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CONSCIENCE AND CHRISTIAN LIVING

A Puritan Contribution to Ethics

W. David J. McKay

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The Puritans of the late sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries did not regard themselves as innovators. In their writing and their preaching they sought to build on the biblical foundation laid by the Reformers, especially Calvin, in the immediately preceding years. They recognised that the truths they believed and proclaimed were not original to the Reformation, but were in fact a rediscovery of what God had revealed to his apostles and prophets and had been recorded in Scripture under the direction of the Holy Spirit.

The Puritans were deeply concerned about the *application* of the Word of God to daily living in all its diversity and complexity. This is reflected in the fact that many of their published works are either biblical commentaries or sermons. The Puritans have therefore much to contribute to the formulation of distinctively Christian ethics, both in general foundational principles and in specific guidance in a wide range of areas, individual and corporate.

The material available from the Puritan period is, to say the least, abundant, and not all of the sources that are most significant for ethics are available in modern editions, despite the zeal of numerous publishing houses. Readers approaching the Puritans for ethical guidance may well feel overwhelmed. It may well be helpful, therefore, to focus on a single subject which draws together a number of themes running through Puritan writing on ethics. The subject of the present study is conscience and its role in Christian living, a subject on which a number of the greatest Puritans wrote extensive treatises. As we shall see, their work is not abstract or divorced from real life, but is rather thoroughly biblical and eminently practical.

Defining conscience

All the leading Puritans, from the towering figure of William Perkins (1558-1602) onwards, were in broad agreement as to the definition of conscience. They considered the conscience to be a rational faculty implanted

in all men, a power of moral self-knowledge and judgment, which deals with issues of right and wrong, duty and desert. Not only does the conscience provide information, but, crucially, it evaluates thoughts, words and actions, dealing with them authoritatively as the very voice of God within man.

Puritan writers commonly appealed to the form of the word ‘conscience’ (from the Latin *con-scientia*) as pointing to the fact that the knowledge which conscience possesses is shared knowledge. It is knowledge held in common with another, namely God. This comes out clearly in the following quotation from Perkins:

[Conscience] signifieth a knowledge joined with a knowledge; and it is so termed in two respects: First, because when a man knows or thinks anything, by means of Conscience he knows what he knows and thinks: Secondly, because by it, man knows that thing of himself which God also knows of him. Man hath two witnesses of his thoughts: God and his own Conscience. God is the first and chieftest, and Conscience is the second, subordinate unto God, bearing witness unto God either with the man, or against him.¹

Thus the judgments of conscience, when it functions properly, express the deepest and truest self-knowledge a man ever has, since it is a man’s knowledge of himself as God knows him.

This approach to conscience is evident in the work of another great Puritan authority on the subject, William Ames (1576-1633). He begins his textbook on conscience and casuistry (deciding difficult moral questions) entitled *Conscience with the Power and Cases thereof* by quoting Thomas Aquinas’ definition of conscience as ‘a man’s judgement of himself, according to the judgement of God of him.’² In support of this definition Ames offers two texts, Isaiah 5:3 ‘And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard’ and I Corinthians 11:31 ‘For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged’. Ames goes on to stress that conscience, as a judging faculty, belongs to the understanding, rather than to the will, and it is a practical faculty. Thus he argues:

Conscience is not a contemplative judgement, whereby truth is simply discerned from falsehood, but a practical judgement, by which that which a man knoweth is particularly applied to that which is either good or evil to him, to the end that it may be a rule within him to direct his will.”³

The conscience, therefore, as an aspect of the understanding, provides direction for the will and, ultimately, for action.

If we may include the Scottish Covenanters under the heading of “Puritans”, we find the same view in the writings of David Dickson, whose *Therapeutica Sacra* was published in 1664. His definition of conscience is as follows:

the understanding power of our souls examining how matters do stand betwixt God and us, comparing his will revealed, with our state, condition and carriage, in thoughts, words or deeds, done or omitted, and passing judgment thereupon as the case requires.⁴

The operation of conscience

How, precisely, are we to think of the conscience operating? As noted above, the Puritans thought of conscience as a reasoning faculty. Thus the conscience followed a process of rational deliberation leading to a particular conclusion on some moral issue. In taking this approach they were following medieval writers such as Aquinas, not that they regarded them as necessarily authoritative but because their teaching was judged by the Puritans to be scriptural.

Puritan analysis of the working of conscience made extensive use of what is termed the 'practical syllogism', something which is now regarded as characteristic of Puritan moral theology. Although the term may sound off-putting, the syllogism is not in fact a difficult thing to understand. In logic, the discipline dealing with the construction of arguments, a syllogism is the drawing of an inference from two statements, termed 'premises'. One premise, called the 'major premise', is a general statement, whilst the second, termed the 'minor premise', is a specific statement. Such is the nature of a syllogism that, if both premises are true, the conclusion drawn from them is necessarily true. An example, unrelated to Puritans or the conscience, will serve as an illustration:

MAJOR PREMISE: All dogs have four legs.

MINOR PREMISE: Rover is a dog.

CONCLUSION: Rover has four legs.

In traditional logic, the construction of syllogisms was, of course, explored in sophisticated ways which yielded more significant conclusions than the number of legs on a dog. The basic idea, however, is relatively straightforward.

The Puritans employed the syllogistic form of argument in relation to two practical issues, hence the name 'practical syllogism'. The issues were, on the one hand, our standing before God (obedient or disobedient, approved or under censure), and on the other hand, our duty as Christians (what we should or should not do).

Consider first our *standing before God*. In such a syllogism the major premise will be some statement of revealed truth drawn from Scripture, which will provide a general rule for self-judgment. The minor premise will be an observed fact about oneself. Together these will yield a conclusion about one's

spiritual standing. The following two examples are drawn from William Ames.⁵ First, a syllogism calculated to stir the conscience:

MAJOR: He that lives in sin, shall die.
 MINOR: I live in sin.
 CONCLUSION: Therefore I shall die.

The second is a syllogism to give comfort to true believers;

MAJOR: Whoever believes in Christ shall not die but live.
 MINOR: I believe in Christ.
 CONCLUSION: Therefore I shall not die but live.

The second type of practical syllogism deals with our *duty as Christians*. David Dickson provides a number of examples of this form of reasoning. Beginning with the most general case, Dickson says:

If the Conscience be about to give directions for what is to be done, it reasoneth thus,
 What God hath appointed to be the only rule of faith and manners, I must take heed to follow it as the rule.
 But, the holy Scripture, God hath appointed to be the only rule of faith and manners.
 Therefore, I must take heed to follow the Scripture as the only rule.⁶

As Dickson develops his theme, he gives a series of syllogisms, some relating to duty and some to a man's standing before God. On the subject of conviction of sin, we read:

That which God hath commanded me, I should have done:
 But, to repent and turn to Him, He hath commanded me;
 Therefore, I should have repented and turned to God.⁷

In the same vein, Dickson also writes:

That way of reconciliation which God hath appointed a self-condemned sinner to follow, I am bound to follow;
 But, this way (and no other) hath God appointed, that the sinner, convinced of sin and of deserved wrath should flee to Christ Jesus the Mediator, that by Him he may be justified, sanctified and saved:
 Therefore, this way of reconciliation, and no other, I am bound to follow.⁸

The Puritans' use of the practical syllogism has often come under attack. It is, according to critics, artificial, mechanical, legalistic. No doubt this method of moral reasoning could be abused in such a way as to become mechanical or legalistic. We also recognize that in real-life decision making

people do not consciously work through this reasoning process, in many cases being aware only of the conclusion. Nevertheless it does seem that Puritan writers such as Perkins and Ames have correctly analysed how the conscience functions as a reasoning faculty. It must also be kept in mind that text-book examples are deliberately kept fairly obvious for purposes of instruction, whilst actual moral dilemmas encountered by Christians are generally more complex and require several stages in the reasoning process.

Puritan writing on conscience also emphasizes a truth that is consistently borne out in human experience: the conscience operates in a largely *autonomous* way. We cannot really choose how or when conscience makes its judgments. It is certainly true that sometimes the conscience can be stifled or temporarily suppressed, but usually it speaks independently of our will, and indeed often contrary to what we may want. Conscience thus stands apart from us, addressing us with an absolute authority which we did not give it and cannot take away from it, however much we may wish to do so. As Ames puts the matter, 'Conscience bindeth a man so straitly that the command of no creature can free a man from it.'⁹

It is not at all surprising that many Puritan writers personified the conscience, since they regarded it as God's watchman in the soul. Various New Testament texts offer warrant for such personal language. Thus Paul states in II Corinthians 1:12 'Our conscience *testifies* that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, in the holiness and sincerity that are from God.' He also says in Romans 2:15, with reference to the Gentiles, 'they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even *defending* them.'

As we might expect, it is among the great Puritan preachers that the most vivid personifications of conscience are to be found. Listen to Richard Sibbes (1577-1635) in his exposition of II Corinthians 1:12:

Now conscience is a most excellent thing, it is above reason and sense; for conscience is under God, and hath an eye to God always. ...Conscience looks to God. It is placed as God's deputy and vicegerent in man.¹⁰

Even more striking is the language of Thomas Brooks (1608-80):

Conscience is God's spy in our bosoms: keep this clear and tender, and then all is well... Take heed of tongue-tied consciences; for when God shall untie these strings, and unmuzzle your consciences, conscience will be heard, and ten concerts of music shall not drown her clamorous cries.¹¹

The metaphors used can be quite elaborate. David Dickson, for example, considers the working of conscience in the language of the law-courts.

Conscience in turn plays the parts of judge (citing the prisoner), officer (presenting the accused), accuser, recorder (quoting the law), witnesses, judge for the second time (pronouncing sentence), sergeant (removing the convicted man), prison and stocks.¹² The task of conscience is all-embracing.

In Puritan thinking, conscience is a faculty placed by God in every person to monitor all aspects of life. As J. I. Packer puts it, conscience is:

the faculty which God put in man to be a sounding-board for his work in its application to our lives, or ... a mirror to catch the light of moral and spiritual truth that shines forth from God and to reflect it in concentrated focus upon our deeds, desires and choices.¹³

Conscience and Scripture

In Puritan thinking, the conscience was not created to function, nor must it be allowed to function, as an independent faculty. It is God who must control the conscience absolutely. This view is stated concisely in the Westminster Confession:

God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are, in any thing, contrary to His Word; or beside it, if matters of faith, or worship.¹⁴

David Clarkson (1622-86), successor to John Owen, sets out the same position in rather more detail:

The conscience must be ruled by [God]. This must be subjected to him, and to him alone; for he alone is the Lord of the conscience. It is the will of God that obliges conscience; and this should suffer itself to be bound up by it, and nothing else should oblige or disoblige it but the will of him who rules over all. Though it be the freest faculty, and the most exempted from the control of any other authority, yet in all its acts and offices it must be in full subjection to God.¹⁵

Since this is the case, it is necessary for us to have our consciences attuned to the mind and will of God. We must, in the language of II Corinthians 10:5, 'take captive' every thought to make it 'obedient to Christ'. If that is not done, the conscience will inevitably go wrong and, in the Puritan view, it is sin both to flout conscience and to follow an erring conscience. The Puritans realized that it is a very dangerous thing to make the conscience the ultimate standard of conduct when it is not in subjection to the will of God. Richard Baxter of Kidderminster (1651-91), who wrote extensively on pastoral issues, was well aware of this danger. Thus he writes:

Make not your own judgments or consciences your law, or the maker of our duty; which is but the discerner of the law of God, and of the duty which he maketh

you, and of your own obedience or disobedience to him ... it is not ourselves, but God, that is our lawgiver. And conscience is ... appointed ... only to discern the law of God, and call upon us to observe it: and an erring conscience is not to be obeyed, but to be better informed.¹⁶

The Puritans were unanimous that such shaping of the conscience could happen only when it was harnessed to the Bible as the inspired Word of God. It is in the Scriptures that the mind of God has been revealed by the Spirit of God. As the living Word of the living God, the Bible provides clear directions for the church in every age on all matters of faith and life that could possibly arise. Along with the authority of Scripture, the Puritans also assert strongly the sufficiency of Scripture. This is reflected in the carefully worded statement of the Westminster Divines:

The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture.¹⁷

The Scriptures are thus the sole infallible guide for the Christian's conscience. As William Ames says:

All things necessary to salvation are contained in the Scriptures and also those things necessary for the instruction and edification of the church ... Therefore, Scripture is not a partial but a perfect rule of faith and morals ... The Scriptures need no explanation through light brought from outside, especially in the necessary things. They give light to themselves, which should be uncovered diligently by men and communicated to others according to their calling.¹⁸

We may also note the comments of William Perkins in his famous handbook for preachers, *The Art of Prophesying* (1606). He states that two things demonstrate the 'exceptional character of the influence of Scripture'. One is: 'Its power to penetrate into the spirit of man'. The second is: 'Its ability to bind the conscience, that is, to constrain it before God either to excuse or accuse us of sin'.¹⁹

The Puritans saw no insurmountable difficulties in the Bible's coming from an age distant in time and culture from their own. Whilst some on occasion may have been liable to ignore such differences entirely, their approach in general was sound. They believed that if they could discern the principles that God was teaching and applying in his recorded dealings with Israel and with the early Church, they could learn to re-apply them in their own situation. Among other things, this would provide the guidance needed by the Christian's conscience. The God who, by the Holy Spirit, through the agency of the human authors, wrote these things does not change and, consequently, his will for man's life does not change.

Of course, Puritan writers and preachers recognized that it is possible to go astray because of ignorance of Scripture or because of misjudgment of particular situations. They knew from their own experience that it is not easy to be humble enough to seek and accept the required help of the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless they were convinced that in principle Scripture provides clear and exact guidance for every aspect of life and for all the issues on which the conscience must adjudicate.

What is crucial is the attitude with which the reader or hearer approaches the Scriptures. Puritan writers were convinced that if a person approached the Scriptures in a humble, teachable and expectant frame of mind, then God would seal on his heart and mind a clear certainty of how he should behave in whatever situation he faced. This is reflected in the comments of Jeremiah Burroughs (1599-1646) on how one should prepare to hear the preaching of the Word of God. 'First, when you come to hear the Word, if you would sanctify God's name, you must possess your souls with what it is you are going to hear. That is, what you are going to hear is the Word of God',²⁰ says Burroughs. Subsequently he advises 'Pray beforehand that God would open thine eyes, and open thine heart, and accompany his Word'.²¹ After quoting a number of texts, such as Psalm 119:18 ('Open thou mine eyes...'), he concludes, 'Oh, come with such a praying heart to the Word ... God will be glorified and you will be profited.'²²

The Puritans sought clear certainty as to God's truth in its practical application and they believed that in Scripture, brought home to the heart by the ministry of the Holy Spirit, they had been given that certainty. Their quest served to sharpen their moral sensibilities and also their insight into the meaning of Scripture. This helps, at least in part, to explain the richness of Puritan sermons and Bible commentaries. They wanted to grasp God's truth with the *same preciseness* with which they believed it to have been revealed. For this reason the early Puritans were dubbed, in mockery, 'precisians'. Although intended as a derogatory label, it was in fact quite accurate. As one pastor, Richard Rogers, put it, 'I serve a precise God'. As far as the Puritans were concerned, God has made a precise disclosure of the truth and so expects from his people a corresponding preciseness of belief and behaviour.

Perkins on applying Scripture

A useful example of how Puritan writers sought to use the Word of God in relation to the conscience is provided by one of the sections in William Perkins' work *A Treatise tending unto a Declaration, whether a Man be in the Estate of Damnation, or in the Estate of Grace*.²³ The chapter is entitled 'How a man should apply aright the word of God to his own soul' and begins with the assertion, 'Every Christian containeth in himself two natures, flat contrary one

to the other, the flesh and the spirit'.²⁴ He then argues that the way to Christian perfection is by subduing the flesh and strengthening the spirit.

Perkins next draws a parallel between the two natures and the two parts of God's Word:

First, the Law, because it is the ministry of death, it fitly serveth for the taming and mastering of the rebellious flesh: and the Gospel containing the bountiful promises of God in Christ, is as oil, to pour into our wounds, and as the water of life, to quench our thirsty souls; and it fitly serveth for the strengthening of the spirit.²⁵

Perkins then addresses those who are conscious of their battle with sin, who are led into captivity to sin by the flesh (as Perkins puts it). To such his advice is:

Look now only upon the Law of God, apply it to thyself, examine thy thoughts, thy words, thy deeds by it: pray unto God, that he would give thee the spirit of fear, that the law may in some measure humble and terrify thee.²⁶

He drives home his point by listing a number of 'most effectual meditations'²⁷ in the Law which will serve to expose sin and bridle the flesh. He begins with the greatness and number of one's sins, suggesting the drawing up of lists of sins for consideration. He mentions too the consideration of God's judgments on men, with examples supplied both by Scripture and by daily experience. Every judgment, says Perkins, is to be considered a sermon on repentance. He also suggests remembering that whenever a sin is committed, God, along with the angels, is present, and 'he is an eye-witness,...he taketh a note of thy sin, and registers it in a book'.²⁸ Other subjects for meditation include the suddenness with which death may strike, the sudden return of Christ and the wrath of God which could be pacified only by the death of Christ.

Perkins then turns quickly to the Gospel. When the Law has stirred an awareness of sin, 'have recourse to the promises of mercy contained in the Old and New Testament'.²⁹ God's answer to the wounded conscience is provided fully in Christ. Drawing on the language of Scripture, Perkins says:

Is thy conscience stung with sin? With all speed run to the brazen serpent Christ Jesus, look on him with the eye of faith, and presently thou shalt be healed of thy sting or wound.³⁰

Again Perkins provides a list of suitable biblical truths on which to meditate, this time to bring comfort and encouragement. They focus, as we might expect, on the benefits which Christians enjoy through their union with Christ. Perkins lists a series of contrasts between what is the Christian's lot in

Adam and what it is in Christ. He says, for example, 'Through Adam, thou art condemned to hell; by Christ thou art delivered from it. Through Adam, thou hast transgressed the whole law; in Christ thou hast fulfilled it.'³¹ As the series unfolds, the richness of the blessings bestowed on the people of God becomes ever clearer. The Christian is made alive, accepted as a child of God. The 'crosses' which formerly were punishments for sin are now tokens of God's mercy. In one striking phrase Perkins says, 'In Adam, thou art worse than a toad, and more detestable before God; but by Christ, thou art above the Angels.'³² The contrasting positions of those in Adam and in Christ is summed up thus:

Lastly, in Adam, thou art poor, and blind, and miserable; in Christ thou art rich and glorious, thou art a king of heaven and earth, fellow-heir with him, and shalt as sure be partaker of it, as he is even now.³³

The contrast is depicted as being between eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, as Adam did in Eden, and eating of the tree of life in the heavenly Jerusalem. 'Fear no danger,' says Perkins, 'be bold in Christ to eat of the fruit, as God hath commanded thee; it will quicken thee, and revive thee being dead.'³⁴

Perkins goes on to stress that the Word of God must actually be applied to the soul if benefit is to be experienced. Just as ointment must be applied in time to a wound, so the Word of God must be applied 'in order and time convenient'.³⁵ He identifies two opposite errors into which Christians fall in this regard. On the one hand are those who apply only the Gospel to themselves, constantly pleading the mercy of God yet never coming to a real conviction of sin. The result is dangerous spiritual complacency. Retaining the medical imagery, Perkins describes such a person thus:

But he playeth the unskilful surgeon, he useth healing plasters, before his poisoned and cankered nature have felt the power and pain of a corrosive. And it will never be well with him, until he take a new course.³⁶

On the other hand, however, are those Christians who neglect to apply the promises of the Gospel to themselves and so 'only have regard to their own sins, and God's infinite vengeance'.³⁷ Sadly, they are willing to listen to the accusations of Satan against them and, instead of answering him with the Gospel promises, they fall into self-accusation. The result is that 'they are brought into fearful terrors, and often draw near to desperation.'³⁸

Perkins provides a good example of the Puritans at their best: with pastoral sensitivity and biblical balance, he seeks to dispel dangerous complacency, yet also to bring consolation and encouragement to those who are struggling with a troubled conscience.

Conscience and the spiritual life

(i) Types of conscience.

Godliness for the Puritans was intimately related to the conscience, since it centred on a disciplined and hearty response to the Word of God and centred on the getting and keeping of a good conscience.

The fundamental distinction drawn by the Puritans was that between a bad conscience and a good conscience. Apart from the grace of God, the conscience can only be bad, or asleep, and the conscience of the unregenerate oscillates between these two conditions. When divine grace begins to work in the heart of a sinner, it in fact makes the conscience thoroughly bad, since the sinner becomes aware of his guilt, pollution and alienation from God. In discussing 'How the sinner ought to prepare himself to conversion', William Ames writes,

It is required ... that upon that comparing of our state with God's law, there do follow a conviction of conscience which in Scripture is called ... a being without excuse, Rom 1.20. And a concluding one under sin, Rom 11.32. Rom 2.20 and 7.7.³⁹

Earlier in his study he describes such conviction of conscience in this way:

... a Sinner ... must judge himself ... He doth this, by pleading God's cause against himself, that is by accusing himself, witnessing, alleging, and confessing, or by acknowledging God's Law against himself, by revealing the secrets of his heart, and his hidden filthiness, to his own ignominy and shame. Then by condemning himself, that is, by declaring what torment and punishment God may justly inflict upon him; or by proclaiming of himself guilty of everlasting death.⁴⁰

If God is pleased to add a change of mind and faith in Christ, the convicted sinner will find forgiveness and peace of conscience.

The unregenerate are characterized by an 'evil conscience', according to Ames, a conscience that is blind to the distinction between good and evil and that approves what it in reality should condemn. He recognises that believers too may at times have such an evil conscience, but in believers 'there is a principle of grace, by strength whereof they are upholden, they wrestle and withstand, and by little and little are healed of it.'⁴¹

Similar thoughts are to be found in William Perkins. In *A Discourse of Conscience* he too states that conscience is either good or bad, and that 'Good conscience is that which rightly, according to God's Word, excuseth and comforteth'.⁴² He then notes that the conscience is good either by creation, as in the case of Adam before the Fall, or by regeneration. Of the latter case Perkins says,

Regenerate conscience is that which being corrupt by nature, is renewed and purged by faith in the blood of Christ. For to the regenerating of the conscience, there is required a conversion or change; because by nature all men's consciences since the Fall are evil, and none are good but by grace.⁴³

Writers such as Perkins and Ames exemplify the Puritans' precision in dealing with the subject of conscience. Not only are the broad categories of good and bad distinguished, but various other types, or conditions, of conscience are examined and practical conclusions drawn. Ames, for example, speaks of the 'natural' conscience and the 'enlightened' conscience in the context of the source of moral knowledge which provides the major (general) premise in the practical syllogism described above. As Ames states the distinction:

Natural conscience is that which acknowledgeth for law the principles of nature, and the conclusions arising from them. *Enlightened* is that which doth beside those, acknowledge whatsoever is prescribed in the Scriptures.⁴⁴

In saying this, Ames is not proposing some source of moral knowledge independent of divine revelation, but is making use of the common Reformed view that God has provided revelation in the creation and in the written Scriptures. Using the Greek term *synteresis* to refer to the source of moral knowledge in the widest sense, he writes:

From hence it appeareth that the perfect and only rule of Conscience is the revealed will of God, whereby a man's duty is both shown and commanded. For *synteresis* in a more large sense consisteth, partly of moral principles that are naturally in us, together with their conclusions; and partly of those which God besides them hath enjoined. But the revealed will of God whereby a man knows his duty, containeth both these.⁴⁵

The Puritans' pastoral concern and sensitivity is particularly evident in their treatment of the different types of conscience. Perkins, for example, in *The Whole Treatise of the Cases of Conscience* notes three cases in which a person may be said not to act 'of faith' (using Paul's terminology in Romans 14:23 'Whatsoever is not of faith is sin'). There is the case, first of all, where someone acts 'with a doubting and unresolved conscience',⁴⁶ due to a lack of knowledge of the truth. An example he cites is those in the early Church who refused to eat certain kinds of food, in particular meat offered to idols (as addressed in Romans 14). For such to eat the meat in question would not have been eating 'of faith' and would therefore have been sinful.

Perkins second case is 'where a thing is done upon an erroneous Conscience',⁴⁷ when again it is sin. Perkins stresses that sincerity is not sufficient to make such actions righteous. Thus a priest saying mass may

believe he is performing an ordinance of God, yet his conviction does not render his action right or good. Similarly, if someone holds that fornication or theft are indifferent matters and not immoral, he nevertheless sins if he commits either of them. As Perkins sums up the matter:

For the error of the judgment cannot take away the nature of that which is simply evil. Sin is sin, and so remaineth, notwithstanding any contrary persuasion of the conscience.⁴⁸

The third case mentioned by Perkins is ‘when a thing is done with a repugning or gain-saying conscience’.⁴⁹ By this he means an action done against the doer’s conscientious conviction. Although the action, judged by the standard of God’s revealed will, may be perfectly permissible, for someone to do it against his conscience makes it sinful. The example Perkins gives is of an Anabaptist who believes it is wrong to swear an oath. Even though such swearing is not in fact wrong, should the Anabaptist swear an oath, against the dictates of his conscience, he is sinning. As Perkins states it:

an Anabaptist ... sinneth if he take an oath: not in swearing simply, for that is God’s ordinance: but because he swears against the persuasion of his Conscience.⁵⁰

At rather greater length, William Ames considers similar issues in the early chapters of *Conscience with the Power and Cases thereof*. He begins with the erring conscience, having first stated that, ‘There are some principles so clear, and written in the hearts of all men, that they cannot err to obey and practise them’,⁵¹ examples being, ‘That God ought to be loved; Perjury ought to be eschewed’. Ames then indicates the sources of an erring conscience:

The error of Conscience comes, either because that the particular conclusions are not rightly drawn out of the general principles: or because those things which God in the Scripture hath commanded us to believe are not sufficiently understood: or finally, because the assent of Faith is not given to those things which ought to be believed, though they be understood.⁵²

Ames, however, recognises that complex situations can arise because of an erring conscience, since conscience (even if it errs) binds a man, and yet the action he chooses in obedience to his conscience may also be sinful. It would seem that in some cases there is no option which is entirely free from sin. The complexities come out clearly in the example Ames cites, and which is worth quoting in its entirety:

If any man through error of conscience should hold it to be an unlawful thing to go to the Church, and serve God there (which otherwise he is tied to do) because

he knows the Preacher to be a lewd and naughty man, and thinks that he shall be partaker with him in his wickedness; his sin is greater in staying away, than if he were present there: because it is a greater sin to neglect God's service, than to communicate with another's personal wickedness in that service. But if he should think it unlawful to be present at holy duties for Idolatry, which he judgeth will be committed there, he should sin more heinously if he should be present there: because the sin of Idolatry is greater than a neglect of true worship.⁵³

The upshot of this discussion is that in the first case the greater sin lies in following conscience and in the second case it lies in disobeying conscience. In general, Ames concludes, 'No certain and general rule therefore can be set down in this matter'.⁵⁴

After a discussion of a doubting conscience, in which again careful distinctions are drawn, Ames turns to consider 'a Scrupulous Conscience'.⁵⁵ He defines a scruple in vivid terms as 'a fear of the mind concerning its practice, which vexeth the conscience, as a little stone that cannot be discerned in a man's shoe, paineth his foot'.⁵⁶ He further asserts that not every fear is to be counted a scruple, but only those that arise from slight or no arguments supporting them. Ames contrasts the scrupulous conscience with the doubting conscience in this way: the doubting conscience has objections to acting and not acting in a particular case, whilst a scrupulous conscience is drawn to one option by conviction and to the other 'by a kind of fear'.⁵⁷

In giving advice for dealing with a scrupulous conscience, Ames shows himself to be a practical and wise pastor. He asserts first that 'one must labour diligently to remove these scruples, which reason can take away by due trial of the grounds of them',⁵⁸ making sure to stress that God must be called upon to give grace for this task. The greater the knowledge of God's revealed will, the quieter the conscience. His second piece of advice is very down-to-earth:

It helpeth much (if it may be conveniently) that the thinking upon those things be shunned, from which scruples may rise; for the fancy being once stirred, many thoughts arise, which cannot be suppressed again, without great difficulty.⁵⁹

In some cases, and this is Ames' third piece of advice, scruples which cannot be removed by reasoned arguments must simply be shut out of our thoughts. Such 'ought to be laid down as it were by violence, refusing to think or consider of them'.⁶⁰ Ames wisely recognises that sometimes prolonged thinking about scruples, in an attempt to reason them away, can in fact strengthen and even multiply them. Finally, if all these ways of removing scruples fail, 'it is lawful, and the best course, to do a thing against such scruples'.⁶¹ The example Ames gives is of a man who is a true believer yet scruples to come to the Lord's Table because of a sense of his own unworthiness. Ames' advice is that he should come, since by defying a

groundless fear he is in fact acting according to conscience, not against it. In general, argues Ames,

a scruple is a rash fear without any ground, and so cannot bind to do according to it; yea through custom of doing against such like scruples, conscience itself is made more strong and settled.⁶²

(ii) Christian liberty.

A subject frequently addressed by Puritan writers, especially as it relates to the conscience, is Christian liberty. William Ames states the crucial central principle thus: 'The conscience is immediately subject to God, and his will, and therefore it cannot submit itself unto any creature without Idolatry.'⁶³ Whilst men are bound in conscience by God to obey just human laws, those laws cannot be said to bind the conscience. Similar views are expressed by the Westminster Divines:

God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are, in any thing, contrary to his Word; or beside it, if matters of faith, or worship.⁶⁴

William Perkins in the third chapter of *A Discourse of Conscience* provides a helpful concise summary of Puritan views of Christian liberty. Christian liberty, says Perkins, is 'a spiritual and holy freedom purchased by Christ.'⁶⁵ Spiritual liberty, according to Perkins, is to be distinguished from civil liberty, which deals with the outward and the bodily, and from ideas of liberty to be found among the Jews (earthly and political) and the Anabaptists (anarchic). As holy liberty, it stands in opposition to the claims of the 'Libertines' who seek freedom to live as they wish. This liberty has been purchased by Christ, as shown for example in Galatians 5:1 ('Stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made you free'). In this Perkins sees the answer to Rome's doctrine that, although freedom has been purchased by Christ, it is maintained partly by Christ and partly by man.

Perkins then analyses Christian liberty into three elements.

1. Freedom from justification by the moral law, which for the sinner is an impossible task. 'For he that is a member of Christ is not bound in conscience to bring the perfect righteousness of the law in his own person for his justification before God'.⁶⁶ This entails the fact that no works performed by man can contribute to justification, and it is also the case that in Christ the Christian is freed from the curse and condemnation of the law (as in Romans 8:1 and Galatians 3:13).

2. Freedom from the rigour of the law, which demands perfect

obedience. In support of this assertion Perkins quotes Romans 6:14 and I John 5:3. He draws from this the conclusion that 'God will accept of our imperfect obedience, if it be sincere: yea he accepts the will, desire, and endeavour to obey for obedience itself.'⁶⁷

3. Freedom of conscience from the bond of the ceremonial law of the Old Testament. The laws relating to foods, for example, no longer bind God's people. Here Perkins quotes texts such as Galatians 3:25, Ephesians 2:14,15 and Colossians 2:14,16. The practical result of this freedom is 'that all Christians may freely without scruple of conscience use all things indifferent, so be it, the manner of using them be good.'⁶⁸

The proper use of 'things indifferent' has been a matter of vigorous debate down through the history of the Church, not only in Reformed circles. Perkins provides a number of insights which are of help in this controversial area.

He begins by setting out the two uses of things indifferent which are acceptable for Christians – the 'natural' use and the 'spiritual' use. The natural use 'is either to relieve our necessities, or for honest delight'.⁶⁹ He quotes Psalm 104:15 in this regard, where God is said to provide 'wine that maketh glad the heart of man, and oil to make his face to shine, and bread which strengtheneth man's heart'. He also asserts:

God hath put into his creatures infinite varieties of colours, savours, tastes and forms, to this end that men might take delight in them.⁷⁰

His conclusion may surprise those who have imbibed the caricatures of the Puritans as miserable kill-joys: 'Hence it follows that Recreation is lawful, and a part of Christian liberty if it be well used. By Recreation I understand exercises and sports serving to refresh either the body or the mind'.⁷¹ Certain activities, he believes, are not 'indifferent' and are to be shunned, his examples being the dances of his day, which he considered promoted immorality, games of dice and plays representing the vices of the world. In addition, use of permitted recreations was to be 'sparing, moderate and lawful'⁷² according to the rules he later provides. We may, however, have some sympathy with the comments of Leland Ryken in his (sympathetic) study of the Puritans entitled *Worldly Saints*, when he says that the Puritans held a utilitarian theory of recreation. He writes,

Instead of valuing recreation for its own sake, or as celebration, or as an enlargement of one's human spirit, the Puritans tended to look upon play as something that made work possible.⁷³

The *spiritual* use of things indifferent, writes Perkins, 'is when we take occasion by the creatures to meditate and speak of heavenly things'.⁷⁴ The examples given are of seeing a vine and its branches, which leads to

consideration of the union between Christ and his Church, and of the sight of a rainbow stimulating thoughts of God's promise not to send another universal flood.

In order to decide upon the right use of things indifferent Perkins provides several rules, in addition to the general principle that they are to be sanctified by the Word and prayer (I Timothy 4:3-4). Perkins rules are:

- (i) All things must be done to God's glory. This applies even to matters such as dress.
- (ii) Our use of things indifferent is to be constrained by love for others and by 'the wholesome laws of men, whether Civil or Ecclesiastical'.⁷⁵
- (iii) Our use of things indifferent must advance us in godliness. The body is not to be pampered in such a way that we are hindered from spiritual activities.
- (iv) 'Things indifferent must be used within compass of our callings, that is, according to our ability, degree, state, and condition life.'⁷⁶ Perkins has strong words for those who pass themselves off as being of a higher social class than they actually are. Ideas of upward social mobility play little part in Perkins' sixteenth century worldview.

(iii) Peace of conscience.

Peace of conscience – a 'good conscience' – was considered by the Puritans to be a precious gift of God, but one which also required the believer to fulfil certain responsibilities if it was to be received and kept. Crucial is the believer's response to the Word of God. Thus William Ames contrasts an evil conscience and a hard heart with 'a tender conscience which is easily moved by the word of God'.⁷⁷

He returns to the same subject in more detail later in this treatise when he states that 'the concomitant object of obedience is a quiet conscience'.⁷⁸ He first sets out a number of important qualifications which clarify the relationship between obedience and peace of conscience, since misunderstanding easily arises. Thus he affirms that peace of conscience 'depends not upon our obedience as upon the principal cause, but rather upon the justification which we have in Christ Jesus',⁷⁹ citing as proof-texts Romans 5:1, Hebrews 10:22, I Peter 3:21 and I Corinthians 4:4. Ames is seeking to avoid any suggestion of merit in the obedience of believers and also knows that reliance on our own imperfect obedience can never bring peace of conscience. Obedience removes obstacles to peace and may be thought of as a secondary cause of peace. Ames' argument, which is compressed and lacking in his usual clarity, is that our objective peace with God depends on justification by faith in Christ, which results in obedient living, which in turn gives grounds for subjective peace of

conscience. Our obedience is 'a sign of our reconciliation with God'⁸⁰ and so promotes peace.

William Perkins also addressed these issues in *A Discourse of Conscience*. Man's duty in relation to conscience, he says, is first obtaining one and second keeping one.

Regarding the obtaining of a good conscience, Perkins, in fine Puritan style, sets out three steps, which are also subdivided: 'a preparation to good conscience; the applying of the remedy; the reformation of conscience'.⁸¹ As far as the *preparation* is concerned, Perkins lists four stages or requirements, namely a knowledge of God's law, a knowledge of the sentence of God's law on those who break it, a 'just and serious examination of the conscience by the law',⁸² and, finally, genuine sorrow over sin. These steps must be followed diligently by sinners since, Perkins notes, people do not generally believe they are in danger of God's wrath. As he puts it, 'stones will almost as soon move in the walls and pillars of our Churches, as the flinty hearts of men'.⁸³ The *remedy* provided by God is the blood of Christ provided to cleanse sin. In order to profit from the remedy, the sinner must humble himself before God and must lay aside any doubts about God's promises of mercy. We must, as Perkins puts it, 'endeavour by God's grace to resolve ourselves that the promises of salvation by Christ belong to us particularly'.⁸⁴ The *reformation* of conscience follows from a sincere crying to God for mercy:

For then the Lord will send down his Spirit into the conscience by a sweet and heavenly testimony to assure us that we are at peace with God.⁸⁵

As far as keeping a good conscience is concerned, Perkins indicates that two things must be done: 'avoid the impediment thereof, and use convenient preservations'.⁸⁶ The impediments to a good conscience arise from our own sins, in particular, according to Perkins, ignorance, unmortified affections and worldly lusts. Ignorance is to be removed by knowledge of God's Word. Affections are to be redirected, so that anger is directed towards our sins and love is directed increasingly to God. The answer to worldly lusts is to learn the lesson of Philippians 4:12, namely contentment with God's providential dealings with us. If these impediments are not removed they will be like worms in a dead body:

Unless we take great heed, out of the sins and corruptions of our hearts, there will breed a worm a thousand fold more terrible, even the worm of conscience that never dieth; which will in a lingering manner waste the conscience, the soul, and the whole man; because he shall be always dying and never dead.⁸⁷

On the positive side, in order to keep a good conscience Perkins gives two 'preservatives'. The first is 'to preserve and cherish that saving faith whereby

we are persuaded of our reconciliation with God in Christ',⁸⁸ and this may be accomplished by daily prayer and repentance. The second preservative is 'the maintaining of the righteousness of a good conscience',⁸⁹ which Perkins defines as a constant endeavour and desire to do the will of God. In practical terms, this is accomplished by following three fundamental rules: first 'we are to carry in our hearts a purpose never to sin against God in anything';⁹⁰ second, like Enoch we must walk with God and be aware that we are always in his presence; third, we must 'carefully ... walk in our particular callings, doing the duties thereof to the glory of God, to the good of the commonwealth, and the edification of the Church'.⁹¹

Perkins thus provides a concise summary of the Christian life built around the subject of conscience. Indeed 'conscience' lies at the heart of Puritan thinking about what it means to be a Christian. A healthy conscience in a regenerate man or woman is constantly in operation, listening for God's voice in the Word, seeking to learn his will in everything, always active in self-watch and self-judgment. The wise Christian knows his own frailty and always distrusts himself, lest sin and Satan catch him unawares. Hence he regularly examines himself before God in the light of the Word. Closeness to God is reflected in sensitivity of sin and tenderness of conscience. To borrow from William Perkins, a good conscience is indeed a 'precious jewel'.⁹²

Notes

In quotations, where no modern edition exists, spelling has generally been modernised for the sake of clarity.

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2. William Ames, *Conscience with the Power and Cases thereof* (n.p., 1639), Bk.1, p.1.
3. William Ames, *Conscience*, Bk.1, p.3.
4. David Dickson, *Therapeutica Sacra*, (Edinburgh: Evan Tyler, 1664), p.3
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9. William Ames, *Conscience*, Bk.1, p.8.
10. Richard Sibbes, *The Complete Works of Richard Sibbes, D.D.*, edited by the Rev Alexander Balloch Grosart, (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1862), 3.209.
11. Thomas Brooks, *The Works of Thomas Brooks*, edited by Alexander B Grosart, (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1980), 5.281.
12. David Dickson, *Therapeutica Sacra*, p.7.
13. J I Packer, *Among God's Giants. The Puritan vision of the Christian life*, (Eastbourne: Kingsway Publications, 1991), p.144.
14. *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 20.2.
15. David Clarkson, *The Works of David Clarkson*, (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1988), 2.475. The context is a sermon on Psalm 103:19 'His kingdom ruleth over all'.
16. Richard Baxter, *The Works of Richard Baxter* (London: George Virtue, 1838). 1.116.
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22. Jeremiah Burroughs, *Gospel Worship*, p.171.
23. William Perkins, *A Treatise tending unto a Declaration, whether a Man be in the Estate of Damnation, or in the Estate of Grace*, (Cambridge: John Legate, 1608).
24. William Perkins, *A Treatise tending*, p.408. A careful and, to this writer convincing, presentation of the other view current among Reformed theologians, namely that there is but one nature in the regenerate, is provided by John Murray in *Principles of Conduct*, (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1957), chapter ix, 'The Dynamic of the Biblical Ethic'.
25. William Perkins, *A Treatise tending*, p.408, section 2.
26. William Perkins, *A Treatise tending*, p.408, section 3.
27. William Perkins, *A Treatise tending*, p.408, section 4.
28. William Perkins, *A Treatise tending*, p.408, section 4.
29. William Perkins, *A Treatise tending*, p.408, section 5.
30. William Perkins, *A Treatise tending*, p.408, section 5.
31. William Perkins, *A Treatise tending*, p.408, section 6.
32. William Perkins, *A Treatise tending*, p.409, section 6.
33. William Perkins, *A Treatise tending*, p.409, section 6.
34. William Perkins, *A Treatise tending*, p.409, section 6.
35. William Perkins, *A Treatise tending*, p.409, section 7.
36. William Perkins, *A Treatise tending*, p.409, section 8.
37. William Perkins, *A Treatise tending*, p.409, section 9.
38. William Perkins, *A Treatise tending*, p.409, section 9.
39. William Ames, *Conscience*, Bk.2, p.8.
40. William Ames, *Conscience*, Bk.1, p.35.
41. William Ames, *Conscience*, Bk.1, p.42.
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44. William Ames, *Conscience*, Bk.1, p.5.
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47. William Perkins, *The Whole Treatise*, p.28.
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54. William Ames, *Conscience*, Bk.1, p.16.
55. William Ames, *Conscience*, Bk.1, pp.19-21.
56. William Ames, *Conscience*, Bk.1, p.19.
57. William Ames, *Conscience*, Bk.1, p.19.
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63. William Ames, *Conscience*, Bk.1, p.6.
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65. William Perkins, *A Discourse*, p.532.
66. William Perkins, *A Discourse*, p.532.
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72. William Perkins, *A Discourse*, p.533.
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78. William Ames, *Conscience*, Bk.3, p.60.
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80. William Ames, *Conscience*, Bk.3, p.61.
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84. William Perkins, *A Discourse*, p.546.
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88. William Perkins, *A Discourse*, p.547.
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JOHN ELIOT (1604-1690)

Puritan Minister and Pioneer Missionary

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England under Elizabeth I was basically hostile to the Puritan movement under such dynamic leaders as William Perkins and Thomas Cartwright. On the death of Elizabeth and the accession to the throne of Scottish King James I, brought up a Presbyterian, English Puritans were hoping for a more sympathetic monarch. Their hopes were dashed when, at the Hampton Court Conference in 1604, the king instead of redressing their grievances, revealed his hostility to the Puritans. As historian S. M. Houghton points out:

The conference soon broke up and before long 300 clergymen were deprived by the bishops of their livings in the Church of England.¹

In the same year as the Conference was convened, a son was born to yeoman Bennett Eliot and his wife Lettia. Baby John was baptized in the parish church at Widford, Hertfordshire. John grew up in an England that was increasingly hostile to those who embraced Puritan values leading many to emigrate to New England. The Pilgrim Fathers (1620) paved the way for many to follow. As a young man John Eliot emigrated in 1631, eventually to become a missionary to the North American Indians.

John Eliot owed much to the godly home in which he was nurtured in the Christian faith, later in life testifying:

I do see that it was a great favour of God unto me to season my first times with the fear of God, the Word and prayer.²

He grew up in Nazeing in Essex, just five miles south of his birthplace, along with his six brothers and sisters. In the spring of 1618 he went to Jesus College, Cambridge, as a pensioner (one who pays his own expenses) and matriculated on 20th. March, 1619. Graduating with a BA degree in 1622, Eliot took a teaching position in the small school of one of the Puritan ministers, Thomas Hooker, in the village of Little Baddow, Essex. There is reason to believe that sometime during his stay with Thomas and Susanna Hooker Eliot came to a personal knowledge of Christ for he later wrote:

Here the Lord said to my dead soul, Live! Live! And through the grace of God I do live and shall live for ever! When I came to this blessed family I then saw as never before, the power of godliness in its lovely vigour and efficacy.³

Hooker's popularity as a preacher soon attracted the attention of Archbishop Laud, who was the enthusiastic enforcer of Charles I's persecuting measures against Puritans. Hooker was forced to flee to Holland in 1630 before emigrating to New England in 1634.

Eliot, having adopted Hooker's strong non-conformist opinions, recognized that to stay in England would mean only a prison cell with no opportunity to preach the gospel. Hence on 3rd. November, 1631, he boarded the ship *Lyon* and sailed to Boston with sixty other people of Puritan sympathies from a number of small parishes in south-west Essex. Upon arrival in Boston they were warmly welcomed and 'everything which kindness could suggest, was done to give them a pleasant reception.'

Eliot's Family Life

Before leaving England Eliot became engaged to Hannah Mountford and in less than a year she followed her fiancée to the New World, where they were married in September, 1632. This proved to be a long and happy union, Hannah being described as John's constant helper. Cotton Mather portrays her as:

a woman very eminent, both for holiness and usefulness and she excelled most of the "daughters who have done virtuously"⁴

John and Hannah were blessed with six children who had the privilege of growing up in a godly home. Cotton Mather, who knew the family well, gives us some insights into the relationships which distinguished the Eliot home. With respect to John's affection for his wife he writes:

That one wife which was given to him truly from the Lord, he loved, prized, cherished, with a kindness that notably represented the compassion which he taught his church to expect from the Lord Jesus Christ.⁵

Although John would lead a very full and demanding life the nurture of his children in the gospel of Christ was his first priority. Cotton informs us:

His family was a little Bethel for the worship of God constantly and exactly maintained in it; and unto the daily prayers of the family, his manner was to prefix the reading of Scripture; which being done, it was also his manner to make the young people chuse a certain passage in the chapter, and give him some observation of their own upon it. By this method he did mightily sharpen and improve, as well as try their understandings, and endeavour to make them "wise unto salvation".⁶

It is not surprising to learn that the Eliot children, early in life, committed themselves to Christ. Five of them predeceased their father but, typical of Eliot, he saw reason to praise God, even in the hard providences that entered his life. After the death of his third son he testified:

I have had six children and I bless God for his free grace that all are either with Christ or in Christ: and my mind is now at rest concerning them.⁷

When someone asked Eliot how he could bear the death of such excellent children, his humble reply was:

My desire was that they should have served God on earth, but if God will chuse to have them serve him in heaven, I have nothing to object against it, but his will be done!⁸

Such remarks indicate the spiritual calibre of the man whose life and ministry was mightily used by God.

Eliot's Devotional Life

Eliot was a diligent student of the Bible, it being his practice to read a portion of both Testaments every day in their original language, describing it as necessary food for the soul. His biographer informs us that:

he would not upon easy terms have gone one day together without using a portion of the Bible as an antidote against the infection of temptation.⁹

Another aspect of his spiritual life was his keeping of the Sabbath, being particularly exact about his remembrance of the Sabbath day, to keep it holy:

Every day was a sort of Sabbath to him, but the Sabbath day was a kind, a type, a taste of Heaven with him.¹⁰

And when leading his Indian converts to engage in a covenant with God he added the particular clause:

Wherein they bind themselves, mehquontamunat Sabbath, phketeaunat tohsohke pomantamog; i.e. to "remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy, as long as we live".¹¹

As well as being a man of the Word and a man filled with zeal for the Sabbath he was a man of prayer. He was noted for his secret prayers, recognizing that by this means he could overcome many difficulties. When, in company with others and a report would come of bad news he would say,

“Brethren let us turn all this into prayer.” When on a visit to a friend’s house he would say before departing:

Come let us not have a visit without a prayer; let us pray down the blessing of heaven on your family before we go.¹²

The secret of Eliot’s devotional life is discovered in his love and affection for his Saviour Jesus Christ. This was particularly evident in his preaching. His biographer testifies that:

the Lord Jesus Christ was the loadstone which gave a touch to all the sermons of our Eliot; a glorious precious, lovely Christ, was the point of Heaven which they still verged unto.¹³

With such a focus on Christ it is not surprising to hear him advise young preachers:

Pray let there be much of Christ in your ministry¹⁴

Whenever he heard a sermon that set forth Christ in his beauty he would comment:

O blessed be God that we have Christ so much and so well preached in poor New England¹⁵

Eliot’s Pastoral Calling

Within a week of his arrival in Boston John Eliot, at the invitation of the Governor, was appointed to work and preach in the city in the absence of the usual minister, Mr. Wilson, who had returned to England to settle some business. Eliot ministered with such acceptance in this Boston charge that the congregation urged him to remain when Mr. Wilson returned and act as his assistant. He refused the invitation and instead became the first minister of the Congregational church at Roxbury, now a suburb of Boston, then a separate township on the edge of virgin territory. In Roxbury he was minister until his death almost sixty years later. He enjoyed the help of various assistants over the years, but the assistantship of his youngest son Benjamin must have been among the happiest years in his life.

As minister of Roxbury he was energetically engaged as preacher and pastor to his congregation, but the record reveals that he was not silent in matters of State when the honour of Christ was at stake:

His active and aggressive spirit twice brought him into unpleasant relations with the civil authorities in 1634, for criticizing the method of making a treaty with the Pequods, and again in 1660, when one of his publications, written several years previously, “The Christian Commonwealth,” was “condemned, and by order of

the general court suppressed.” Explanations and acknowledgements led to a speedy and satisfactory settlement.¹⁶

John Eliot responded to the needs of the worshipping community in Massachusetts when he was involved in the translation of the Hebrew Psalter into singable English. The purpose of the work was stated plainly to be that of teaching God’s Word in song, and not to ‘titillate the ears with sweet rhythms’. The volume became known as *The Bay Psalm Book*, published in 1640, and held the distinction of being the first complete book to be printed in North America.

Eliot’s Missionary Zeal

As pastor of Roxbury, Eliot soon became aware of the spiritual needs of the native Indian population. A Royal Charter laid out the goal of the first settlers; “to win and incite the natives of that country to the knowledge and obedience of the only true God and Saviour of mankind, and the Christian faith ...”.¹⁷ However this goal was never taken seriously as most of the colonists regarded the Indians as nothing better than savages. Eliot in a pamphlet entitled *The Day Breaking, if not the Sun-Rising of the Gospel in New England* identifies this prejudice:

Me thinks now that it is with the Indians as it was with our New English ground when we first came over – there was scarce any man who could believe that English grain would grow, or that the plow could do any good in this woody and rocky soil. And thus they continued in this supine unbelief for some years, till experience taught them otherwise; and now all see it to be scarce inferior to Old English tillage, but bears very good burdens. So we have thought of our Indian people, and therefore, have been discouraged to put plow to such dry and rocky ground, but God, having begun this with some few, it may be they are better soil for the gospel than we can think.¹⁸

In 1644 Eliot began to learn Algonquin, the local native Indian language. This was only possible with the help of a young Indian boy whom John had befriended. It was a difficult language to master, being unwritten and without a systematic grammar. Eliot after listening carefully would then translate phonetically what he heard into Algonquin. The number of letters required to make up a single word would test the patience of any translator, for example:

Our lusts = nummatchekodtantamoonganunnonash
 Our loves = noowomantammoonkanunonnash
 Our question = kummogkodonattoottummoetiteaongannunnonash

Our Eliot, however, was no ordinary linguist and soon he had mastered

the language sufficiently to translate the 10 Commandments and the Lord's Prayer into Algonquin. The Governor of the colony, John Winthrop, made this note in his diary, 'Eliot took pains to get their language'. Having attained a degree of competence in Algonquin, Eliot soon sought an opportunity to preach.

In the autumn of 1646 John Eliot set off with his young Indian companion and two fellow ministers to preach the gospel to the Indians in the region northwest of Roxbury, called Nonantum (Newtown). There the first of many sermons was preached to the Indians. Neville B. Cryer describes what took place:

the sermon, which began with the text from Ezekiel 37:3, 'Can these (dry) bones live?' contained 'all the principal matter of religion, beginning first with a repetition of the Ten Commandments and a brief explication of them, God's wrath at those who broke his commandments, Jesus Christ the redeemer of our sins, the last Judgement, the blessed estate of all those that by faith believe in Christ, the Creation, the Fall of Man, Heaven and Hell: these things and more were expounded – not meddling with any matters more difficult, and which to such weak ones might at first seem ridiculous, until they had tasted and believed more plain and familiar truths.¹⁹

The sermon lasted seventy-five minutes, and in the words of one of the other minister's present:

it was a glorious, affecting spectacle to see a company of perishing, forlorn outcasts, diligently attending to the blessed word of salvation then delivered²⁰

After the message opportunity was given to ask questions and there followed for over an hour a set of fascinating questions, concerning which Eliot 'gave wise and good answers to them all'²¹ Some asked how they might come to know Jesus Christ. Eliot answered,

that they could do this principally through the Bible, which the Indians must consequently learn to read, but also through what they were taught by ministers like himself, linked with prayer and repentance.²²

Eliot's 'Praying Indians'

There were no immediate conversions, but our missionary pioneer continued. Over the next two months three further meetings were held and after the last of these several Indians declared themselves converted and were soon followed by many others. As these Indians set out to follow Christ they needed much guidance with respect to the way of holiness. A tract, drawn up in 1647, contains thirty points for private and public conduct and includes the

following:

2. No more powawing ...
8. Monogamy to be the rule ...
13. The Lord's Day to be strictly observed ...
15. They were to wear their hair comely as the English do ...
16. There was to be no more greasing of their bodies, or howling
17. No more killing their lice between their teeth ...
26. No Indian or Englishman to enter the other's house or wigwam without first knocking ...²³

The converted Indians also recognized the need to give up their nomadic existence and establish a town. To fund this and the ongoing mission work, a London-based Corporation for the "Promoting and Propagating of the Gospel among the Indians of New England" was set up by Parliament. In 1651, with financial help from the Corporation, Eliot established an Indian settlement at Natick, provided the natives with employment, houses and clothes. Subsequently thirteen more settlements were established. The Corporation paid salaries to teachers and preachers, founded schools and provided for the expense of printing translations.

It was at Natick in 1660 that the first 'Indian' church was established. The meeting house had been erected in 1651, where Eliot preached once a fortnight as long as he lived. From Natick the influence of the gospel spread rapidly, so that by 1674 the unofficial census of the praying Indians numbered 4,000. Neville B. Cryer points out:

By the time of the Stuart Restoration in 1660 there were seven 'old' and seven 'new' praying towns, embracing approximately 1,100 souls, 'yielding obedience to the Gospel'. Twenty-four Indians had been trained as Evangelists to their own people and their influence on the domestic and social life of the Indians – in saying grace at meals, in Sabbath observance which was most sternly applied, in morning and evening prayers as a family, and in much stricter and more seemly behaviour towards the women folk – is attested, not only by the Tracts but also by other observers who were not inclined to show undue bias on the one side or the other.²⁴

From the outset of this work it became clear to Eliot that the Indians **needed** a translation of the Bible in their own language. So he embarked upon **this task** together with the translation of other religious works that he **considered** a priority. Since Eliot placed so much value on the question and **answer method** of communicating truth (catechizing), it is not surprising that **the first work** completed was the Catechism published at Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1653, in the Indian language.

Several years elapsed before Eliot completed the task of translating the **Bible**. The **New Testament** was published in 1661, the **Old Testament**

following two years later. The final publication (1663) consisted of both Testaments along with a metrical version of the Psalms and a Catechism, and this was the first Bible to be printed in America. J. H. Trumbull, a nineteenth century expert on translation work, commented on the accuracy of Eliot's Bible:

On the whole, his version was probably as good as any first version that has been made, from his time to ours, in a previously unwritten and so-called "barbarous" language²⁵

*Praise indeed, and yet we may by now find it hardly surprising for thoroughness was all but a synonym of John Eliot's name*²⁶

Not content with furnishing his Indian converts with a Bible, metrical Psalter and a Catechism, our friend Eliot, now in his sixtieth year, sought to provide them with other spiritual helps. In July, 1663, we find him writing to Richard Baxter of Kidderminster, with whom he kept up a regular correspondence:

My work about the Bible being ... finished (he means the Indian Bible), I am mediating what to do next for these sons of the Morning – they having no books for their private use, of ministerial composing. For their help, though the Word of God be the best of books, yet Humane Infirmity is, you know, not a little helped, by reading the holy Labours of the Ministers of Jesus Christ²⁷

His primary purpose in writing was to obtain permission to translate Baxter's *Call to the Unconverted*. Baxter of course agreed and in six months the book was ready for publication under the staggering title of *Wehkomaonganooa asquam Psantogig kah asquam Quinnupegig*. Other books followed including, *The Sincere Convert* by Thomas Shepherd, and in a relatively short time a useful "Indian library" was established.

Eliot's Indians Devastated

Eliot's 'Praying Indians' were dealt a devastating blow by King Philip's War (1675-6). In June, 1675, Metacomet of the Wampanoag tribe, known as King Philip to the English, declared war against the English colonists. Although Metacomet's father, Massasoit, had befriended the Pilgrims, and Metacomet himself had known the colonists since his teenage years, he consistently rejected their religion and society. The conflict proved to be savage. The 'Praying Indians' did not join the revolt, but remained loyal to the colonists. However, in November they were forced from their villages on an hour's notice and resettled on Deer Island. Due to the severe winter, many of them died from malnutrition and exposure to the cold. Eliot sought to soften

the effects of this enforced relocation by providing supplies of food and clothing. Perhaps the most crushing blow was the loss of their Bibles as their homes and villages were pillaged by bands of marauders.

Within a year the overwhelming military and economic power of the colonists crushed the rebellion. With the end of the war the 'Praying Indians' were able to return safely to their villages. Eliot requested a second printing of the Algonquin Bible to replace those lost in the devastation caused by the war. Despite some opposition a new edition was prepared and printed in 1685.²⁸

As a community the 'Praying Indians' never fully recovered from King Philip's War. There was no major revival of the work that John Eliot and others had witnessed previously and after his death their decline was very rapid. Up to 1733 all the town officers in Natick were Indians, but by 1760 the Indians were reduced to one family, and in 1846, the 200th anniversary of Eliot's first service at Nonantum, only one girl remained as the sole surviving Indian representative.²⁹

The work may have begun to decline, but Eliot persevered and maintained his regular preaching itinerary to the praying Indians as an octogenarian. Naturally his strength declined and his preaching to the Indian Christian communities became less frequent, until by 1687 his visits were restricted to once every two months. In that same year the Indians chose one of their own number to maintain the ministry that Eliot had so faithfully pioneered.

On 21st May, 1690, Eliot died at the age of 85 and was buried at Roxbury in a grave already occupied by his wife and several of his children. On his deathbed he still maintained a vision for the work among the Indians for which he had been so passionate for over forty years:

There is a cloud ... a dark cloud upon the Work of the Gospel among the poor Indians. The Lord revive and prosper that work, and grant that it may live when I am dead. It is a Work, which I have been doing much and long about. But what was the Word I spoke last? I recall that Word. My Doings! Alas, they have been poor and small, and lean Doings, and I'll be the man that shall throw the first stone at them all.³⁰

Paying tribute to his friend, Richard Baxter wrote: 'There is no man on earth whom I honoured above him'.³¹ Obviously, to Baxter's mind John Eliot amply illustrated the principles of pastoral ministry which he had so powerfully outlined in *The Reformed Pastor*.

John Eliot's Challenge

John Eliot's life on earth closed over three hundred years ago, but his influence lives on. We are challenged in several ways by this English Puritan

who made such an impact on the New World.

We are challenged by:

1. His Industry

When we take into consideration all that Eliot accomplished in one lifetime we are amazed. When some of his contemporaries marveled at his translation of the Bible into Algonquin, his reply reveals the secret of such a productive life, 'Prayer and pains through faith in Jesus Christ can accomplish anything'. In this respect we can see how his life's work is a reflection of good king Hezekiah about whom the Chronicler testified:

In everything that he undertook in the service of God's temple and in obedience to the law and the commands, he sought his God and worked wholeheartedly. And so he prospered.³²

2. His Method

When Eliot went out to evangelize the Indians, it wasn't with some novel technique or ingenious gimmick. His focus was the effective and powerful preaching of the gospel and in such a manner he commended Christ. We must never lose confidence in this method which God has appointed 'to save those who believe'. At the human level, his preaching was effective because he took the trouble to preach in Algonquin, using concepts and illustrations familiar to these Native Americans. Eliot also believed that the best people to take the gospel to the Indian population were the Indians themselves. So we find him persuading some of his reluctant fellow ministers to consider ordaining Indians for the gospel ministry. In Eliot's Brief Narrative, written in 1670, he shows the crucial importance of having 'ordained Indian Officers into the Ministry of the Gospel'. Then he writes, 'I find a blessing when our Church of Natick doth send forth fit persons unto some remoter places, to teach them the fear of the LORD.'³³ In this respect Eliot was a man ahead of his time, for it would take the modern missionary movement many years to accept the importance of delegating the work of ministry to native converts.

3. His Love

John Eliot was a legend in his lifetime for the love that he had for others. His correspondent, Richard Baxter, stated that it was impossible to mention the name of John Eliot apart from the word 'love'. Some months before he died some friends would call and ask 'how he did', to which he would answer:

Alas, I have lost everything; my understanding leaves me, my memory fails me, my utterance fails me; but, I thank God, my charity holds out still; I find that rather grows than fails!³⁴

Eliot maintained this Biblical priority through his long life and how important it is, for,

if I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.³⁵

His charitable spirit is illustrated in his last year on earth when, in 1689, he gave the new 'John Eliot School' seventy-five acres of his own land for the teaching and instructing of Negro and Indian children.

4. His Concept of Discipleship

When Eliot was ministering to the Indian converts he did not overlook that vital clause in the Great Commission:

teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.³⁶

Eliot applied the Lordship of Christ to the doctrine the Indians were taught (Shorter Catechism), the praise the Indians offered to God (unaccompanied Psalm singing), and the manner in which they organized their towns (along Biblical principles).

Eliot was not a pragmatic evangelist. He was a man who loved God and followed Jesus Christ and, like the apostle Paul, this 'Apostle to the Indians', as he became known, preached the whole counsel of God for the glory of Christ and the advancement of his Kingdom.

Notes

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EVANGELICALS AND FUNDAMENTALISTS¹

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Introduction

Like many evangelicals, I have frequently been called a 'fundamentalist'. If this were to be a positive affirmation, indicating that I was among those who held fast to the fundamentals of the faith, then I would have no problem with the title. Unfortunately, it is now commonly used in a much more pejorative sense, often indicating an unthinking, anti-intellectual obscurantism. In this paper, I intend to trace the roots of fundamentalism and to indicate the differences between fundamentalism and evangelicalism.

The Fundamentals

In 1909, Lyman Stewart, an oil millionaire from Southern California, with the help of his brother Milton, commissioned the publication of a series of volumes to articulate and defend the fundamental doctrines of the Christian Faith. Ultimately this involved the publication of twelve paperback volumes, published between 1910 and 1915.²

Having commissioned these volumes, the two brothers then paid for them to be sent out to those they considered to be in positions of influence. George Marsden notes:

They financed free distribution to every pastor, missionary, theological professor, theological student, YMCA and YWCA secretary, college professor, Sunday school superintendent, and religious editor in the English-speaking world, and sent out some three million individual volumes in all.³

R. A. Torrey, the third Executive Secretary of the committee charged with the responsibility of carrying out the commission to publish *The Fundamentals*, tells us that some of the individual volumes went to as many as 300,000 people but that by 1917 many of them had gone out of print and, there being still a demand for them, a new edition was published.⁴

Each volume contained a number of articles, by different writers, from different parts of the English speaking world. Some of the writers were distinguished scholars, such as B. B. Warfield and Charles R. Erdman,⁵ Professors at Princeton Theological Seminary and James Orr, Professor at the United Free Church College in Glasgow, Scotland.⁶ Some of the other writers were relatively unknown.⁷ Several of the articles were taken from the writings of authors who had lived in earlier days, such as Thomas Boston⁸ and Bishop J. C. Ryle.⁹ A very high percentage of the articles dealt with the doctrine of Scripture in general and with the so-called 'Higher Critics' in particular.

The evangelicals who wrote the articles in *The Fundamentals* were united in their conviction that the Bible is inspired by God and therefore has full authority, although they would have disagreed on other matters, given the range of theological perspectives among them, including Reformed, Dispensationalist and Arminian. Even on the doctrine of Scripture, the authors ranged from those who 'tended to drift towards the dictation theory'¹⁰ to those who were unhappy with any doctrine of inerrancy.¹¹ These differences did not impact on *The Fundamentals*, however, and have to be established from the authors' other writings.

Fundamentalists

The publication of *The Fundamentals* was followed by the World Conference on Christian Fundamentals. This took place in 1919 in Philadelphia and resulted in the formation of 'The World's Christian Fundamentals Association'. Harold B. Kuhn notes that

the organisation required of its members adherence to nine points of doctrine, namely: (1) the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture, (2) the Trinity, (3) the deity and virgin birth of Christ, (4) the creation and fall of man, (5) a substitutionary atonement, (6) the bodily resurrection, (7) the regeneration of believers, (8) the personal and imminent return of Christ, and (9) the resurrection and final assignment of all men to eternal blessedness or eternal woe.¹²

Bruce Shelley tells us that it was not long before the word 'fundamentalist' was created. He writes,

By 1918 the term "fundamentals" had become common usage, but "fundamentalist" and "fundamentalism" were coined in 1920 by Curtis Lee Laws, Baptist editor of the *Watchman-Examiner*.¹³

As a direct result of this, there arose among the Baptists in America a group calling themselves 'fundamentalists'. For our purposes, it is important to note that, at this stage, 'fundamentalist' was a title which some evangelical Christians took for themselves as a positive identification with the 'fundamentals' of the faith. It was not a pejorative term applied to them by

others, as it would later be.

Fundamentalism was and is primarily an American movement and its history has been well documented.¹⁴ It did affect other countries, notably the United Kingdom but never in the same way and certainly not to the same effect.

As time went on, however, fundamentalism began to develop certain characteristics which distinguished it from the mainstream of the evangelical movement, not least a strong emphasis on premillennial eschatology, within the broader context of dispensational theology. Indeed, Ernest Sandeen sees this emphasis, which he traces to the English Brethren writer J. N. Darby, as the main identifying feature of the movement.¹⁵ This aspect of fundamentalism was strengthened by the increasing use of the *Scofield Reference Bible*¹⁶

Fundamentalism was also affected by the revivalist movement, not least among those who had been brought to faith in Christ through the Moody and Sankey campaigns. In addition, there was an increasingly separatist mentality, including a gradual separation from mainstream schools and theological colleges when it became apparent that theological liberalism had affected the teaching in those mainstream schools. As a social phenomenon, the movement adopted certain cultural distinctives: fundamentalists did not dance or drink or smoke or go to the cinema, for example. Above all, there was an increasingly anti-intellectual thrust to the movement, with the complete rejection of any form of biblical or textual criticism. There was also serious concentration on one issue, namely, the campaign to ensure that the case for biological evolution was not permitted to be taught in the public schools. This led to the infamous trial in 1925, when John T. Scopes, a school teacher in Dayton, Tennessee, was found guilty of teaching evolution.¹⁷ This became a cause célèbre and leading figures rallied to support both prosecution and defence. The national and international coverage of the case was astonishing but ultimately did not help the cause of fundamentalism. As Louis Gasper noted,

This farcical episode, as it turned out to be, attracted the attention of the nation and other parts of the world, but it did not seem to have helped the fundamentalists to any great extent, even though Scopes was found guilty.¹⁸

Fundamentalism & Politics

Fundamentalism also had a political side, ultimately leading to the formation of the 'New Right'. This fundamentalist, pro-America, anti-communist force, was republican in its sentiments but was taken seriously by both main political parties, not least when independents like Pat Robertson were put forward as presidential candidates by the fundamentalists themselves.

It is important, however, to recognise that the 'New Right' is only one

expression of the ongoing relationship between American Christianity and politics. William Martin, in a book written to accompany a television series documenting the 'New Right', argues that the Puritan legacy, not least in its understanding of the relationship between church and state and its consciousness of human sin, provides the background against which all such movements are to be understood. He writes,

This combination of covenantal thinking, conviction of divine mission, and profound awareness of human fallibility have marked American political institutions and movements from the Mayflower Compact to the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, through the New Deal and New Frontier and Great Society, to the rise of the Moral Majority and the Christian Coalition and the construction of the Republican Party's 1994 Contract with America.¹⁹

It was perhaps unlikely that fundamentalists would become involved in politics. Two sociologists, Robert C. Liebman and Robert Wuthnow, edited a symposium on the 'New Right'.²⁰ They begin their introduction to the book with these striking words,

Scarcely anyone expected it. For more than 50 years evangelicals kept studiously aloof from American politics. They sang hymns and tended to souls, but left the burdens of legislation and social policy to their more worldly counterparts in the Protestant mainstream. From time to time an occasional voice broke the self-imposed silence – Carl McIntyre striking out at the liberal establishment or Billy James Hargis stirring up anti-Communist fears. But these were the exceptions and even fellow fundamentalists tended to regard them with suspicion. Politics was an evil of the flesh, an exercise in futility. Only repentance and salvation could bring genuine renewal. That evangelicals might emerge as a political force seemed dubious at best. They were, by all indications, a declining remnant, destined to survive only by withdrawing from active confrontation with the secular age. Like Prohibition and creationism, evangelicals appeared to be more a vestige of the past than a vital dimension of the present. That their own pastors would lead a political movement seemed out of the question.²¹

The 'New Right' has become such a noteworthy movement that it has attracted significant academic attention. A number of important books and symposia have been published, both sympathetic and unsympathetic, from a popular perspective,²² and from a more academic perspective.²³ Perhaps the best volume from a broadly sympathetic position is the symposium edited by Richard John Neuhaus, Director of the Rockford Institute Center on Religion and Society in New York City, and Michael Cromartie, Director of Protestant Studies at the Ethics and Public Policy Center in Washington. Their book seeks to define the differences between fundamentalists and evangelicals and to identify their respective concerns.²⁴ Neuhaus is well known for his concern

about the 'Naked Public Square' where religion is excluded from political and social debate, and the book argues strongly for an involvement of Christians in the formation of public policy. After some introductory essays which set the historical context, including chapters by Neuhaus himself and by George Marsden, there are chapters written by evangelicals and fundamentalists themselves, including Carl F. H. Henry, Jerry Falwell, Charles W. Colson and Jim Wallis. Finally, there are essays by a number of leading American intellectuals, including Martin E. Marty and Harvey Cox.

For a more critically objective academic treatment, see the work of the British sociologist, Steve Bruce.²⁵ Bruce surveys a significant ten year period in the history of the 'New Right' and identifies what he regards as the factors which led to the demise of the movement, or at least to a lessening of its influence on American politics.

Fundamentalism & Scripture

Having outlined something of the character of fundamentalism as a movement, we must now focus on the fundamentalist doctrine of Scripture. We noted earlier, that among the writers of *The Fundamentals* there was a range of opinion on the doctrine of Scripture. Ultimately, this was resolved and the fundamentalists took their stand on the doctrine of inerrancy, thus excluding those like James Orr who could not accept this position. Even among those who held to the doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture, however, there were differences which soon came to light. Some continued to express the doctrine of inerrancy in a way that suggested the 'dictation theory' and rejected any possibility of biblical or textual criticism. Others could not accept this view. Ultimately this disagreement led to a parting of the ways between those who continued to call themselves 'fundamentalists' and those who began to define themselves as 'neo-evangelicals'. We will deal first with the fundamentalists and then turn our attention to the neo-evangelicals.

As indicated above, one key element in the doctrine of Scripture, namely, the commitment to biblical inerrancy, was shared by both fundamentalists and most other evangelicals. Many of the fundamentalists defined and used this term in precisely the same way as the later neo-evangelicals and indeed both groups followed the lead of the Princeton theologians. On this matter, at least, there was agreement among evangelicals although, as we noted earlier, some defined inerrancy in an unhelpful way so as to suggest a 'dictation theory'. Many, however, did not and it would be impossible to drive a wedge between the majority of fundamentalists and evangelicals on this matter.

Where the fundamentalist doctrine of Scripture developed some uniqueness was in the matter of textual criticism. In an over-reaction to the

Higher Critical movement, which stemmed mostly from German Liberal Theology, many fundamentalists argued that no form of textual criticism was acceptable. This, of course, caused many problems in developing a doctrine of Scripture. Which text of Scripture are we to use? Which Hebrew and Greek manuscripts are to be the basis for translations of the Scriptures into English and other languages? Those fundamentalists who rejected any form of textual criticism, normally resolved this question by arguing that the Authorised or King James Version (KJV), is the only one which should be used. This argument is still maintained by many fundamentalists today.

Two arguments were put forward in support of this position. Some argued that God acted supernaturally in and through the 1611 translators, so as to keep them from all error and hence to guarantee the virtual inerrancy of the KJV. This group argue that no other English translations are either possible or desirable because God had given his Church, once for all, an inerrant English Bible.

The other argument, which seeks to defend itself against apparently arbitrary claims concerning the superiority and indeed finality of the KJV, argues that it was not the KJV itself which was providentially preserved in an inerrant condition, but rather the Hebrew and Greek manuscripts which provided the basis for this translation. They call these manuscripts the *Textus Receptus* or 'Received Text'. Those who hold to this position are prepared to accept that modern translations of the Bible into English are theoretically possible, so long as the *Textus Receptus* is the manuscript basis for any new translation. Some of those in this group, for example, would be willing to use the New King James Bible.

The most significant early defender of the *Textus Receptus* against the modern textual critics was John William Burgon, in the late nineteenth century.²⁶ Modern defences of the *Textus Receptus* range from fairly academic studies such as that by Wilbur Pickering²⁷ and Ted Letis²⁸ to some very intemperate, popular material, which shows no willingness to engage in any serious manner with the textual arguments and is severely discourteous to any Christian taking another position.²⁹ Much of the modern work defending the KJV and the *Textus Receptus* has been published or promoted by the Trinitarian Bible Society.

There have been a number of responses to the fundamentalists. Perhaps the best two volumes of response in terms of accessibility have been those written by James White³⁰ and by D. A. Carson.³¹ The whole issue of evangelical scholarship in relation to the Bible, especially but not exclusively in America, has been well documented by Mark Noll.³²

The Neo-Evangelicals

As a result of the theological, sociological, political, separatist and

anti-intellectual factors noted above, by the 1950s the word 'fundamentalist' had come to be identified with a particularly narrow form of evangelical Christianity. As a result of this rather negative image, and particularly because of the view of Scripture adopted by those within the fundamentalist movement, certain evangelicals who shared the essential concerns which had been highlighted in *The Fundamentals*, no longer wanted to be identified as 'fundamentalists'. They believed that the name had been high-jacked by a group of people who were theologically narrow, socially exclusivist and politically extremist. Those who took this view coined the name 'neo-evangelical' and included such distinguished evangelical leaders as Carl F. H. Henry, Harold John Ockenga, E. J. Carnell and Billy Graham. They founded a new magazine called *Christianity Today* and sought to develop an evangelicalism which was, among other things, more intellectually respectable.³³ They also founded Fuller Seminary.³⁴

In other parts of the world, evangelical Christians took a similar line to Henry and his associates. For example, F. F. Bruce, J. I. Packer, John R. W. Stott and Alec Motyer in England. The influence of these and other men, not least in the formation of the Tyndale Fellowship, the IVF and its publishing arm, IVP, has been of enormous help to evangelicals, particularly students.

Conclusion

Despite the clear difference between fundamentalism and evangelicalism, at least as characterised by scholars like Carl Henry, James Packer and others, the word 'fundamentalist' is still used to refer to evangelical Christianity in general, even where none of the social, political, cultural, theological and anti-intellectual elements of fundamentalism exist. It is in this sense that the word is used by James Barr, himself a former evangelical. This demonstrates either an ignorance of the difference between fundamentalism and evangelism or a quite cynical disregard for the facts. In either case, it is entirely inappropriate to use the word 'fundamentalist' to refer to evangelicals.

Notes

1. This paper was originally part of a lecture given to the Scottish Evangelical Theology Society Conference in 2003.
2. A. C. Dixon, L. Meyer & R. A. Torrey (eds.), *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*, (Chicago and Los Angeles, 1910-15).
3. G. M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture - The Shaping of Twentieth Century Evangelicalism: 1870-1925*, (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), p.119.
4. R. A. Torrey, *The Fundamentals*, Four Volumes, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1970), p.5. This four volume edition is a reprint 'without alteration or abridgment from the original, four-volume edition issued by the Bible Institute of Los Angeles in 1917'. Torrey tells us that all of the articles in the original twelve volume work were reproduced in this four volume edition, 'with the exception of a very few that did not seem to be in exact keeping with the original purpose of *The Fundamentals*...'. The references below are to this 1970 reprint.

5. Warfield wrote the article on 'The Deity of Christ' (vol.2, pp.239-246); Erdman wrote several articles including, 'The Holy Spirit and the Sons of God' (vol.2, pp.338-352); 'The Church and Socialism' (vol.4, pp.97-108); and 'The Coming of Christ' (vol.4, pp.301-313).
6. Orr wrote a number of articles, including, 'The Holy Spirit and Modern Negations' (vol.1, pp.94-110); 'The Early Narratives of Genesis' (vol.1, pp.228-240); 'Science and Christian Faith' (vol.1, pp.334-347); and 'The Virgin Birth of Christ' (vol.2, pp.247-260).
7. Or even unidentified, such as the article entitled 'Evolutionism in the Pulpit', where the author is identified merely as 'By an Occupant of the Pew' (vol.4, pp.88-96).
8. 'The Nature of Regeneration' (vol. 3, pp.128-132).
9. 'The True Church' (vol.3, pp.315-319).
10. G. M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture - The Shaping of Twentieth Century Evangelicalism: 1870-1925*, (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), p.122.
11. There was a difference of opinion on this matter between B B. Warfield and James Orr.
12. Harold B. Kuhn 'Fundamentalism' in E. F. Harrison (ed.), *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1960).
13. 'Fundamentalism' in J.D. Douglas (ed.), *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974).
14. For an overview of the rise and development of fundamentalism, see the following: Stewart G. Cole, *The History of Fundamentalism*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1931); Norman F. Furniss, *The Fundamentalist Controversy, 1918-1931*, (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1954); Louis Gasper, *The Fundamentalist Movement*, (The Hague/ Paris: Mouton & Co., 1963); Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism 1800-1930*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970); George W. Dollar, *A History of Fundamentalism in America*, (Greenville, SC: Bob Jones University Press, 1973). C. Allyn Russell, *Voices of American Fundamentalism: Seven Biographical Studies*, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976); Nancy Tatom Ammerman, *Bible Believers: Fundamentalists in the Modern World*, (New Brunswick/ London: Rutgers University Press, 1987); Mark Ellingsen, *The Evangelical Movement: Growth, Impact, Controversy, Dialog*, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1988).
15. Sandeen, op cit.
16. C.I. Scofield (ed.), *The Scofield Reference Bible*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1909); new edition published as *The New Scofield Reference Bible*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967).
17. For an account of the controversy, see Norman F. Furniss, *The Fundamentalist Controversy, 1918-1931*, (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1954), pp.3ff.
18. Louis Gasper, *The Fundamentalist Movement*, (The Hague/ Paris: Mouton & Co., 1963), p.14.
19. William Martin, *With God on our Side: The Rise of the Religious Right in America*, (New York: Broadway Books, 1996), p.2.
20. Robert C. Liebman and Robert Wuthnow (eds.), *The New Christian Right: Mobilization and Legitimation*, (New York: Aldine Publishing Company, 1983).
21. Ibid, p.1.
22. Robert Zwier, *Born-Again Politics: The New Christian Right in America*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1982).
23. Melvin I. Urofsky and Martha May (eds.), *The New Christian Right: Political and Social Issues*, (New York & London: Garland Publishing, 1996).
24. Richard John Neuhaus and Michael Cromartie (eds.), *Piety and Politics: Evangelicals and Fundamentalists Confront the World*, (Washington: Ethics and Public Policy Centre, 1987).
25. Steve Bruce, *The Rise and Fall of the New Christian Right: Conservative Protestant Politics in America 1978-1988*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).
26. John William Burgon, *The Revision Revised*, (London: John Murray, 1883).
27. Wilbur N. Pickering, *The Identity of the New Testament Text*, (Nashville: Nelson, 1977).
28. Theodore P. Letis, *The Majority Text: Essays and Reviews in the Continuing Debate*, (1987 - No details given of publisher. ISBN: 0-944355-00-5).
29. Peter Ruchman, *Why I Believe the King James Version is the Word of God*, (Pensacola: Bible Baptist Bookstore, 1988); Gail Riplinger, *New Age Bible Versions*, (Munroe Falls, Ohio: A.V. Publications, 1993).

30. James R. White, *The King James Only Controversy: Can You Trust the Modern Translations?*, (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1995). White is particularly good at explaining the key issues to the reader with no technical background. He also responds very well to the extremists, particularly to Ruchman and Riplinger.
31. D. A. Carson, *The King James Version Debate: A Plea for Realism*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979). This is an excellent introduction to the nature and significance of biblical textual criticism and the principles of translation.
32. Mark A. Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism: Evangelicals, Scholarship and the Bible in America*, (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986).
33. Carl F. H. Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1947).
34. G. M. Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987).

URBAN MISSION

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'God made the country; man made the suburbs; but the Devil made the city!' So said an old man after hearing a talk on urban mission. As urban theologies go, it has its attractions – it's simple, clear-cut, and seems to fit with the experience and prejudices of many Christians. But is it biblical?

In the past twenty years there has been a marked surge of interest in urban ministry, urban evangelism, and the urban church. Major Evangelical missions agencies, which traditionally focused on rural and remote regions of Africa, Asia and South America, have increasingly turned their attention to the big cities of the third world - and of the other two worlds. Urban Mission is no longer the specialist interest of fringe groups but, instead, has a prominent place on the Church's agenda.

But what is so special about the 'urban' that it would seem to qualify the missionary activity of Christ's people? How different is 'urban mission' from other 'mission'?

In addressing these questions I am conscious of my context. London is undeniably 'urban'. Once the largest city on earth, it remains a major metropolis of some seven million residents. It is increasingly a global city, with astonishing ethnic, linguistic and cultural variety, at least a third of its population being from minority ethnic groups, and some thirty million visitors entering and leaving it each year. In some ways London is very different from other UK cities (and, indeed, may have more in common with New York, Tokyo, and Los Angeles than with them). Yet most of the differences are matters of quantity and timing rather than quality. With the power of modern communications and the globalization of the economy, social and religious issues spread very rapidly from world-cities like London to regional cities and even on to towns and villages.

In terms of traditional theological definitions, Urban Mission would be a sub-division of Missiology, under the heading of Practical Theology. But that very categorization provides a pointer to why this topic has been so neglected and why it is such an urgent problem today, when at least half the world's population now lives in cities. In this article, I shall look in turn at The City in the Bible; The City as a Problem; The History of Urban Mission; and The City as a Challenge to our Theology.

Cities in the Bible

It was Cain who built the first recorded city (Genesis 4:17),

immediately highlighting the spiritual ambivalence of urban life as both a symptom of human rebellion against God and an expression of the wide-ranging mercy (common grace) that extends God's protection even to a fratricide. After the first great judgment of the Flood, it is a city, Babel, that becomes the focus of that rebellion and the consequent longing for self-control and self-sufficiency (Genesis 11:4). In the light of the final salvation-judgment, it is another city, the New Jerusalem, that becomes the ultimate expression of God's saving mercy and grace, God's alternative to Babel (Revelation 21:2–22:5).

In between those two poles, as the Bible story unfolds, the city is encountered by the covenant mission-community in a variety of contexts. Although Israel remains throughout the O.T. period a predominantly rural, agricultural society, almost all the decisive events and encounters in her history are directly related to cities.

Jerusalem is, of course, the city - the centre around which Israel's whole theocratic life revolves (Psalm 122), the only refuge when faced with hostile invasion (2 Kings 18), the location of the only place of acceptable sacrifice (John 4:19-22), the dwelling-place of Jehovah (Psalm 76:2). Besides Jerusalem, there are no other cities of note in Israel. (Samaria is an upstart product of rebellion against the house of David.)

All other significant cities in the O.T. are outside Israel. Tyre is, in one way, the most positive, for its king provides valuable aid to Solomon in building the Temple (1 Kings 5). But Tyre, along with all the great cities of human power, is doomed to destruction (Ezekiel 26:1-6). The enormous cities of Mesopotamia feature as objects of moral opprobrium and fear (Nahum 3; Jeremiah 50), condemned alongside Tyre. Nineveh, however, also features as the goal of Jonah's surprising and successful mission, and the exiled Jews are commanded to pray for the prosperity of Babylon (Jeremiah 29:7).

The apparent contradictions in these perspectives in fact reflect the dual nature of non-Israelite cities in the O.T. era. On the one hand they are the centres of hostile nations, ever threatening to overwhelm the chosen people militarily or culturally. On the other hand, they are the 'heads' (Isaiah 7:8f) of the very 'peoples' for whose ultimate salvation Abraham was called and Israel was designated a 'priestly kingdom'. The judgments on them reflect God's righteous protection of his own. The blessings tasted by them are a foretaste of the ultimate redemption. So it is altogether appropriate that it is in Babylon, the mightiest of all the empire-cities, that Jehovah demonstrates that his miraculous power is not restricted to the land of Israel. Precisely there, God will prosper his people and humble their enemies (Daniel 1-5).

In the New Testament, as the Christian Church takes up its post-Pentecost task of mission, the same city-centred theme emerges. Damascus, Antioch, Philippi, Thessalonica, Athens, Corinth, Ephesus and Rome - Paul's missionary

travels amount to a tour of the major cities of the eastern Roman Empire. Nor is the itinerary accidental - at key points it is directed by supernatural intervention (Acts 16:10; 18:9,10; 27:24). Along the way, Paul encounters the many faces of the big city - trading centre and cultural melting-pot (Antioch), centre of learning and philosophy (Athens), the place where traditional morality is challenged and dissolved (Corinth), the seat of religions that dominate culture and economy (Ephesus), the centre of power and worldwide influence (Rome). In all of them the gospel is effective. The N.T. church is portrayed as a primarily urban phenomenon.

It is worthwhile to go back for a moment to the dawn of Paul's career as a Christian and to note carefully that he who was to become such a city-centred missionary was himself converted en route to the largest city of central Syria/Palestine. Why did Saul the persecutor not go to Capernaum and its surrounding villages in order to root out 'the Way'? The most likely answer is that he recognized that refugees gravitate to big cities, where they are more likely to find familiar contacts and relatives, and where they will have more opportunities to exercise trade and manufacturing skills while enjoying a degree of anonymity. At the same time, big cities are cosmopolitan, centres of influence and communication, political, military and economic cross-roads which spread news, wealth and ideas far beyond their walls. Saul the Pharisee probably recognized that a new religion established in Damascus posed a greater threat to contemporary world-wide Judaism than any number of believers scattered through the villages of Galilee. Paul the Christian worked on the same principle from a new perspective. Ministering in one city gave immediate contacts to other cities, as merchants, officials and migrants were converted. Gospel success in Thessalonica rapidly became the talk of the whole province of Achaia (1 Thessalonians 1:8). Rome, the ultimate city, became the final goal of Paul's ministry (Romans 1:13-15), his preaching there, even as a prisoner, bringing the gospel to the ends of the earth (cf. Acts 1:8), since 'all roads lead to (and from) Rome'

Summing up, cities in the Bible are frequently seen as the encapsulating and controlling centres of a nation's life, as places where hostility to God's purpose and evil in all its forms are concentrated, and also as places full of people made in God's image for whom the God of Abraham has a saving purpose. They are places where believers can settle and multiply, and from which the gospel can spread along 'natural' routes to other cities and their hinterland. Far from city life being essentially evil, the Bible reveals that believers are destined to spend the rest of their days in an enormous city!

The City as a Problem

In the Western World, however, there is a general revulsion against cities.

If people are at all prosperous, their ambition is to move out of the inner city, first to the suburbs, then, ideally, to a country village or small town. Over the past 100 years or so, this has been very marked in London, with the 'suburbanisation' of an increasing proportion of the population. (At least it was the case until very recently, when there has been something of a move back into the inner city by young professionals, buying waterside apartments, but such people commonly have a country cottage for their weekends.)

Christians and churches have shared in this 'migration' - the inner city is typically full of large, Victorian church buildings which are now used as carpet warehouses, or turned into mosques, or standing derelict. In contrast, suburban churches have flourished. In the suburbs, and in newer, dormitory towns around the periphery of our cities, there is a Bible-belt of wealthy churches. The result of this process is the modern 'inner-city' - an area which is unattractive to all and neglected by Christian ministry in general, where churches lack local leadership and struggle for funds. Into this inner-city have come sizable immigrant communities, increasing the sense of 'differentness' and alienation felt by the native population.

A stream of sociological and statistical analyses has shed some light on how and why our cities became such a problem. Politicians have launched many initiatives to tackle it, usually by allocating vast sums of money. Fashions have come and gone - high-rise housing, traffic-calming measures, community policing, comprehensive schools, multi-culturalism. In times of comparative economic prosperity some progress is evident, but there seems to be a reservoir of new problems which emerge just as old ones are fading. The abuse of drugs, the decline of traditional family life, and the consistently higher levels of unemployment, illness, and illiteracy provide a bass note of harsh reality to any politician's optimistic songs. The inner city is diverse and ever-changing; its people are poorer; it contains so many lonely, neglected and hurting people.

We must, however, remember that not all the city is impoverished in the same way. Other parts are financially prosperous, with all the trappings of a comfortable and assertive society. The Church has been somewhat more effective in reaching out to professionals than it has been in going to the poor. In many cities there are excellent examples of churches and ministries that proclaim the gospel in ways relevant to the middle classes. Some are going further and encouraging their members to use their skills and energy in the service of the gospel and the whole city. But the presence of several large city-centre churches must not blind us to the stark reality that over 90% of the population of our British cities does not attend church. The prosperous parts of our urban communities are as full of hurting, lonely, driven people as are the UPAs (Urban Priority Areas). Rich or poor, sophisticated or ugly, our cities are largely godless.

Yet Christians who live or work within them find that cities are exciting, places of surprising influence and networks, contexts where people can be unexpectedly accessible, and places where remarkable things happen as God transforms lives. In this, the practice of urban ministry ties in with the eschatological role of the city. But, all too often, the Christian Church has failed to respond positively and eagerly to the modern city.

The History of Urban Mission

The Roman Empire was the empire of a city and an empire of cities. If 'all roads led to Rome, the Romans also developed or founded many other cities: Alexandria, Carthage, Milan, Byzantium, Antioch, London. The Early Church was a city-based organisation. The word 'pagan' meant 'one who lives in the countryside'. The decline and fall of the Empire was also the decline and abandonment of cities. Depopulation by war and plague spelled the end of 'civilisation' ('city-isation'), and the remaining/new population reverted to non-urban living. Rome itself was largely ruined and deserted. In most of Europe, the Church's missionary outreach during and after 'The Dark Ages' was to rural, agrarian tribes, rather than to any sizable cities.

During that period, the only large and effectively-functioning cities were found in the Eastern Empire (Constantinople, Thessalonica, Antioch, Alexandria). Following the Islamic invasions, Baghdad, Cairo and Damascus became centres of political power, learning and science, but little attempt was made by the contemporary Church to reach these Muslim cities. In the West, it was only after the Renaissance that urban concerns again began to be a part of the Church's work. Although cities were still comparatively small, and constituted a minority of the population, movements such as the Lutheran Reformation in Germany and Puritanism in England were predominantly urban in character, and the work of Calvin in Geneva and Richard Baxter in Kidderminster provided forceful models of ministry to an entire urban community. Yet the emergence of a specifically urban focus to ministry and mission had to await the nineteenth century when the dramatic growth of (initially) British cities made the issue inescapable.

It was in Scotland in the first half of that century that one of the most active and considered 'schools' of urban mission developed around the remarkable personality and ministry of Thomas Chalmers (1780-1847). Chalmers became minister of the Tron parish in Glasgow in 1815. For four years he carried out a thorough investigative visitation of the population of his rapidly-growing parish and developed a theory of urban ministry from the results. In 1819 he tested it by an innovative church-planting experiment in a new parish, St. John's, carved out of the old Tron parish. Chalmers described all this in voluminous writings, reports and lectures, and inspired a host of

followers and imitators throughout Britain. Chalmers was one of the most famous and popular of all preachers, yet his basic mission strategy involved visitation by elders and deacons to address spiritual and physical poverty. Behind it lay a negative appraisal of the traditional Presbyterian response to new centres of population, as can be seen in the following quotations:

The mere building and opening of a new church will not attract the masses. The glare of publicity and an eloquent preacher may draw a crowd, but it will be from those pre-disposed to Christianity - and they will be a mixed crowd, not a local congregation. There is no portion of what may be called the 'outfield population' that will be reclaimed by it. And little do they know of this department of human experience, who think that it is in the mere strength of attractive preaching, that this is to be done. (Chalmers, "The Christian and Economic Polity of a Nation with special reference to large towns" in Works, Vol.14, p.127)

We know of no expedient by which this woeful degeneracy can be arrested..., but by an actual search and entry upon the territory of wickedness. A mere signal of invitation is not enough. Instead of holding forth (our) signals (of invitation) to those who are awake, we knock at the doors of those who are most profoundly asleep. (ibid., pp.81-85)

'District Visitation Societies' and 'City Missions' were started in towns and cities by people seeking to emulate Chalmers' success in Glasgow. By the 1850s there were more than six hundred and fifty City and Town Missions in Britain whose basic approach was the same systematic visitation with spiritual and practical concern. But it was in Scotland, and largely among those who followed Chalmers into the Free Church in 1843, that he found the most enthusiastic and assertive following. Chalmers' reputation has been dominated by his involvement in the 1843 Disruption and by his strong interest in the administration of financial relief to the poor, but it can be convincingly argued that both of these were strictly secondary to his desire to reach the newly urbanized masses of the towns and cities of Britain. The traditional role of ministers in administering Poor Relief schemes was seen as an obstacle to their work of evangelism. Even the founding of the Evangelical Alliance in 1845 was viewed by Chalmers as primarily an attempt to maximize and co-ordinate urban church-planting. The students and followers of Chalmers have shared his fate, being remembered more for ecclesiastical matters than for their main life's work of urban ministry among the poor: To name but the more famous, Robert Murray M'Cheyne was first and last an urban church-planter in Dundee, Robert Buchanan and Alexander Moody-Stuart were serial church-planters in the inner cities of Glasgow and Edinburgh, and James Begg was as famous in his life-time for advocating and providing better housing for the working-classes and for opening Princes Street Gardens for their leisure activities as for any ecclesiastical conflicts. Thomas Guthrie rivaled Chalmers as a practitioner

and advocate of urban evangelism, caring ministry to the poor (especially in the provision of Ragged Schools), and of social and political action to address the problems of the city. The lives, work and writings of this group of men merit far more attention than they have yet received. They probably remain the most practical, effective and coherent group of urban theologians that the Reformed/Evangelical churches have yet produced.

Within the Evangelical churches the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw many individuals and groups involved in urban ministry, especially in the Salvation Army and the university settlements, as well as countless parish ministries and Non-conformist chapels and mission halls. C.H. Spurgeon, for example, was not only a famous preacher but also (recognizing that his congregation was middle-class rather than working-class) an eager practitioner of outreach to and diaconal ministries for the poor. From his earliest days in London his congregations paid for City Missionaries to visit the district around the church, and raised funds for orphans, widows and the destitute. However, the Evangelical withdrawal from social involvement, coinciding with the flight to the suburbs, contributed to a widespread neglect of ministry to the poorest and neediest areas of the city. While Britain has not yet had a chronicler of this period to parallel Harvie Conn's 'The American City and the Evangelical Church', it is evident that by the 1960s Evangelicalism was little different from the general Christian Church in being predominantly middle-class and suburban in its culture.

Two main causes can be identified which led to a marked change in attitude from about 1980 onwards. One was the rapid urbanization of the population of the third world. Many cities in China (e.g. Shanghai), Africa (e.g. Lagos), Latin America (e.g. Mexico City and Lima), and South-East Asia, were now surrounded by vast shanty-towns as migrant workers began moving to the cities from the countryside and improvements in healthcare led to larger families and increased longevity. Faced with cities now dwarfing the traditional Western big cities such as London and New York, some Western missionaries recognized the need for a re-direction of missionary effort away from the remotest areas (where Evangelical missions have tended to concentrate) towards the cities. Among them were two Americans - Harvie Conn, an Orthodox Presbyterian missionary in South Korea, and Roger Greenway, a Christian Reformed missionary in Sri Lanka. They both began writing on urban mission and eventually came together in a fruitful period at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. Westminster's link with CUTS (Centre for Urban Theological Study) and the Seminary's Urban Mission courses and Urban Mission Journal have played a key role in the developing movement.

The second cause of a new interest and urgency in urban mission was the urban violence of the 1980s in Europe and America. There had been serious

outbreaks in the States in the 1960s, but the 1980s events in London, Liverpool and elsewhere showed that this was not a localized or isolated phenomenon. Something was seriously wrong in the inner cities of the Western world, and Christians (as well as politicians and police) recognized the need for serious thought and action. The Church of England's response that led to *Faith in the City* (1985) has already been mentioned, and became notorious because of the ensuing conflict between Prime Minister Thatcher and various bishops and archbishops. In evangelical circles there was a quieter but no less definite response. Books began to be published with 'Urban' in their titles – one of the earliest being *Urban Harvest* (1982) by Roy Joslin, a faithful and thoughtful practitioner of inner-city evangelism and pastoral ministry in Walworth, South London. Probably more influential was *The Urban Christian* (1987) by Chicago-based pastor Ray Bakke, detailing his experience of 20 years' ministry in the inner-city, and the flow of 'urban' titles has not ceased.

Three other factors have fed this Evangelical interest in ministry to the poorer parts of the city. One is the emergence of the 'new churches' stemming from the Charismatic Movement. Some of them, such as the Ichthus churches in South London, have concentrated on the inner city, experimenting with new forms of church life and organization. The second factor is the amazing growth in the number of immigrant churches, which by their very nature tend to be found in the poorer parts of western cities. Christians from Africa and Latin America have brought new cultures and styles of worship, much of it in the Pentecostal tradition, into the church-life of British and American cities. Their vitality is already affecting the statistics of church attendance - inner London, for instance, is one of the few areas of the UK to show an increase in the latest survey, due almost entirely to the immigrant and ethnic-minority churches. The third factor contributing to an interest in urban ministry has been the 'rediscovery' of the inner city by the (predominantly) middle-class church. Changing patterns of business and property development have led to many professionals living and working in areas such as the London Docklands that were previously 'off the map'. Some Christians among them are involved in the growth of the 'new churches', while others are linked with the large, traditional city-centre churches, several of which are now developing church-planting ministries in formerly working-class districts.

All of this has placed urban mission on the evangelical church's agenda in a way that it has not been for over a century. There has been much new activity, a plethora of conferences, and a tide of new terminology, but that is not necessarily to say that a wise and appropriate new theology of urban mission has been developed.

The City as a challenge to our theology

• the city is so central to human society, and so prominent in the

unfolding story of the Bible, then it demands to have a crucial role in our theology. In the city the whole of our theology is constantly needed and tested, in a way that it is not in the quieter, mono-cultural settings of rural and small-town churches. In the city, daily encounters with cults and other religions such as Islam and Hinduism not only require an explanation of our doctrine of the Trinity but also a clear grasp of the personality and otherness of God. These truths may be assumed but unmentioned basics of our churches' lives, but they are on the daily agenda of urban evangelists.

In the field of ethics, too, the city demands constant and deep thinking. The complexity of the consequences of the fall and the 'cross-fertilization' of sin that takes place in crowded urban areas demand the sort of detailed and careful theologizing that Paul displays in 1 Corinthians (a letter to urban converts, addressing the ethical and religious assumptions and distortions they have brought with them). In the city, the implications of the Incarnation become urgently relevant, as the Church struggles to evangelize by word and deeds without compromise.

In our Western tradition the study of theology has largely been an 'ivory tower' pursuit, carried on by those with academic rather than ministerial ability. To term someone an 'evangelist' frequently implies that they are less gifted intellectually, and in any case would have little interest in theology. Were our theological colleges to move back into the city, in spirit as well as geographically, with their teachers engaging in street-level ministry between lectures, would there not be a marked change in the atmosphere and emphasis of their classes? Would there not also be a marked improvement in much inner-city ministry? Too often, the gulf between theology and evangelism has meant that those who practice mission in the city cannot provide the quality of ministry that their situation demands. If it is to go to the heart of our modern world, our theology needs to be urban in its setting and its mind-set. Its supreme task is to express the gospel clearly, relevantly and uncompromisingly to this diverse, sophisticated and lost community. Urban mission is not a minor sub-section of theology's agenda, but the central purpose of all theology.

Because so much of the city is deprived and damaged, urban mission requires a James-like ministry of words and deeds. Because the deprivation and damage are deep and complex, urban mission is very likely to bring about confrontations between the Church and the various levels of the State. Deprived urban areas are almost totally dependent upon government (local or national) funding, so issues of social justice and 'political correctness' inevitably arise. In Britain we have had little recent experience of conflict in such areas, and we must relearn the lessons of Jesus' own encounter with both the Sadducees and the Zealots, a tension between collaboration and rebellion that runs strongly through the accounts of his ministry.

Urban mission demands clear thinking about the nature of the Church.

Should it be a 'local' church, or a church 'gathered' from those who will choose to travel to its ministries? Recent American teaching in the 'Church Growth' tradition disparages the local church, in an age when people drive to their favourite superstore, commute long distances to work, and have little involvement in a local community. But if the church is to be a 'city set on a hill' within the earthly city, does this not imply a strong community-within-the-community dimension to the church's life? The most effective inner-city churches are 'walking churches' - where the bulk of the congregation arrives on foot. Urban life challenges, too, our traditional church schedules and use of buildings. 'A Mission-shaped Church' may be the latest slogan, but it ought to be a truism of every church.

Again, urban mission raises the issue of the Church's ethnic and cultural identity. Much modern evangelism has targeted one particular ethnic or social group, gearing the whole life of the Church to them - the so-called 'Homogeneous Unit Principle'. This produces a series of distinct monocultural churches. The accepted wisdom is that such churches are easier to plant, and grow more quickly, but it is difficult to equate this approach with the New Testament, where the Church glories in containing Jew and Gentile, Greek and barbarian, slave and free. In a world where ethnic and social divisions are rampant, the urban church has a unique opportunity to demonstrate the transforming power of a gospel that is for 'all the peoples'. After all, it was in the large city of Antioch that the term 'Christian' was coined, precisely because the converts there were drawn from different ethnic and religious backgrounds and contemporary society had no way of categorizing people whose religion crossed so many barriers. Acts 15 shows that such multi-ethnic churches have to face difficult practical problems - but that is what theology is for!

Urban ministry raises a further question of ecclesiology: faced with the enormous challenge of the unreached urban populations, evangelical churches must either co-operate or else be swamped by the scale of the task. Chalmers and Guthrie recognized this, even in the smaller-scale situations of the nineteenth century. They called for the different denominations to recognize each other's responsibility for particular neighbourhoods of the city, rather than to continue viewing themselves as the only true church. Facing the anticipated objection that this would encourage the spread of what some would regard as "error and false theology", Chalmers wrote,

Where is the man, and what is his denomination, who can hold up his face to the declaration, that he would rather have the millions of our hitherto neglected population not to be Christians at all, than to be Christians minus their (own) peculiarity? (Chalmers, 'On the Evangelical Alliance', 1846, p.51).

With denominations and splinter-groups continuing to multiply, Chalmers' challenge is uncomfortably relevant today.

Because it encounters such an enormous range of people, cultures and religious opinions, urban mission inevitably has to question the stereotypes of conversion and discipleship that have developed in traditional evangelicalism. It is, of course, true that the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit is essential, that salvation is by grace through faith, and that holiness of life is the goal of salvation. But conversions of Zoroastrians, for example, will involve a lot more ground-clearing instruction than was necessary for Saul of Tarsus. People steeped in the non-Christian values and mores of deprived or immigrant communities require a syllabus of ethical re-education akin to that which Paul provided for the Corinthians. It may well be a long time before they develop the outward appearance of 'ordinary Christians' (cf. C S Lewis' essay on "Nice People or New Creatures?"). Certainly, they will need re-training in truly Gospel patterns and principles of family-life, self-awareness, and Christian service. The urban church cannot make the comfortable assumption that its converts already possess a reasonable knowledge of Scripture and clear models of how Christians should live.

Finally, urban life demands a full-orbed Trinitarianism - not just an intellectual defence of the doctrine. If the New Jerusalem is God's ultimate answer to the needs of fallen humanity, then the urban church is called to model all the richness of God's present grace in the Babel-cities of our generation. We need to proclaim by word and example that Christianity is the only way into the vibrant glory-fellowship of our God who is 'not just a Me but an Us'. We need to be amazed and excited by the grace of our eternally-delighting Father who 'gave' His unique, eternal Son to suffer and die for our salvation. We need to have the fullest appreciation of the joy and privilege of being members of the Trinity's own family, united to Christ, enjoying sonship with the Father, and sustained by the indwelling Spirit. This communal, Trinitarian faith is the perfect remedy for the loneliness and meaninglessness of the isolated city-dweller. It is a joyful, re-creative faith that restores the image of God and challenges the ugliness and barrenness of the inner-city. It is a deeply serious faith, not peddling a quick-fix, but going to the root of all the city's troubles and proclaiming a genuine, perfect resurrection-solution.

Faced with Babel, the Church of Jesus Christ is in a unique position to challenge, to console, to heal and to restore. Possessing this truth, how can the church possibly avoid her urban mission?

THE FELLOWSHIP MEETING

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Introduction

Any who are familiar with the history of the Reformed Presbyterian Church will be aware that the roots of the denomination can be traced back, without break, to groups of men and women who met in their much loved Societies in Scotland during the 17th century. In such family-based fellowship meetings thousands of people committed to the Kingship of Christ found biblical instruction, pastoral care and interactive, life-embracing Christian fellowship.

Alongside an examination of the New Testament and first century cultural background to the fellowship meeting, this article will survey several historical and contemporary examples of these meetings throughout the history of the Church.

New Testament and Cultural Background

Thomas Houston in his volumes on Pastoral Theology states that the fellowship meeting is an institution that 'can certainly plead a divine warrant'¹ and that,

the church in the house frequently mentioned in the book of Acts and in the apostolic epistles, was in primitive times, an institution for private Christian fellowship in many instances, even more than for the exercise of the ministry or for public worship.²

It is the most natural thing for men and women who have come to a personal knowledge of Jesus Christ to seek out and enjoy the company and fellowship of other believers. The New Testament Scriptures therefore have many references to such gatherings.

During the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ his followers gathered in homes to hear his teaching and be blessed through his ministry (Mark 14:14). This pattern appears to have continued following Christ's death. For example in Acts the followers of Jesus Christ met together for support and worship (Acts 1:13a,14). Following the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, gatherings

in the homes of believers continued to take place (Acts 2:46). A further post-Pentecost example occurs when the apostle Peter was imprisoned and a group of believers gathered in the house of Mary the mother of John Mark (Acts 12:12). John Calvin comments on this particular gathering:

It is obvious that this was a woman of exceptional piety, whose house was a kind of temple to God, where meetings of the brethren were in the habit of being held...I have no doubt that companies were also gathered elsewhere praying.³

Such house meetings were prevalent not only in Jerusalem. As the gospel spread to the Gentile world there was always the need to have a meeting place, and so, for example, we read that in Troas there was a room on the third floor where the church met (Acts 20:7a,10). This room may well have been in one of the tenement blocks (*insulae*) in which the poorer members of society lived.⁴

Several decades later the apostle Paul appears to make note of these house-based gatherings in his often repeated phrase *the church that meets at their house*, and variations thereof (I Corinthians 16:19, Romans 16:5, Philemon 2, Colossians 4:15). There may also be a clear reference to the gathering of believers in homes in Romans 16:23, *Gaius, whose hospitality I and the whole church here enjoy, sends you his greetings*. Concerning this reference William Hendriksen concludes that though this simply may mean that Gaius was willing to give hospitality to any in need, it may also be that the home of Gaius served as a house-church for part of the congregation.⁵

From these scriptural references it is apparent that the first century Christians met for their fellowship primarily in private homes, where they would find privacy from the world which was becoming increasingly suspicious of the habits and practices of this new, developing group.⁶

Obviously the house gatherings of the New Testament have had a variety of explanations and interpretations through the ages, depending on the ecclesiastical position being supported. The weight of evidence would tend to support the conclusion that they were either simply extended Christian families meeting for fellowship on an informal basis or the seedlings of local churches that would in time develop into more ordered and structured groups as apostolic teaching unfolded. Perhaps Gordon Fee's 'we simply do not know'⁷ is the wisest option.

The Church must learn from the intimacy and warmth that there was in the house gatherings of the first century church and seek to establish ways in which such fellowship can be enjoyed in the church of the twenty-first century.

The foundational function of these gatherings was the provision of a safe social environment where the fledgling Christians could meet. These home-based churches were, at a secondary level, multi-functional, being places for worship, hospitality, missionary expansion and leadership development.

Both Jewish and Gentile cultural backgrounds had their own brand of house gatherings, which may to a greater or lesser extent have influenced the early Christian gatherings. For example, there are a host of similarities between the Christian gatherings and the guilds of the Greco-Roman world, namely numbers attending, a common meal, free choice of membership, dependence on wealthy benefactors, order and structure, the role of women, and problems of division. It is possible to argue that the many aspects of similarity were simply normal patterns and practices of life that would occur in any groupings without being modelled on a previous situation.⁸

As many of the early Christians came from Judaism, many favour the opinion that Jewish roots were the greatest factors influencing the structural development of these meetings of the first-century Christians. Not only are there similarities in where they met, there is also a very strong similarity in what took place, namely the reading of the Scriptures and the oversight by appointed leaders. Burtchaell and his co-authors believe that there is a particularly close association with the Jewish home study groups (*charburoth*), which appeared in the second century B.C.⁹

Historical Examples

On the subject of the fellowship meeting Thomas Houston writes,

The history of associations for spiritual fellowship dates from a very early period, and can be traced through the annals of the Church in various countries, and in all past ages. It is inseparably connected with the life and progress of true religion.¹⁰

With this in mind there will be important principles to glean from a survey of some of the appearances of the fellowship meeting throughout church history.

The Waldensians

The history of the Waldensians illustrates that fellowship meetings can appear out of necessity in the face of persecution. Although it cannot be said that the Waldensian Church thrived and expanded during persecution, the group maintained its existence and in some measure developed through the vehicle of the fellowship meeting. As the Waldensians fled increasing persecution throughout the valleys of Europe, they survived spiritually in their private meetings for united prayer. In these isolated gatherings they came into contact with a variety of Reformed teachers who assisted them in their shift to a more Reformed position. It is reported that at one stage there was but one lonely society, which met in the secluded valleys of the Alps. In this small, localised

setting they remained steadfast and looked in faith to a time of deliverance.¹¹

The historical development of these fellowship groups has relevance for the Church today, in that the Waldensian example highlights the importance of the fellowship meeting in the development of a church and also in the survival of a church. While the Church today faces little physical persecution in the West, oppression is still present, albeit in more subtle forms. The fellowship meeting can provide a place of security and strength for the daily battles of life and a meeting together of the “soldiers of Christ” for personal encouragement and exhortation.

Bucer’s *Christlichen Gemeinschaften*

While some of the reformed leaders like Luther and Knox seem to have made their own tentative suggestions concerning *ecclesiolae in ecclesia* (‘little churches within the church’), it was Martin Bucer who was the main protagonist of fellowship groups in the church during the 16th century. When Bucer arrived in Strasbourg in 1523 he joined forces with the resident pastors in Strasbourg. They were greatly grieved that the magistrates had not fulfilled their responsibility to use the sword to eliminate what they perceived to be harmful influences on the church.¹² Bucer initially, in his treatise, *Von der waren Seelsorge*, sought to encourage the Strasbourg council to take up their duties, but to no avail. An alternative mechanism to restore discipline to the church had to be sought, and so in the late 1540s the pastors, too long rebuffed, tried a new tactic, namely the establishment of Christian cells, *Gemeinschaften*, throughout the city. Through these *Christlichen Gemeinschaften* Bucer sought to render the church of Strasbourg more faithful to the primitive and ancient church.

Bucer’s well-developed plan for these fellowship meetings was perhaps not simply due to his eye for detail, but also a realisation that they would meet with opposition. In implementing the fellowship groups pastors were encouraged to preach on the necessity for corporate living in the church and those in the congregations interested in developing these were called to meet at a set time, date and venue. The developing groups, which operated at a parish level and consisted of men, women and children, had a clearly defined aim, namely to teach the Word and ensure that the Word was practiced.¹³ The feature of these cells that made them light years ahead of anything that had appeared before was the practice of the priesthood of all believers. Bucer emphasised that it was not only the pastors’ responsibility to teach the Word, but also the duty of all to admonish one another in the Lord.

Bucer’s fellowship meetings were met, as he had expected, with widespread criticism and were seen as unnecessary innovations. Thus within a few short years his parish cells disappeared. Bucer’s Word-centred and

discipline-focussed Christlichen Gemeinschaften stand in marked contrast to many contemporary fellowship meetings, which are sadly often lacking in these vital principles.

The Puritans and the Fellowship Meeting

During the time of their ascendancy there were several situations where fellowship meetings were established at least in some measure. Some, under the rise of persecution, saw fellowship meetings as their only method of survival. To this end Cragg comments:

In the days when repression was severe, a man might divide his congregation into groups of four, and at great cost in time and effort repeat his sermon to tiny gatherings throughout the day.¹⁴

These tiny gatherings arose where laws were passed forbidding groups of certain sizes to meet outside of the established church. In such extenuating circumstances many Puritans, suspicious of fragmentation, allowed for the development of fellowship meetings.¹⁵

Another dimension of the fellowship meeting in the Puritan era was the *Lecture*, which was, 'a course of adult education of the most exacting kind...to supplement the simpler fare of the Sabbath'.¹⁶ These Lectures, which were held midweek, began with confession and ended with prayer and a confession of faith. This fellowship-style meeting survived for many years and was indeed seen as an opportunity for true fellowship between the various strains of Puritans that developed. For example, in the Bristol area Baptist, Presbyterian and Congregationalist tried to establish a midweek Lecture to which they could all come.¹⁷ These meetings came under increasing pressure, being seen as dangerous by those in authority.¹⁸

Besides the Lecture meeting, which was for the benefit for the common people, there were also the *Prophecyings*. These meetings were designed for clergy only and fulfilled the function of spreading Puritan beliefs.¹⁹

Although the Puritan era drew to an end formally in 1662 with the ejection of many ministers from the Church of England, their influence continued. As the years passed, some of the ministers set up small groups within the established church. In doing so they were simply following the general pattern of the society that was setting up all sorts of small groups.²⁰ One such example was that of Dr. Anthony Horneck who came to Savoy Chapel in London in 1672. Many within the established church were deeply concerned about the lack of true spirituality in the church and saw religious societies as one way in which to remedy the problem and return to the pattern of the early Christians.

It would be fair to say that fellowship meetings were not all that abundant in the Puritan era and that those that did appear were more out of necessity rather than vehicles for reform, as in the era of the Reformation. Indeed there were key components of Puritan thought and practice that severely limited such expressions in church life. The Puritan desire to remain steadfast to what the Lord had commanded rather than establish one's own ideas for church life is an important principle to maintain in a modern ecclesiastical climate that tends to embrace immediately the most recent fad rather than assess the scriptural warrant.

Cotton Mather's Collegia

By the late 1600s fellowship meetings were beginning to develop in the New World. For example, Cotton Mather was initiating praying groups and family meetings in selected neighbourhoods of his congregation. Mather is quick to point out that these informal gatherings were not an innovation but that they had been flourishing from the foundation of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Speaking of these meetings, he writes that those who were not ministers had 'their private meetings, wherein they would seek the face, and sing praise to God; and confer upon some questions of practical religion, for their mutual edification'.²¹

Mather makes reference to a host of *Collegia*, including: meetings for families, women, young men and ministers. The family meetings are of particular interest and ideally were composed of about twelve individuals meeting in homes once a month or fortnight. These meetings incorporated into their programme prayer, psalm singing, reading sermons, sharing spiritual experiences and tending to practical needs. The families who met in these cells were encouraged to look after one another at both a practical and spiritual level, as well as 'doing good in the neighbourhood.'²² Mather's meetings were well structured and organised, with financial collections being made, members disciplined and existing members encouraged to recruit new members on a regular basis. Lovelace makes the most telling comment when writing about Mather's fellowship meetings. He states that such,

Puritan Collegia seem to antedate, and in their development and variety dwarf their Anglican and Pietist counterparts.....the strongest roots of the conventicle approach seem to be in the Reformed tradition.²³

Mather's Collegia sadly lost their way when Mather incorporated into his fellowship meetings an excessive emphasis on outward moral reformation. Such moral reformation was an integral part of *Reforming Societies* that were sprouting in parts of the Western World. It would seem that the final downfall

of his small groups was both lack of and improper leadership. Mather's strong convictions against lay leadership meant that there were simply too few in a position to lead.²⁴ Whatever the problems that his gatherings experienced, however, Mather regarded them as vital sign of life and the very means for producing it. His feelings are not difficult to detect when he writes:

Where they have been kept alive and under prudent conduct, the Christians that have composed them, have like so many living coals kept one another alive and kept up the life of Christianity in the vicinity.²⁵

Wesley's Classes

John Wesley grew up in a home where fellowship-style meetings were an integral part of the life of both his mother and father. With the impact also of both the Oxford Holy Club and the example of the Moravian fellowship meetings, it is no great surprise that fellowship groups came to be such an integral part of Wesley's work and ministry.

Wesley's fellowship meeting structure was however to some degree stumbled upon rather than deliberately designed. Many who were converted through his ministry flocked after him seeking counsel. These growing gatherings of converts were called Societies and soon became too large to oversee with any effect. The answer to the dilemma began in Bristol, where Wesley's group of followers had grown to 1,100 people. Here Captain Foy suggested that one person call on eleven others of the Society each week. It would appear that these groups, later termed Classes, did not arise primarily for spiritual oversight but for the paying of debts to the Bristol group. As leaders went around their prescribed members to collect the money, an assessment was made of their spiritual welfare and reports given to Wesley. Wesley seems to have suddenly realised that Captain Foy's plan was the blueprint for the way forward in meeting all the needs of the growing numbers that were converted through his preaching.

Soon every Society had been broken down into smaller Classes of twelve people who met weekly with the Class leader for pastoral care, exhortation, examination and instruction.²⁶ Discipline of the Classes was by means of the Class Ticket, which was essential for entrance to the quarterly love feast. These were only given to members who were living circumspect lives.

In the Class, ministering to the needs of the people was married with rule and order in a unique forum. There is much in this Class system that has relevance for the redevelopment of effective fellowship structures in the Church today. Most importantly the balance of the vital components of rule, order, oversight and compassion would be essential in any new developments of the fellowship meeting.

Covenanting Societies

There are those who would claim that these gatherings of Covenanters that developed in the mid 1600s can trace their roots of belief and practice back to Calvin's Friday Evening Meetings and Knox's gatherings that were simply called *The Exercise*.²⁷ Such claims, although not beyond the bounds of possibility, are difficult to be dogmatic about. Calvin's weekly meetings appear designed for the preachers of Geneva and the surrounding districts rather than the people, and were more a seminary than a fellowship meeting. However the setting of a passage for examination and discussion does bare some similarity to the practice of the *Covenanting Societies* where the passage for discussion was given out before hand and the people were to come prepared.²⁸ As regards connection with Knox's Exercise, the links may be stronger. Although these meetings were primarily for preachers, Knox on other occasions refers to meetings that were open to all. At these meetings he saw the place for a prayer of confession, Scripture reading, exhortation and intercessory prayers.²⁹

Like several other fellowship meetings, the Societies of the Covenanters were born out of adversity and persecution. In particular it was out of the persecutions and legislation under Charles II that the *Society People* proper emerged. Cast out from their pulpits and manse through government legislation, ministers gathered the people for worship in hillside conventicles. It was from those attending these conventicles that the Society People would later emerge. Before Societies would develop fully, a series of Indulgences offered by the Government purged the ranks of the Covenanters to leave a group whole-heartedly and determinedly committed to the Kingship of Christ. It was from this group, under the leadership of men like Cameron, Cargill and Renwick, that the Covenanting Societies were established.

At a foundational level these groups of strict Covenanters comprised several families meeting together for worship in available homes or other "haunts." This assembling in homes was not an entirely new phenomenon. As far back as 1639 the General Assembly passed the following decree:

That there shall be weekly catechising in some part of every congregation, that the families shall be catechised at home by the heads of families of which duty the ministers shall take account, assisted by an elder, and that family worship shall be performed in each house morning and evening.³⁰

These family gatherings for worship were the seedbeds of the Society Meetings. Indeed this family atmosphere was the very framework and essence of these fellowship meetings where all ages were welcomed and encouraged to take part. The pamphlet "Rules for Religious Societies" published in 1782 provides a clear and concise summary of the function of these fellowship groups, namely,

...the advancement and increase of the practical knowledge of God, instruction of the ignorant, supporting the weak, comforting the feeble-minded, preventing and withstanding error and seduction, and the discharge of all other duties of Christian brotherly love, and the fellowship of the members one with another in the gifts and graces with which they are blessed.³¹

The Covenanting Societies were not isolated disconnected gatherings. Modern historian Ian Cowan explains that the Society People began to form themselves into a *Union* or *General Correspondence* which had its first convention at Lesmahagow on 15th. December, 1681.³² Societies within the same county were united into *District Societies* or *Correspondences* and from these District Societies commissioners were sent to the quarterly meeting of the *General Meeting*.

The Societies of the Covenanters should not be viewed as some static ecclesiastical structure but an evolving forum. When congregations were established following the organisation of the Reformed Presbytery in 1743, Society Meetings took on a new format under the authority of the local session. Indeed in the Irish Reformed Presbyterian Church they formed a key component of church extension and congregational life until the end of the nineteenth century. The clearly set-out oversight and mission mindedness of these fellowship meetings has much to teach the Reformed church of the twenty-first century.

The Welsh Experience Meeting (Seiat)

One of the most striking similarities of the eighteenth century awakenings in England and Wales was the development of fellowship groups designed to help and stimulate new converts. In Wales these meetings were called *Experience Meetings* or in the Welsh vernacular *Seiats*. These, writes Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, met on a weekly basis, 'to provide a fellowship in which the new spiritual life and experience of the people could be safe-guarded and developed.'³³ Though stress was laid on Bible reading and prayer, these were not small group Bible studies or theological tutorial groups. The primary emphasis of these groups was to provide help for the challenges of daily Christian living. Initially the Experience Meetings were led and organised by the preachers, but, with increasing numbers, suitably qualified lay leaders were appointed.

Rev. William Williams, with his outstanding organisational gifts, was recognised as the leader and leading proponent of the *Seiats*. Williams saw these Welsh fellowship meetings as the very means for maintaining spiritual life at an individual level, forestalling problems in the fellowship, giving opportunity to bear one another's burdens, and the vehicle to heed the scriptural exhortation to pray one for the other. To this end each *Seiat* was to have a

Steward who was to be a man of exemplary character. Stewards were to keep a register of those who attended, provide care for the needy and exhort the members to live circumspect lives. Discipline was a key component of the Seiat. It was also the Stewards' task to ensure that the members interacted only on sanctioned topics. Anything that would engender cold, prejudiced thoughts of others was forbidden, while matters that focussed on Christ and kindled Christian love were encouraged.³⁴

Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones urged ministers to read William's booklet *The Experience Meeting* and introduce such meetings into the life of the church.³⁵ The Seiat's emphasis on discussion of Christian experience in a carefully controlled environment is most certainly needed in the Reformed church today, where the experience of many is that they have rarely conversed in any intimate manner on matters of the heart.

Contemporary Examples

In examining the fellowship meeting through the ages, it is important not only to be aware of the historical developments, but also to have some understanding of more recent trends. Two of the most influential types will now be examined. Many who have engaged in establishing fellowship meetings in recent times have undoubtedly been influenced by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who wrote:

The renewal of the Church will certainly come from a new type of monasticism, which has in common with the old only the uncompromising nature of a life lived according to the Sermon on the Mount as a disciple of Jesus Christ. I believe it is high time for men to band together to do this.³⁶

Cell Church

Cell Church activists like William Beckham claim Bonhoeffer's ideas were fundamental in establishing their new way of church life. This form of church life developed in 1958 from the work of David Paul Yongii Cho, pastor of Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul, Korea. The proponents of Cell Church argue that for too long the church has been a one-winged bird, with large-scale structures and nothing to meet people's needs at a local and personal level. It is claimed that the 'cell' part of Cell Church provides the bird with a second wing and enables it to fly. Fundamental to Cell Church is the fact that the church is divided into a number of smaller self-replicating cells. Cell Church proponents make it clear that cells are not merely prayer or Bible study groups. The emphasis is not churches with cells but that cells are the church. These cells, despite their simple and useful "WWW" format (Welcome, Worship, Word & Witness) have serious weaknesses including the downplaying of the

wider church body, leadership inadequacies, discouraging any form of didactic teaching, and the unhealthy, unbalanced exaltation of human need. Nevertheless their attempts at giving the people a forum to practise the 'one anothers' of Scripture is to be commended, and their emphasis on growth and replication has vital lessons to teach the Reformed church of today and tomorrow.

Fellowship Groups in the Church Growth Movement (CGM)

Donald McGavran, the father of the *CGM*, argued that the task of the Church was not simply to evangelise but actually to make disciples, and that the Church should embrace anything that would assist to that end. The *CGM*, with its tendency to borrow from the world, makes much of the sociological evidence for the need for small fellowship groups. Gibbs in his book, *I believe in Church Growth*, summarises this sociological aspect well when he writes, 'God has not made man to live in solitude and independence. Neither does He intend him to be lost in the crowd and so made to feel a nonentity.'³⁷

The key feature of fellowship groups in the *CGM* is that they have tended to gather together individuals from similar walks of life. Commenting on group life at Willow Creek, *Christianity Today* notes, 'there are groups drawn together by age, gender, marital status, profession, spiritual gifts, hobbies, life situation and talents, to name just a few.'³⁸ Groups are also organised on a functional basis, for example seeker groups, support groups, service groups, and growth groups. The *CGM* argues that it is in small groups in the church that man's basic sociological needs are met. They see these needs to be strength for life's storms, wisdom for making important decisions and accountability. According to the *CGM*, the fellowship meeting is the vehicle for activating its *up, out, together* model for church life.

While any development of fellowship groups in Reformed churches would wish to avoid the extremes of homogeneous groupings, the *CGM*'s emphasis on "up, out, together" has a helpful practical thrust that would be beneficial in any development of fellowship groups in Reformed circles.

Conclusion

There is evidence that the early New Testament believers met together in less formal settings than our congregational meetings of today. These groups of believers, meeting in homes throughout cities, were the seedbeds of the New Testament Church. It was where believers were nurtured in their newfound faith and where the world saw how much the followers of Christ loved one another.

At every stage of church history the Lord's people have aimed to seek out

others of like mind and be bound in close connection with one another. At times persecution and trial have caused the formation of these fellowship groups. Sometimes they have formed out of the need to reform and revive the Church. On other occasions they have formed simply due to the fact that the people needed closer and more intimate fellowship than was provided in belonging to a larger church.

The rise of all sorts of fellowship meetings in more recent times in every corner of the Church has shown that many of the scriptural functions of the Church are not being met on the larger congregational scale. People want to experience and enjoy a sense of belonging and care that is only available in smaller fellowship groups in the Church.

Some in the Reformed churches have veered away from these fellowship groups, fearing a sense of fragmentation and schism. However if something of the organisation and oversight apparent in the Societies of the Covenanters is implemented, these fears will evaporate. With well-trained and qualified elders at the helm the “ship” of the fellowship meeting can be held on course and bring great blessing.

To borrow Knox’s comment regarding his Exercise Meeting and use it in the wider setting of the fellowship meeting, ‘these exercises, we say are things most necessary for the church of God this day.’³⁹ To take McFeeter’s comment regarding the Covenanting Societies and give it a wider application:

When social worship of God characterises the Church, the people will take on strength and be able to stand amidst the spiritual landslides and general defection that characterises the times in which we live.⁴⁰

Notes

1. Thomas Houston, *Works Doctrinal and Practical*, (Edinburgh: Andrew Elliot, 1876), Vol.2, p.284.
2. *Ibid.*, p.306.
3. John Calvin, *The Acts of the Apostles*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), Vol.1, p.342.
4. Robert Jewett, ‘Tenement Churches and Communal Meal in the Early Church: The Implication of a Form Critical Analysis of II Thessalonians 3:10’, *Biblical Research* 38 (1993).
5. William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary, Romans*, (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1981), Vol.2, p.515.
6. Floyd Filson, ‘The Significance of the Early House Churches’, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 58 (1939), p.106.
7. Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, (Michigan: Eerdmans, 1991), p.684.
8. T.M. Lindsay, *The Church and the Ministry in Early Centuries*, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1953), p.129.
9. J.T. Burchaell, *From Synagogue to Church. Public Services and Offices in the Earliest Christian Communities*, (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p.276.
10. Thomas Houston, *Works*, Vol.2, p.305.
‘Letter of the Waldensian Churches to Oecolampadius’, in Scott’s *Continuation of Milner’s History of the Church of Christ*, vol.1, pp.134-5.

12. A. N. Burnett, *The Yoke of Christ: Martin Bucer and Christian Discipline* (Kirksville: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1994), p.181.
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14. C. G. Cragg, *Puritanism in the Period of the Great Persecution*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957), p.158.
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THE CHURCH'S UNFINISHED TASK

Harry Coulter

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Readers of this Journal who are pastors will be all too aware of the competing demands that are made on their time and energy as they give themselves to their calling. Among these are preparation for pulpit ministry, the ongoing care of members, meetings of Session and Presbytery, involvement in denominational committees and the need to be reaching out with the gospel into the community.

In the busyness of the pastorate it is easy to lose sight of what the task of the Church is. Hence the subject of this article, 'The Church's Unfinished Task'. This article is an attempt to define the work of the pastorate and of the Church in terms that are biblical, easy to remember and that can become a litmus test to be applied to everything that is done in congregational life. Its basic proposition is that the unfinished and consequently the ongoing task of the church is *to make disciples* and *to strengthen disciples*.

The illustration of the coin with its two sides is helpful. Every pastorate and every congregation are to have two sides to their work and witness, that of making disciples and that of strengthening disciples, and the two are so closely linked as to be inseparable.

As we explore this theme we want:

1. to see that 'making disciples and strengthening disciples' was the heartbeat of the ministry of Christ, his apostles and the New Testament Church.
2. to note some relevant applications to pastoral and congregational ministry today.

1. Scriptural Evidence

The noun 'disciple' occurs 269 times¹ and the verb 'to disciple' 4 times² in the Gospels and the Acts. The Greek word 'mathetes' has at its core the concept of 'learning and training'. A man was known as a disciple when 'he

bound himself to another to acquire his practical and theoretical knowledge'.³ So in the ancient world the apprentice to a weaver, the medical student training under a doctor and the pupil enrolled in a philosophical school, all were called disciples.

When the word is used in the NT, however, a number of important differences are obvious. In the New Testament discipleship begins with a call in which Jesus takes the initiative (John 1:43), whereas among Jewish teachers and Greek philosophers the initiative lay with the student to seek out a teacher for himself.

In the NT discipleship is first and foremost commitment to the person of Jesus and, as a result, to his teaching. It is not first a commitment to a philosophy or a vocation. In the NT the destiny of the disciple is bound up with his teacher. In the NT disciples are servants. They are never equal or superior to Jesus. He is their Lord.

The Gospels

The repeated use of the word 'disciple' in the Gospels and Acts has led Rengstorff in his article in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* to observe, ' "mathetes", of course, is a fundamental term.' And no one can dispute it was fundamental in the ministry of Jesus. Early in his three year ministry, Luke records in 6:13, 'He called his disciples to him, and from them he chose twelve whom he also named apostles.'

Having been *selected* by Jesus these men *accompanied* Jesus, were taught and trained by him to be committed to him as Messiah and to the advancement of his messianic kingdom. At the end of his earthly life, having accomplished the work of Messiah by dying for his people, he charged them with the responsibility of continuing the work:

Matthew 28:19-20, 'Go therefore and *make disciples* of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, *teaching them* to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo I am with you always, even to the end of the age.'

The main verb is 'disciple'. William Hendriksen comments, "'Make disciples" is by itself an imperative. It is a brisk command, an order."⁴ 'Baptising' and 'teaching' are subordinate and highlight that those *made disciples were to be strengthened as disciples*. They were not to be left in spiritual babyhood.

Acts

Acts records what the ascended Christ continued to do through his

Apostles. One way to interpret Acts is to see it as the record of how the Apostles *made disciples* and strengthened disciples 'in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth' in obedience to the command of Christ.

Acts 1-11 concentrates on mission to Jews, beginning at Jerusalem (cpts.1-7) and spreading through Judea (cpt.8), touching briefly on mission to Samaritans (cpt.8) and Gentiles (cpts.10-11). Of the thirty uses of the word 'disciple' in Acts, thirteen occur in Acts 1-11. It is clear that, among all three cultural groupings, Jews, Samaritans and Gentiles, the focus of the ministry of the apostles and the New Testament Church was to *make* and *strengthen* disciples.

Acts 9 introduces us to Paul, whom God had chosen to be the Apostle to the Gentiles. Following his conversion, he became closely associated with Barnabas in ministry to the church at Antioch (Acts 11:25ff.). From there he embarked on three missionary journeys, with Barnabas at first and others later, taking the gospel to the Gentiles.

In Acts 14:21 Luke concludes his account of the first missionary journey with these words: 'And when they had...*made many disciples* [cf. Matthew 28:19), they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch.' Paul and Barnabas had given themselves to a ministry of *making disciples*.

Having made disciples in these places, why did the missionary team return to Antioch by the route they had come? Was it because it was the route they knew best? Was it because it was shorter? No. Acts 14:22 provides the answer: '*strengthening the souls of the disciples*, exhorting them to continue in the faith'.

The verb Luke uses for 'strengthen' is a compound of the verb 'sterizo'. The main sense of the verb is 'to support' or 'to confirm'. It was used in Greek of medicines prescribed by a doctor to strengthen a sick or weak person. It occurs thirteen times in the New Testament.⁶ In Acts 14 and on three other occasions in Acts, Luke uses the compound form 'episterizo'.⁷ It means 'to make stable', 'to strengthen', 'to make firm'. Luke uses it here to stress how the missionary team not only made disciples but strengthened them or 'made them lean on' Jesus Christ. Luke, of course, as a doctor by training, but now also as a Christian, has a particular interest in the weak becoming strong and the sick being made well!

So during his first missionary journey Paul gave himself to *making disciples* and *strengthening disciples*. The same pattern can be identified in his subsequent missionary journeys. In Acts 15:41, as Paul sets off with Silas on the second missionary journey, 'He went through Syria and Cilicia, *strengthening the churches*'. It was whilst doing so that he gained Timothy for his missionary team.

Only after he had strengthened those who had earlier become disciples

and who had already been organised as congregations did Paul embark on further missionary endeavour. Acts 16:6-18:18 records the missionary activity of the second journey in the Roman provinces of Macedonia and Achaia. During it Paul stayed eighteen months in Corinth not only *making disciples but strengthening disciples*.

In Acts 18:23, as Paul sets out on what we now call the third missionary journey, 'He went over the region of Galatia and Phrygia in order, *strengthening* all the disciples.' These were the regions where he had made disciples at the outset of the second missionary journey. From there Paul headed for Ephesus to take up the opportunity that had presented itself at the end of the second missionary journey, of preaching the gospel in the province of Asia Minor.

At the end of three years when Paul was forced to leave Ephesus he visited the provinces of Macedonia and Achaia to *strengthen believers* (Acts 20:2), before returning to Asia Minor to strengthen believers (Acts 20:6-38) en route to Jerusalem.

Paul had two clear and unchanging strands to his mission to Gentiles - that of *making disciples* and that of *strengthening disciples*. Paul had not been one of the original twelve apostles. He had not been there when Christ gave the command, 'Go, make disciples, baptising them...teaching them...' Yet he had the same priorities in his ministry. Why? Because Christ had appeared to him not only to call him but also to reveal to him the same commission He had given to the twelve.⁸

Our study of the ministry of the Apostles, patterned on the example and the command of Christ, reveals that they gave themselves to the unfinished task of *making disciples* and *strengthening disciples* for the Lord Jesus in three geographical areas (Palestine, Greece and Asia Minor) and in both Jewish and Graeco-Roman settings.

The Epistles

This note of strengthening disciples is also evident in the apostolic writings. Significantly, ten of the thirteen uses of the word 'sterizo' in the NT occur in the letters of Peter, Paul, James and John (see note 6 above). George W. Knight has observed:

The early church was interested in edification as well as evangelism, in sanctification as well as conversion, in church government as well as preaching.'

2 Contemporary Relevance

Firstly, in the pastorate and in congregational witness we need to

maintain a balance between *making disciples* and *strengthening disciples*. In many Reformed circles today pastors and churches are so caught up in ministry within the church that they are failing to make disciples in the world.

Secondly, in the task of *making and strengthening disciples*¹⁰ we need to retain the primacy and centrality of preaching because much of the material being written today on discipleship bypasses preaching for one-on-one and small group ministry. In many cases twenty-first century discipleship has lost sight of the fact that Christ and the Apostles saw preaching as central to the task of *making and strengthening disciples*.

Thirdly, we need to foster New Testament congregational life¹¹ so that discipleship is promoted not only through the ministry from the pulpit, but also through the ministry of the pew, by one member to another. The Jerusalem Church enjoyed a union and communion with each other in Christ¹² which expressed itself as they met in homes for times of informal worship, sharing their faith, their food and their possessions. The result was they strengthened one another as disciples of Christ.

The Reformed Presbyterian Church was strong in this area in the past when she met in societies outside her times of public worship. J. C. McFeeters commenting in 'Sketches of the Covenanters' maintains,

when social worship of God characterises the church the people will take on strength and be able to stand amidst the spiritual landslides and general defection that characterises the times in which we live.¹³

Fourthly, discipleship provides a framework for pastoral care. The Code of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland advises:

The minister, accompanied if possible by an elder, should visit, at least once a year, the families of the congregation under his care. The main object of pastoral visitation is to ascertain the spiritual state and to promote the spiritual growth of the members...¹⁴

We could be more structured, original and deliberate in our pastoral visitation, for example selecting a theme in advance, making it known by means of a leaflet, incorporating matters for discussion with members. By doing so, pastoral visitation would make a greater contribution to the spiritual growth of church members. Pastors wishing to do so will find plenty of scope in the subject of discipleship.

Fifthly, in New Testament discipleship we have a tried and proven way of developing men for church leadership. Mark records of Jesus, 'He appointed

twelve, that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach...'. His ministry touched many but he trained twelve to continue the work after his death.

Among the Apostles, Paul stands out as one who trained men by selection, association and instruction (Acts 13:5, 16:1-3, 20:4). At the end of his ministry and, significantly, towards the end of the apostolic era he exhorted Timothy, 'The things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also' (2 Timothy 2:2).

To meet our present and future leadership needs, pastors should disciple faithful men who in time will assume leadership responsibilities. This will prove to be the most fruitful way of responding to the current dearth of men for the pastorate and diaconate.

Notes

1. It is used almost always for those who follow Jesus.
2. Matthew 13:52, 27:57, 28:19; Acts 14:21.
3. Colin Brown (ed.), *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1986), article 'Disciple', Vol.1, p.484.
4. K. H. Rengstorff, article *manthano* in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, abridged in one volume by Geoffrey W. Bromiley, (Grand Rapids/Exeter: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publ. Co./Paternoster Press, 1985), p.554.
5. William Hendriksen, *The Gospel of Matthew*, (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1973), p.999.
6. Luke 9:51, 16:26, 22:32; Romans 1:11, 16:25; 1 Thessalonians 3:2,13; 2 Thessalonians 2:17, 3:3; 1 Peter 5:10; 2 Peter 1:12; James 5:8; Revelation 3:2.
7. Acts 14:22, 15:32, 41, 18:23.
8. Galatians 1:11-2:21.
9. George W. Knight, *The Faithful Sayings in the Pastoral Letters* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), see pp.55-61.
10. Acts 2:42, 6:7, 8:4-5,14,25, 10:34,42, 13:5, 14:32, etc.
11. Acts 2:42-47, 4:32-37; 1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4:1-16; cf. 'one anothers' of Scripture.
12. 'they were all with one accord'. Acts 1:14, 2:1,46, 5:12.
13. Quoted in 'The Society People' by C.K. Hyndman, *Reformed Theological Journal*, Vol.15, November 1999, p.55.
14. *The Code: The Book of Government and Order of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland* (1989), 3.30.

BOOK REVIEWS

As God is My Witness, The Presbyterian Kirk, the Covenanters and the Ulster Scots, Brian J. Orr, Heritage Books Inc., 2002, pbk., 458 pp., \$21.95

In recent years there has been a renewed interest in the struggle for civil and religious liberty that embroiled the British Isles in the 17th century and which caused intense suffering to the Scottish Covenanters. Brian Orr, the author of this volume, is an Ulster Scot by descent, and in his retirement he has devoted himself to researching the historical context which led his ancestors to move from Scotland to Ireland at the Plantation of Ulster.

The book is made up of four parts, the first part giving an extensive and well researched history of the Reformation in Scotland and the north of Ireland. The influence of John Knox and Andrew Melville is recognized as being foundational to the emerging Reformed Church in Scotland. The teaching of these men and their successors, Orr carefully documents, gave the Scottish church its Covenanting practice and Presbyterian polity. This provides the context for the conflict which arose between the House of Stuart and the Covenanters from the reign of James I until his grandson, James II, fled from the throne in 1688. The cause of the Covenanters is sympathetically considered as they struggled against the tyrannical rule of the Stuart kings and the men who implemented their policies. A few deeply moving chapters recount their sufferings in Greyfriars open prison, at the Bass Rock and Dunnottar Castle. Particular attention is given to the drowning of the two Margarets in the Solway and historical evidence is produced which demonstrates the veracity of these cruel and merciless executions.

Part I of the book concludes with the Sanquar Declaration of 1680, the Cameronians and the rise of the Society movement, which Orr accurately recognizes was the cradle out of which the Reformed Presbyterian Church emerged. This corrects an inaccurate statement made in an earlier chapter which states: "*these Seceders and their Secession church eventually became the Reformed Presbyterian Church*". The Secession Church in Ireland formally united with the Synod of Ulster in 1840 to form the Presbyterian Church of Ireland, although a few congregations did take independent action and joined the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland.

Part II of this gripping historical account is made up of interesting biographies defined under the general title '*The People of the Covenant*'. Included are: James Graham, the first Marquis of Montrose, Scottish nobleman and soldier, who renounced his Covenanting vows to wage war against the Covenanters in 1645-6, Archbishop James Sharp, who betrayed the Covenanters in the negotiations which led to the restoration of the Monarchy in

1660, and some of the great preachers of 17th century Scotland, many of whom suffered martyrdom. The Irish connection is well integrated through the lives of Robert Blair, John Livingston, Alexander Peden and James Hamilton. This section is fittingly concluded with an interesting account of John MacMillan, the first minister of the Reformed Presbyterian Church.

Part III describes the conditions experienced by the Scots settlers in the Ulster Plantation, their sufferings in the 1641 Rebellion, the persecutions of the 1630s and 1660s and the circumstances which drove many to emigrate to the American colonies in the late 17th and early 18th century.

The final part of the book is an interesting epilogue featuring a recent debate in the Presbyterian Church of Canada about where a marble statue of Margaret Wilson, the Solway martyr, should be located.

Fifteen appendices provide valuable information relating to the period. Documents included are: the Five Articles of Perth (1618), the National Covenant (1638) and the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647). Lists of early Scots settlers in Ulster, the ministers who served them and the names of Covenanters imprisoned or executed are an invaluable resource. Sixty maps and photographs, strategically placed throughout the text, help the reader to visualize the people and places under consideration.

This book is a veritable storehouse of information for anyone who is interested in this fascinating period of history. The author is to be commended for his valuable research, although it is a pity that proof reading was not more thorough as the book contains many typographical errors.

Robert McCollum

Richard Hobson of Liverpool; A Faithful Pastor, Banner of Truth Trust, 2004, hbk., 359 pp., £13.50.

This autobiography records the life and work of a man who ought to be better known than he is. His ministry was long and fruitful, and he saw remarkable growth in the church which he served for the greater part of his life.

Richard Hobson was born on 7th October, 1831, in what he describes as 'the picturesque village of Donard, Co Wicklow.' He grew up in a godly Church of England home, though like many families in Ireland in the mid nineteenth century his suffered from the great famine. From his youngest days he 'found delight in the things of God' He saw this as evidence of God's answer to the prayer for regeneration offered at the time of his baptism.

Hobson grew up in a society in which the dominant religion was Roman Catholicism. The more he learned of its error, the more burdened he came for his fellow countrymen, and eventually he became a missionary with

the Irish Church Mission to Roman Catholics. Hobson loved this work, but became convinced of the call to the pastoral ministry and after training in England was appointed to St Nathaniel's Church in Liverpool in 1868. The church was situated in a notorious part of the city covering 'sixteen acres of sin'. Hobson's ministry there lasted for thirty-three years, during which time he saw the congregation grow from an initial five people to over three thousand.

This book gives many helpful insights into the pastoral ministry and congregational life, and also into life in a large English city in the nineteenth century. Its great value however lies in the challenge and encouragement which it brings to those engaged in pastoral ministry. Hobson challenges us simply by the amount of work he did. He was a man willing to spend and be spent for the good of his people in the congregation. This led in later years to a break down in his health and one writer is probably correct when he says that 'a good wife may have helped him to cultivate a more moderate use of his energies.' He remained a bachelor.

He challenges us too in regard to preaching. Hobson was committed to Reformed theology and preached it boldly, but was able to reach people who had little or no biblical knowledge. He loved and illustrated the saying of his friend, Bishop of Liverpool JC Ryle, 'If you want a warm church, put a stove in the pulpit'.

He challenges us also by the diligence of his pastoral work and the personal holiness of his life: 'Oh the persuading, convincing, holding power of a hold life,' he said, 'It is the pastor's great need.' No pastor today reading this autobiography could bring himself to complain of being busy.

The story is told for the most part in a number of chapters which summarise the events of each year of ministry. This makes it rather repetitive in style. However, this does not detract from the challenge and encouragement of a faithful pastor's life.

The author states several reasons for writing this autobiography. One of them is 'that any Christian worker in a position similar to mine may through reading this narrative take fresh courage and press on, realising that, as "the battle is the Lord's", He will give the victory.' His writing should certainly fulfil that desire.

Knox Hyndman

Worship: Reformed according to Scripture, Hughes Oliphant Old, Westminster John Knox Press, 2002, pbk., 195 pp, £14.99.

In this expanded edition of a volume first published in 1985, Hughes Oliphant Old has provided a valuable overview of Reformed and Presbyterian worship. In an era of liturgical confusion and panic-stricken change, his work

is particularly timely.

After laying down as basic principles that Reformed worship is according to Scripture, in the name of Christ and directed by the Spirit, Old deals with its constituent elements: baptism, the Lord`s Day, praise, the ministry of the Word, prayer (in church and family), the Lord`s supper and alms. He provides, in each chapter, a brief examination of the scriptural data, followed by a survey of how the Church has understood and implemented that teaching through the centuries.

Much of the material in these pages is informative and challenging. We are reminded of the richness of the Reformed tradition and reintroduced to figures such as John Oecolampadius, Peter Martyr Vermigli and John Willison, who thought and wrote profoundly about worship, but have been eclipsed by more eminent contemporaries. Old is thought-provoking on baptism, the various dimensions of the Lord`s Supper and the need to enrich the ministry of public prayer. His chapter on the ministry of the Word is a fine mini-history of preaching, although it would have been improved by more detail on the preaching of the apostles, and one wonders at the absence of reference to Martyn Lloyd-Jones. His plea for expository preaching and *lectio continua* (working in order through entire books of Scripture), is a welcome one.

Although a formidable researcher, the author does slip up on occasion. It was not, for example, the Solemn League and Covenant which the Scots signed in 1638 (p.139), nor was it the Duke of Cumberland 'at the end of the seventeenth century' who 'tried to suppress the celebration of Presbyterian worship' (ibid.). Old advocates a greater emphasis on the singing of psalms, but, for this reviewer, blots his copybook by deprecating, with no solid scriptural support, 'a legalistic insistence on exclusive psalmody' (p.48), which he condemns with faint praise as 'a most venerable sort of hyperconservatism' (p.163). His exposition of the regulative principle, at the heart of Reformation theology, should have been more specific and central than it is.

In the final chapter, 'Tradition and Practice', the writer urges us to keep us in contact with our roots and his conclusion is noteworthy: 'The greatest single contribution that the Reformed liturgical heritage can make to contemporary...Protestantism is its sense of the majesty and sovereignty of God, its sense of reverence and simple dignity, its conviction that worship must above all serve the praise of God...In our evangelistic zeal we are looking for programs that will attract people...It is the story of the wedding of Cana all over again, but with this difference. At the crucial moment when the wine failed, we took matters into our own hands and used those five stone jars to mix up a batch of Kool-Aid instead...How can we possibly minister to those who thirst for the real thing?... "Do whatever he tells you" (John 2:5). The servants did just that, and the water was turned to wine, wine rich and mellow beyond anything they had ever tasted before' (p.176).

Edward Donnelly

Dominion and Dynasty: A Biblical Theology of the Hebrew Bible, Stephen G. Dempster, Apollos, 2004, pbk., 267 pp., £12.99.

It is a delight to review the work of an old Seminary friend (now Professor of Religious Studies at Atlantic Baptist University, New Brunswick, Canada), especially one who shares a passionate interest in Old Testament Biblical Theology. This book is written in a very readable style and he handles a mass of material with a very sure and deft touch and the content is fresh and very stimulating. This is a study of the Old Testament in its final canonical form as *Tanakh*, a structure which he says gives a 'wide-angle lens' through which its contents (or storyline) can be viewed. As he says, generations of believers have, on the one hand, believed in the unity of the Old Testament, but, on the other, have often lost sight of the overall message (the forest) because of all the little texts (the trees). Then, in our post-modern world today, many are asking: is the Old Testament a unified 'text' or merely an eclectic collection, or anthology, of 'texts' without a storyline, coherence or unity?

In his opening chapter, where he interacts with modern scholarship, he sets out to establish the unity of the Old Testament, skilfully outlining the external and internal evidence, before showing that structural and conceptual unity is found within a comprehensive narrative framework which is a story of 'dominion and dynasty'. The 'engine that drives these themes forward is that of the relationship between the Creator and his human creatures on the earth. He creates them like himself for a relationship with them and their main task is to exercise lordship over the earth ... the relationship fails at the beginning ... the rest of the story recounts the restoration of the relationship through the twin themes of dominion and dynasty', as we move on from Adam to David to a coming 'Son of David' and his kingdom (p.49). The structure that carries the storyline is *Tanakh*. First the storyline is carried through the Torah and the Former Prophets. There is then a digression in the Latter Prophets and the first part of the Writings for extended poetic commentary, before the storyline is again resumed in the latter part of the Writings (i.e. from Daniel to Chronicles).

So much for the central unifying theme and structure. We could no doubt quibble over points of detail. The documents of the Hebrew canon could no doubt be organised somewhat differently. The present reviewer would prefer a unifying theme that gave more prominence to covenant as an organizing principle. However it is when the writer puts flesh on the bones of the structure he espouses that the book really comes into its own with many fresh and stimulating insights that are tremendously helpful. He closes with a chapter that touches on some of the links that tie the Old and New Testaments together (perhaps this could have been longer?). All in all this is a very readable and profitable book that is highly recommended.

Norris Wilson

The Intellectual Origins of the European Reformation, Alister E. McGrath, Blackwell Publishing, Second Edition, 2004, pbk., 289 pp., £16.99.

This is an updating of what has become a standard study of the intellectual factors which contributed to the development of both the Lutheran and the Reformed strands of the Reformation. McGrath begins by setting out in Part 1 the intellectual context of the Reformation, particularly late medieval religious thought, humanism and late medieval theology. He stresses the diversity of each of these factors, rejecting the oversimplifications which have come to be part of Reformation historiography on both Protestant and Roman Catholic sides. The intellectual movements usually designated "Humanism" and "Scholasticism" manifest considerable diversity and resist concise definition. Of great significance is the evident powerlessness of the ecclesiastical authorities in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries to enforce doctrinal conformity, which allowed new theological ideas to take root.

In Part 2 McGrath examines issues related to the sources and methods of Reformation theologising, with a particular focus on Scripture. Questions of translation, text, the place of tradition, and biblical interpretation are given exhaustive treatment, along with the role given by the Reformers to the testimony of the Church Fathers, especially Augustine. The differences between Lutheran and Reformed perspectives are again brought out clearly.

The final chapter summarises McGrath's conclusions. He argues that the "Reformation" was in fact the coming together of a number of initially unrelated reforming movements with quite distinct agendas and outlooks, with the Lutheran stream engaging mainly with Scholasticism and the Reformed stream engaging mainly with Humanism. There is, in McGrath's opinion, no single "cause" of the Reformation, but rather a range of intellectual trends which made different contributions to different elements of the Reformation. The book leaves the reader with a much stronger sense of the Reformation's diversity than of its unity. On what grounds may we speak of "the Reformation"? At this point McGrath raises more questions than he answers. It must also be kept in mind that McGrath is working within the conventions of university scholarship and so gives no attention to the role of supernatural factors, in particular the work of the Holy Spirit, in the development of the Reformation. A full picture of the origins of the movement could not omit this dimension.

This is a book for scholars, with much closely-reasoned argument, constantly interacting with original sources. The bibliography is very extensive, running to eighteen pages, with the majority of items in foreign languages such as German, Latin, French and Italian. Only those with access to the major research libraries of the world will be able to check McGrath's citations. It is nevertheless a significant study for those with a serious interest in Reformation thought.

The Resurrection of the Son of God, N. T. Wright, SPCK, 2003, pbk., 817 pp., £35.

A number of years ago the bishop of Durham, David Jenkins, courted controversy by denying the bodily resurrection of Jesus. How ironical that the present Bishop, Tom Wright, has written a massive, scholarly defence of the bodily resurrection of Jesus which serves to show how poorly informed and unscholarly Jenkins was. Although the book forms part of Wright's on-going publication project *Christian Origins and the Question of God*, it can be read as a stand-alone volume. Whilst we may have important questions regarding Wright's view as expressed in earlier volumes in the series, this book should be judged on its own merits.

Wright begins by surveying some of the main objections which modern scholars have raised against belief in bodily resurrection. Chief among these are the claims of historians (and others) that we have no real access to 'what actually happened' in the past, that there are no analogies to the resurrection of Jesus and that there is no real evidence for his resurrection. Scholars often 'explain' the resurrection as a way of describing Jesus' present exalted status, or his 'perceived presence' in the Church now, or in some other symbolical way. With great care and copious references to original sources, Wright addresses these problems and objections, and demonstrates how unfounded they actually are. In so doing he disagrees at many points with what may be considered the scholarly consensus, always graciously, yet often with devastating force.

The book consists of a comprehensive study of ideas of resurrection in ancient paganism, the Old Testament, Post-Biblical Judaism, Paul's writings, the rest of the New Testament (especially the Easter narratives) and the Early Church. He shows, for example, that there is nothing in paganism analogous to bodily resurrection, in spite of the claims of some scholars that the roots of the idea are pagan. The clear hope of resurrection is demonstrated to have arisen late in the OT period, although more might have been made by Wright of some earlier OT texts. Most significantly, he links belief in bodily resurrection with belief in the sovereignty of God whose purposes are not frustrated by death. The section on Post-Biblical Judaism, an area with which few readers of this journal will be familiar, provides many fascinating insights into the diversity of views current within Second-Temple Judaism. The clear disagreement between Sadducees and Pharisees was but a part of the ferment of ideas in Jewish communities of the period. It emerges clearly that for a first-century Jew, as all the apostles were, belief in bodily resurrection was a significant option.

Wright's study of the New Testament material, beginning with Paul, demonstrates that Christians' sense of who they were and who Jesus was

depended on their belief that Jesus had been raised bodily from the dead. Wright correctly treats the Gospels as historical sources in their own right, not as mere reflections of the later beliefs of the Church (as many scholars wrongly do). In Wright's vivid words, 'They are not the leaves on the branches of early Christianity. They look very like the trunk from which the branches themselves sprang...' It is clear that the only option for Christians was belief in the bodily resurrection of Jesus. That, and that alone, was what they meant by 'resurrection'. The final chapters of the book draw out some of the implications of these findings for issues of history and belief.

Wright's erudition in so many fields of study is truly impressive. He appears to be familiar with every significant text on life after death from Plato to Origen and beyond, yet his writing is remarkable for its clarity. It must be remembered that he is working within the world of academic scholarship and there are positions he holds on various issues that will not be acceptable to conservative evangelicals. Nevertheless, when allowance is made for this, we recognise that here is a study of great significance for the defence of the biblical doctrine of bodily resurrection, and one which will serve to strengthen commitment to this keystone of the Faith.

David McKay

BOOK NOTICES

From Paul to Valentinus, Peter Lampe, T. and T. Clark International, 2003, hbk., 525 pp, £35.00.

In a tour de force of multi-disciplinary scholarship, Peter Lampe, Professor of New Testament at the University of Heidelberg, uses data from archaeology, epigraphy, ancient records, the New Testament and church history to construct a composite socio-historical picture of the Christians of Rome in the first two centuries AD. The church which he portrays is largely immigrant and lower class, existing in house-fellowships in the poorer quarters of the city. Lampe casts fascinating new light on the life-situations of these early believers, but his book is a demanding read and the detail occasionally overwhelming. Magisterial in scope, this revision and English translation of a work first published in 1987 is emphatically a volume for the specialist or researcher.

Edward Donnelly

Gnosis. An Introduction, Christoph Marksches, T. and T. Clark, 2003, pbk., 160 pp., £14.99.

The subject of "Gnosticism" in the early centuries AD is both fascinating and complex. The sources are fragmentary, with much of the information supplied by opponents, and the resulting picture often confused. The question of the impact of "Gnostic" ideas on the New Testament has been highly controversial and some elements of the New Age Movement have drawn on Gnostic imagery and mythology. A clear, scholarly, yet introductory, study of the subject is needed, and such a need has been well met by Christoph Marksches, Professor of Historical Theology at the University of Heidelberg. In the first chapter he defines what he understands by the term "gnosis", which he prefers to the term "Gnosticism" that assumes the existence of an organised movement from an early date. In succeeding chapters he examines the sources (both sympathetic and critical), the early forms of gnosis in the ancient world, the great systems of gnosis, such as Valentinianism, leading to the culmination of the movement in the Manichaeism which so influenced the young Augustine. Among his significant conclusions is the assertion that the New Testament shows no evidence of the influence of gnosis. This is a useful and accessible introduction to an important collection of ideas which continue to exercise influence.

Old Testament Ethics for the People of God, Christopher J. H. Wright, IVP, 2004, hbk., 520 pp., £19.99.

This beautifully produced volume brings together revised and updated editions of two of Christopher Wright's major contributions to the study of Old Testament ethics: *Living as the People of God* (1983) and *Walking in the Ways of the Lord* (1995). Wright begins with a structure for OT ethics, considering in turn the theological, the social and the economic angles. He then addresses a wide range of particular themes in OT ethics. These include ecology, economics, the land, politics, justice and righteousness, law and the legal system, culture and the family, and the individual. The final section surveys historical approaches to OT ethics and also contemporary scholarship in this field, concluding with a consideration of hermeneutics and authority in OT ethics. An appendix entitled "What about the Canaanites?" is a significant study of an issue which troubles many people, and for some provides an excuse for rejecting the OT as a source for ethics. When first published, the original works were ground-breaking and have exercised a powerful influence on the development of the study of OT ethics. This revised version is essential reading for anyone interested in coming to grips with the contribution of the OT to Christian ethics and Christian living.

To Know and Love God. Method for Theology, David K. Clark, Crossway Books, 2003, pbk., 464pp., \$35.

The fruit of ten years' preparation, this new book by David Clark, Professor of Theology at Bethel College, St. Paul, Minnesota, provides a comprehensive survey of theological method from an evangelical perspective which builds on the unique and absolute authority of Scripture. Clark deals with issues such as the authority of Scripture, contextualisation, perspectivalism and foundationalism, theology as an academic discipline, theology and science, Christian theology and world religions, and the nature of truth. At the heart of the book is Clark's contention that the goal of theology must be the cultivation and embodying of godly wisdom in daily life. Rightly understood, theology can never be abstract or purely theoretical. Clark interacts with a vast range of thinkers, including the most recent theorists, and provides biblically based responses to the great challenges faced by theology in the twenty-first century. To work through this book will provide aspiring theologians with a thorough grounding in the main issues involved in formulating a theology that is shaped by the Word of God and which is in turn to shape the people of God.

An Introduction to the Theology of Religions. Biblical, Historical and Contemporary Perspectives, Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, IVP(USA), 2003, pbk., 372 pp., \$29.

Theology and the Religious. A Dialogue, Viggo Mortensen (ed.), William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003, pbk., 481pp., £24.99.

The study of world religions and the subject of inter-religious dialogue have given rise to a multitude of publications in recent years. These two books provide very different approaches.

Kärkkäinen's work is a textbook designed to introduce the main contributors to the study of religions from a professedly Christian viewpoint. After sections on biblical perspectives and on historical developments, the bulk of the study examines the 'current scene'. Six chapters consider 'ecclesiastical approaches', covering Roman Catholic, Anglican/Episcopalian, Mainline Protestant, Free Church, Evangelical and Ecumenical approaches. The following section considers in detail 'theologian's interpretations'. These are divided into several categories: Ecclesiocentrism (Early Approaches), Christocentrism (Roman Catholic, Mainline Protestant and Evangelical versions), Theocentrism and Ecclesiocentrism (Contemporary Evangelical Approaches). All the important contributors are considered, including Barth, Rahner, Tillich, Hick, Panikkar, Netland and Ramachandra. The author's method is to present a faithful 'neutral' exposition of each viewpoint, on the basis of which the reader can come to his own conclusions. Within those limits, this is a valuable survey of significant contributions to a subject which provides some of the greatest challenges to the contemporary Church.

The volume edited by Mortensen brings together thirty-eight papers presented at a conference held in Denmark in 2002, examining issues of religious diversity and inter-religious dialogue. The first section considers 'multiculturalism and multireligiosity', with general papers and a number of specific case studies. The second section examines inter-religious dialogue with regard to both principles and practice. The final section deals with the theology of religions from a considerable range of viewpoints. Contributions are drawn from, among others, Christianity, Islam, Judaism and New Age thought, and the writers too are international in origin. Perhaps the chief impression left by the book is one of the cacophony of voices in this field, out of which no clear consensus could possibly emerge. Given the growing emphasis on multiculturalism and inter-faith activities in western societies, the issues discussed here are of great importance, but this particular collection requires readers to have some previous familiarity with the subject.

Jonathan Edwards, Philosophical Theologian, Paul Helm and Oliver Crisp (eds.), Ashgate, 2003, 165pp., hbk., £40, pbk., £15.99.

Published to mark the tercentenary of the birth of Jonathan Edwards, this collection of essays considers various aspects of the theology and philosophy of one of the greatest Reformed theologians. The list of contributors includes a number of the most eminent experts on Edwards, including Stephen Holmes, Amy Plantinga Pauw, Gerald McDermott and Michael McClymond. Paul Helm, who also contributes a paper, is regarded as one of the pre-eminent Christian philosophers in the world today. Topics covered include hell (two papers), free will, personal identity, Edwards' 'occasionalism', virtue ethics, ontology, divine simplicity, other religions and salvation as 'divinization'. The massive intellect of Edwards made significant contributions to a range of problems, theological and philosophical, and this tribute reflects something of the richness of his thought. The contributors are by no means at one in every interpretation of Edwards' views, and their disagreements are also stimulating. For those with some knowledge of philosophy, this collection offers some profound insights into the mind of a great Christian thinker.

Proclaiming the Incomprehensible God. Calvin's Teaching on Job, Derek Thomas, Mentor, 2004, hbk., 416 pp., £16.99.

The publication of Derek Thomas' doctoral research on Calvin's sermons on the Book of Job provides a valuable resource in relation to both the Genevan Reformer and a difficult OT book. At the heart of Calvin's exposition is the fact of the incomprehensibility (but not the unpredictability) of God, with which Job himself struggled in the course of his testing. Thomas examines Calvin's work not only in a scholarly way, but also in a spirit that will promote the preaching of this neglected book of Scripture. This is of course an academic study, and much of the space is taken up with copious quotations from Calvin, many of them in French or Latin, or from early English translations. It therefore makes demanding reading, but the effort is well worthwhile. Calvin had a very high view of Scripture, which made him a careful exegete who took every part of the biblical text seriously. His preaching of a book which has so much to say to the people of God as they endure trials is most valuable, and in Derek Thomas we have an able guide to Calvin's work.

The Dort Study Bible. An English translation of the Annotations to the Dutch Staten Bijbel of 1637 in accordance with a decree of the Synod of Dort 1618-1619. 1. Genesis-Exodus, translated by Theodore Haak, edited by Roelof A. Janssen, Inheritance Publications, 2003, hbk., 351 pp., \$18.90.

This is the first volume in the projected republication of one of the fruits

of the famous Synod of Dort. The *Annotations* to the translation of the Bible authorised by the Synod consist mainly of textual notes, together with brief explanations of particular words and alternative translations, and some brief theological comments. They are therefore not in any sense an extended commentary, nor indeed do even they provide as much help in understanding the text as some modern 'study Bibles'. They are therefore of limited usefulness to preachers and expositors, being more of historical value in relation to seventeenth century Dutch Reformed thought. This is a revised version of the translation produced by Theodore Haak in 1637 on the instructions of the Synod, an action indicative of the international outlook of the members at the Synod. The series will mainly be a resource for theological libraries and specialist scholars.

Jesus Now and Then, Richard A. Burridge and Graham Gould, SPCK, 2004, pbk., 215 pp., £9.99.

Christology in Cultural Perspective. Marking out the Horizons, Colin Greene, Paternoster Press, 2003, pbk., 434 pp., £19.99.

These two books provide different ways into the contemporary study of Christology.

Jesus Now and Then aims to provide for theological students and others interested in the subject an introduction to the ways in which traditional beliefs about Jesus have been viewed since the time of the Enlightenment. Burridge and Gould begin with the new Testament, considering in turn scholarly views of the Historical Jesus, Jesus in the gospels, Jesus and Paul, and New Testament Views of Jesus. They next turn to the Early Church and examine the Early Church and the Teaching of Jesus, Jesus in Early Christian Worship, Jesus-Divine and Human, and conclude with modern understandings of Jesus, both liberal and conservative. The book is clearly written, with summaries and basic facts set out in boxes within the text to aid comprehension. For those who wish, or need, to understand what has been said about Christology by scholars in recent times, from a very wide range of starting points, this is a useful place to start.

Christology in Cultural Perspective is a rather different book, wide-ranging, demanding, and stimulating. Greene, who is Head of Theology and Public Policy for the British and Foreign Bible Society, seeks to bring Christology into dialogue with the paradigms that have shaped modern and postmodern thinking. After surveying the ways in which Christology has

traditionally been constructed, Greene turns to examine some of the ways in which Christology impacts on the cultural paradigms that produced 'modernity'. These include the Enlightenment, religious experience, and three 'myths': the myths of progress, transcendentalism and emancipation. Thinkers addressed here include Schleiermacher, Tillich and Rahner, together with the Feminist perspective on theology. Greene then examines the cultural paradigms that have contributed to the rise of 'postmodernity', beginning with the end of the Enlightenment and going on to consider the task of Christology in the fluidity and confusion that characterise postmodernity. Greene's positive proposals for the way ahead focus on eschatology and apocalyptic. Throughout the book he draws on an impressive range of disciplines, and provides a provocative study of a vital subject. Twenty-five pages of bibliography testify to the breadth of Greene's reading, and challenge those who would respond to his proposals.

David McKay