For that his work was not in vain, that his sufferings were not fruitless was openly declared by God the Father when he raised Jesus from the dead, with power declaring him to be his Son. "Sit at my right hand" God said, "until I make thine enemies, thy footstool". So now we who share the vision of Jesus, see him enthroned at the right hand of the majesty on high. That is where our Mediator is. He is still active there in our interest. That is what assures us that the covenant peace, sealed by his blood, will for ever continue to load us with benefits.

He is still active on our behalf. he rules over all for his body's sake which is the Church. All power in heaven and on earth has been given to him. He assured the disciples that every detail of their life and interests was known to the Father. The very hairs of their head were numbered. That is the measure of his knowledge and interest in every one of his people. With infinite power and goodwill he rules them and for them. Their defence is sure. In the presence of God he continues to act as priestly intercessor. Before God he presents the memorial of his sacrifice on behalf of his people. Always his sacrifice comes between the guilt of his people and the just wrath of God. In him the loyalty of his people to God is fully and finally expressed. For when the time of consumation is fully come the kingdom will be surrendered to God that he may be "all in all". This is the achievement of the Mediator of the new Covenant.

NEO-CALVINISM

by Cornelis Pronk

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What is Neo-Calvinism? The word *neo* means new and Calvinism is the name given to that branch of Protestantism that followed the teachings of John Calvin. As such, Calvinism is another word for Reformed. When people say Calvinism, they mean the Reformed Faith as distinguished from, say, Roman Catholicism, Lutheranism and Arminianism. The term Neo-Calvinism, therefore, would suggest that it represents a form of Calvinism that is new or different from its original form. This is indeed the case. Let me say first of all that the word Calvinism and its derivatives, Calvinist and Calvinistic, are not really proper as synonyms for the Reformed Faith and Reformed churches. Calvin himself was opposed to calling the Reformed churches after his name and those churches did not want to be referred to as Calvinistic either, but simply as Reformed. The reason for this was that they felt that the church of Christ should never be associated with a mere human being. As indebted as the Reformed churches were to Calvin, they understood that the doctrines he taught were not products of his own genius but simply the doctrines of Christ which he had found in the Gospel. Another reason for rejecting the name Calvinism was that historically it had always been heretics whose names were given to the movements they started, e.g., Arianism, Pelagianism and Montanism. A third reason was that Calvinism was a label put on them by their opponents, the Roman Catholics, Lutherans and Anabaptists. The name Calvinist became an abusive nickname for anyone holding to the hated doctrine of predestination which many thought to be the invention of Calvin. For these reasons the Reformed rejected the label Calvinism and they maintained that position for many years.

Calvinism and Abraham Kuyper

Why then was the name Calvinism eventually adopted? Perhaps it was inevitable that in their controversies with Rome as well as with other

Protestant churches, the Reformed were increasingly identified with their great leader and his system of theology. While Calvinism eventually became just another name for Reformed because of the doctrines associated with Calvin, especially predestination, in more recent times the term Calvinism has come to represent something more than that. It is here where Neo-Calvinism comes in. And Neo-Calvinism brings us to Abraham Kuyper, the great Dutch theologian and statesman whose name is inseparably connected to what has been called the great revival of Calvinism in the Netherlands.

In his book *Calvinism*, which is a collection of lectures on that subject delivered at Princeton University, N.J. in 1897, Kuyper mentions four uses of the word Calvinism. According to him Calvinism may be viewed as:

1. a *sectarian* name given to the Reformed by their opponents.
2. a *confessional* name used by those who subscribe to the dogma of predestination and other related truths.
3. a *denominational* name used by churches which want to be identified as Calvinist, such as Calvinistic Baptists and Methodists.
4. a *scientific* name, either in a historical, philosophical or political sense.[1].

Says Kuyper:

> Historically, the name of Calvinism indicates the channel in which the reformation moved, so far as it was neither Lutheran, nor Anabaptist nor Socinian. In the philosophical sense, we understand by it that system of conceptions which, under the influence of the master-mind of Calvin, raised itself to dominance in the several spheres of life. And as a political name, Calvinism indicates that political movement which has guaranteed the liberty of nations in constitutional statesmanship; first in Holland, then in England, and since the close of the 18th century in U.S.A.[2]

Neo-Calvinism as World-and-Life View

It is in this *scientific* sense that Kuyper understands the concept of Calvinism , namely as "an independent general tendency which, from a mother-principle of its own, has developed an independent form both for

our *life* and for our *thought* among the nations of Western Europe and North America."[3]

For Kuyper the domain of Calvinism was much broader than what most people in his time understood by it. His contemporaries in Reformed circles saw Calvinism as basically an ecclesiastical and confessional movement. Reformed or Calvinistic for them meant believing in the depravity of man and his absolute dependence on God for salvation. In other words, they stressed the doctrines of grace or the so-called Five Points of Calvinism in opposition to Arminians and Modernists who denied these doctrines.

Kuyper saw it as his mission in life to convince his fellow Reformed believers that Calvinism was much more than that. It was an all-encompassing world-and-life view, he insisted, which enables us to understand and make sense of reality. Our task as Christians, he believed, is to bring the principles of Calvinism to bear upon the world so as to influence and change it, redeeming and claiming it for Christ to whom the whole created order belongs.

The Key Concept: God's Sovereignty

The key-concept of Calvinism, according to Kuyper, is the sovereignty of God over the whole cosmos in all its spheres. This divine sovereignty is reflected in a three-fold human sovereignty, namely in the State, in Society and in the Church. It is this concept of Calvinism that has come to be referred to as Neo-Calvinism, not only by its opponents, but by Kuyper and his followers themselves. It is new in that it represents ideas and teachings which are not found in the original, classic Calvinism or the Reformed faith, although Kuyper claimed that many of his ideas were *seminally* present in Calvin. The seeds are there in Calvin's thought, he insisted, but they only need to be worked out and applied.

It is true that Calvin taught the sovereignty of God in all things. He also knew that God's sovereignty is not limited to salvation but that there are implications of this doctrine for all of life, including Church-State relations, the role of the family, the Christian's calling in society, the place of science, etc., etc. Yet in the process of working out the implications of Calvin's thought, Kuyper ended up with a system of Calvinism that in some important areas constituted a departure from its original version.

Kuyper has often been praised for the impact he has made on the Netherlands by applying Calvinistic principles to society in all its spheres. This praise is well-deserved. The man was a phenomenon in many respects. For those readers who are not too familiar with Dutch church history, the following thumb-nail biographical sketch of this great man may help to give some idea of his importance.

Biographical Sketch of Kuyper

Abraham Kuyper was born in 1837 at Maassluis, South Holland. His father, J.F. Kuyper, was a minister in the Dutch Reformed Church and belonged to the moderate party. Young Abraham was exceptionally intelligent. A voracious reader from the time he mastered the alphabet, he needed no prodding from his parents to apply himself to his studies. At the age of twelve he was enrolled at the gymnasium of Leiden which he completed with distinction six years later. The next seven years were spent at the famous Leiden University from which he graduated in 1862 with a doctor of theology degree summa cum laude.

Kuyper left the university with different religious views from those he held when he entered it. He had been brought up fairly conservative and even felt inclined towards the ministry. During his university years, however, Kuyper became thoroughly influenced by liberalism. His model was a Dr. Scholten, one of the leading exponents of modernism at the time. Therefore, if God had not called him to a halt Kuyper would have gone far down the road of apostasy, probably even further than his mentors. But God did intervene and changed the direction in which this brilliant but blind student was going at break-neck speed.

In 1862 Dr. Kuyper became a candidate for the ministry in the Dutch Reformed (state) church, but due to an oversupply of candidates he did not receive a call until almost a year later. He was ordained as pastor of the congregation of Beesd, a small village in the eastern province of Gelderland. But not all members of the congregation were happy with their new minister. There was at least one lady who did not agree with his preaching. Her name was Pietje Baltus, a God-fearing woman who sensed immediately that her minister was a stranger to God and to grace. When he came to visit her she told him how the Lord had converted her and spoke to him about the needs of his soul. She warned him that unless he was born again he would

perish forever. Kuyper listened and was impressed. More visits followed. As it turned out the Lord was pleased to use the testimony of this simple, uneducated woman to bring about a radical change in Kuyper's life.

Through contact with this godly woman as well as others who feared the Lord in Beesd, Kuyper's life was completely changed. He went through a profound spiritual struggle, but there came a moment when he surrendered to the Lord and experienced the peace that passes all understanding through faith in Christ and his finished work on the cross. The re-born preacher rapidly became known as a champion for orthodoxy and started to receive calls from larger, more influential congregations. In 1867 he accepted a call to Utrecht and three years later he moved to Amsterdam where he became the leader of the *Doleantie* (Grievance), a movement which in 1886 led to a separation from the State Church similar to, yet also different from, the earlier Secession of 1834.

For many years Kuyper worked tirelessly in an effort to reform the Dutch State Church from within. But he was not just concerned with church reform. The nation also had his interest and he became actively involved in politics. Soon he became editor of a weekly paper called *De Heraut* (The Herald) and a Christian daily, *De Standaard* (The Standard). He was elected to parliament and became leader of the Anti-Revolutionary Party (anti, against the godless principles of the French revolution). From 1901 to 1905 he served as prime minister and helped to pass many laws improving the lot of the poorer classes and promoting social justice for all citizens.

Kuyper was also the main founder of the Free University, a school of higher learning based on Scripture and Reformed principles. An accomplished speaker with great oratorical gifts, he could hold audiences spell-bound for hours on end. For almost half a century he dominated the ecclesiastical and political scene in the Netherlands. During that time Calvinism became a force to be reckoned with in the affairs of the nation. Almost singlehandedly he was able to mobilize Reformed Christians into a powerful constituency strong enough to secure many seats in Parliament and even form governments.

Antithesis and Common Grace

This was certainly a great accomplishment. Although he respected God-fearing people like Pietje Baltus, he realized that their faith was too inward directed and that they had to be brought out of their religious and cultural isolation. They needed to let their light shine and take seriously their task as Christians *in* the world, while still showing that they were not *of* the world.

How did Kuyper convince and persuade his religious constituency? He did so by teaching two seemingly contradictory doctrines, namely those of the antithesis and common grace. The word *antithesis* is made up of *anti*, meaning against, and *thesis* which means proposition, theory or statement. Antithesis, then, means taking position against beliefs held by one's opponents, e.g. in the spheres of religion and philosophy. According to Kuyper there exists a basic antithesis between the church and the world. The redeemed live out of one principle — love for God — and all others live out of the opposite principle, namely enmity against God, however this might be expressed.

One might conclude from this that with such a gap existing between church and world there could be no cooperation at all between the two camps. But Kuyper found the solution to this problem by constructing a new doctrine, namely that of common grace. It was not an entirely new doctrine, because elements of it can be found in Calvin and the Reformed confessions,[4] but it is certainly true that Kuyper put his own stamp on this doctrine. What, then, is common grace as defined by Kuyper? It is the idea that in addition to special or saving grace which is given only to God's elect, there is also a grace which God bestows on all men. Whereas special grace regenerates men's hearts, common grace (1) restrains the destructive process of sin within mankind in general and (2) enables men, though not born again, to develop the latent forces of the creation and thus make a positive contribution to the fulfilment of the cultural mandate given to man before the Fall.

Because all men share in this common grace by virtue of the image of God left in them, Christians can and should work together with unbelievers towards improving living conditions, fighting poverty and promoting social justice for all. Besides, Kuyper argued, common grace enables us to recognize and appreciate all that is good and beautiful in the world and allows us to enjoy God's gifts with thanksgiving. Therefore Christians

should be actively involved in the arts and sciences and thus in the development of culture. In this way Kuyper challenged the Reformed community to "purge themselves of their 'pietistic dualisms,' their separation of Sunday from the workweek, of the spiritual from the physical — in theological terms, of nature from grace."[5]

Kuyper's doctrine of common grace has been called the linchpin of his entire work and thought. By skillfully combining it with the doctrine of the antithesis, he was able to reassure those who were concerned to preserve the difference between church and world, while at the same time satisfying intellectuals within the Reformed camp who appreciated at least some aspects of culture.

The Dual Purpose of Common Grace

Common grace thus served a dual purpose. On the one hand it reconciled the doctrine of total depravity with the presence of good among the unregenerate, while on the other hand God's sovereignty was safeguarded by insisting that whatever good there still is in the world is not the result of human effort, but the fruit of divine grace. But not only that, common grace also showed that such institutions as the government and the legal system, the arts and sciences were not just *products* of grace but *means* of grace — instruments whereby God restrained sin and enabled man to develop creation as he had originally intended.

If common grace was the linchpin of Kuyper's thought, it also proved to be the Achilles heel of his system. For while many Reformed people followed Kuyper and his ideas enthusiastically, there were also many who strongly disagreed with his views. Especially in the Secession churches (the churches which had left the State Church earlier, in 1834) there was much opposition to Neo-Calvinism. Men like Lindeboom and Ten Hoor were convinced that in some very important areas Kuyper's teachings were contrary to Scripture and the Reformed confessions. There were at least three areas of concern. First, there was Kuyper's doctrine of the church. Second, there was his view of the primary task of the church. And, third, his optimistic view of culture and the potential for redeeming it.

The Church as Institute and Organism

Kuyper believed that a distinction should be made between the church as institute and the church as organism. As institute the church has been entrusted with the three offices and is called to preach and administer the sacraments and exercise discipline. As organism or body of believers she is to be involved in social activities and thus carry out the cultural mandate. As such there was nothing wrong with this distinction, but the way Kuyper used it alarmed the Seceders. Kuyper seemed to say that the real church is not the church as institute but the church as organism. This is how he put it: "The church as institute is not all of the church, nor the real or essential church, not the church itself, but an institute established through the church and for the church in order that the Word can be effective in its midst."[6] In other words, the church as institute exists to serve the church as organism, equipping the saints for their task in the world. And what is that task? For Kuyper it is primarily one of social involvement, redeeming the world for Christ, obeying the cultural mandate.

Thus Neo-Calvinism marks a radical departure from the older Calvinism or Reformed theology. Until Kuyper's time the Reformed viewed the church as a salvation-institute, the work-shop of the Holy Spirit, where sinners are saved and believers nurtured in the faith as well as equipped for living in this world as Christians. In Kuyper's scheme the elect enter this world already regenerated and thus may be presumed to be in a state of grace from birth. In fact, infants are to be baptized on the ground of this presumption. Consequently, the church's primary task is to *nurture* the regenerate and prepare them for life in the world.

Prior to Kuyper the Reformed, while not denying that the church has a task in society, put the emphasis on the salvation of sinners. Preaching for the Old School Calvinists, therefore dealt with the great biblical themes of repentance — and then not just daily repentance of believers, but especially the initial act of repentance on the part of the unconverted in the church — faith, the new birth, justification, sanctification and so on. But with Kuyper a shift in emphasis took place. Not what the Holy Spirit works in sinners' hearts through the Word, but what Christians should do to redeem society and culture — that became the important thing.

The Cultural Mandate

This brings us to the cultural mandate. Kuyper believed that the task God gave Adam before the Fall is still the task of Christians today. In fact, he says it is really only Christians who are able to carry out this task properly because they have been regenerated by the Spirit of God and restored into the original relationship which was lost through Adam's fall.

What was that task? According to Kuyper it is spelled out in Genesis 1:28, "And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth." This verse, Kuyper says, sums up God's real purpose for man. That purpose, ultimately, is not the salvation of *sinners*, but the redemption of the *cosmos*. Salvation is but the means to that end. God's real purpose in saving us is that we will carry out that original command or cultural mandate first given to Adam and Eve.[7] So important is this mandate for Kuyper and his disciples that it seems to take precedence over the Great Commission. Kuyper believed that Christ is not only the Mediator of redemption but also the Mediator of Creation. That means Christ died not only for lost sinners but also for a lost *world* or cosmos.

To put it still differently, in Kuyper's view, predestination does not just concern the salvation of the elect but also the restoration of the entire creation. God in predestination focuses his attention on the whole creation so that the decree encompasses all of history and is directed to the end that he will receive the glory from all the works of his hands. In this way, Kuyper felt, one's attention is not restricted to the work of particular or special grace, but it also extends to that completely different work of God in the realm of common grace.[8]

The Christian, then, has a formidable task in this world. He is to carry out his cultural mandate and fully develop the creation's potential. In fact the believer's activity in this area is absolutely necessary as a preparation for the coming of God's Kingdom. Christ will not return until this mandate is completed.

> For us, Kuyper says, it is certain that the Parousia must bring us not only a change from the militant to the triumphant church ... but also that everything that God has hidden in nature and the world must be brought to light *before the end can be ushered in* (emphasis mine, C.P.).[9]

Surely Kuyper went too far here. And so did and do many of his followers. Not many years ago, B. Zijlstra, one of the spokesmen for the Toronto based Institute for Christian Studies (ICS), wrote that the church is essentially "redeemed humanity restored to its original task assigned to mankind at the beginning," and that in his view the missionary mandate of Matthew 28 is basically a republication or restatement of the cultural mandate of Genesis 28.[10]

Critical Evaluation of the Cultural Mandate

Is this biblical Christianity? Hardly. The very notion that Christ's second coming is contingent on the progress we make with our cultural endeavours is preposterous, to put it mildly. If the timing of our Lord's second coming has anything to do with our activity it is our involvement in *missionary* work that is emphasized in the New Testament. As Jesus himself states in Matthew 24:14, "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come."

What about Genesis 1:28? Does it have nothing to say to us today? Indeed it does. It cannot be denied that here God speaks of a definite task or mission given to man. But is this so-called cultural mandate still in force in the same way as it was for Adam? Clearly it is not. The very notion of a cultural mandate carries with it a connotation of legalism. It is a term that does not belong in the context of grace and the covenant of grace. When God gave this mandate, if you want to call it that, the Fall had not yet taken place. When Adam sinned, however, he was no longer in a position to carry out this command. It was Christ, the second Adam, who took over this responsibility from the first Adam and fulfilled the task assigned to man at the beginning. No, God did not abrogate his original demand. Rather, in Christ he himself met that demand. By his obedience he has kept the law for us. The result of his saving work is that the character of our work and activity has fundamentally changed. Good works, cultural or otherwise, are now performed by the believer out of gratitude and never out of fear. Any notion, therefore, that our activities, or the lack of them, could either hasten or delay the return of Christ is to be firmly rejected.[11]

For this and other reasons the term cultural mandate should be avoided. As Dr. W.H. Velema says, "As a term it does not reflect any relation to the

work of Christ and puts us all the way back to the starting line... Our work takes place after Christ has brought about a decisive turn in world history."[12] When the apostles urge believers to perform good works they always join the imperative to the indicative. In other words, the command to work is always issued on the basis of Christ's *finished* work. All our spiritual activities are grounded in his saving activity. Neo-Calvinists, with their emphasis on cultural, rather than missionary endeavour tend to lose sight of the fact that believers do their work in the sphere and context of Christ's soteriological work. This is a tragic error which has hindered the progress of the real work of the Gospel.[13]

In recent years Dutch theologians like J. Douma and W.H. Velema have questioned the exegetical basis which Kuyper and his followers have adduced for the cultural mandate. Douma, e.g., wonders if such passages as Genesis 1:28; 2:15, 3:23 and Psalm 8 really constitute such an all-encompassing mandate as Neo-Calvinists believe. True, Genesis 1:28 and 2:15 assign man the task of subduing the earth as well as dressing and keeping the garden, but does this have to be seen as a mandate to bring the life of creation to its full potential?

Douma points out that the Hebrew verb *abad* means simply to cultivate a field. This labour is required of man if he is to eat (Gen.1:29; 2:5; 3:17ff.). What these verses seem to tell us is that there is a connection between working and eating and that sin has made work difficult. Douma does not deny that there may be implications here for culture in a broader sense, but he cautions against reading more into these verses than is warranted. Culture in the sense of the unfolding of what God has put in his creation in seed form, in his view, is more a matter of consequence than a specific mandate. Because God has created man in his image and with the urge to reproduce himself the human race will populate the earth and in the process a culture will develop that will go beyond eating and drinking so that man may still enjoy many good things.[14] W.H. Velema rejects the idea that Christians are under obligation to complete a specific cultural program, for in that case such a program would first have to be drawn up, but for this we find no evidence at all in the New Testament, let alone that it prescribes a "mandate."[15] He warns against such a preoccupation with culture and social involvement that the Christian life loses its "pilgrim" character. We are first and foremost strangers and pilgrims on earth. Being a pilgrim is essential for the church of Christ. "The congregation of the New Testament knows that she is 'on the way.' She is not at home here. She has been loosed from

her old environment and now looks for the future revelation of the Kingdom which Christ will establish, not man."[16]

Velema prefers to speak of the Christian's *vocation* or calling in the world instead of a mandate. And what is this vocation? It is to live in this sinful and corrupt world as salt and light. Just as salt checks decay in meat and other foods, as well as giving it flavour, so Christians should by their Gospel witness and holy walk seek to influence the world around them. In other words, their presence and activity in the world should help to alleviate and offset the baneful effects of sin and make life in society tolerable and conducive to the work of proclaiming the Gospel. Everything we do as Christians should have a missionary and eschatological focus. Even our cultural involvement such as it is, should take place from the perspective of Christ's coming kingdom. This is the clear teaching of the New Testament. As Paul writes to the Philippians," Do all things without murmuring and disputings: That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain." (2:14-16; cf. I Thess. 3:13; 5:23; 2 Pet. 3:14).

While it is our calling as Christians to try to have this kind of impact on the world, we should not entertain unrealistic hopes of success. We should certainly not expect the Kingdom of God to come through our efforts, be they cultural or missionary. The most we can look for in the way of visible results is that the Lord will graciously enable us to erect a few *signs* of the coming Kingdom. That Kingdom is basically an eschatological reality, i.e., as far as its fullness and visible manifestation are concerned, it is still a future reality. During this dispensation it is basically inward, spiritual and invisible. "The kingdom of heaven," Jesus said, "is within you." Christ now rules in the hearts of his people and he is King in his Church and acknowledged as such.

True, Christ is also King of the world, but until his return a Christ-rejecting world continues to make Satan its god, and as long as this dispensation will last "the whole world lieth in wickedness" (or in the wicked one, Satan; I Jn. 5:19)

Common Grace: A Doctrine Often Distorted

Summing up, the question is not whether Christians have a task in this world or not, but what this task consists of and what is the Scriptural basis and warrant for it.

Kuyper, as we saw, found the basis in the doctrine of common grace. This doctrine, or at least the way he formulated it, is open to serious question. If he had only meant by common grace what the church has always understood by it, namely God's gracious disposition toward all men, so that he lets his sun shine and his rain fall on the just and the unjust, few in the Reformed community would have a problem with it. Again, if common grace for him meant that God wants his Gospel to be preached to the whole world and offers his grace to all, most would heartily agree. But Kuyper's version of this doctrine includes much more than that. For him common grace is primarily a grace directed to the redemption of the cosmos and culture. By rooting this doctrine in the divine decree of predestination he was able to construct a system whereby God's plan for his creation is realized along a double track: the elect are brought to salvation by Christ as Mediator of redemption (particular grace) and the cosmos with all its potential for culture is redeemed by Christ as Mediator of creation (common grace). Such a conception had to lead to an essentially optimistic view of culture and the world. Not that Kuyper himself lost sight of sin and its awful consequences for the human race and the cosmos. He deeply believed in the antithesis and thus in the fundamental difference between common and particular grace. The same cannot be said of all his disciples, however. If some had problems with his theory of common grace because they saw in it a threat to particular or saving grace, many others were only too happy with it because it offered an escape from what they considered a too rigid view of the Christian's separation from the world. Thus common grace opened the door to worldliness.

Is Neo-Calvinism different from the old, classic Calvinism? Yes, in many ways. W. Aalders, a scholar of renown in the Netherlands who has studied this issue thoroughly does not hesitate to refer to Kuyper and the whole Neo-Calvinist movement as *De Grote Ontsporing* (The Great Derailment). In his view, Kuyper with his lop-sided emphasis on culture and social involvement has contributed greatly to what he calls the externalization of the doctrines of grace, especially justification and regeneration. In Neo-Calvinistic circles, he says, justification is not denied,

but no longer experienced as it was by Luther, Calvin and all who live by God's Word rather than by human, be it Christian philosophy. What do Neo-Calvinists still know of justification as an inner occurrence wherein the living Word in union with the Spirit introduces a sinner into the spiritual reality of Christ and his realm? Speculative, abstract, philosophical thinking has eliminated the sovereign, spiritual, inward working of the Word, turning it into a cerebral, intellectual concept. An abstract, organic idea of regeneration as a slowly maturing seed has taken the place of regeneration and justification by God's Word and Spirit.[17]

Kuyper's zeal for the kingship of Christ in the world had to lead to an acceleration of the process of the secularization of spiritual values. Through ever-increasing contact with the world and exposure to the spirit of the world, the Reformed faith became more and more externalized or hollowed out. Some of Kuyper's closest friends were alarmed by this growing trend in Reformed circles. J.C. Aalders, himself a Neo-Calvinist, warned his colleagues at a ministers' conference in 1916 in these words:

> Our Reformed people, having gradually come into contact with the world of culture are in great danger of being influenced by humanism. To the degree that mysticism and anabaptism have been overcome, God's people have recognized their earthly calling. But now we face the danger of contamination by the spirit of the age. The doctrine of common grace, confessed and put in to practice by our people, opens with the world at the same time the danger of conformity to the world. We have not escaped a certain imbalance in our spiritual food. Not enough attention is given to the needs of the individual heart and soul. Outward obedience is not sufficient to salvation.[18]

About a decade earlier, H. Bavinck had written in an introduction to a Dutch translation of sermons by the great Scottish divines Ralph and Ebenezer Erskine:

> Here we have an important element which is largely lacking among us. We miss this spiritual soul-knowledge. It seems we no longer know what sin and grace, guilt and forgiveness, regeneration and conversion are. We know these things in theory, but we no longer know them in the awful reality of life.[19]

It is well-known that Bavinck became very disillusioned with certain aspects of the Neo-Calvinist movement towards the end of his life, because so much of it seemed to result, be it ever so unintentionally, in worldliness,

superficiality and pride.

What Neo-Calvinism has ultimately led to or at least contributed to, can be seen in the apostasy taking place at present in the very churches Kuyper did so much to establish, the Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (Reformed Churches in the Netherlands) and to a lesser degree in their sister churches in North America, the Christian Reformed Church. May God help us avoid making the same mistakes and may he preserve us in the faith once delivered to the saints by the apostles and rediscovered and set forth by the Reformers and their successors the Puritans. What we need is not *neo* Calvinism but the old or classic Reformed faith which is Scriptural, confessional and experiential.

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DOCTRINE OF IMMEDIATE RETRIBUTION

by Derek Thomas

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When asked to explain Job's suffering, his three friends were of one mind: Job's pain was the result of God's immediate retribution, rendering to men and women, here and now, what they deserve; rewarding good with blessing, evil with punishment. Since Job was suffering, he must have sinned; God was displeased with Job.

Nor is such counsel unique. It finds expression, today, in those who suggest to the terminally ill, that if only they had had more faith, they would not have become sick. Such advice presupposes that suffering is the invariable result of misconduct, either directly (some tangible violation of God's law), or indirectly (a lack of faith). Either way, the sufferer is culpable, and the way of cure is the way of repentance. Such counsel, in Job's case, is almost universally condemned,[1] and rightly so.

Immediate retribution: partly wrong

Job's counsellors are misguided in their analysis of suffering for three reasons.

Firstly, it is clearly wrong to suggest that all suffering is the result of immediate retribution. Sickness is not always the result of punishment as Jesus made clear in relation to the man who had been born blind (John 9:1-12). Those who insist that suffering is inevitably a result of divine punishment imply that following Christ need not involve suffering. This is patently false. Christ's image is fulfilled in us by means of suffering. Paul even suggests: 'I fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of his body, which is the church' (Col.1:24). Paul's words are worth examining closely, for they help us understand why God allows his children to suffer for reasons that are not immediately related to personal sin. Paul is not suggesting at all that there is something lacking in Christ's atonement Not at all! But he is suggesting that Christ goes on suffering, *in*

and through his people. When folk like Job suffer, Christ suffers along with them. And it is part of our Christian vocation to accept this yoke patiently and meekly. Job will, but not quite yet.

True, there is a part of Old Testament (old covenantal) expectations which prepared Israel for material and this-worldly blessing (c.f. Deut.28), but there are shadows of the cross which fall deep into the Old Testament also. Isaiah, for example, had prepared Israel to reckon that God's servants could expect to be tried and tested, to suffer not because they sinned, but as part of God's calling to faithful service in his kingdom (c.f. the 'servant-songs' of Isaiah: 42:1-7; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; 52:13 - 53:12).[2] Many of Isaiah's fellow prophets, Jeremiah and Elijah for example, knew days of pain in faithful service to God. And there were scores of earlier prophets, who brought God's word to unfaithful kings, who were harshly treated for their faithful service, including Hanani, who was imprisoned by King Asa (2 Chron 16:7-10), and Micaiah, who spoke against Jehoshaphat, and was slapped in the face (2 Chron. 18:23).[3]

The New Testament explains it more fully. Jesus warned of two areas of expectation in preparing his disciples for a life of service: self-denial and cross-bearing (Matt. 16:24; Mk. 8:34; Lk. 9:23). It is in this sense that Paul could write to the Corinthians when, like Job, he felt he was about to die under the strain, telling them that he felt 'he had the sentence of death' upon him (the Greek is 'answer' and not 'sentence', implying that in response to his prayer for deliverance from the crushing effect of his trials, God had given the answer 'no'; 2 Cor. 1:8-9). There were reasons for Paul's sufferings, that had to do with something other than the fact that Paul may have sinned in some way. These included: (i) that the sight of Paul's suffering would encourage the prayers of others (few things will make others pray more, than when a friend is hurting), and (ii) that God's refusal to intervene immediately helped demonstrate in graphic fashion his sovereign power; and (iii) when Paul was finally relieved of his burden, the thanks for his deliverance was to be given to God alone (2 Cor. 1:11).

Secondly, God does not always carry out his judgements immediately. Indeed, an argument can be made that even on those occasions where he does judge immediately, the wrath exhibited is nearly always mitigated; the punishment is less severe than the crime demands. This is so, because the full force of God's wrath will only be felt on 'the day of wrath' (Rom. 2:5); he current world order is being 'kept until the day of judgement' (2 Pet.

That there are times when God seems to delay in the execution of his judgement, seems to be what Job himself has in mind when he says: 'The tents of robbers prosper, and those who provoke God are secure—in what God provides by his hand.' Not only does the punishment seem light; it appears at times to be non-existent. Sinners appear to prosper in their criminality. It is the observation of the psalmist, too, in Psalm 73. The sins of some men go ahead of them whilst the sins of others drag behind (c.f. 1 Tim. 5:24).

It has to be said that retribution is what we expect of God. We know in our hearts that this is what ought to be. It is why we feel such pain when the ungodly seem to prosper. It is the anguish felt by Asaph, when he sees the affluence of the ungodly; the wicked are 'free from the burdens common to man; they are not plagued by human ills' (Psa. 73:5); and this simply ought not to be. Instinctively, we agree with Asaph's dilemma. Contrary to almost everything we seem to believe or at least expect, the godless seem to get on in life. And this ought not to be, we say to ourselves. We expect God to judge the wicked and bless the righteous. Good deeds should be rewarded and bad deeds should be punished, and when they are not, indeed, when the very contrary seems to occur, it calls into question the very justice of the universe; and of God himself!

Behind all this lies a sense of justice which is engraven indelibly in every human consciousness. We all believe in justice and equity. That is what makes us moral creatures. We see wickedness and we immediately evaluate and assess. We blame and assign guilt. We call for punishment. Our society has erected an impressive juridical structure: legislature, judicatories, penal establishments. There are laws, sanctions, judges, and sentences, all of which speak of the ultimate validity of justice. Unless God is just, unless there is infinite justice, then our own juridical structures have no validity. We have no right to send another human being to prison, either in our own name, or that of the state. Such judgements are right only as executions of the justice of God.

The sense of justice is one of the most basic of human instincts. As Christians, we feel it even more intensely. Justice is what we expect from God. "Whenever you hear the glory of God mentioned,' wrote John Calvin, 'think of his justice.'[4]

is part of Job's assessment of things, in his reply to Zophar, that

'those who provoke God are secure' (12:6). Zophar has had the temerity to point to the 'empty headed donkey' (11:12) and suggest that even it can back up his contention that good is rewarded and evil is punished. For Zophar everything in the garden was neat and tidy. He had everything all boxed up. But for Job, all in the garden was not lovely. There were thorns and briars: judges become fools (12:17) and priests are humiliated (12:19) and advisers are silenced and elders are deprived of good sense (12:20). Like the gangster (without any warrant in his case) he seems to say; 'there ain't no justice.'

The book of Job opens by preparing us for this idea: why else tell us that Job was wealthy, healthy and pious? It can only be to heighten the shock that a man of such eminent godliness should be treated so harshly. It is certainly not what some current evangelicals tell Christians to expect if they follow the Lord wholeheartedly. The 'prosperity gospel' (as it is called) is founded on the principle that godliness brings with it freedom from disease and want. It was the propaganda which Job's three friends, especially Zophar, tried hard to sell: not just that God rewards those who follow him with material, this-worldly blessings, and likewise punishes those who do not by withdrawing these things; but that he does so immediately. It is just here that the premise is false.

Thirdly, it is wrong to suggest that the kind of blessing/judgement folk can expect is always a material one. It is to suggest that illness was a sign of God's dis-favour, evidence that specific sin had taken place. Good health is, by consequence, the result of an obedient life-style. This is patently false. I think, as I write these lines, of a godly woman seemingly a few weeks away from death by cancer (and consequently proved to be so), who was told by a minister who hardly knew her, that if she had only exercised faith, she would have recovered. According to this view, her unbelief (the sin that ensures the progress of disease) is the root cause of her trouble. This is more than mere theological naïveté; it is cruel advice.[5] 'To be told that longed-for healing was denied because of some defect in your faith when you had laboured and strained every way you know how to devote yourself to God and to 'believe for blessing,' is to be pitchforked into distress, despair, and a sense of being abandoned by God. This is as bitter a feeling as any this side of hell — particularly if, like most invalids, your sensitivity is up and your spirits down.'[6]

To expect that God always intervenes *immediately* with material

(this-worldly) judgement or blessing is to have an 'over-realised eschatology' — a difficult term I know, but one which helps convey the notion that expects now all the judgements and blessings which are promised us in *the age to come*. Paul seemed to be contending with this very thing when in writing his last letter (2 Timothy) he corrects those who insist that the resurrection is past already (2 Tim. 2:18), and that therefore freedom from suffering and material prosperity are to be experienced now to the full. He exhorts Timothy, who may have been tempted to give up his calling to be the Lord's servant, not to yield to the panderings of the flesh or the enticements of the world. He also warns of Demas who appears to have done this very thing. 'Fulfil your ministry,' Paul tells Timothy, by which he means: don't give up your calling to be a preacher by the allurements of this-worldly things (c.f. 2 Tim.4:5).

Immediate retribution: partly right

If the doctrine of immediate retribution is partly wrong, it is also partly right. God reacts to human conduct; and he sometimes does so immediately. He invariably does so *righteously*. In the first place, the immediate retribution may be in the form of a *blessing*. Under the Old Covenant immediate blessings of a material kind were indeed to be expected (c.f. Deut. 29:19). And in the New Testament also we are told that every good and perfect gift comes from God (c.f. Jam. 1:17). We are not to be moaning Christians! In criticism of those who peddle the 'prosperity gospel' we must not sin by denying that God has given us much more than we ever deserve. God does give us good days: good health, a good marriage partner, the blessing of children, days of leisure and fun. We do God a grave injustice when we do not acknowledge the good things he gives. Counting our blessings is the way to glorify God. This is not merely an evangelical cliché, but a profound and staggering truth! God is better to us than we deserve and far better than we ever acknowledge.

But, in the second place (and this will be the main emphasis of our present study), God's retribution is seen in his anger displayed towards sin. His response to sin is one of absolute propriety at all times, on all occasions. Infringement of his law results in a display of divine anger. Ultimately, hell is the place where men experience God's unmitigated anger. There is a 'day' when God will judge the world in righteousness, by Jesus Christ (Acts 17:31). On this day, 'the wicked, who know not God, and obey not the

Gospel of Jesus Christ, shall be cast into eternal torments, and be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power'[7] (Matt.25:31ff; Rom. 2:5; 2 Thess. 1:7-10).

But hell is not the only place where we experience the anger of God. This anger is experienced on this side of eternity, too. There is anger when God chastens his own children (Prov. 3:11-12; Amos 3:2; Heb. 12:5-6). There is anger when God judges the church (1 Pet. 4:17). In history, God has expressed his anger against entire civilizations (Gen.6:5ff; 19:24). And in particular, this anger is what Paul refers to when he tells us that God has given some men over to 'a reprobate mind' (Rom. 1:28, KJV). The moral collapse of mankind is in itself evidence that 'the wrath of God is being revealed from heaven' (Rom. 1:18). No one was ever more conscious of the experience of God's wrath in his life than was Daniel, when he expressed in a model prayer: 'You have fulfilled the words spoken against us and against our rulers by bringing upon us great disaster. Under the whole heaven nothing has ever been done like what has been done to Jerusalem' (Dan. 9:12). It is precisely on this level that Peter exhorts us to live in fear before God. Why? Because in God's dealings, even with his own family, his judgement is impartial (1 Pet. 1:17).

God reacts to human conduct because he is righteous. He also reacts to human conduct because of a covenantal relationship. Death universally reigns in human society because of Adam's transgression of the covenant. As Geerhardus Vos puts it:

> Man's original state was a state of indefinite probation: he remained in possession of what he had, so long as he did not commit sin, but it was not a state in which the continuance of his religious and moral status could be guaranteed him. In order to assure this for him, he had to be subjected to an intensified, concentrated probation, in which, if he remained standing, the status of probation would be forever left behind.[8]

Having failed the terms of probation, Adam, and those whom he represented as covenantal head (viz., all mankind), felt the full force of the covenantal curse: 'but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die' (Gen. 2:17). Because Adam sinned, we sinned in him (Rom. 5:12-21). 'All mankind... sinned in him, and fell with him, in his first transgression'[9]. Nor can it be argued that we are merely innocent victims in this matter; each of us

continues to break the terms of that covenant; each of us suffers the curse: 'Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law' (Gal.3:10).

God hates sin and it is impossible for him to react in any other way, but to enforce his retribution. Not everyone is agreed upon the connection between covenant transgression and the chastisement it deserves. The saintly Samuel Rutherford curiously speculated that God could have chosen to ignore sin had he so wished: 'God punishes sin by no necessity of nature. Nay, if He chose, He might leave it altogether unpunished'.[10] This seems altogether implausible. His 'eyes are too pure to look on evil' (Hab. 1:13). There is an aspect of God's being, his just and righteous nature, that makes it necessary for God to punish sin, whenever and wherever it appears. Punishment is not an option. With mercy, however, it is different; for mercy is always optional.

> We do not need any special revelation, to inform us that God is a just Being, and that His anger is kindled against wickedness, and that He will punish the transgressor. This class of truths, the Apostle informs us, are written in the human constitution... That which God must do, He certainly will do. He must be just, and therefore He certainly will punish sin, is the reasoning of the human mind, the world over, and in every age.[11]

To summarise so far: God is just and we must expect him to punish all wrongdoing. 'Wherever sin is...,' wrote Calvin, 'it is accompanied with the wrath and vengeance of God.'[12]

The doctrine of retribution is fundamental to our understanding of God and of ourselves. The view, then, of Job's comforters is *partly right.* Thinking of the negative side of retribution for a moment, the fornicator who contracts Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) reaps what he has sown. There is no question of merely falling victim to chance. Misconduct has been the cause of his downfall. He has suffered *immediate* retribution. The business-man who conducts one shady deal too many, and whose business, as a result, becomes bankrupt, is likewise the victim of *immediate* retribution.

This is what the Bible leads us to expect! The writer of Chronicles, in particular, seems to have deliberately re-written the history of Samuel-Kings in order to bring out this very point: to bring to the foreground the truth that those who disobey God can expect to be punished *immediately*![13]

Saul and Rehoboam

If we read, for example, the downfall of King Saul in the narrative in 1 Samuel 31, the emphasis falls on the fact that Saul took his own life. Sermons which, in part, condemn (with sensitivity) suicide seem appropriate. However, if one reads the same story in Chronicles (1 Chron. 10), the emphasis is quite different. The account of Saul's suicide is, of course, mentioned, but the Chronicler is anxious to convey a quite different interpretation. Writing six centuries later, he has the advantage of bringing out another truth, one which is especially relevant to those of his readers just emerging from years in captivity and virtual bondage in Babylon. In answer to the question, 'Who killed King Saul?' the Chronicler provides the answer: 'Saul died because he was unfaithful to the LORD; he did not keep the word of the LORD and even consulted a medium for guidance, and did not inquire of the LORD' adding, just in case we have missed the point, 'So the LORD put him to death and turned the kingdom over to David son of Jesse" (1 Chron. 10:13-14). Saul died because God killed him! The sovereign Lord took away his life because he had been unfaithful (Hebrew *mâ'al* 'to act unfaithfully, treacherously'[14]). Saul had violated God's covenant. Saul's death was an example of immediate retribution.[15]

Another example is that of the story of Rehoboam. The account is given, first of all, in 1 Kings 14:21-29. Basically, we are told that Judah did evil during Rehoboam's reign and Shishak attacked Jerusalem. The account in Chronicles highlights a causal connection between Rehoboam's sin and Judah's downfall. Following a period of obedience on Rehoboam's part, 'he and all Israel with him abandoned the law of the LORD. Because they had been unfaithful to the LORD, Shishak king of Egypt attacked Jerusalem in the fifth year of King Rehoboam' (2 Chron. 12:1-2). Unfaithfulness (Hebrew, *mâ'al*) is once again seen as the root cause of the trouble.

Uzziah

Another example is that of the story of King Uzziah. As told in Kings (where he is called Azaraiah) the story covers only a few short verses (2 Kings 15:1-7). The narrative is content to tell us that he was a good king and that he died of leprosy. The same story in 2 Chronicles, however, takes much longer — twenty-three verses (2 Chron. 26) — to tell the story of this

hapless king, pointing out that the reason he died of leprosy was that he became proud, usurping the role of the priests in the temple administrations and that as a consequence leprosy broke out on his forehead from which he died. Indications of how things ought to be are given early in the narrative: 'He sought God during the days of Zechariah, who instructed him in the fear of God. As long as he sought the LORD, God gave him success' (2 Chron. 26:5). But things turned sour: 'But after Uzziah became powerful, his pride led to his downfall. He was unfaithful to the LORD his God, and entered the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense' (2 Chron. 26:16). The main reason for Uzziah's downfall is said to be his 'unfaithfulness' (using the same word as in the case of the downfall of King Saul's dynasty, *mâ 'al*). More importantly, it is the very same word used for explaining why it was that Israel, the northern state, had fallen into the hands of the Assyrians (1 Chron. 5:25), and why Judah, in the south, had experienced a similar catastrophe under the onslaught of the Babylonians (1 Chron. 9:1).[16] The word is also used on two occasions in Numbers (5:12,27) where marital (sexual) unfaithfulness is meant. God's covenant, which is likened to a marriage (c.f. Jer. 3:14, 'I am your husband'), has been violated. Uzziah experienced *immediate retribution!*[17]

Joash and Asa

The idea of retribution is apparent in other instances also. Take the cases of Joash and Asa. Joash comes to the throne of Judah when only seven years of age, mainly through the leadership of the high priest, Jehoiada (2 Kings 12). Having seized the throne from his grandmother, Athaliah , who 'proceeded to destroy the whole royal family of the house of Judah' (2 Chron. 22:10), Joash co-operated with Jehoiada in a programme of reformation. But later on in his life, he faced an attack from Hazael of Damascus, an attack which was halted by the payment of tribute from the temple and palace (2 Kings 12:17-18). The story in Kings then merely records his assassination by his own officials (2 Kings 12: 19-21). Chronicles adds something, however, to the account. Joash remained faithful, only so long as Jehoiada lived; after his death 'they abandoned the temple of the LORD, the God of their fathers, and worshipped Asherah poles and idols. Because of their guilt, God's anger came upon Judah and Jerusalem' (2 Chron 24:18). A prophet named Zechariah comes and denounces Joash. The prophet is killed, saying as he dies, 'May the LORD see this and call you to account' (2 Chron 24:22). Retribution follows by the hands of

Hazael. And the Chronicler's conclusion? 'Because Judah had forsaken the LORD, the God of their fathers, judgement was executed on Joash' (2 Chron. 24:24).

Yet another example is that of King Asa, who ruled for 41 years and did what was right in the Lord's eyes (1 Kings 15:10-11). But in his old age he contracted a foot-disease and died (2 Kings 15:23-24). As far as Kings is concerned, that is all there is to the story. But Chronicles emphasises the element of retribution once more. Throughout his reign, Asa was at war with Baasha, king of Israel (something which Kings also notes (2 Kings 15:16-17). But Chronicles adds a detail once more emphasising the element of retribution: following Asa's initial victory over Baasha, he did not trust the Lord, looking instead to a foreign alliance to help him. A prophet called Hanani denounces him, who is in turn imprisoned (2 Chron. 16:7-10). When Asa finally contracts his foot-disease, he still refuses to seek the Lord (2 Chron 16:12), looking instead to 'physicians'— possibly 'ancestors' or even 'mediums'.[18]

Nor is it difficult to ascertain the reason for the Chronicler's emphasis. Writing as he does following the recent exile of Judah to Babylon, he is anxious that his readers learn a lesson or two from past history. Obviously they had not learnt it yet, else they would not have experienced God's retributive righteousness in being banished from their land. Have they learnt it during the exile itself? Has the chastisement been sufficient instruction, warning them of the consequences of disobedience? Obviously the Chronicler thinks not, and we need only read the half hearted response on behalf of God's people to return to Jerusalem and engage in the rebuilding of the city and its temple to see how necessary the message of Chronicles was.

Other examples could have been cited, including the defeat of the Israelites against the Philistines at the battle of Aphek, when the Ark was taken (1 Sam 4). Not only were Eli's two sons killed, but Phinehas' wife also died in childbirth. Before she died she named her son, Ichabod, meaning 'the glory has departed from Israel' (1 Sam. 4:21). 'But she was wrong,' asserts H. L. Ellison. 'The glory of God had indeed departed, but not because the ark of God had been captured; the ark had been captured because the glory had already departed.'[19] One thinks also of the judgement that befell Uzzah when he reached for, and touched, the Ark as it toppled from the cart when David thought to bring it back to Jerusalem from Kiriath

Jearim (2 Sam. 6; 1 Chron. 13). The immediate retribution that befell Uzzah angered David (2 Sam. 6:6). But he had no cause to be angry; for God was angry with David! 'Whenever God is annoyed,' comments Calvin, 'let us tremble, knowing that his justice is fair, and not like that of sinners.'[20]

Nor is this merely an Old Testament notion. It is precisely this viewpoint that explains why certain folk in Corinth were ill and others had died: they had shown scant regard for the Lord's Table (1 Cor. 11:30). It is also the reason why Ananias and Sapphira experienced summary execution at the Lord's hands: because they lied (Acts 5:1-11).

The Experience of Christ

If we need proof that God exercises on occasions immediate retribution, we need only turn to Calvary. The experience of Jesus Christ on the cross was the experience of unmitigated retribution upon sin — *imputed* sin. In Jesus Christ, God's anger descended on God's Son. Christ bore sin, suffered what sin deserved, 'descended into hell.'[21] Jesus bore in his own soul the torments of a condemned and ruined man. Nowhere is the agony more poignant than in the cry of dereliction, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matt.27:46; c.f. Mk. 15:34). That was Jesus' hell, when he was abandoned, forsaken by God. All he felt was God's anger, God's retribution. He looked for God's comforting presence, and it was not there. Retribution for Christ meant not knowing that God loved him. His very self-identity was reduced to sin. And as he looked forward in Gethsemane to that reality it overwhelmed him, almost unhinged him. He became 'sorrowful and troubled... overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death' (Matt. 26:37-38). The experience of Christ is proof of God's immediate retribution and what it means. When sin was imputed to Christ on the cross, God did not spare Him (Rom. 8:32). He poured forth his wrath, *immediately*!

Evaluation

In the light of this truth, we, perhaps, need to re-assess our understanding of one or two matters. Several possibilities come to mind.

1. *Our understanding of God and His ways.* We have seen that the expression of retribution, and of *immediate* retribution in particular, is

indicative of the essential nature of God. The wrath of God is his reflex reaction to sin. God is good to those who trust him; he is terrible to those who do not. 'The LORD is a jealous and avenging God; the LORD takes vengeance and is filled with wrath. The LORD takes vengeance on his foes and maintains his wrath against his enemies. The LORD is slow to anger and great in power; the LORD will not leave the guilty unpunished. His way is in the whirlwind and the storm, and clouds are the dust of his feet. He rebukes the sea and dries it up; he makes all the rivers run dry. Bashan and Carmel wither and the blossoms of Lebanon fade. The mountains quake before him and the hills melt away. The earth trembles at his presence, the world and all who live in it. Who can withstand his indignation? Who can endure his fierce anger? His wrath is poured out like fire; the rocks are shattered before him. The LORD is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him, but with an overwhelming flood he will make an end of Nineveh; he will pursue his foes into darkness.' (Nahum 1:2-8).

Retribution is at the heart of God's covenantal dealings with sinners. Central to the Mosaic covenant were the promises of blessings to those who adhered, together with curses to those who did not (Deut. 28:1-68). Disobedience brings judgement: 'The LORD will send on you curses, confusion and rebuke in everything you put your hand to, until you are destroyed and come to sudden ruin because of the evil you have done in forsaking him' (Deut. 28:20). God's blessings and judgements are a feature of his *faithfulness to his covenant*. Several times on the plains of Moab, in renewing the covenant with Israel, attention is drawn to what God had 'promised' (Deut. 1:11; 6:3,18,23; 8:1; 9:3,28; 11:25; 12:20; 13:17; 15:6; 18:2; 19:8; 26:15,18-19; 27:3, 28:9; 29:13; 31:20-21; 31:23; 34:4). In Deuteronomy 28:9 the promise of blessings for obedience is made on the basis of what God had 'promised... on oath.' This alludes to an earlier reference to Israel being God's 'treasured possession as he promised' (Deut.26:18). This in turn refers back to the original covenantal ceremony: 'Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession' (Exod. 19:5; c.f. Psa. 135:4; Mal. 3:17). This is, of course, the very language that Peter uses to describe the church of Christ: 'But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light' (1 Pet. 2:9). The New Testament church is in covenant with God and is expected to show forth God's praises in lives of holy obedience in precisely the same way as Old Testament Israel was expected to do. God's relationship to us, and our

relationship to God in Christ is a covenantal one. We can expect God to remain loyal, faithful, to the terms of his covenant. So much was this understood in the early church that the issue became a 'faithful saying': 'If we endure, we will also reign with him. If we disown him, he will also disown us' (2 Tim. 2:12). It was a word of judgement from One who is.. 'faithful and true', 'the Amen' that brought stinging rebuke to the lukewarm Laodicean church (Rev. 3:14ff). Living in covenant with God through faith in Jesus Christ calls for obedience if we are ever to know blessing.

2. *Our understanding of providence.* What we have been thinking about in these pages affects our understanding of providence. If, as Maurice Roberts contends, 'the way a man interprets providence proves his real theology,'[22] then, our profession to be biblical and Reformed can only be understood in the light of our understanding (and proclamation as preachers) of the doctrine of retribution within history itself.

What takes place in the world in general and in our own lives in particular, must take into account the penetration of supernatural acts of judgement and blessing, some sudden and others more generally given. Preachers, especially, are directed to declare the whole counsel of God. This means, in part, that we are to declare all the doctrines, including, therefore, the doctrine of immediate retribution. To be sure, preaching must take into consideration the due proportion and balance of each doctrine. It is undoubtedly true, that the main emphasis of the Christian preacher should concentrate upon the love of God and provision of God in terms of the gospel of Jesus Christ. But it is impossible to preach the cross adequately, without mentioning the element of retribution present in the judgement that befell Christ.

It is no less true, in the application of that gospel to the sinner, that a stress upon retribution is also necessary. It is surely poignant that the apostle Paul, in outlining the gospel to the Romans — a gospel of which he declares in the very opening chapter that he 'not ashamed' (Rom. 1:16) — that he immediately refers to the solemn fact that contemporary with the message of the gospel, 'the wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness' (Rom.1:18). Retribution does not always come in supernatural acts of sudden judgement; it can also appear in less dramatic, but equally devastating ways: God gives men to *impurity* (1:24); he gives men over to *shameful lusts* (1:26); he gives men over to a *reprobate mind* (1:28).

It behoves us, then, to take careful note of certain historical events. In Matthew 24 (and its parallels), Jesus speaks of the Last Things. In the course of his Olivet Discourse, Jesus points to the revelation of God's retribution in ways that are both immediate (relatively speaking) and delayed. The judgement that befell Jerusalem in 70 A.D. was a case of immediate retribution. The destruction of the entire world at Christ's Second Coming is a case of delayed retribution. The passage calls upon us to 'watch' (Matt. 24:42-43; 25:13). We are to be awake to what God is currently doing in this world. Every act of retribution is a sign of the coming judgement at the end of the age. 'You will hear of wars and rumours of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains' (Matt. 24:6-8). Such signs are continual reminders that the Judge is standing at the doors (Jam. 5:9).

We must also be careful to maintain proportion and balance in the application of this doctrine. In the case of wars, famines and earthquakes, for example, things particularly referred to in the Olivet Discourse as signs of 'the end', it is not true that people who suffer, or even die, from such events are to be thought of as the special objects of God's wrath. Jesus specifically refuted such conclusions when asked about the tower in Siloam that fell and killed certain people (Luke 13:4). The same truth lies behind Jesus' reply to the question about the man born blind and the cause of his blindness (John 9: 1-12). It lay neither with him nor his parents. His suffering was for an entirely different reason: that the works of God might be displayed in him and thereby astonish folk to this day who read the story in faith.

3. It must also be realised that the effect of this doctrine is, in part, *to induce a sense of fear*. God sees and reacts to every action. Were it not for our redemption in Jesus Christ through faith alone, our case would be without hope. But we must realise, too, that even as Christians, we shall be judged (2 Cor. 5:10).

> There may be a fear and a terror that does harm, but man need be under no concern lest he experience too much of this feeling, in his hours of weakness and irresolution, in his youthful days of temptation and of dalliance. Let him rather bless God that there is such an intense light, and such a pure fire in the Divine Essence, and seek to have his whole vitiated and poisoned nature penetrated and purified

> by it. Have you never looked with a steadfast gaze into a grate of burning anthracite, and noticed the quiet intense glow of the heat, and how silently the fire throbs and pulsates through the fuel, burning up everything that is flammable, and making the whole mass as pure, and clean, and clear, as the element of fire itself? Such is the effect of a contact of God's wrath with man's sin; of the penetration of man's corruption by the wrath of the Lord.[23]

Preaching this doctrine, can only benefit the souls of men and women to walk before God in fear. Proclaimed in biblical balance, it will induce sobriety and carefulness. And that must surely be to our good. An appreciation of the gospel devoid of the sense of fear is a deficient one. To encourage it is to be guilty, according to John Murray, of 'loose thinking, adding: 'It is the essence of impiety not to be afraid of God when there is every reason to be afraid.'[24] Reminiscing at the very end of his life, Calvin gave expression to the chief motivations of his life: 'I have wished to do good and my failings have always displeased me, and the fear of God has been rooted in my heart.'[25]

4. The doctrine of immediate retribution *highlights the limitations of God's patience*. It is the message of Amos to a recalcitrant people that because of 'three transgressions and for four' (c.f. Amos 1:3,6,9,12), God's patience has run out. Not only was it so for the surrounding nations, but for Israel herself. She, too, had forfeited God's favour (Amos 2:13-16). She had forgotten vengeance of the covenant (c.f. Lev 26:25, 'And I will bring the sword upon you to avenge the breaking of the covenant. When you withdraw into your cities, I will send a plague among you, and you will be given into enemy hands').

God's purposes in salvation, under both the Old and New Testament administrations, in bringing people into his covenant of grace, was never intended to induce a sense of moral complacency but of moral ambition after holiness through the obedience to God's law. The basis of admission is that of justification by grace alone through faith alone (and that was just as true under the Old covenant administration as it is under the New). But the evidence of admission is the works of righteousness that follow faith: 'You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone' (Jam. 2:24). A failure to persevere in the life of faith brings with it a warning that God's patience is not without limit: 'Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realising that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?' (Rom. 2:4). A right consideration

of this truth will induce holiness, without which, no-one can ever see God (Heb. 12:14).

5. This doctrine should *modify our understanding of the place of prayer in the out-working of God's purposes.* I think, particularly, of the key-note text of the books of Chronicles: 'If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land' (2 Chron. 7:14).

True prayer always pleads the covenantal promises of God. Thus, Moses pleaded God's covenant when Israel worshipped the golden calf (Exod. 32:13; c.f. 34:6). Thus, too, Daniel in exile in Babylon and suffering the covenantal curse for disobedience (c.f. Dan. 9:4). Thus, Elijah, pleading God's covenantal name and past promises to the Patriarchs to deliver Israel from Baalism: 'O LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command' (1 Kings 18:36). And God heard him because he was *righteous* (Jam. 5:17). It is the same logic that lies behind our prayer: "Forgive us our debts", because "we forgive our debtors". The forgiving on our part is evidence (not the ground) of our covenantal relationship to God. It is the same logic that applies in the frequent appeals of the Psalms: 'Guard my life, for *I am devoted to you*' (Psa 86:2-3); 'The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their cry' (Psa 34:15). The righteousness implied is that of the righteousness of the covenant. It is the righteousness which John pleads: 'Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him' (1 John 3:22-23).

If God is going to answer our prayers in these days, to remove the curses and bestow the blessings, all the evidence that we are his covenant children will need to be seen. In soliciting God for blessing we shall need to keep this in mind. If ever we are to know revival, we shall need to have this burned into our hearts.

References

I say, 'almost universally' for the reason that some manage to ape the counsellors advice. Frederick Price (one of the leading 'faith healers' and charismatic authors in

the USA), for example, finds himself commenting, 'As long as Job walked in faith, the wall the — hedge — was up. But when he started walking in unbelief and doubt the hedge was pulled down. Job pulled it down!' *Is Healing for All* (Harrison House, 1976), p10. In other words, Job suffered because he sinned. His unbelief is responsible for all the pain. Incredible as it sounds, Price has managed to line up with Job's miserable comforters!

2. The 'servant-songs' find their fulfilment in the Lamb of God, of course, but it would be a mistake not see that they have a relevancy for all who would serve God. Every 'servant' can expect sorrow as part of the price of service in the kingdom of God.
3. Other prophets fared better, including 'Eliezer son of Dodavahu of Mareshah', who denounced the latter years of Jehoshaphat (2 Chron. 20:35-37), Azaraiah, son of Oded, who denounced the activities of King Asa (2 Chron. 15:8ff), and Shemaiah, who spoke fearlessly to King Rehoboam (2 Chron. 12:5-16).
4. *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. F.L. Battles, ed. John T. McNeill (Westminster Press, 1975), III:xxiii.8
5. When such ministers get sick, it is strangely enough always a matter of 'God's sovereignty', but when 'ordinary' Christians get sick it is a matter of unconfessed sin!
6. J. I. Packer, *Laid Back Religion* (IVP, 1987), p. 128-129.
7. *Westminster Confession of Faith*, XXXIII:2
8. *Biblical Theology* (Eerdmans, 1973), pp.31-32. This is what John Murray refers to as 'an administration in which God, by a special act of providence, established for man the provision whereby he might pass from the status of contingency to one of confirmed and indefectible holiness and blessedness, that is, from *posse peccare* and *posse non peccare* to *non posse peccare*'. *Collected Writings*, Vol. 2 (Banner of Truth, 1977), p.49. R. L. Dabney objects to the idea of an 'indefinite probation' on the grounds that it would make Adam's condition 'desperate': 'he being mutable and finite, and still held forever under the curse of the law, which he was, any day, liable to break, the probability that he would some day break it would in the infinite future mount up to a moral certainty.' *Systematic Theology* (Banner of Truth, 1985), p.305.
9. *Shorter Catechism*, answer to Question 16.
10. Cited by James Walker, *The Theology and Theologians of Scotland 1560-1750* (Knox Press, 1962), p.68.
11. W. G. T. Shedd, "The Exercise of Mercy Optional with God", *Sermons to the Natural Man* (Banner of Truth, 1977), pp.365-366. Further comments on this theme are to be found in Donald MacLeod's *Behold Your God* (Christian Focus Publications, 1990), p.74-80.
12. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, II:xi.2
13. Though the examples I have chosen here reflect the Chronicler's pre-occupation with immediate retribution, it must be noted that there are exceptions even in the Chronicler's narration of history. The Chronicler, for example, points out that there are exceptions to the rule of immediate retribution: Josiah was a good king who died in tragic circumstances (2 Chron. 34-35), and Mannaseh was an evil king who lived long (2 Chron.33:1-20).

    It should also be noted that Chronicles does not always allude to immediate retribution even when an occasion demands it. In the case of David's wife, Michal, for instance, even though Chronicles does mention the fact that she despised her husband when he brought the Ark of God to Jerusalem with such evident enthusiasm (1 Chron. 15:29), it is in 2 Samuel that we read 'And Michal daughter of Saul had no children to the day of her death' (2 Sam. 6:23). Michal's childlessness, on the one hand, ensured that there would be no successor from the line of Saul. On the other hand, it was a judgement on Michal's pride. Calvin is particularly severe on Michal, referring to her as a 'wretch', a 'sack full of poison', and a 'whore'! *Sermons on 2 Samuel*, Chapters 1-13, translated by Douglas Kelly (Banner of Truth, 1992), p.277.
14. F. Brown, S. R. Driver and C. A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 591. According to Martin J. Selman, 'this is the most important expression for sin in Chronicles', *2 Chronicles*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (IVP, 1994), p.470.

15. We say *immediate* though it may well be that Saul's death is the result of God's patience finally running out following a lifetime of misdemeanour. However, Chronicles alludes to Saul's consultation with the witch at Endor (1 Sam. 28) in particular as the final straw which brought upon him God's anger (1 Chron. 10:13).
16. The term appears on several more occasions towards the end of 2 Chronicles: 28:19,22; 29:6,19; 30:7; 33:19; 36:14).
17. For those wishing to trace this idea further in Chronicles, see Ray Dillard on *1 & 2 Chronicles*, (Word) pp. 70ff.
18. Selman, op.cit., p. 401. For more on this theme, see, Raymond Dillard, 'The Reign of Asa (2 Chronicles 14-16): An example of the Chronicler's Theological Method,' *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 23/3 (1980), pp.207-218.
19. H. L. Ellison, *Scripture Union Bible Study Books: Joshua-2 Samuel* (Eerdmans, 1966), p. 51.
20. *Sermons on 2 Samuel*, Chapters 1-13, op.cit. p.250.
21. Commenting on the inclusion of this article in the Apostle's Creed, Calvin comments: 'But we ought not to omit his descent into hell, a matter of no small moment in bringing about redemption... If any persons have scruples about admitting this article into the Creed, it will soon be made plain how important it is to the sum of our redemption: if it is left out, much of the benefit of Christ's death will be lost.' *Institutes* II:xvi.8
22. Maurice Roberts, *The Thought of God* (Banner of Truth, 1993), p.34.
23. W. G. T. Shedd,'The Use of Fear in Religion', *Sermons to the Natural Man* (Banner of Truth, 1977), pp.325-326.
24. *Principles of Conduct: Studies in biblical ethics* (Tyndale Press, 1971), p.233.
25. Cited by Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers* (IVP, 1988), p.247. Commenting on the sense of fear that came upon the church and those who witnessed the death of Ananias (Acts 5:11), Calvin remarks that, 'the punishment of one was a lesson to all. But he plainly expresseth in this place a double fear. He saith that the Church feared, because the faithful do never so perfectly fear God, but that they profit yet more, being admonished by his judgements. Therefore, by all those punishments which we read have been laid upon men in times past, and do daily see to be laid upon them, doth God call us back from the enticements and liberty of sinning. For our flesh must be bridled every now and then after this sort, because one bridle will scarce serve the turn. There was another manner [of] fear in the strangers, yet no such fear as brought them unto the sincere worship of God; yet, notwithstanding, it was such as caused them to give the glory to God.' *Commentary upon the Acts of the Apostles*, Vol.1, p.202.

INTERPRETING MATTHEW 24

by G.I. Williamson

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The purpose of this study is a modest one. It is to set forth a few of the certainties of biblical eschatology. It is our view that no one has *all* the answers. The whole history of the Christian Church teaches us to be modest in our claims, and tentative in many details of our doctrine of the future. Yet we do believe the main things are clear in the Holy Scriptures. The material that we are presenting here is intended to demonstrate this fact.

We begin by stating the main principles of interpretation which have guided us in this study.

[1] *We must always begin with the things that are clear, and then work at the problem of understanding the things that are not clear.* For example: we do not begin with the book of Revelation, and then, after we interpret it, go back and impose our interpretation on the gospels and the epistles. No, we begin with the gospels and then move on to the more difficult passages.

[2] *The only infallible interpreter of the Bible is the Bible itself, and the Bible alone is sufficient.* There are those, for instance, who say that there are things in the Bible, concerning the future, that cannot be understood today because we just don't have the resources. We believe that this is incorrect. This denies the sufficiency of the Bible. The truth is that the problem is not in some deficiency in the Bible. The problem is rather in us, that we do not study it carefully enough.

[3] The Westminster Confession of Faith is correct when it says *"the true and full sense of any Scripture . . . is not manifold, but one . . . "* It is often assumed by Bible teachers, for example, that there is such a thing as double (or even triple) fulfilment of prophecies. Our study of biblical prophecy is decidedly against this assumption. It is rather our view that biblical prophecy is quite specific, and that it refers to singular events. This does not mean that there is no *application* of a specific prophecy to other

times and places. What it means is that the application is by way of analogy, not double fulfilment.

[4] We believe *the logical place to begin, in developing a correct view of the future, is the great 'eschatological discourse' of Jesus.* We therefore study the material contained in the gospel accounts in which Jesus speaks of the future. This material is found in Matthew 23-25 (and parallel passages in Mark and Luke). We will first try to understand this passage clearly, and then go on to some of the other material in the Apostolic writings.

The Context

What is happening in the narrative of Matthew 23? Do we not see Jesus Christ pronouncing the knell of doom on the apostate Jewish 'Church?' Time after time, in this passage, our Lord pronounces woe upon the Scribes and Pharisees, the religious leaders of Israel in that day. In them the whole development of the Jewish apostasy reaches its culmination [vv. 34,35]. Jesus also made it clear that this doom that he was threatening would not be long in coming. *"I tell you the truth, all this will come upon this generation"* [v. 36]. *"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem"* cried our heart-broken Saviour *"how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate"* [vv. 37,38]. Up to this time the Temple in Jerusalem was still acknowledged to be the house of God. That is why our Lord cleansed the Temple. But he also denounced those who had made his Father's house a den of merchandise. Now, at this point in the narrative, he was speaking of a day rapidly approaching, a day that was to arrive within that generation [v. 36], when it would no longer be God's house at all. No, it would be "*their* house," and it would be left unto them desolate!

We can well imagine the shock-waves that this caused, as it reverberated through the tradition-bound thinking of the disciples. 'What, *this* house left desolate, this great Temple of God in Jerusalem? Surely not!' they were thinking. So, as they left the Temple that day they *"came up to him to call his attention to its buildings"* [Mt. 24:1]. 'Look, Lord' they were saying, in effect, as they pointed to these great buildings: 'surely you can't mean that *this* is going to come to desolation!' To them this was simply unthinkable. But that was indeed what Jesus meant. We know this because he at once

answered them saying *"I tell you the truth: not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down"* [24:2]. They were utterly astounded. This shattered all the fixed ideas in their minds. It turned their whole idea of the future upside down. You see, they too were expecting that when the Messiah came he would restore the Kingdom to Israel, making the 'good old days' live again, as it were.[1] Yet here was the Messiah himself saying the destruction of the Temple was near. No wonder they began to 'jump to conclusions.' Isn't that what we all tend to do? And isn't this especially true when it comes to predictions of the future?

So the disciples asked Jesus a question which, by its very structure, reveals the conclusion to which they had 'jumped.' *"Tell us,"* they said, *"when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming[2] and the end of the age?"* It is clear, is it not?, that they simply assumed that these things would happen together. If Jesus was right, and this house was going to be left unto them desolate, and if this was going to happen in that generation, then surely it *had* to mean Christ's coming in glory and the end of the age would be simultaneous.

But it was right there, *in that giant assumption*, that they made their big mistake. And the amazing thing is that so many Christian people keep right on making the same mistake today. No, they do not make it in quite the same way. But what *is* the common interpretation of Matthew 24? Is it not assumed that Christ was talking about two entirely different things *as if* they were one? Yes, this is the common interpretation. Many say that Jesus, from this point on, as he answers his disciples, is *not only* talking about [1] the coming destruction of Jerusalem (which took place in 70 A.D.); *but also* [2] the second coming of Christ and the end of the age (which is still future). They say that he was giving us signs of both of these events together. So the false Christs, and false prophets, and the wars, earthquakes, famines, etc., were *not only* intended as signs for that generation, to warn them of the impending destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, *but also* intended as signs to people destined to live many centuries later in order to warn *them* of the nearness of the second coming of Christ.

With this interpretation (as suggested in the introduction) we cannot agree. We do not think it is true that our Lord used one set of words to predict two entirely different things. No, in answering the disciples, as we will seek to demonstrate, the Lord clearly divided the disciples question and carefully discriminated between the two things *they* were confusing. In the first section

of Matthew 24 (vv. 4-35) our Lord dealt with the things about which he warned the Scribes and Pharisees [Mt. 23:36]. In warning of these things he was not talking about his second coming and the end of world history. This is quite clear from chapter 24, verse 34, where he says again (as in 23:36) *"this generation will not pass away until all these things have happened."* After making this crystal clear our Lord went on (in Mt. 24:36-51, and in chapter 25) to deal with the other subject, namely, his second coming and the end this age. We could sum it up this way: *our Lord takes pains to carefully distinguish between the very things that the disciples wrongly confused.* They assumed that these two things, the destruction of Jerusalem and the 'parousia' and the end of this age, would come at the same time. Our Lord is careful to show them that it will be otherwise, as we will see in the next part of our study.

All These Things

Unless we are prepared to give a strained interpretation to Matthew 23:36 and 24:34, then, we must believe that *"all these things"* predicted by Jesus did, in fact, happen in that generation.

(A) But there are those who say 'No, this cannot be the true understanding of what Jesus said *because, in fact, these things did not happen in that generation.*' In order to try to make sense out of the passage, then, they are forced to change the sense of the word generation making it to mean 'race' instead. The meaning, then, would be that the Jewish race will not pass away until all of these things have been fulfilled. We are convinced that this is an erroneous solution. If the reader will take a good concordance and study the use of this word 'generation'[3] in the New Testament, it will soon be apparent that the word has a well-defined meaning. It means the average time span of human life from childhood to maturity. All that we can say about this interpretation is that it cannot possibly be right, because it imposes a sense on the Greek word that has no other support in the Bible. When our Lord, for instance, said *"O unbelieving and perverse generation. . .how long shall I stay with you?"* [Mt. 17:17] he was not talking about the Jewish race. No, he was talking about that part of the Jewish race living in Palestine during the time that he was here on earth. Again, when Jesus said *"This is a wicked generation. It asks for a miraculous sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah"* he was not talking about the entire Jewish race. No, he was talking about the Jews of that time because *they* were so unbelieving.

(B) If we stick to the plain sense of the words, then, in Matthew 24, verse 34, there is no escape: Jesus meant *that generation*. Therefore, what needs to be demonstrated is that all of these things did indeed take place in that generation. It is therefore to this that we turn as we proceed with this study.

[1] To begin with, then, *Jesus warns against being deceived by the false claims of pseudo-messiahs*. That this took place "in that generation" we have abundant evidence. In Acts chapter 5 (vv. 36,37) we read the words of Gamaliel, in which he spoke of two such pseudo-messiahs, Theudas and Judas the Galilean. In the first epistle of John the apostle (2:18,19, & 4:1-4) he clearly states that there already were "many antichrists" in the world at the time that he was writing. We also have confirmation from the writings Josephus the Jewish historian. Even to this Jew who did not believe that Jesus was the Christ the phenomenon of pseudo-messiahs was plainly evident in the period of time leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem.

> Man is readily persuaded in adversity: when the deceiver actually promises deliverance from the miseries that envelop him, then the sufferer becomes the willing slave of hope. So it was that the unhappy people were beguiled, by cheats and false messengers of God, while the unmistakable portents that foreshadowed the coming desolation they treated with indifference and incredulity, disregarding God's warnings as if they were moonstruck, blind and senseless[4]

We therefore maintain that this specific prediction was, indeed, fulfilled in that generation. This is further confirmed by Luke's account of the words of Jesus. Luke wrote for Gentile readers. He therefore explained some things for them that needed no explanation for Jewish readers. In Luke's account (21:8) we read that Jesus said *"the time is near"* as he spoke of these pseudo-messiahs. Jesus was speaking to his disciples. He was warning *them*. How strange the interpretation that ignores this patent fact, and treats the words of Jesus as if he was speaking to people of that day about events that were to have their primary fulfilment hundreds of years in the future.

[2] In the second place, we read about wars and rumors of wars (v. 6). In Josephus [Book IV, chapter 9], we read that (prior to 70 A.D.) *"sedition and civil war prevailed, not only over Judea, but in Italy also."* And again, in Book IV, chapter 10, we read that *"about this very time it was that heavy calamities came about Rome on all sides."* Is this not a perfectly adequate fulfilment? For that generation, since it only 'lived once', a warning such

as this had an urgent meaning. When *they* saw the dark clouds of war beginning to gather over their heads, as it were, then *they* really did have a very clear sign,and it warned *them* of the soon coming destruction (70 A.D.). But on the common interpretation this just isn't true. Was World War I a 'sign' of the second coming? Evidently not. Neither was World War II. But if these wars are not great enough to serve as signs of the near coming of Jesus, what wars could be? The writer can remember, when the war clouds were gathering back in 1939, that preachers of that time were confidently saying this war *was* a sign of the nearness of the second coming. Some even put a limit on the time that was supposed to be left before the second coming would take place. But they were wrong. They were wrong because wars and rumors of wars are *not* a sign of the second coming. But they *were* a sign to the generation which lived when Jesus was here on earth as God's servant, a sign of the fact that Jerusalem and the apostate Temple were soon to be desolate.

[3] In the third place we note that, after repeating the basic idea of war, namely, that nation shall rise against nation, our Lord next spoke of various calamities that we associate with 'nature.' He spoke of *"famine and earthquakes in various places"* (v. 7b). And, again, anyone who reads Josephus' history of the Jewish people will have no difficulty in seeing that this was fulfilled *"in that generation."* Here is a typical excerpt taken from his account:

> The sufferings they endured were unspeakable. In every home, the very shadow of food led to conflict, and the closest relatives came to blows, snatching from each other any pitiful means of sustenance. Not even the dying were believed to be in want of food, and even those expiring were searched by the brigands in case any of them had food hidden inside their clothing and were feigning death. These desperate ruffians stumbled and staggered along like mad dogs, open-mouthed with hunger, battering at the doors like drunken men, and in their helpless confusion bursting into the same house two or three times in a single hour. Necessity drove them to gnaw everything, and objects that not even the filthiest dumb animals would look at they picked up and ate. In the end they did not stop at eating belts and shoes; they stripped off the leather from their shields and gnawed at it. (198) Some tried to live on scraps of old hay, and there were people who collected stalks and sold a tiny bunch for four Attic drachmas [a]. (199) But why should I go on to describe the inanimate things that hunger made them unashamed enough to eat, as I now describe an act of which there is no parallel in the annals of Greece or any other country [b], a horrible and

> unspeakable deed and one incredible to hear. I hope that I shall not be suspected by posterity of grotesque inventions and would have gladly passed over this calamity in silence, had there not been countless contemporary witnesses to bear me out. Moreover, my country would have little reason to thank me if I suppressed the narrative of the horrible miseries that it had to endure.[5]

We also note (in addition to the data in Matthew 27:54, 28:2, Acts 4:31 and 16:26, which is decisive) that Josephus records a great earthquake in Book VI, chapter 5.

[4] In the fourth place, it is interesting to note that Luke, who wrote primarily for Gentile readers, again adds important information (Luke 21:12). To the disciples our Lord said *"but before all this, they will lay hands on you and persecute you. They will deliver you to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name. This will result in your being witnesses to them."* Now as we see it the meaning is clear: Jesus was speaking to real people; he was telling them what was going to happen to *them*. What strange exegesis it is to try to apply these words to people far removed from that generation? Anyone who has studied the book of Acts will know that these things *did* happen to the Apostles. If words are to be interpreted in their natural sense, there is no reason whatever to take these statements out of this context. Our fourth point, then, is the fact that this also happened in that generation.

[5] The fifth thing predicted (in Mt. 24:10) was apostasy from the true faith, with betrayal and hatred. This could be taken to refer to the apostasy of the Jewish people, and their factional conflicts. We know, again, from the writings of Josephus that this was one of the most terrible aspects of the calamity that came on the Jews during the siege of Jerusalem by the Romans. However, when our Lord speaks of turning "away from the faith" it seems more likely that he is speaking of Christians, those who professed that he was the promised Messiah, and then went back on that profession. And, once again, there is no problem in seeing that this happened in that generation. The entire New Testament was written in that generation. And there is hardly a book in the New Testament that does not show the fact of apostasy and dissension. How soon the people in Galatia turned to what Paul calls *"a different gospel, which is really no gospel at all"* [Gal. 1:6,7]. The church of Corinth was sadly divided by factions. And some of the churches were at the point of repudiation by Jesus [Rev. 3:15]. We tend to idealize the Apostolic church. But we should not do so. It was a veritable

thicket of problems. There were some in the Apostolic church who professed to be Christians and then turned away from the faith. These "godless men" were described by the Apostle Jude as "unreasoning animals" (Jude 4 & 10).

[6] The sixth item of information was the fact that there would be false prophets. And here, again, we not only read of such things in the New Testament scriptures (Rom. 16:17,18; I Jn. 4:1; Gal. 1:6,7; Acts 13:6, etc.), but Josephus gives abundant evidence of the large number of false prophets that came along to stir up vain hopes for the Jewish people.[6] And well might we add (from the same evidence) that the love of many grew cold.

Now with reference to the predictions mentioned above, and a past historical fulfilment in that generation, there has been rather general agreement. Even those who apply "these things" partly to the future, admit that the things, outlined above, happened in that generation. But, they also say that from here on in Matthew 24 [down to verse 34] there are several things which did *not* happen in that generation. Therefore, they argue, we are forced to admit that our Lord also predicted things that would only come to pass toward the end of the age in which we live, and not in that generation. At this point it may be well to say that the we also, at one time, held this view, and yet were never satisfied with it. The reason is that it required a very forced interpretation of the 34th verse. The more we studied the word 'generation' as it is used in the Greek New Testament, the more clear it became to us that we had to choose one of two things. Either Christ was wrong in what he said in verse 34, or *we* were wrong in thinking that some of 'these things' were still in the future. This drove us back to a much more careful study of the things Jesus predicted for that generation. And when this was done it became clear, to our surprise, that these things also happened in that generation.

Commonly Misunderstood Items

We shall now deal with the material found in Matthew 24:14-31. In section there are several items that are commonly assumed to be 'yet in the future.' It is our conviction that this is an error, and we hope to show this as we discuss each of these items in the discussion that follows.

[1] In Matthew 24:14 we read that *"this gospel of the kingdom will be*

preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come." The problem here is quickly solved if we observe the constant Greek usage. For this Greek term translated world[7] here does not mean the whole world or earth in the modern geographical sense. No, what this term means is the entire civilized world of that day, or, in other words, the entire known world encompassed by the Roman Empire. Take, for instance, the statement of Luke (2:1) that Caesar Augustus sent out a decree that 'all the world' should be enrolled. The whole 'world 'simply meant the whole Roman Empire. It is used the same way in texts such as these: Lk. 4:1, Acts 11:28, 17:6, 19:27, 24:5, and Rom. 10:18). And the fact is that the gospel *was* preached throughout *that* world in that generation. Take, for instance, the statement of Luke in Acts 2, verse 5. He says that, on the day of Pentecost, there were *"devout men out of every nation under heaven"* in Jerusalem to hear Peter's preaching. And in Colossians 1:6 and 23 we read that *"All over the world this gospel is producing fruit and growing"* (1:6). Yes, says Paul, it *"has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven"* (v. 23). When the Scripture speaks so plainly, why should we doubt it? How, then, can anyone insist that the fulfilment is still in the future?

[2] The second problem that many see in our view is the prediction in verses 15 & 16. *"When you see standing in the holy place 'the abomination of desolation,' spoken of by the prophet Daniel, let the reader understand, then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains."* It is common among Christians today to see, in this, a prediction of a future antichrist. But again, we would argue that there is good reason to see this as fulfilled in 'that generation', the generation to which our Lord was speaking. For the sake of the greatest possible clarity we will here list our reasons.

a) It is clear that Christ said *"this generation will not pass away until all these things are fulfilled"* (v. 34). The only natural interpretation of this statement is that the abomination of desolation (one of these things) also took place in that generation.

b) With this agrees the direct reference, here, to the disciples to whom Christ was speaking. He said *"when **you** see, 'the abomination of desolation.'"* This indicates that they, themselves, would see it. What meaning could this statement have had for those disciples, if the event was not to happen in that generation, but only thousands of years later?

c) With this also agrees the statement which follows (vv. 16 & 17). Our

Lord instructed the people living in Judea as to what they should do when this event took place. They were to flee (v. 16). If they were on the housetop they were not to come down to try to take anything out of the house with them. In Jerusalem, in those days, the tops of houses were flat. One could go across the housetops to the wall (as the story of Rahab indicates). This was common in ancient cities in that era. This would not have much direct force today, where we are seldom up on the housetop, and can go nowhere without first coming down into the house. By what principle of biblical interpretation is this simply ignored, so that this can be applied to the future?

d) Luke wrote his gospel especially for Gentile readers. Note, then, how he speaks of this same event. "When *you* [again, note that word] see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near" (21:20). Jews could be expected to understand the meaning of the phrase 'the abomination of desolation.' They were familiar with the Old Testament, and knew that this phrase appears in the book of Daniel. Gentiles, however, would not be so familiar with the prophetic writings. They needed an explanation. And Luke gave it to them.

e) Our fifth point is the confirmation we find in the writings of Josephus (who witnessed the downfall of Jerusalem). His record shows that the armies of Rome *did* surround the city. And those who took the words of Jesus seriously acted according to what he said as a literal warning to them. When they saw the armies coming they wasted no time in getting out of the city, fleeing to the little town of Pella. Can there be any doubt that this was fulfilled,and fulfilled in such a way as to make it rather strange, to say the least, to speak of a future fulfilment?

[3] In Matthew 24, verse 21, we come to a third 'problem.' Here our Lord says *"For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be."* What should not be overlooked here is the fact that Jesus does not speak of this event as something that will come at the end of world history. No, quite the contrary: he speaks of it as an unparalleled event, unparalleled in the sense that nothing before that time, *or after it*, would ever be its equal. Now it should be obvious that if our Lord had been speaking of something which was only going to take place at the end of world history he would not have said this. But if this event, of which the Lord is speaking, came in *that* generation, then there was a very good reason for contrasting it not only with all that went before but also all that would follow. And here, again, we

find the record of Josephus adequate to support this conclusion, as he described the horrors that came upon the Jews shut up in Jerusalem by the Romans. The words of Luke, written, remember, for Gentile readers, also confirm this. *"There will be great distress* ***in the land*** *and wrath against* ***this people.*** *They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled"* (21:23,24). How could it be made more clear that our Lord was predicting a calamity for the Jewish nation?

[4] The next item is our Lord's warning to his disciples, lest they should be deceived, during this time of distress, by any false teachers [Mt. 24:22-27]. What deserves special attention here is the emphatic way in which he directs his word to the disciples who were present as he was speaking. *"At that time if anyone says* ***to you,*** *'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'There he is!' do not believe it, if anyone tells* ***you*** *'There he is, out in the desert, or 'Here he is, in the inner rooms' do not believe it"* (Mt. 24:23-26). Again we are constrained to ask: what kind of Bible interpretation is it that removes this from that generation? It is certainly true that Christ speaks, in verse 27, of his 'parousia' (that is, his second coming). *"For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so will be the coming* [parousia] *of the Son of Man."* But the reason for this is quite obvious. Our Lord mentions the second coming here simply by way of contrast. He is warning his disciples not to be misled, or deceived, when they, in *that* generation, *hear rumors of* the parousia, or second coming. (Incidentally, Josephus records the fact that there were many such false rumors at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem). In order to help them to withstand this danger our Lord reminded them by way of contrast. His second coming, when it does come, will *not* be secret at all. It will be so public that no one will need anyone else to tell him when it happens.

The Most Difficult Points

Many Bible commentators are willing to admit that,up to this point, our Lord was speaking *primarily* about things destined to take place in *that* generation. But a great many will say, at this point,*'but what about verses 29 to 31? Surely no one can possibly say that these things have also happened in that generation!'* It is, therefore, to this question that we now turn in our consideration of this chapter.

This is the statement of Matthew (24:29-31): *"Immediately after the tribulation of those days 'the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of heavens will be shaken.' Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the land will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together his elect from the four winds, from the one end of the heavens to the other"* [the author's translation]. It is not hard to see why many people have difficulty with this part of the Lord's statement. The writer also, at one time, had difficulty in seeing how this could possibly be one of the things accomplished in *that* generation. But closer examination of what is stated here completely cleared up this problem. In the discussion that follows we will now consider the facts that cleared up the problem.

a) In the first place, a reading of Old Testament prophecies shows that they, too, use language very much like this statement of Jesus. In Isaiah 13, for example, we find the same kind of reference to 'the lights going out' when mighty Babylon was overthrown.[8] Ezekiel also does much the same thing, in chapter 32, when he speaks of the overthrow of Egypt. The study of these, and other like passages, will show that this is a standard type of prophetic expression. It never did mean the literal destruction of the physical universe, but rather the overthrow of a nation or civilization. Amos, for instance, in chapter 8 says *"'And it shall come to pass in that day,' says the Lord God, 'That I will make the sun go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in broad daylight. I will turn your feasts into mourning, and all your songs into lamentation'"* (vv. 9,10). And Micah expresses the same idea when he says *"The sun shall go down on the prophets, and the day shall be dark for them"* (Ch. 3, v. 6). It is the same idea that Jeremiah expresses when he says *"her sun has gone down while it is day"* and Ezekiel says *"I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon will not give its light. All the shining lights in the heavens I will darken over you; I will bring darkness over your land"* (vv. 7,8). When the prophets spoke in this manner they did *not* mean the literal end of the physical universe. And the same is true of the Lord Jesus. He was *not* speaking of 'the end of the world' but of the end of the Old Testament era and the special position of Israel as God's only covenant people. Here, again, Luke clarifies the problem. *"And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon and in the stars"* he says, but then hastens to add *"and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring"* (21:25). Now it may be, as some of the older commentators supposed, that the reference here is to an

eclipse of the sun by the moon [when it does, as a matter of fact, seem to turn to the color of blood]. It is also possible that there is a reference here to an event that was common in ancient warfare. We refer to the fact that cities were burned, and the smoke was often so great that it did, for a time, blot out the sight of celestial bodies. But be that as it may one thing is clear: *Jesus was not talking about the final collapse of the physical universe.* He was predicting the overthrow of the Jewish nation. (Incidentally, this is still the way we speak of this sort of thing. During the second world war,when nations were shaken, there were even songs to this effect. The writer remembers one that was popular in the midst of that great war. It went like this: 'When the Lights Go on again, all over the World.' There are some things that ordinary language is not sufficient to express. One of these is the overthrow of one's own nation. Even today, when something like this happens it is felt to be such a great calamity that it requires the very same kind of language that Jesus was using).

b) Another point that should be noted with care is the fact that Jesus said '*the powers of* heaven will be shaken.' I understand him to refer, by this, to the spiritual powers belonging to Satan. Christ's victory became manifest precisely in the fact that there was a destruction of the Jewish nation. This was what he meant when he warned the Scribes and Pharisees that their house was about to be left to them desolate (Mt. 23:38). Christ's victory over Satan began with the end of that historical period during which the Church was confined within the Jewish nation. From that time on the Church was destined to spread out to all nations. The nations which, before, had been held in chains of darkness by Satan, now saw the great light sent to them from heaven (see Isa. 9:2 as quoted in Matt. 4:16). In the very day when the heavens became dark over the Jewish nation (Ezekiel 32:7), the glorious light of the day dawned upon us, the Gentile nations. Satan was bound, in other words, so that he could no longer deceive the nations. Now Christ is exalted *"far above all principality and power and might and dominion"* (Eph. 1:21). And *"now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places"* God makes *"known by the church the manifold wisdom"* he has *"purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord"* (Eph. 3:10.11). Having spoiled principalities and powers, in other words, he has made manifest his triumph over them (Colossians 2:15). So, calamitous as it was for the Jewish nation, it was anything but the end of what God had planned to accomplish in world history. The conclusion is clear: this also took place in that generation.

[5] We now come to what some would call 'the Achilles heel' of our

interpretation. In verses 30 and 31 we read of 'the sign of the Son of man in heaven,' and of 'his coming in the clouds of heaven.' The reader, at this point, may well be saying: 'now surely you will have to admit that **this** did not happen "in *that* generation."' Yet, amazing as it may seem, at first sight, the fact is that it **did.** Christ was not referring here to his second coming [the parousia]. No, what he was referring to in this statement was his exaltation to the right hand of God and his present reign there in glory. We here present the evidence that demands precisely this conclusion.

a) Note first of all, then, the fact that it is *'the sign of'* the Son of Man that was to appear, *not the Son of Man himself.* It does not say 'then the Son of Man will appear in heaven,' but 'then *the sign of* the Son of Man in heaven will appear.' There is a big difference between the two. Yet how constantly this fact is overlooked. A sign is not the same as the thing for which it stands. The rainbow is 'the sign of' God's promise that he will never again send a universal flood, but the rainbow is not, itself, the promise. Again, baptism is 'a sign of' regeneration and renewal. But it is not, itself, regeneration. And the bread and wine used in the Lord's Supper are a sign of the body and blood of Christ. But they are not, and do not become, physical flesh and blood. There is, in other words, a very important difference between the *sign* and the thing signified. The same is true here. To say that 'the sign of' the Son of man will appear, is one and the same with saying that Christ himself will *not* be seen, not visibly. That is the very reason why the sign is needed!

b) But what does it mean, when it says *"They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory?"* (v. 30). We do not see that there can be any doubt that it means the fulfilment of the great prophecy of Daniel? Daniel wrote: *"I was watching in the night visions, and behold, One like the Son of Man, coming* **with** *the clouds of heaven! He came* **to** *the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His Kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed"* (7:13,14). Clearly, Daniel was not referring to the second coming of Jesus (or the 'parousia'). *"Coming with the clouds of heaven"* does not have that meaning in prophetic language. On the contrary, what it refers to is Christ's exaltation *to* the right hand of the Father in glory. It means that Christ is enthroned *in* heaven, and that the Father has given all authority in heaven and earth to him [Mt. 28:18-20). Daniel's prophecy

looked forward to the time when the great Kingdom of Jesus Christ would supplant all other universal Kingdoms. And it is perfectly clear that this *has been* fulfilled (the ascension and enthronement of Jesus) and *continues to be fulfilled* in the world-wide extension of the Kingdom of God through the preaching of the gospel. Is it not clear that when Christ was exalted to the right hand of the Father, it was in order that he might receive the authority that he now exercises over all things for the Father [Mt. 28:19,20]? Yes, but we cannot see Jesus Christ with our physical eyes at this time. That is why our Lord spoke of 'the sign' of Christ's reign in glory. And what was that 'sign?' It was precisely the fulfilment of Christ's threat against apostate Jewish teachers, and an apostate Jewish nation. When the Romans came, the lights went out, as they made the city, and temple, a scene of complete desolation That was the sign which made it perfectly clear that Christ was reigning in glory. And Christ reigning in glory is, in Daniel's terminology, a coming [**not** parousia] on, or with, the clouds of heaven. It means that Christ's work is moving forward, coming more and more to realization, because he is no longer in a state of humiliation but now in a state of exaltation (enthroned on the clouds of heaven).

It should be noted here that this fully agrees with other seemingly enigmatic statements of Jesus. He said *"Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming[9] in His kingdom"* [Mt. 16:28, also Mk. 9:1 & Lk. 9:27]. Now how could we possibly interpret this statement to refer to some far-off moment, long after the death of all of those people? Such interpretation, common as it is, is a dishonest handling of Scripture. Jesus was either wrong (which, of course, we deny) or this actually happened. And when we see that he was referring to the prophetic witness of Daniel, we can see that it really did happen. In truth, there is no problem.

[6] A sixth thing that we need to notice is the fact that Jesus said *"all the tribes of the land will mourn"* [v. 30]. The problem here is not in the text, as it stands in the original Greek, but in the misleading translations in English (and even recent translations persist in this). The New International Version says *"all the nations of the earth will mourn."* This makes it, in this particular instance, one of the worst of all the translations. The New American Standard and the New King James versions are much better, but still far from satisfactory, when they translate this phrase as *"all the tribes of the earth."* And yet even this still gives the ordinary English reader the impression that our Lord had in mind all of the people on the whole planet.

But he did not. What he had in mind was "*all the tribes of* ***the land*** *(of Israel).*" This becomes self evident if we compare a parallel passages in Luke. Since this gospel was written primarily for Gentile readers, it does not even mention this statement. Now if Christ had really predicted that 'all the tribes (or nations) *of the world*' would mourn just before the sign appeared, why would Luke not also record this fact? If, on the other hand, as we believe, these words were addressed to the Jews, there was no reason for Luke to mention this to the Gentiles, and every reason for Matthew to record it (since he wrote for Jewish readers). They were the ones who did indeed mourn throughout the land when their house was left to them desolate!

[7] We do not usually think of the present age in terms of what is written in Matthew 24:31. Yet this is really what is now going on in the world. This is true regardless of the way in which we interpret the word 'angels.' Sometimes, in Scripture, the word angels simply means men as God's official messengers. Sometimes it means heavenly beings. Since there is sufficient support for either of these, we find it difficult to be dogmatic on one side or the other. It does seem to us, however, that the word in this instance, probably does refer to these heavenly beings, because the Book of Revelation often speaks of them as sounding the trumpet. These trumpets, of course, are not literal trumpets that we can hear. They are rather symbolic representations of the execution of the decrees of God. But the fact is that the angels of God are even now gathering God's elect together. This is the very thing that the Jews found so startling and offensive! Would God really leave *their* house to them desolate? Would he really go into the highways and byways in order to gather others in even the Gentile nations? This was simply unthinkable for most of them (See Matt. 22:1-15, especially v. 15). Yet, even as Jesus spoke these words, the hour of fulfilment was fast approaching. That is why our Lord then went on to say: "*Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So you also, when* ***you*** *see all these things, know that it is near, at the very doors.*" (vv. 32,33). Here again we observe that these words become quite strained if we try to transpose them to what is still future to us today. If our Lord had intended his words to refer to something *that* far in the future, he would surely have spoken after this manner: 'Now don't imagine that summer is near, just because the fig tree says so! No, it is a long way off yet, and so, when you see these things don't get excited. It isn't going to happen for at least another 2,000 years. It is *not* at the door for this generation.' But of course Jesus did not speak in this manner. The reason is that these things were ***not*** in the far

distant future, but were going to happen in that generation. *"I tell you the truth,"* said Jesus, *"this generation will certainly not pass away until* ***all*** *these things have happened"* (v. 34). Then, as if to add one more 'hammer blow' he said *"heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away"* (v. 35). As much as to say: 'incredible as it may seem this is absolutely certain, **all** these things are going to happen within this generation.' Yes, and that is exactly what happened.

[8] This becomes even more patent when we go on to observe the manner in which Christ *then* spoke of his second coming (from Matt. 24:36 to the end of the chapter). It is not our purpose, in this brief study, to give a full exposition of this teaching of Jesus. It will be sufficient to emphasize here the fact that Christ draws a contrast. Already once, in verse 27, Christ mentioned his second coming by way of contrast. *There* he reminded people then living that his second coming would be like the lightning that comes out of the east and shines to the west. When it did suddenly come, in other words, there would be no need to announce it, and therefore no excuse for being dupes of deception. It is this point that Jesus now elaborates on, in the rest of this passage. He first says that no one knows, or can know, the day or hour of his second coming (it is known by the Father only). Since this is so, it follows (does it not?) that it could not be predicted. This is precisely the point of the comparison between the second coming and the time just before the great flood (24:37-39) and the intrusion of a thief in the night (vv. 42 & 43). If the second coming of Christ is not known as to the time appointed, and if it will come like lightning, like a thief in the night, like the great flood, then surely we cannot use material from the earlier part of Matthew 24 in order to try to calculate its nearness? Yet this is precisely what is so often done.[10] People often say that Christ's second coming is very near because of all the signs, the wars and rumors of wars, earthquakes, famines, and so on. Yet, *this* was the very thing the teaching of Christ was designed to prevent! The one common feature of these three things, the *lightning*, the *thief* in the night, and the *flood* of Noah, is that all of them come (or came) without warning signs. And so it will be with the second coming of Jesus.

Some people find it hard to accept the fact that the majority can be so wrong. But popularity never was the test of the true Christian doctrine. The truth is that our Lord was right. "All these things" *did* come to pass in that generation. And the very force, or purpose, of the teaching of Jesus was to warn against the error so common today. We are *not* to confuse the destruction

of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. with our Lord's second coming. There *were* signs to warn of the one [the destruction of Jerusalem]. There *will be* no such signs to warn of the other. No, our Lord will return 'as a thief in the night.' His second coming (or parousia) will be as sudden, and unexpected, as a lightning flash way off on the horizon on a dark summer night in mid-west America. It will be like 'the flood of Noah.' It will, in other words, come without warning signs. The only warning is the Scriptural warning. And that warning says it will be exactly "when *they* say 'Peace and safety!'" that "sudden destruction comes upon them, and they shall not escape. But you, brethren," says the Apostle, "are not in darkness so that this Day should overtake you as a thief." (I Thess. 5:3,4). It is certainly true, as Paul informed Timothy, that *"in the last days perilous times will come"* (II Tim. 3:1). But we must never forget that 'the last days' began with the incarnation and ascension of the Lord Jesus (Cf. Acts 2:17, Heb. 1:1, etc.). Can anyone study the history of the Church without seeing that in many places, and at various times, perilous conditions have come? Think of the Christians burned by Nero. Think of believers tortured in the Inquisition. Think of Christians killed under the tyranny of Hitler. Think of what happened to the Church in China during the rule of Mao. Yes, and it could happen to us. If the apostasy of the Western Church continues, it could be that perilous times are ahead for us. But this is a very different thing from what we read in Matthew 24:1-34.

Christ was speaking to living men, about things that were going to happen in their generation. That is why he gave to them a whole series of signs by which they could know when it was about to happen. It is not so with the second coming of Christ, for of *that* day and hour there is, and can be, no human foreknowledge. That is why Paul, writing to the Thessalonians, repeats this teaching of Jesus. *"But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write you. For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night"* (I Thess. 5:1,2). The very purpose of Christ was to carefully distinguish these things that differ. How strange it is that so many persist even yet in confusing them.

What does the future hold? Our answer is that it holds no such gloomy and pessimistic scenario as so many imagine. Christ is on the throne. He will reign until he has put all enemies under his feet (I Cor. 15:23-28). Yes indeed, perilous times will come. But so will seasons of refreshing (Acts 3:19). Dreadful apostasy may well come *here*, while over *there* we see a great revival. But the world as a whole will simply continue with the wheat

and the tares growing together until the harvest (Mt. 13:24-30, 37-43). Then, without any warning signs at all, the Lord will appear in his glory. May the Lord enable us to be ready for that great day.

References

1 We know this because the disciples still tended to think this way even after Christ's death and resurrection [Acts 1:6].
2 Greek: 'parousia' (parousia)
3 Greek genea
4 Josephus, *The Jewish War*, Bk. VI, par 287,288
5 Josephus, loc. sit. 193-200.
6 Ibid. 185ff.
7 Greek oikoumene
8 Isaiah 13:9,10
9 The Greek term here is ercomenon, *not* parousia.
10 The recent debacle of Harold Camping's prediction that the world would come to an end in September of 1994 is just one more tragic example.

BOOK REVIEWS

Princeton Seminary: Faith and Learning 1812 - 1868, David B Calhoun, Banner of Truth Trust, 1994. Hbk. 495pp. £17.95

This book is the first of two volumes in which the author records the history of Princeton Seminary, USA. It covers the years 1812 to 1868 and volume two, due for publication in the Spring of 1996 will carry the story on till 1929. To many the story of fifty years in the life of a Theological Seminary may sound remote, academic and uninspiring. That however would be an unjust assessment. This valuable book has insights and lessons for the church at large. The author David Calhoun is Professor of Church History at Covenant Theological Seminary, St Louis, Missouri. His book, surprisingly is only the second history of Princeton Seminary. The other was published in 1992 and the period 1812 - 1929 is dealt with in around one hundred pages. Professor Calhoun's work is therefore a timely and necessary one. The story of the Seminary is told through the lives of its Professors and students. The author states that this book is 'about the people, especially the two dozen Professors who, with the students made Princeton Seminary what it was.' Of the Professors, Archibald Alexander, Samuel Miller and Charles Hodge are given a chapter each.

Archibald Alexander, the first Professor at Princeton, was a true Southerner who until his last breath was 'intensely a Virginian'. He moved north when he accepted a call to be pastor of the Third Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia which was then the largest city in the nation with a population of 50,000. Alexander subsequently moved within the city to become pastor of Pine Street Church which was known for its old fashioned Scotch Irish Presbyterianism. Communion tokens were used and the people as the new pastor noted 'are greater enemies to the reading of sermons than the Virginians themselves!' In 1812 the General Assembly elected Alexander as the first Professor of the Church's Seminary at Princeton. As a teacher the Professor brought his students into his own home where they studied with him and shared in his family life 'not merely learning of him but living with him'.

Princeton Seminary began its work 'with but a single Professor though this Professor had great things on his mind'. Those great things became apparent as the Seminary grew in the size of its student body and the extent

of its premises. Alexander was joined by Samuel Miller and together they laboured in the Seminary for around forty years.

Many of the issues facing Reformed Seminaries today have been faced in the past. In the early decades of its life the men serving at Princeton saw themselves not only as Professors but also and perhaps primarily as preachers. They came to the Seminary from the pastoral ministry and were glad for every opportunity to preach the Word. Alexander greatly missed regular preaching 'As I have been so long accustomed to preaching, it does not seem pleasant to be altogether silent'. He remedied this by starting a regular service each Lord's Day afternoon.

However although it was always the intention of the first Professor that Princeton should 'send out warriors of the Cross' by the early 1860's some concern was being expressed that the Seminary was not producing great preachers. The author suggests that this may have been due to a change in the Seminary faculty. By 1860 the 'faculty did not possess a great preacher to inspire and challenge the students in this important area'. J.W. Alexander, the founder's son, was probably the exception but he taught for only two years before returning to pastoral ministry. "Preaching Christ", he said "is the best, hardest, sweetest work on this side of beholding Him." The author comments 'that though the faculty tried to teach their students to be strong preachers, they clearly missed the skill and example of their first two Professors who drew on years of pastoral ministry and preaching experience to teach and inspire the students to be great preachers'. There is surely a valuable lesson here for Reformed seminaries today.

The story of Princeton is however more than the story of the training of men for the ministry. Princeton Seminary was one of the centres of American evangelicalism during the nineteenth century. So its history reflects the state of the church and of the Old School/New School division in Presbyterianism. We learn about the longing for revival and the experience of it in the middle of the century.

Almost from its inception Princeton fostered a missionary spirit. Serving missionaries who were home on furlough were regularly invited to address the student body. One of the earliest student bodies was specifically established to promote an interest in missions. During the first fifty years one student in every three leaving the Seminary went out to preach the gospel 'on missionary ground'. Henry Boardman at the semi-centennial

Jubilee service was able to comment that 'many a pagan land has reason to thank God that Princeton Seminary has been established'.

The story of the Seminary of course also gives a picture of the history of the nation. As William McLoughlin has written 'the story of American evangelicalism is the story of America itself in the years 1800 - 1900'.

This book is well produced and illustrated with line drawings at the beginning of each chapter. Occasionally there is a great amount of detail which can, in some places, make the book seem stilted. Generally however it is a book which accomplishes the author's purpose and is written in a clear, warm style with dashes of humour. This is certainly a book for Seminary libraries and Professors. But it has a far wider appeal. The record of these godly men, the missionary vision and sacrifice of the graduates and the urgent concern to prepare 'warriors of the Cross' cannot fail to be a heart-warming challenge. The issues facing a new Reformed Seminary remain pertinent today and the insights into American ecclesiastical and social history are extremely valuable. The second volume is eagerly awaited.

C.K. Hyndman

God in Christian Perspective, George Newlands, T & T Clark, 1994, 431pp. £24.95 (Pbk £14.95).

The aim of this substantial work by George Newlands (Professor of Divinity in the University of Glasgow) is to work out a modern restatement of a Christian understanding of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Newlands interacts with a wide range of thinkers, from classical times through to the twentieth century, and seeks to hammer out a formulation of the great truths about God which will be true to Christian experience and stand up to contemporary challenges.

It should be said at the outset that this is not a book for the non-specialist. A considerable knowledge of theology and philosophy, ancient and modern, is assumed throughout. Thus mention is made of the views of, for example, Pannenberg or Rahner, with the assumption that their basic positions need not be expounded. Even those with an introductory knowledge of theology or philosophy would struggle to keep up with Newlands. For those who can cope with this aspect of the work there is much stimulating material.

Like all theologians, Newlands has his own perspective and agenda. He says in the Preface that the book "explores the sense of the presence of God as a hidden presence, appropriated in the response of faith. God is known always as creator and reconciler simultaneously, identified with his creation in its joy and its suffering, characterised always by the self-giving love of Jesus Christ, active as spirit in the Church and in the world." (p. vii). At the core of the study is the relationship between creation and reconciliation, and the consequences of reconciliation, although, as Newlands says, it has developed into a systematic theology. These themes will be familiar to readers acquainted with Barth's theology, and Newlands also indicates his indebtedness to Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

It is to this theme of the inseparability of creation and reconciliation that Newlands returns throughout the book, and indeed it determines the whole structure of the study which is divided into two parts - God in Creation and God in Reconciliation. In the first part Newlands considers such themes as the immanence and transcendence of God, his holiness and love, what it means to speak of God as "personal", the Persons of the Trinity, the work of creation, divine action, and many more subjects generally classified under Theology Proper. In the second part, after considering the Gospel tradition, Newlands deals with the person and work of Christ, his deity and humanity, death and resurrection and the meaning of reconciliation. Attention is also given to the work of the Spirit, the experience of salvation and the new creation. In one way or another most of the key issues in theology receive attention.

The coverage in terms of contemporary academic theology is good. Many of the important names are present - Ebeling, Barth, von Balthasar, Jüngel - but it is significant that in neither the text nor the bibliography do conservative evangelical scholars receive notice. This is not a work which is interested in restating what has always been said and so the work of conservative writers is ignored, as so often in academic circles.

Even within its own terms there are significant omissions, however. There has, for example, been a great deal of thought and writing about the doctrine of the Trinity and trinitarian language is no longer dismissed out of hand by theologians. It is surprising therefore to find no reference to a writer such as Colin Gunton who has done important work on the Trinity, nor to John Zizioulas, whose thinking on personhood has had a significant influence. Of course not every theologian can be considered, but there are some who should not be overlooked.

The Reformed reader will find plenty in Newland's book with which to disagree. To take only one example, many questions are posed by his methodology. His aim is to build a cumulative, rational case for Christian beliefs on the basis of reason, revelation and experience. In his view Scripture does not have exclusive authority in theology. The theologian's thinking must also be informed by the experience of the Church in society and must draw on a variety of cultural contexts, so that theology will develop in various ways in a pluralist world. In Newlands' opinion, "A theology which seeks to reflect the concern of God for all humanity will seek to respect and benefit from this richness" (p 63).

To interact with Newlands' views, however unacceptable, to understand why one disagrees and to come to a more satisfactory conclusion is a stimulating and profitable exercise. It is too easy for a theologian to become lazy, reading only what he knows he will agree with. Beginners will look elsewhere for a book that tells them the basics of what the Bible says about God, but for those who wish to know what is being said in current academic theology or who seek to have their thinking stretched and provoked, "God in Christian Perspective" is a useful starting point.

W.D.J. McKay

Assurance of Faith: Calvin, English Puritanism, and the Dutch Second Reformation, Jeol R. Beeke, Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 1994. Pb. 518pp. £39.95.

In this study of the doctrine of personal assurance of salvation, the author follows a five step approach. First, having discussed the subject as viewed in the early and medieval Church, and during the period from Luther to Bullinger, there is a detailed study of the position of Calvin, the early English Puritans and the Dutch Second Reformation. Second, the position of the Westminster divines is examined. Third, John Owen's distinctive emphasis is considered. Fourth, the input of Dutch theologians, especially that of the "Scottish-turned-Dutch" Alexander Comrie is reviewed. Finally, a discussion of the English-Dutch post-Reformation doctrine of assurance as found in Thomas Goodwin leads to a comparison between the English Puritans and the divines of the Dutch Second Reformation. That is the broad sweep of the book; other theologians past and present are also discussed.

In a thorough analysis of the respective positions of Calvin and subsequent Calvinism, Beeke rightly sees a quantitative rather than a qualtitative difference. Here he disagrees with men like B. Hall and R.T. Kendall who have argued that Beza, followed later by Perkins, took a radically different position from that of Calvin concerning faith and assurance so that the organic relationship between them was virtually annulled. It has become common for scholars to see William Perkins, the Puritans and the Westminster divines as having derailed Calvinism in a number of areas: this work is one of the best refutations of that argument that we have seen.

In outlining Calvin's view of assurance Beeke shows that "for Calvin the Holy Spirit underlines all assurance of salvation in both it's objective and subjective character." This does not denigrate the role of Christ, "for the Spirit is the Spirit *of* Christ who assures the believer by leading him to Christ and his benefits, and by working out those benefits within him" (p.69). Consequently the objective and subjective elements in assurance - God's promises and the Spirit's working - cannot be separated. "They form one unity, for the objectivity of salvation in Christ is bound to the subjective sealing by the Spirit" (p.69). The bearing that this has on the reprobate is also noted, for "the reprobate may claim God's promises without experiencing the 'feeling' *(sensus)* or 'consciousness' of those promises" (p.70).

Calvin's emphasis on the relationship between the Word and assurance is well stated, and again the role of the Spirit is seen as crucial. Calvin saw all three persons of the Godhead involved in the believer's assurance. "The Holy Spirit reveals to the believer that God is a propitious Father in the promise of his word and enables him to look to Christ to embrace these promises by faith for himself" (p.72). However in terms of the covenant, there is a conditional as well as an unconditional aspect. So Calvin could say, "Think not but that your God can drive you out of his heart and out of his church, if he find you unworthy of the benefit which he has offered to you" (p.75). Yet Calvin saw clearly that it is Christ who fulfils in the elect the "condition" of sanctification. "The marks of grace in believers only prove that they are joined to Christ, since they would never be able to perform obedience apart from him" (p.76).

Dealing with the Fathers of English Puritanism and the Dutch Second Reformation, our author concentrates on the work of William Perkins (1558-1602) and Willem Teellinck (1579-1629). As he points out, Perkins

the Cambridge divine, was a major link between the Reformed thought of Beza and the Westminster Confession. He gives a careful analysis of Perkins' view of assurance, dealing with conversion's steps: humiliation, faith in Christ, repentance and new obedience. He concludes convincingly that "none of Perkins' accents were foreign concepts to the Reformers." There was difference in emphasis, not in substance.

Equally influential in the Netherlands was Willem Teellinck. His goal was to "infiltrate the Dutch scene with English-style, pietistic Puritanism" (p.119). This is hardly surprising as he was converted while staying in a Puritan home in England, was married to a Puritan woman from England and was familliar with the Puritian movement. Beeke argues that in some ways Teellinck "out-puritaned" the "fathers" of Puritanism (p.120). Like Perkins, however, he believed that "assurance was of the essence of faith and that faith was always a gift of God, not a condition for the sinner to fulfil out of self-strength" (p.122).

Beeke's analysis of the position of the Westminster Confession on assurance is of exceptional importance. His exposition of chapter 18 of the Confession on assurance is the finest that we have seen. He discusses at length the *possibility* of assurance (18:1), the *foundation* of assurance (18.2), the *cultivation* of assurance (18:3) and the *renewal* of assurance (18.4). It is worth buying the book for this chapter alone. Here the notion that the Confession is radically at odds with Calvin and that, as Kendall claims, Puritan theology "setting out to be Calvinistic, turned within half a century into Arminian legalism without anyone noticing," is laid low.

A whole chapter is devoted to John Owen, who never wrote a separate work on assurance, but stated his position in his exposition of Psalm 130 and in other works. Beeke sees his cardinal contribution to this doctrine in his emphasis on "the special primacy of the Holy Spirit" (p.265). Owen is shown in healthy tension with Socinianism, which rejected an experiental pneumatology, and Quakerism, which made such pneumatology an end in itself. To every aspect of the believer's experience of assurance, Owen brought a rich variety of the Spirit's workings.

The work of a Scotsman, Alexander Comrie, who laboured in Holland, is viewed in it's historical and biographical context. He was influential in the Dutch Second Reformation, a movement similar to that of English Puritanism. There is an appendix dealing with this whole movement in the

Netherlands. Essentially his position was that of the Westminster divines. Thomas Goodwin, an Englishman who spent some time in the Netherlands, and mixed with Dutch divines, "imbibed a number of their emphases while he retained Puritan emphases as well" (p.323). Here Beeke considers the merging of English-Dutch thinking on assurance and Goodwin is seen as "a mediating figure in English-Dutch thinking." It would be good if such a bridge could exist today.

In his conclusion Beeke sees similarities and differences of emphasis in the English Puritans and the Dutch Second Reformation divines. Both insist that assurance may not be divorced from a Trinitarian framework. Both gave a crucial role to the Holy Spirit. English Puritans, however, tended to emphasise the *marks of grace*, whereas the Dutch stressed the *steps of grace*.

There are many telling statements in this book as the author shows how assurance belongs to the *well-being* of faith rather than to the *being* of faith(p.150), as he indicates that the Westminster divines faced somewhat different questions from those facing the Reformers (p.157), and as he consistently sees the Trinitarian background to his subject. The book abounds with quotable quotes. For example: "The Christian cannot enjoy high levels of assurance when he persists in low levels of obedience" (p.183); "God's saints cannot sin inexpensively, forgiveness notwithstanding" (p.184). There are also many gems of apposite quotations. Beeke has researched widely, carefully and exhaustively. There is a wealth of information in the footnotes of each chapter, an extensive bibliography, an index of names and subjects and an index of biblical references. The work is warmly commended in a brief Preface by Sinclair B. Ferguson. It deserves a place in every minister's library.

F.S. Leahy

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones: Letters 1919 - 1981, Edited by Iain H. Murray, Banner of Truth Trust, 1994. 248pp. £11.95.

The Editor's Introduction is a powerful incentive to read these letters. The Publisher's blurb on the front dust-cover also draws us to the book. The reproduced press-cuttings on the inside covers are very interesting reflections of how M.L-J was received in various places over the years. A Biographical

Table at the beginning sets out a useful chart of M.L-J's life and work: and there is a good index at the back.

Drawing on his long association with M.L-J the Editor presents what was evidently a 'labour of love', adding to the two-volume Life of David Martyn Lloyd Jones (1899 - 1981) which he had alreaady published. His notes throughout the book are invaluable; and we thank him for his meticulous care in research and collation, and for having M.L-J's mother-tongue translated for us into ordinary English, though we do appreciate the few instances of quotations in Welsh (spice to the sauce) with helpful translations in brackets. We stand here upon "holy ground", for we are permitted to intrude into that which was private and personal, and never intended for public view. Here we find M.L-J at his openest, yet always courteous with Christian love. Take this book reverently, and read to be enriched by the depth of spiritual insight and understanding which God graciously gave to his servant.

In nine sections the Editor takes us through: 1. The Early Years; 2. To His Wife; 3. To Friends and Fellow Ministers; 4. Westminster Chapel; 5. Some Family letters; 6. A Younger Generation and New Agencies; 7. On Evangelical Unity and the Threat of Ecumenism; 8. Queries and Controversies; 9. The Retirement Years. In all there are 124 letters, some long, some short.

The Early Years: introduce us to his deep friendship with Mr. Ieuan Phillips, his brother-in-law, revealing his personal concern for Wales spiritually, and his own unshakable faith 'after a year of personal struggle'. "Nothing is trivial, nothing is unimportant, everything matters..vitally". "There is no respsonsibility except within the kingdom".. "nothing can or will prevent my going about to tell people the Good News".

Letters to Mr. E.T. Rees deal with his involvement with the 'Bethlehem Forward Movement' at Sandilands, Aberavon, and M.L-J's first pastorate there, until April 1939 when he accepted the call of Westminster Chapel, London, to be co-pastor with Dr. Campbell Morgan.

Letters to his wife were not just news. They reveal the deep love which they had for each other, his constant need to write to her and to await her letters when he was on his travels. He paid her this supreme compliment. "The passing of the years does nothing but deepen and intensify my love fo

you... I see that there is no end to love". They also show his concern for her wellbeing and for their daughters during the war-years. "Leave yourself and me too and everything in God's hand, and you will find peace and rest". On his visit to U.S.A. in 1937 when demands on his preaching were intense he wrote to her, "I have never been so thankful for the consistent reading which has been my custom for the past ten years". Then he recalled what a minister there said to him, "You have demonstrated that there is no incompatibility between a first-rate intellect and evangelism".

To his Friends and Ministers: To Mr. Geoffrey Williams he wrote about his delight at the foundation of Beddington Free Grace Library, and expressed his desire "that this library should not become a museum, but a living force". (Sep. '39). Letters to Dr. Douglas Johnston of I.V.F. are full of interesting references to various contemporary religions, personal and social matters.

His advice to Mr. Leslie Land (Nov. '40) about going into the ministry produces a statement which he may afterwards have re-thought, "Non-conformity is to have a real fight for existence after this war (1939-45). It seems to be the case, in England especially, that the Church has a better opportunity". A letter to Rev. Philip E. Hughes mentions the formation (Feb. 1942) of a 'fellowship of evangelical ministers and clergy', which was to become 'The Westminster Fellowship'.

Letters from the Westminster Chapel days reveal his deep pastoral concern for individuals, a war-widow, a deacon, and for others who even occasionally visited Westminster Chapel. His annual letters to Westminster Chapel members show his pastoral care for them, and his concern to make them a vital spiritual force. "The work of evangelism is to be done regularly by the local church, and not by sporadic efforts and campaigns". "More and more as modern influences tend to disintegrate and disrupt the recognised and divinely ordained units in life, such as the family and home, shall we need to stress the unique value and importance of the church and church-life as the vital unit in the spiritual realm"..."The glory of life in the church is that it is corporate without violating individual presonality as is done by crowds and mass meetings and movements".

Some Family letters: His letters to his mother, noting the value of family ties, reveal his deep affection and care for her, particularly 22 years after his father's death. Letters to his daughter Elizabeth on her marriage to Mr. Fred

Catherwood, and later, show his loving concern for both, and desire for their spiritual up-building by giving them lengthy notes of his sermons.

Younger Generation, New Agencies: This set of letters to young men introduce us to Mr. Raymond Johnston, and bring forth the counsel to "keen young men to walk circumspectly", with two important points about 'othodoxy' and 'heresy', and 'the danger of argument from results'. Later he wrote (Feb. '56) to him clarifying that he did not teach that Sanctification is a Second Blessing....though that was a popular doctrine at that time.

To Iain Murray (Sep. '55) he wrote about the inception of the Banner of Truth Magazine, expressing his pleasure. Later (Mch.'56) he wrote to him about plans for the formation of the Banner of Truth Trust, counselling caution to 'publish books first and create a constituency' before having a meeting for inception.

On Evangelical Unity and the threat of Ecumenism: Put on your 'thigh-boots' to wade in 'deep waters'! Mr. Fred Catherwood was at that time (Aug.'55) taking a close interest in discussion for changes going on among the Brethren, and possibilities for a larger unity among evangelical churches in England. Here we find M.L-J's own non-paedobaptist stance, but that adult believers could be baptised by either mode of sprinkling (his own preference) or immersion. (See also p. 169.)

To Dr. Philip Hughes he wrote (Dec.'70) with some important reflections on ecumenism, and his reason for stopping the Puritan Conference. He had no place for 'denominationalists' (those who put denomination before fellowship) within the Westminster Fraternal. This set of letters is important to understanding the ecclesiastical malaise of the 60's because of the pushing of the 'ecumenical movement', and indeed gives understanding of the shock-waves which continue today.

Queries and Controversies: Here we find him first dealing with mis-reporting in the Glasgow Herald of his point that the church's main task in counteracting the influence of the press, cinema and the wireless is preaching the Gospel.

He had to take the British Weekly to task for mis-representing the I.V.F. and his pamphlet 'Maintaing the Evangelical faith Today'. "I have always asserted..as strongly as I could that evangelicals should not separate on the

question of Calvinism and Arminianism". His letters to Rev. Dr. John A Schep and Rev. Dr. Klaas Runia show his ability not to become a 'referee', but to show each the biblical teaching in answer to their division.

The 'Baptism of the Holy Spirit' and 'the charismatic movement' were the subject of replies to Dr. Gerald Golden, and Dr. Douglas Johnston, with particular reference to 'the business at Chard' (see Ed. note, p.204). It would appear that the 'Toronto Blessing' is no new thing.

The Retirement Years: His Farewell Letter to the members of Westminster Chapel shows his great love for them, but also his clear call to take time from the pastorate to publish much of his lifetime's preaching. He wrote a very cordial letter to Rev. Eric J. Alexander urging him to accept the call to be his successor at Westminster Chapel. In the event the call was declined.

The letters of his last year show still his shining faith in face of progressive illnesss. "We and our works are nothing. It is His chosing us before the foundation of the world that matters, and He will never leave us nor forsake us"..."believe His word, and surrender ourselves to Him utterly". He thanked God "for bountiful grace".

M.L-J's last existing written words read: "The Christian life starts with grace, it must continue with grace, it ends with grace. By the grace of God I am what I am ... Yet not I, but the grace of God which is with me".

We thank Lady Catherwood and Mrs. Ann Desmond, and many other friends, for this privilege of seeing more deeply into the life and work of M.L-J. Here is a book well produced, lovely to handle, full of meaty subjects, with a good photograph of M.L-J on the dust-cover. Even at the price it is well worth consideration as a 'gift to a friend', but put one on your own shelf first!

Samuel L. Reid

BOOK NOTICES

John Bunyan on the Order of Salvation, Peter de Vries, Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 1994. Hdbk. 234pp. £15.

In this book the author, a minister of the Dutch Reformed Church, analyses the order of salvation in the theology of John Bunyan. The first chapter places Bunyan in his historical context as the history of the English Church from the reign of Henry VIII to the Revolution of 1688 is surveyed. Bunyan is thus seen as a Puritan theologian. Apart altogether from Bunyan, this is a valuable chapter with its description of Puritanism, discussion of tensions within the movement, and the significance of the Westminster Assembly.

This is followed by a fascinating account of Bunyan's life, works and ecclesiastical allegiance. He emerges as a prolific writer, powerful preacher and accomplished theologian. It is interesting to see how the author succeeds in bringing out the underlying biographical side of Bunyan's writings, particularly in *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Altough Bunyan was a Baptist, he was moderately so, holding to "open communion" (as opposed to Strict Baptists) and having two of his children, Elizabeth and Joseph, sprinkled.

De Vries provides an outline of Bunyan's theology, paying particular attention to the relationship between Law and Gospel, Church and Sacraments, Scripture and Reason, and his polemics with Edward Foweler (who espoused a neo-Platonic philosophy and saw Christ merely as the ideal of what a morally upright life should be) and with the Quakers and their mysticism.

There is a separate discussion of Covenant and Predestination in which it becomes clear that Bunyan saw the Covenant of Grace as the historical revelation of what had been decreed in God's eternal counsel of peace (Covenant of Redemption). He did not, however, make the sharp distinction between these covenants that was made by men like Ames, Flavel, Dickson and Rutherford. De Vries rightly points out that the difference between Bunyan and these men was more one of terms than of substance. The chief doctrine for Bunyan was justification. His order was clear. "Election precedes calling, but knowledge of election follows only after knowledge of calling." De Vries makes it clear that Bunyan cannot be bracketed with

Hyper-Calvinists or with Neonomians who founded justification on obedience to the demands of the Gospel.

The closing chapters deal with effectual calling and rebirth, justification, sanctification, faith and repentance, and assurance. Bunyan emerges as a worthy representative of Puritanism at its high-water mark, a preacher of free grace and a man whose doctrine was never academic, but always a living reality. It is interesting to read of his friendship with John Owen, who, when asked by Charles II why he went to hear an unlettered tinker, replied, "May it please your majesty, if I could possess that tinker's abilities for preaching, I would most gladly relinquish all my learning" (p.46). Bunyan often preached to over a thousand people.

This work contains a complete bibliography of Bunyan's works, a bibliography of primary sources, a general bibliography and an index of names. An index of subjects would have helped. Proof-reading has been poor, if at all! On pages 39, 40 material is repeated and even juxtaposed! Do we detect the presence of a computer? An important work like this deserved better attention. It is an excellent analysis and synopsis of Bunyan's theology and deserves a wide circulation.

Argula von Grumbach: A Woman's voice in the Reformation, Ed. Peter Matheson, T & T Clark Ltd., 1995. Hdbk. 213pp. £16.95.

Argula von Grumbach was born about 1492 in the Ehrenfels castle, seat of the von Stauff family, not far from Beratzhausen to the northwest of Regensburg (Ratisbon) in Germany. Early in life she became acquainted with the Lutheran movement and she studied the Scriptures thoroughly. It would have been well nigh impossible for her to have been untouched by the Reformation. In nearby Augsburg Luther had confronted Cajetan in 1518. Matheson records that the *Regensburgische Chronik* spoke of "whole barrel-loads of Lutheran books being imported into Bavaria at this time, and of countless informal groups meeting to discuss them" (p.13).

Argula was probably the first Protestant woman writer to use the printing press to further her cause, something that broke all taboos in the sixteenth century. Because of her noble descent she had the time and money to write and to lobby. Her correspondence was extensive and it is interesting to note her contacts with Luther and the esteem in which he held

her as he witnessed her battle with church dignitaries and university authorities - he terms her "our Argula." Soon she earned such abusive titles as 'she devil,' 'shameless whore,' 'wretched and pathetic daughter of Eve' and worse. Luther commisioned Spalatin, in Nuremberg, "to greet her from him and comfort her in the name of Christ" (p.21). She even urged Luther to marry at once and he soon followed her advice (p.23). Luther, in a letter to Spalatin, referred to "what this pious woman has to put up with and suffer" (ibid).

Conscious of Scriptural teaching concerning the role of women in the church, Argula tended to see herself as one of a long line of prophetesses, and noted the "militant roles of Deborah, Jael, Esther" and others. She was no feminist before her time and Matheson rightly warns of the danger of "an anachronistic reading of her position from late twentieth-century perspectives."

A spirited lady, Argula showed a remarkable grasp of Reformation principles, particularly the primacy and sufficiency of Scripture. Risking martyrdom she roundly condemned the errors and abuses of Rome and insisted that God's Word was her sole authority, not Luther. Even if Luther were to recant, she would not change.

Much valuable material concerning this remarkable woman has been lost, yet it is possible that important finds may yet be made as research continues. It is estimated that some 20,000 copies of her pamphlets circulated on the eve of the Peasants' War and her first writing ran into fourteen editions in less than two months! It is indeed strange that one of the major pampleteers of th Reformation should have been so long forgotten, and good that reseach into her life and work is now renewed. Those interested in the period of the Reformation will find that this book fills a gap.

Justice the True and Only Mercy, Essays on the Life and Theology of Peter Taylor Forsyth, Ed. Trevor Hart, T & T Clark Ltd., 1995. Hdbk. 333pp. £19.95.

In 1895 the Senate of the University of Aberdeen honoured Peter Taylor Forsyth, one of its own graduates, with the award of the degree of Doctor of Divinity. It so happens that in 1995 the university celebrates its official quincentenary. "To mark this dual anniversary, and to stimulate and foster renewed interest in Forsyth's theology" writes Trevor Hart, "the university's

Department of Theology and Church History convened a colloquium on Forsyth's life and thought. . ." Fourteen of the papers presented then appear in this symposium. They provide a careful analysis of Forsyth's position on such subjects as the church, the atonement, prayer and art and creation.

Many years ago Professor R.A. Finlayson wrote that in several respects the positions of Karl Barth were anticipated by P.T. Forsyth *(The Story of Theology*, p. 59). Professor John Thompson, of Union College, Belfast, in a chapter entitled 'Was Forsyth really a Barthian before Barth?' admits that "Forsyth did anticipate much of Barth's approach" (p.237). He sees an interesting parallel between their respective lives and experiences. He sees "remarkable similarity" in their understanding of "the knowledge of God, the church and sacraments, social and political issues" (p.239).

That overworked word, genius, may fairly be applied to Forsyth, who, like Barth, reacted against the liberalism of the nineteenth century and in some measure against the teaching of Albert Ritschl, under whom he had studied briefly, and the Hegelian philosophy with which he was familiar. During the First World War, Forsyth wrote one of his most telling books, *The Justification of God.* The older liberals did not understand him and referred to his work as 'fireworks in a fog.' Yet conservative theologians are disappointed in certain aspects of Forsyth's theology. This is the case when his doctrine of the atonement is scrutinised and his kenotic Christology and his view of Scripture are considered. Professor Thompson rightly avers that for Forsyth, Scripture "is not *simpliciter* the Word of God" (p.240), and he refers to Forsyth's view that we use the Scriptures in such a way that "we have some difficulty in not believing in verbal inspiration" (p.254). Forsyth put it like this: "I do not believe in verbal inspiration. I am with the critics in principle. But the true minister ought to find the words and phrases of the Bible so full of spiritual food and felicity that he has some difficulty in not believing in verbal inspiration" (*Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind*, p.38). Is this a case of a theologians heart being better than his mind?

This study of Forsyth, who had so many brilliant insights, despite his latent liberalism, is to be welcomed. It is a pity that his picture which appears on the dust jacket is not included in the book and an even greater pity that although there is some biographical material, there is no biographical chapter as such. There is a complete Forsyth bibliography filling seventy-four pages! and an index of names.

F.S. Leahy