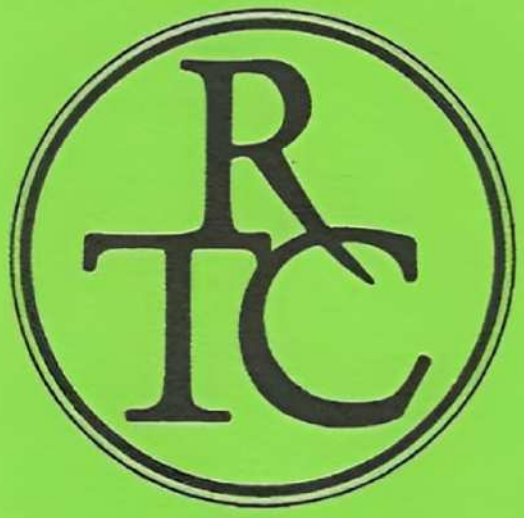

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Rev. Prof. Frederick S. Leahy

1922-2006

The Editors of the Reformed Theological Journal record with sorrow the death on 4th. January, 2006, of Prof. Frederick Leahy, at the age of 83. As Professor of Systematic Theology, Ethics and Apologetics, and subsequently as Principal of the Reformed Theological College, he exercised a profound influence on the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland and in the wider Christian community. He was instrumental in the founding of this journal and contributed many valuable articles over the past twenty years. It is fitting that this issue carries an article from his pen, completed shortly before his death. We give thanks to God for his long and fruitful ministry.

Revelation 14:13

THE REFORMED VIEW OF THE DIACONATE

Frederick S. Leahy

The late Frederick Leahy was Principal of the Reformed Theological College, Belfast, and Professor of Systematic Theology, Ethics and Apologetics. He was also pastor of several Reformed Presbyterian congregations.

The word "Reformed", when capitalized, refers to a theology and to churches that emanated from the Swiss Reformation, especially Geneva, and that spread into France, the Low Countries, and across the channel to the British Isles from where they reached the New World through Puritan and Presbyterian influence. In this context the term "Reformed" is used in distinction to "Lutheran".

In the sixteenth century, and well before that, poverty was widespread in Europe and begging was common. Roman Catholics were taught to regard giving to beggars as meritorious. The Reformers saw begging as shameful and to be eliminated, even outlawed. There had, however, to be an organizational response to the needs of the poor and the sick. This response found expression through the *Bourse Française,* a fund for the poor founded when Geneva accepted the Protestant Reformation (1536). It ministered initially to French refugees and it existed to help those who came to Geneva for religious reasons, i.e., to escape from persecution. Refugees from other countries followed the French example. There was an Italian *Bourse,* and Germans had their *Bourse allemande.* Many of these refugees were prosperous merchants who gave valuable support to the *Bourse.* During this period, Geneva, a city of around 10,000 inhabitants, more than doubled in size. Ole Peter Grell states that

> the whole-hearted commitment to Calvinism of the merchant elite is underlined by the prominent role it played, serving as elders and deacons, within Reformed churches which the refugee communities established in nearly all places where they settled[1].

The *Bourse Française* was originally controlled by the Council of Geneva. Gradually Calvin brought it within the control of the church. Calvin saw four offices within the church: pastors, elders, deacons and doctors (teachers). He placed the *Bourse Française* within this ecclesiastical structure. Ministers were responsible for preaching, elders for discipline, deacons for managing money and helping the needy, and doctors for teaching. Jeannine

Olson comments that

> the ideas of Calvin combined with practical needs to produce a unique institution that blended pragmatism, social theory, and theology. It was Calvin's vision about the duties of Christians toward the less fortunate and the role of deacons in the church that provided the conceptual framework within which the Bourse Française grew.[2].

By the mid-nineteenth century, the *Bourse Française* was fully merged with the city hospital. The last meeting of the deacons of the *Bourse* took place on 14th September 1849.

The Warrant for this Office

From Apostolic times, the office of deacon was established in the Church. In 1 Timothy 3:8-13,[3]. the qualifications of deacons follows those for elders; and in Philippians 1:1 we read of deacons. The word translated "deacon" *(diakonos)* means "servant". Our Lord applied the term to himself: "the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve" (*diakoneo,* Matthew 20:28, cf. Romans 15:8). In the New Testament the term can refer to any service rendered to the Church, but in the light of 1Timothy 3, clearly there was the office of deacon.

The Genevan Reformers regarded the seven men chosen to minister to the needs of certain Hellenistic widows (Acts 6:1-6) as the first deacons and that view has been widely accepted ever since. The term "deacon" does not occur in that passage. On what grounds, then, can such a conclusion be reached? We read that the Apostles appointed elders in every church (Acts 14: 23), but there is no record of the appointment of deacons. When we compare the qualifications for deacons in 1 Timothy 3 with those of the 'seven' in Acts 6, it does seem reasonable to assume that the 'seven' were the first deacons or at least the forerunners of the diaconate.[4].

Most Reformed theologians regard the office of deacon as permanent, although some maintain that it was designed to deal with an emergency and is renewable on such occasions. The latter have Acts 6:1-6 in mind, and they see deacons in the same class as prophets and prophetesses. Again, it has been maintained that the *office* is permanent, but that the term of service for those appointed is limited. In a number of Reformed churches, especially those of Dutch origin, elders and deacons are appointed for a set period of time. Article 27 of the Synod of Dort's *Church Order* reads:

> The Elders and Deacons shall serve two years, and every year half their number shall retire and others shall be substituted, unless the circumstances and the profit of any church require otherwise.

In this connection, Calvin's comment on Acts 21:7-8 is significant:

> Furthermore, he saith, that when he [Paul] came to Caesarea, they lodged with Philip, whom he called an Evangelist, though he were one of the seven deacons, as we may see in the sixth chapter (Acts vi: 5). By this we may gather, that that deaconship was an office which continued but for a time; because it had not otherwise been lawful for Philip to forsake Jerusalem, and go to Caesarea.[5].

Here Calvin shows no awareness of the principle that the greater office includes the lesser. So the Apostle Peter, addressing elders, did so as 'a fellow elder' (1 Peter 5:1).

Calvin did see the *office* of deacon as permanent, and he saw two kinds of deacons:

> The case of the poor was entrusted to the deacons. However, two kinds are mentioned in the letter to the Romans: 'He that gives, let him do it with simplicity;. . . he that shows mercy with cheerfulness' [Rom.12:8]. Since it is certain that Paul is speaking of the public office of the church, there must have been two distinct grades. Unless my judgment deceives me, in this first clause he designates the deacons who distribute alms. But the second refers to those who had devoted themselves to the care of the poor and sick [1Tim.5:9-10]. Women could fill no other public office than to devote themselves to the care of the poor. If we accept this (as it must be accepted), there will be two kinds of deacons: one to serve the church in administering the affairs of the poor; the other, in caring for the poor themselves . . . Here, then, is the kind of deacons the apostolic church had, and which we, after their example, should have.[6]

Most Reformed scholars agree that Romans 12:8 does refer to deacons and that the diaconate is a permanent office in the church, having clear biblical warrant. In Scottish Presbyterianism, elders and deacons are appointed for life as there is nothing in such practice that conflicts with Scripture.

The Nature of this Office

In the Roman Catholic system the function of the deacon is liturgical and was the lowest rank in the hierarchy. That position remains largely unchanged. In Episcopalianism becoming a deacon is the first step to priesthood. The word "priest" comes from the Old English *preost,* meaning presbyter, and it was used in this sense in the Anglican Prayer Book. In many Baptist and Congregational churches, deacons act as elders, assisting in the distribution of the elements at the Lord's Supper.

Calvin reacted strongly to what he saw as Roman Catholic perversion of the diaconate, and replaced it by a concept which was the result of biblical exegesis. Elsie McKee observes that

> in the Reformation the deacons of Plilippians [1:1] and First Timothy [3:8-13] were usually seen through the new spectacles of Acts six as administrators of (ecclesiastical) benevolence.[7].

The diaconate was seen *primarily* as the official expression of the Church's compassion. The role of the deacons was so well known that it is not mentioned in 1Timothy 3, so that passage has been viewed through the glasses of Acts 6. Every Christian should show compassion, but the Genevan Reformers saw the diaconate as the Church's institution for what John Murray has termed 'a ministry of mercy to the poor and infirm'.[8]. It was seen to be the Church's duty as *Church,* and not optional.

It is clear that Calvin saw a diaconal role for women, albeit subordinate to and in support of men in that office. There were no deaconesses in Geneva, and Calvin called this a shame. Preaching on 1 Timothy 5:9-10, Calvin affirmed:

> When we read the order which is reported here by St. Paul, we ought to be very ashamed that the doctrine of the gospel is preached among us and yet we do not have any idea what is contained in this passage, with regard to practice. For where today are the widows who have this honourable office which we have mentioned above? We see then that the Word of God does not have such vigour in us as could be hoped, inasmuch as we have the teaching about it but the practice must be sought far and wide. The fact that we do not have such an organization St. Paul sets here ought to teach us to lower our eyes, recognizing that it is so much evil in us for which with good reason we can be blamed, and for which the papists can reproach us.[9]

However, there were *de facto* deaconesses in Geneva, mature women, widows, usually over sixty, in keeping with 1Timothy 5:9. They cared for orphans supported by the *Bourse,* and were fully involved in the diaconal outreach of Calvin's Geneva. That was an eminently practical ministry in which women must have had an important role. Jeannine Olson describes that ministry:

> According to need, the deacons provided a weekly handout, clothes, firewood, a Bible, or Psalter, a place to stay, a mattress, bedclothes, and occasionally an allotment of grain. They apparently did not provide ready-made bread until late in the seventeenth century when the deacons arranged with the city hospital to use their ovens. Besides meeting their needs of daily subsistence, the *Bourse* also met extremities by providing medical care for the sick, hospitalisation, wet nurses for infants, and foster homes for older orphans. To teach people to read and provide them with a trade, the deacons paid school and apprenticeship fees.[10].

Practical Christianity! Loving one's neighbour as oneself. The corporate expression of the Church's love. The Genevan Reformers left a model for the diaconate which they firmly regarded as biblical. Reformed churches of Dutch

origin excel in their diaconal awareness. Scottish Presbyterianism has, in a measure, lagged behind. In some branches of Presbyterianism the diaconate virtually ceased to exist, being replaced by committees. In some Presbyterian circles today a serious effort is being made to restore this office that God has ordained for his Church.

In the light of Scripture, deacons do have the responsibility of handling money, paying the minister's salary, and maintaining church property, but that role, although important, is secondary to the ministry of compassion already noted. That ministry is not limited to church members; it should extend to all who are in need resulting from war, famine or flood. Our Lord fed the hungry multitudes.

David McKay emphasizes the primary function of the diaconate:

> The office which deals particularly with the ministry of mercy is that of deacon...In many Reformed churches deacons, if they have not been replaced by boards or committees, have come to deal mostly with the finances and fabric of churches. The biblical focus of their work, however, is clearly to show practical love in the name of Christ's Church to those in need. An almost endless list of possible avenues of service could be drawn up, including giving financial advice or help, visiting the sick, none of these tasks being limited to helping those within the Church, since the ministry of mercy is part of the Church's missionary task. The deacons' qualifications indicate that spiritual counsel could well be part of the assistance they give.

McKay quotes Leonard Coppes who says:

> In a world swamped in misery and suffering one does not need to look far for someone oppressed by physical and material needs. Indeed how can there be clear separation between the spiritual and the non-spiritual? [11].

The Holders of this Office

We have seen the subordinate role granted to women in the sixteenth century Geneva and that there were no deaconesses. It is possible that there were deaconesses elsewhere in Switzerland, and this became more likely with the spread of Reformed churches. It is known that in the town of Wesel along the Rhine, the Reformed church had deaconesses elected to office. By the early seventeenth century, the practice of electing women to this office seems to have died out, but was revived in the nineteenth century in German-speaking areas and in the New World. Scholars like J.L. Thompson would argue that Calvin, in spite of his theory, was reticent to put all his theory with reference to women into practice. [12].

Calvin did see men and women equal in status, but differing in function; and he strongly maintained the headship of the man in home and church in

accordance with Scripture. Some liberals like to speak of what they term Calvin's "paulinism"! [13]. A crucial passage in deciding if women should be elected to serve as deacons is Romans 16:1-2, where Phoebe is termed "a servant (diakonon) of the church at Cenchreae". Was she a deaconess? Calvin speaks of her "office", stating that "she performed a most honourable and holy function in the church".[14]. In deciding the nature of Phoebe's service, much will depend on one's exegetical and theological stance on other passages. Frederic Godet translates "deaconess" here, and asks, almost in exasperation, why such "a rich and devoted woman", who had rendered such service, could not have borne "the title of deaconess?" [15]. As already noted, the word for deacon in the New Testament can refer to any service rendered to the Church. So John Murray says that "there is no warrant to point an office" in this case.[16]. W.S. Plumer takes a similar position, but Charles Hodge calls Phoebe a deaconess. [17]. Herman Ridderbos makes the significant comment:

> Even if Phoebe were not a deaconess in the 'official' sense of the word, there is in that fact, as we have repeatedly contended, no fundamental difference whatever from official appointment to the occupancy of such a ministry in the church.

Ridderbos adds in a footnote:

> The text [i.e. Rom.16:1-2] does not in our view permit firm conclusions...There is also a difference of opinion whether in 1Tim.3:11ff. there is mention of the wives of deacons or of deaconesses. The former is the more probable.[18].

There we have wise and scholarly caution. In Scottish Presbyterianism, in its conservative denominations, only men have been elected to serve on what is termed "the Deacons' court". That position was held in Dutch Reformed churches worldwide, and would still be true of conservative denominations. However, Feminist theology has undermined this position in a number of churches. The advocates of a male diaconate would argue that it is a sounder method to view the case of Phoebe in the light of 1Timothy 3:8-13 where men, as in the case of elders, are mentioned, and also in view of Acts 6 where seven men were chosen, rather than the other way round – making the case of Phoebe determinative. Some would use counter-arguments based on cultural changes. That is a risky way to handle Scripture. There are conservative churches that on exegetical grounds do appoint deaconesses.

Because God's Word forbids women to hold the teaching office in the Church (1Timothy 2:12) - and no amount of cultural change can invalidate the reason given for that prohibition - it does not follow that there is not an important role for women in the Church. In Matthew 27:55 we read of "many women" who "ministered" to the Saviour, and Paul refers to "women who have

laboured side by side with me in the gospel." (Philippians 4:3), and to Priscilla a "fellow worker in Christ Jesus" (Romans 16:3).

Conservative Reformed churches need to consider carefully how they use the talents of godly women. This can be done without appointment to any office. Too often there is a tendency to disregard the opinions of women, forgetting that frequently some of the finest minds in the congregation are those of women. Where would our society be without such women? The church that fails to relate to them, does so to its own loss, leaving the door open for feminist theology with its demand for the ordination of women, as recent church history has shown. Every Dorcas, Priscilla and Phoebe is a gift from God to his Church: may such gifts be used to the full.

Whatever position is taken on the occupants of the office of deacon, the crucial factor is its function as the compassionate arm of Christ's Church. What he has ordained we have no right to minimize or set aside. If deacons only perform the duties of a committee, merely attending to church finances and property, they fall far short of the biblical standards for which the Reformers contended.

Today in many countries, the State meets a range of personal and social needs, but there are needs that the State cannot meet. The lonely need to be visited, students from overseas welcomed, and helped to find accommodation, help with an old person's garden is needed, reading a book once a week to a blind person, helping with shopping, driving the elderly to and from church, giving financial advice when requested: not haphazardly, but all under diaconal supervision. The Welfare State does not make the diaconate in the least redundant. In this cold, self-centred world, the office of deacon still has a role of love and compassion to fulfil. Without the diaconate the Church would have lost one of her hands. Calvin did not exaggerate when he stated that "the deacons who are chosen should be as the hands of God." [19]. That is true because the diaconate is a biblical institution of God.

Notes

1. "Merchants and ministers: the foundation of international Calvinism", in *Calvinism in Europe, 1540-1620*, Andrew Pettegree, Alastair Duke and Gillian Lewis (editors), (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p.257.
2. Jeannine Olson, *Calvin and Social Welfare* (London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1989), p.29.
3. Biblical quotations in the main text of this article are from the English Standard Version.
4. A number of passages in the Epistles are said to have reference to the diaconate: Romans 12:8; 16:1; 1Timothy 3:8-13; 5: 3-10; Philippians1:1.
5. John Calvin, *Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), vol.2, p.270.
6. John Calvin, *Institues of the Christian Religion*, translated by Ford Lewis Battles, (London:

S.C.M. Press, 1960), 4. 3. 9.

7. Elsie McKee, *John Calvin on the Diaconate and Liturgical Almsgiving* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1984), p.171.
8. John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), Vol.2, p.124.
9. Translation by Elsie McKee. See Calvin's sermon in *John Calvin's Sermons on Timothy and Titus*, Facsimile of 1579 edition, (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1983), p.479.
10. Op. cit., p.179.
11. David McKay, *The Bond of Love* (Fearn: Christian Focus Publications, 2001), p.227.
12. J.L. Thompson, *Calvin and the Daughters of Sarah* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1992), chapters 5 and 6.
13. For example, J.L.Thompson, op.cit., p.24.
14. John Calvin, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), p.542.
15. Frederic Godet, *Commentary on Romans* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1977), p.488.
16. Op. cit., p.226.
17. W.S. Plumer, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (London: Religious Tract Society, n.d.), p.461.
18. Herman Ridderbos, Paul: *An outline of His Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), p.461.
19. Quoted by Elsie McKee, op. cit., p.184.

MARTIN BUCER ON THE KINGDOM OF CHRIST

Hugh J. Blair

Dr. Hugh Blair is a retired minister of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland who pastored congregations in both Scotland and Ireland. He was also for many years Professor of Old Testament at the Reformed Theological College, Belfast.

The importance of Bucer

It is strange that history has been so slow to take account of the contribution of Martin Bucer to the Reformation, and that it is only in comparatively recent years that he is beginning to emerge from the shadows. Stranger still is the fact that, though a great part of his work had a direct reference to the situation in England, so many years passed before any of his writings were translated into English. It seems scarcely credible that his *De Regno Christi (The Kingdom of Christ)*, in particular, dedicated to King Edward VI, and directed to the 'solid restitution' of the Kingdom of God in England, that is, the reorganisation; of the public and national life in obedience to the Gospel of Christ,[1]. was not translated into English until 1969, by Wilhelm Pauck.[2]. This persistent English neglect of Bucer's work – apart from a few studies, outstanding among which are Constantin Hopf's *Martin Bucer and the English Reformation* (Oxford, 1946), and a most important section in T. F. Torrance's *Kingdom and Church* (Edinburgh, 1956), would justify the study of *De Regno Christi* which follows. Additional impetus is given by the fact that, to quote Dr. Hopf, 'the *De Regno Christi* is Bucer's final word, summing up all his life's work for the advancement of the Reformation',[3]. and also by the undoubted influence of Bucer on Calvin's view of election, the Kingdom of Christ, the ministry of the Church, and the place and function of discipline.

Bucer's influence on Calvin has been much debated. All that is certain is that it was Bucer, who, like Farel, laid hands on Calvin and compelled him to abandon all hope of living as a private individual. Calvin writes in the autobiographical preface to his *Commentary on the Psalms*,

> I decided to live quietly as a private individual. But that most distinguished minister of Christ, Martin Bucer, dragged me back again to a new post with the same curse which Farel had used against me. Fortified by the example of Jonah which he had set before me, I continued the work of teaching. And although I always consistently avoided public notice, somehow I was dragged to the imperial assemblies.[4].

It was almost certainly Bucer who mediated to Calvin the thinking of the German Reformers, as Calvin knew no German. But it would be unwise to be dogmatic about who influenced whom, for all the Reformers, on the Continent and in England, were working on common problems and exercised a reciprocal influence, sometimes directly, often indirectly, on one another. For our present study the most important significance of Bucer's work was that it gives a direct challenge to the view that the doctrine of the Kingship of Christ was not a fundamental Reformation doctrine. This view has been expressed, for example, by W. A. Visser 't Hooft in his book *The Kingship of Christ.* He writes,

> Protestantism stands in a theological tradition in which the priestly and prophet ministries of Christ have been strongly worked out but in which the kingly office has been obscured. The Reformers are more reserved in their teaching concerning the Kingship of Christ than they are about his other offices.[5].

The doctrine of the Kingship of Christ can be shown to be clearly found in the teachings of Luther and Calvin, but Bucer is of outstanding significance because he specifically gathered together Reformed doctrine under the concept of the Kingdom of Christ. It should be noted that he speaks consistently of the *restoration* of Christ's Kingdom. He sets out his aim as being to show

> how salutary and necessary it is...that Christ's Kingdom may as fully as possible be accepted and hold sway over us[6].

and in the conclusion of his work he declares that he has given an account

> of the ways and means by which, as we are taught by the eternal and only salutary Word of God, Christian kings and princes, and all governors both can and should firmly restore for their peoples the blessed Kingdom of the Son of God our only Redeemer...[7].

Bucer's work is divided into two sections: Book One consists of an analysis of the idea of the Kingdom of Christ and the chief functions of the Church, while Book Two, of a more practical character, contains Bucer's suggestions for establishing the kingdom in England.

Definition of the Kingdom of Christ

Bucer begins with a consideration of the Biblical terms for the Kingdom – the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ, his beloved Son, and the Kingdom of Heaven. The word kingdom is applied to

> the administration of a people or state by which the one person who excels the others in wisdom and every virtue *[a piece of judicious flattery of Edward VI?]*

> so arranges and obtains whatever is for the well-being of the citizens that nothing at all is lacking to them, in such a way that from earliest childhood everyone is formed and led toward a responsible and happy way of life.[8].

The kingdom of God exhibits these qualities in perfection and uniquely, since God alone is good, wise and powerful.

Bucer proceeds further to define the nature of the Kingdom of Christ by showing what the Kingdom of Christ and the kingdoms of the world have in common; and what are the special marks of the Kingdom of Christ. Summing up his argument he writes,

> If these examples are religiously considered and the texts alluded to in the Scripture diligently pondered, it will easily be seen what the Kingdom of Christ has in common with the kingdoms of the world, and what is proper to the Kingdom of Christ, and how they are conjoined and how they should serve each other in mutual subordination.[9].

Bucer gives seven points of comparison and contrast, and in most, if not all, the contrast is more significant than the comparison.

> The first point of similarity between the kingdoms of the world and the Kingdom of Christ is that one person exercises the supreme power of government. . . . Secondly, the governance of the kingdoms of the world and of Christ have this in common, that the kings of this world also ought to establish and promote the means of making their citizens devout and righteous...[10].

Our heavenly King, Jesus Christ, is, according to his promise, with us everywhere and every day. He himself sees, attends to, and accomplishes whatever pertains to the salvation of his own. But Bucer is very much aware that the power of kings to change the hearts of sinful men is limited, and that something more is needed and is available.

> Although earthly kings extend all their concern in this direction and omit nothing pertinent to this matter, nevertheless they themselves are not able to purge the hearts of men of their innate impiety and unrighteousness nor to endow them with piety and righteousness. They are able to cut down from the field of the Lord, from the people entrusted to them, the useless trees, briars and thorns. They are able to prune and nourish the field, that is, the curable element of the people, with good laws, and to some extent to prepare them for the reception of the Word of God....But it cannot be expected that the field will bear the fruit of piety and righteousness until Christ our King has breathed his own increase upon the seed of the gospel scattered there (I Cor. 3:7).[11].

Two essential points emerge here. One is Bucer's emphasis on the Kingdom of Christ as a spiritual kingdom, concerned primarily with the bringing to life of those who were dead in sins to the life of righteousness, by

the instrument of the Gospel. The other is his awareness of the limitations of the power to procure righteousness.

> Thirdly, it is common to the kingdoms of this world and to the Kingdom of Christ that they should tolerate the wicked while they lie hidden among the good; but when they have done their impious misdeeds openly, and will not change their ways when corrected, it is proper to remove them from the commonwealth...There is this difference, however, between the administration of the kingdoms of the world and the Kingdom of Christ, that the kings of the world use...various forms of execution "For they do not bear the sword in vain" (Romans 13:4). But in the Kingdom of Heaven and of Christ, those who have wandered from the way of salvation, if they are curable, are led back to it with the chains of repentance under the impulse of only the word and the Spirit.[12].

It is in this setting that we find a favourite word of Bucer's – 'Respublica' (community) – which he uses to refer both to the community which is the Church and the community which is the State, thought of in each case as a Christian society. Here, too, is emphasised the truth, which Bucer refers to again and again, that Christ rules only by his Word and Spirit:

> Fourthly, there is a similarity between the kingdoms of the world and of Christ, in that, as do the kings of the world, so also Christ our heavenly King wants his subjects to be received into and sealed for his Kingdom, to be gathered into his congregations, to come together in his name, and to be ruled by his ministries by means of certain covenants and sacraments of an external nature. Our King, however, cleanses his subjects from sins through his sacraments according to the hidden counsel of his eternal election, and he gives a new and eternal life beyond the power of earthly kings.[13].

This end will be accomplished by the appointment of ministers and pastors that through their ministry faith may be preserved among his elect, together with an eagerness for the heavenly life, and that it may grow day by day and be perfected.

When Bucer comes to the fifth point in his comparison of the kingdoms of the world and the Kingdom of Christ, he seems to intermingle the two kingdoms, giving to both of them the responsibility of seeing to it that no one should be in need. He starts with the heavenly Kingdom, but immediately goes on to the duty of the kings of the world:

> Fifthly, our heavenly King also attends to the details of providing and making abundantly available the necessities of life to his subjects, so that not a single one among his people shall be in need of these. For he knows what things they need...First of all, and this is also the duty of the kings of the world, he sets each of his citizens, directly from childhood, to encountering and learning the skills and functions for which he himself has fashioned and fitted each individual. And he has so distributed them that only in his Kingdom this end of civil government is achieved.[14].

At the end of the section Bucer brings both kingdoms together:

> The kings of the world ought...to establish and work out all these things for their subjects; but their full realization belongs properly to the rule of Christ which has the power to bring this about.
>
> Sixthly, the kingdoms of the world and of Christ have this in common, that they are perpetually at war both with evil men and evil spirits. It is proper to the kingdoms of the world to use even carnal weapons against evil men. But the Kingdom of Christ fights only with spiritual weapons against its enemies, carnal as well as spiritual. These are the weapons described in the tenth chapter of the second letter to the Corinthians (vs.3-6) and in the sixth chapter of Ephesians (vs.14-17).[15].
>
> Seventhly, there is this similarity between the kingdoms of the world and the Kingdom of Christ, that just as the kingdoms of the world are subordinated to the Kingdom of Christ, so also is the Kingdom of Christ in its own way subordinated to the kingdoms of this world.[16].

Just as Christ in the days of his flesh subjected himself to the powers to whom he himself had committed the power of the sword, so also must his people do, even when rulers are unjust. But, on the other hand, every true kingdom of the world must subject itself to the Kingdom of Christ.

> As the Kingdom of Christ subjects itself to the kingdom and powers of the world, so in turn every true kingdom of the world (I say kingdom, not tyranny) subjects itself to the Kingdom of Christ, and the kings themselves are among the first to do this...[17].

This insistence on a mutual subjection of the Kingdom of Christ and the kingdoms of the world is Bucer's distinctive contribution to the doctrine of the Kingship of Christ and the question of Church and State, and presupposes a state that will listen to the Word of God - the only weapon that the Church can use - proclaimed through the Church, whose task it is to call the state into obedience to Christ. T. F. Torrance in his *Kingdom and Church* gives an accurate summary of Bucer's thought here:

> The Regnum Christi in Butzer's theology constitutes the Communio Christiana, which, through the Word and Spirit, is visibly and actively realised on earth, and through obedience to the Church's preaching of the Word and daily witness also in the State. The relations of the Church and State are mutual. The Word of God is communicated to the State through the Church, and in obedience to that Word the State creates within the world a sphere of liberty, setting bounds to the kingdom of Satan, so that the life of the Church protected by the State may freely grow in obedience to God's Word and in the exercise of love, and so assume the character of a Respublica or Societas Christiana.[18].

In chapter III Bucer considers some more evident chapters of Holy Scripture concerning the Kingdom of Christ. They are taken from the prophet Isaiah and Bucer's exegesis of them all follows the same pattern. He will come back in chapter IV to passages elsewhere. It will be sufficient here to take two passages and Bucer's characteristic application of them to the Kingdom of Christ. One is from chapter 40: 'Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings; lift up your voice, fear not; say to the cities of Judah: "Behold your God"' (Isaiah 40: 9).

> Here that property of the Kingdom of Christ is commended to us by which every church of Christ ought so to be a bearer of the good news that in every congregation of the saints the word of the gospel will sound constantly...[19].

A second passage is Isaiah 60: 4-14 which Bucer says 'rather magnificently describes the supreme happiness and glory of the Church of Christ...by the multitude of the nations which were eager to flow from all parts of the world' into it.

> In this passage it is foretold by the prophet that Christ, our Lord and King, will effect all these things for the glory of his own name, in order that he may have a kingdom and a holy city on earth, ie, the Church, adorned with all piety and virtue...It must also be noted that the prophet attributes to the nations who will come to the Church the duty of announcing the praises of the Lord; for this is the proper and main task of every Christian man.[20].

In chapter IV Bucer deals with 'The Various Periods Of The Church', and begins with a good reason for doing so. The fact is that times change.

> There is a time when our King, to declare his heavenly might in the infirmity of his subjects and to illustrate their faith in him, permits Satan to stir up the entire world against them...There is likewise a happy time when our King provides for his subjects a surface calm and procures the favour of men, even under the rule of tyrants, as he did in the early Church, as Luke describes in Acts, the second, fourth, and fifth chapters.[21].

Bucer goes on from the Book of Acts to find an outstanding example of a happy time in the reigns of Constantine and the pious emperors who followed him, and pays tribute to all that they did for the Church.

> Truly in these periods the churches of Christ experienced that abundant kindness of the Lord toward themselves which the prophets had predicted.[22].

Bucer briefly summarises the centuries which followed – a most difficult time for the Church of Christ – by speaking of the oppression of the Church of Christ

by 'the Antichrists, the pseudobishops and clergy, following their head, the supreme Antichrist', and quotes with approval the stern criticism of them by Bernard of Clairvaux.

> [They] first horribly corrupted the teaching of the gospel with numerous harmful comments about the merits of the saints and those proper to each, and about the saving power of their ceremonies, things which are obviously impious and which they also conduct impiously. Furthermore, they present all this to the people of Christ in an alien tongue, and forbid the reading of the Holy Scripture.[23].

It should be noted that the quotations from Bernard of Clairvaux focus on the failure of the priesthood to set an example of piety and simplicity, Bucer has no comment to make here on Bernard's adherence to Roman dogma.

Coming to his own time, Bucer describes the present time of the Kingdom of Christ as yet fluctuating and uncertain. He asserts the need for the public preaching of repentance, for the correction of all the sins of all orders of people. There were demands that the ministers of the churches should give the sacrament of communion to anyone who asked, without any probing into his faith and life. Ministers were not lacking who preferred to do this rather than undertake the burden of listening to and admonishing sinners and undergo the odium of this ministry. In an editorial footnote Wilhelm Pauck suggests that this passage reflects Bucer's efforts and experiences as a reformer, particularly in Strassburg.

> In this city, he made repeated attempts to establish church discipline but he was never entirely successful, chiefly because the city council, though in favour of the Reformation, refused to accede to his demands for fear the evangelical preachers would become too powerful in their control of the people of the city.[24].

Bucer's own comment on the situation as a whole is, 'It has happened that in a great many places the entire doctrine of the Kingdom of Christ has been faithfully announced to the people, but I for one cannot say in what churches it has yet been firmly accepted and Christian discipline publicly constituted.'[25]. Bucer concludes his brief historical account of various periods of the church on a note of optimism and praise:

> From these things it can now be seen how varied the ways are by which the Lord treats his churches in this world. Meanwhile, however, there are no churches, or even private individuals, who, if they give themselves over completely to the Kingdom of Christ, will not perceive all the happiness which the prophets foretold, even in this life, in its fashion of the moment, in such a way that they cannot thank God enough, in joy and gladness.[26].

Concluding this chapter, Bucer reverts to his exegesis of Scripture passages supporting his interpretation of the Kingship of Christ.

One obvious example from Jeremiah may be taken as a sample: 'Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous branch, and he shall reign as king and administer his charge prudently and happily, and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.' (Jeremiah 23:5).

> The prophet testifies, first, that only Christ the Lord is truly righteous and justifies those who believe in him; secondly, that he alone is the only true King, and administers a true kingdom among his own subjects, and brings it about that among them all things are inaugurated and pursued prudently and happily and therefore rightly and in good order, ie, righteously.[27].

Turning to the Psalms, Bucer finds that the forty-fifth Psalm 'sings magnificently of the omnipotence, magnificence, and splendor of our King and his Kingdom, i.e., the Church.'[28].

Many passages are quoted from the New Testament, setting forth the same basic truths about the Kingdom of Christ, and Bucer gives a neat summary at the end of the chapter:

> Whoever considers devoutly the texts which we have here proposed will readily understand the nature and makeup of the Kingdom of Christ as well as its properties, and will see what must be sought and forsaken by those who wish this Kingdom of Christ to be firmly restored among them.[29].

The final paragraph of the chapter provides a bridge to the next chapter, which will deal with what the kingdom of Christ is, and what is necessary for its restoration.

> The Kingdom of our Saviour Jesus Christ is that administration and care of the eternal life of God's elect, by which this very Lord and King of Heaven by his doctrine and discipline, administered by suitable ministers chosen for this very purpose, gathers to himself his elect, those dispersed throughout the world who are his but whom he nonetheless wills to be subject to the powers of the world. He incorporates them into himself and his Church and so governs them in it that purged more fully day by day from sins, they live well and happily both here and in the time to come.[30].

He stresses that the means to be used are the Word and Sacraments, and then proceeds to indicate particular characteristics of the Kingdom of Christ.

> The first of these is that whatever is done in the churches should pertain to the ministry and contribute to the gaining of men's salvation in such a way that, cleansed from sins and reconciled to God through Christ, they may worship and glorify God in Christ the Lord in all piety and righteousness.
>
> Whatever does not contribute to this end, and nothing can do so which has not

> been ordained for this purpose by the Son of God and so commended to us, should be rejected and abolished by those who wish the Kingdom of Christ restored among them.[31].

Among the things to be rejected and abolished Bucer lists 'all dogmas of religion not derived from Holy Scripture...and that sacred rites should be performed for the people in a foreign language.'

A second characteristic of the Kingdom of Christ is that

> the elect are gathered from the world into his Kingdom through the preaching of the gospel, ministered by fit ministers chosen and sent for this very purpose by the Lord himself, with the simultaneous breathing forth of the Holy Spirit...[32].

These two points renew Bucer's emphasis on the Kingdom of Christ as a spiritual Kingdom, dependent for its realisation in the world on the preaching of the Gospel by true and faithful preachers.

In considering a fourth characteristic of the Kingdom of Christ Bucer again identifies the Kingdom with the Church. The conditions of both are the same – a knowledge of the Gospel, repentance, renunciation of the world and Satan, and obedience that shows itself in consistent living.

> Adults should not be received into the Kingdom of Christ, ie, his Church, unless they are first sufficiently instructed in the gospel of Christ, acknowledge and deplore their sins, renounce Satan and the world, profess complete submission to the gospel, and do not manifest a way of life and manners repugnant to this profession. Then, after this, the Kingdom of Christ should be bestowed upon them, and as their sins are forgiven and washed away in the most holy sacrament of Baptism, the covenant of salvation, their adoption as sons of God, should be confirmed and sealed.[33].

A fifth characteristic of the Kingdom of Christ is that all its true citizens

> offer themselves to Christ the King to be ruled and governed throughout life, ie, to be purged from sins unto all piety and righteousness, ie, to be instructed, trained, and perfected unto eternal life, and this through the sacred ministry of the Church. Hence it is necessary for every church of Christ to have this ministry duly constituted...[34].

That leads straight to the next section of the work, including the teaching of Christ, the dispensation of the sacraments, and the administration of discipline.

Reformation of Church and State

As we come to details of Bucer's suggestions for the reformation of Church and State, it must be noted that Wilhelm Pauck, his translator into

English and his editor, is selective in his choice of subjects to be dealt with in detail. Pauck has criticisms of *De Regno Christi* to offer:

> It was his custom...to produce his written work in haste, and *[De Regno Christi]* clearly shows traces of this. There are many unnecessary repetitions in it, and the style of writing is wordy and often rather careless...Certain parts of it were perhaps written before Bucer came to England and were incorporated by him in his treatise in the form in which he had them available. This is almost certainly the case with respect to the long series of chapters on marriage and divorce which occupy more than a quarter of the whole work and which represent a treatment that in comparison with the other topics is disappointingly long.[35].

How selective Pauck has been can be seen from the fact that he leaves more than a quarter of the material on marriage and divorce – chapters 22 to 46 – untranslated. One can only speculate on his reason for his omission of these chapters in an English translation. Possibly he felt that he had to make a decision regarding the relevance to the contemporary situation in which he finds himself centuries later. (Pauck's translation was made in 1969, *De Regno Christi* was published in 1550).

The present writer will refer to one item in Bucer's section on *The Sanctification and Regulation of Marriage*, his insistence that marriage is a *civil* affair. There, it seems, he was returning to the view and practice of the Early Church. While our information on Christian marriage in the earliest age of Christianity is very scanty, it seems clear that, whatever Christian ceremonies came to be associated with the blessing of marriage, the essential thing was the contract between the parties to accept each other as partners. It was not until the thirteenth century that vows before a priest became obligatory as part of the marriage itself, and only later was the Nuptial Mass celebrated. It was much later, as Calvin and Bucer and the other Reformers pointed out, that marriage was made into a sacrament, and thereby the Church's control was clamped more firmly on the lives of its members. All the Reformers denied that it was a sacrament, but Bucer went further than the rest in seeking to make it a purely civil affair, as it had been in the early centuries of the Church.

In a day when many couples are anxious to have a church wedding, though their link with the church may be merely a nominal one, rather than a vital, personal membership, is there not something to be said for having the actual marriage as a civil thing in the Registry Office followed, for those who are committed Christians, by a church service in which they renew their joint commitment to Christ as their Saviour and Lord, and receive his blessing on their marriage and their home? That will be truly marriage, as described in the New Testament, 'only in the Lord' (I Corinthians 7:39).

It is interesting that King Edward VI made a positive response to Bucer's book. In 1551 he wrote an essay entitled 'Discourse on the Reformation of

Abuses' responding to the proposals that Bucer had made with regard to secular power. Edward recommended that steps should be taken '(1) to combat the luxury that had spread in all classes of the population and (2) to check idleness and unemployment which were becoming worse through the lack of adequate education.' Many of the evils noted by Edward in response to Bucer's suggestions had a modern ring about them: 'the expensive and wasteful import trade, general wastefulness, the corruption of judges and public officials, etc.'[36].

We have already looked at some principles of reform that Bucer followed. He felt that reformation would come by the mutual contribution made by Church and State working together. That suggestion is made again and again and the basic assumption is that a combined effort by Church and State would achieve the reformation desired. It will be done, as stated at the beginning of chapter V of Book Two of *De Regno Christi:*

> first through the preaching of the gospel...then also through the persuasion of Your Royal Majesty and of those in his councils whom he will find most suitable for this task.[37].

Bucer realises that this will be seen to be Utopian, but answers that in the final chapter of his work:

> I earnestly ask, for the sake of the Kingdom and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and the salvation all of us have in common, that they would judge and estimate what I have proffered and suggested not on the basis of the judgment of men of this or an earlier age, but by the eternal and immutable Word of God...For how can one acknowledge and adore Christ, God and Man, our only Saviour, also as one's own Christ, Redeemer, King, and God, and not accept all his words and try to follow them wholeheartedly, just as they are, the words of eternal life?[38].

In Scotland in 1638 and 1643 were the National Covenant and the Solemn League and Covenant Utopian? For a time in Scotland Church and State were united in true Biblical Reformation. The Reformed Presbyterian Church still sees these Covenants as binding and as stating the continuing task of a Christian Church and a Christian State.

Means of reformation

It is significant that Bucer has certain items of reformation that he cannot wait to deal with before he comes to deal formally with the ways and means by which radical reformation will take place. Three things that he has especially in mind are indicated by his statement that 'the duties of this sacred ministry include the teaching of Christ, the dispensation of his sacraments, and the administration of his discipline.'[39].

i. The preaching of the gospel

The chapter which follows, entitled 'The dispensation of the doctrine of Christ' shows the importance for Bucer that the preaching of the gospel had as the essential basis of reformation. What is involved in the preaching of the gospel is clearly stated:

> All doctrine must be derived from Holy Scriptures...It must be manifested to the people in these ways: first, by the reading of Holy Scriptures; next, by their interpretation, but one which has specifically been derived from the Holy Scriptures themselves; then, by the sound teaching of religion, ie, by a lucid explanation and a sure confirmation of the dogmas of our faith; then, by pious exhortations, admonitions, reproofs, and testimonials taken from the same Scriptures; after that, by the religious instruction of the ignorant, and by repetition of what has been heard from the doctrine of Christ;...lastly, also by private teaching, exhortation, consolation, and correction.[40]

More details of gospel preaching are given:

> Those pastors and teachers of the churches who want to fulfil their office and keep themselves clean of the blood of those of their flocks who are perishing should not only publicly administer Christian doctrine, but also announce, teach, and entreat repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, and whatever contributes toward piety, among all who do not reject this doctrine of salvation, even at home and with each one privately[41].

Gospel teaching can be furthered by the use of the catechism:

> In accordance with the same common diligence of true teachers, everyone must acknowledge how useful it is, and how necessary, for the more unlearned to be taught by the catechism...so that they may be individually instructed by appropriate questions and answers in the fundamentals of our religion.[42].

Let it be repeated that all this detailed instruction about the preaching and teaching of the gospel comes before Bucer comes to give detailed instructions for reformation in Book Two of his work. The point that is being emphatically made is that the basic prelude to reformation is the preaching of the gospel.

One further thing to be noted is that the responsibility for communicating the gospel rests upon every true member of the Church:

> Nor can this be unclear to anyone who has read the Holy Scriptures and believes them to be divine, that there is no greater duty assigned to all men, and so necessary to salvation, as that each (according to his place in the Church of God and whatever gifts and powers he has received from the Lord) even in external things, watch, work, struggle, and labor that all the precepts and teachings of our King and Saviour Christ are conveyed to all men.[43].

Among the chapters which follow, giving details of necessary reformation, are the administration of the sacraments, the ministry of life and manners (dealing with discipline), the ministry of the discipline of penance, the hallowing of church buildings, the restoration of the ministries of the church, setting aside certain times for the worship of God, Lent and other fasts and the taking of food, the regulation of ceremonies, care for the needy. As already indicated, only some of these, considered to have a special relevance, will be considered in some detail.

ii. The discipline of the church

Next to the preaching of the gospel, Bucer comes to deal with another function of ministry, the discipline of the church. He gives a clear and concise statement of what is involved in it:

> The discipline of life and manners consists in this, that not only the public ministers of the churches (though these principally), but even individual Christians should exercise a care for their neighbours. By the authority and magisterium *[formal instruction]* of our Lord Jesus Christ, each person should strengthen and advance his neighbours, wherever this is possible, and urge them to progress in the life of God, as his disciples, in his faith and knowledge. And if any fall into error of doctrine or some vice of life or manners, whoever can should with utmost zeal recall such persons from all false doctrine and depraved activity, both for the purity of Christian doctrine and the sedulous conformity of all life to the will of God.[44].

As always, Bucer gives Scriptural support for what he is recommending, quoting the grave admonition of Paul to the elders of Ephesus and his letter to Titus:

> 'Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock over which the Holy Spirit has made you bishops, to feed the Church of the Lord, which he obtained with his own blood' (Acts 20:28). Likewise, that which he commanded Titus (Titus 2:15): 'Speak these things, and by them exhort and correct, with all authority as over those subject to you.'[45].

Finally, Bucer summarises what Church discipline consists of, by quoting from the Letter to the Hebrews, chapter 13:17: 'Submit to those who are over you and obey them, for they are keeping watch over your souls as men who will give account, so that they may do so with joy, and not sadly.'[46].

iii. Care for the poor and needy

Bucer gives care for the poor and needy a high place in the Church's priorities:

> A...common observance of all the churches, and one proper to the Kingdom of Christ, is the care for the poor and needy. For the Lord expressly forbids his people to allow anyone among them to be in need (Deut. 15:4). The early Church of Christ at Jerusalem observed this so religiously that of the alms collected by the brethren as much was distributed to each as was necessary for him to live decently and devoutly, so that not one of them was found to be in need (Acts 2:44-45; and 4: 34-35). That this care for the poor might be better accomplished, the apostles, with the prior approval of the entire Church and using prayers and the laying on of hands, put 'seven approved men' in charge of this, men 'of good repute' and 'full of the Holy Spirit and of wisdom' (Acts 6:1-6).[47].

Bucer is strongly opposed to personal distribution of alms, since the Bible has given this task expressly to the deacons, and adds another practical reason:

> Furthermore, when everyone gives alms by his own hand, it is with great difficulty that he will exclude from his heart a desire for the appreciation and praise of men; and when he receives this empty reward from men, a real and sure one is not to be expected from God.[48].

Bucer realises that where there are people (for example, widows) in need, the responsibility for meeting their need rests first with their own family circle. It that help is not forthcoming, other individuals may have a responsibility of being a good neighbour:

> If any needy persons belong to anyone's circle, either by blood or marriage or by any other special relationship of particular custom, it is certainly their duty, if they have the means of the Lord, to provide for their own the necessities of life and spare the churches in order that they may have more to nourish and assist those who have no home or family who would want to or could help them.[49].

But when need still persists, almsgiving through the Church's deacons comes into effect.

Does almsgiving by deacons set apart for this service have any relevance in the complicated economic situation of today when the State accepts responsibility for many needs? According to Bucer's interpretation of Scripture it does. Wendel, the editor of *De Regno Christi*, has pointed out[50]. that this section of Bucer's work proceeds entirely from the practice followed in Strasbourg, where it seemed to work satisfactorily, and he makes a strong appeal for this practice to be restored elsewhere:

> All who have a deep desire to embrace the Kingdom of Christ should restore this practice also among them with utmost care. For among those 'who have the good things of the world and see their brothers in need, and close their hearts to them, the love of God' does not abide (1 John 3:17); neither, therefore, does the Kingdom of Christ.[51].

Bucer was anxious that the office of deacon should be fully recognised and suggests that deacons should have a share in the sacred ministry of both teaching and the sacraments. But the demands imposed upon them by their diaconal duties would surely make other involvements virtually impossible. That is why it seems inadvisable that deacons today should have any other responsibilities in the congregation. They are ordained for one particular task, for which there is full biblical warrant, the care of the poor and needy.

iv. Education of the young

Another vital priority for Bucer is the education of young people. He strongly emphasises the need for children to be educated for God. That could be ensured through the mutual concern of Church and State which Bucer assumes throughout, though it makes it difficult to apply his principles when that is not the case. But it is from Biblical principles that he makes his case for parents' responsibility for the education of their children. Orders are given to parents

> to educate and establish their children in Christ's faith and obedience with great care...Next, [they must] diligently make the Church's catechism known to them when they are old enough to understand it. For unless the foundation of the Church is firmly laid in early childhood through the catechism of Christ, its upbuilding will proceed very poorly from then on.[52].

Bucer gives dire warning to delinquent parents:

> Those who do not labour with utmost zeal to instruct and train those whom they have consecrated to Christ the Lord in Baptism expose themselves to dire retribution. For those who neglect this when it is in their control snatch back the children whom they have consecrated to the Lord and hand them over to the dominion of Satan.[53].

When Bucer comes to give details of arrangements to be made for the education of youth, he makes a demand both of parents and the State and gives a warning about the deleterious effects of idleness:

> The Lord...demands that not only every private person but also every state and commonwealth should educate, form, and train its children for him with utmost care, and adapt each of them to those skills and activities for which the Lord himself has created each to be most suited; thus each person, as a sound and useful member in the body of the commonwealth, may contribute his share also to the good of the entire commonwealth, and no idle person may feed as a drone on the labours of others.[54].

One paragraph might have been written about idleness and juvenile delinquency in a newspaper of today:

> When [men] are engaged in no proper activities and salutary concerns, Satan implicates them in evil and harmful pursuits and deeds...They despise and neglect the means by which they may prove themselves industrious citizens, fruitful to their neighbours and to the entire community, and they surrender to Satan as captives to his whim, so that he may use them as instruments to inflict all manner of harm on men.
>
> They are the ones who commit treacheries and shameful acts and think up pernicious pleasures. They introduce an intolerable luxury of food, drink, clothing, and other things pertinent to the use or adornment of the body; they undermine laws and overthrow public moral discipline. They subvert reverence and obedience due to princes, magistrates, and men outstanding in prudence and authority; they cause the increase of thefts, bloodsheds, and robberies and stimulate insurrections.[55].

When Bucer comes to positive recommendations regarding the education of juveniles, he gives very practical advice and suggests a wide variety of courses.

> In every village, town, and city there should be appointed a certain number of men, in proportion to the population. They should be men of outstanding piety, wisdom, and prudence whose task it would be to be in charge of education from childhood through young manhood in every jurisdiction and to arrange that every citizen should give his children over to the learning of certain skills, and each one to the particular skills to which it seems that the Lord has made him best suited...[56].

That would be comprehensive education in the very best sense of the term as used today. But more is necessary than comprehensive education.

> Faithful pastors of the people of God certainly must see to it, as much as the Lord wishes to use their ministry in this matter, that each person committed to their governance should be restored and led back to this very image of God, both by pious learning in the knowledge of salvation and by faithful exercise toward every virtue.
>
> And since the assiduous reading of Holy Scripture...most contributes toward the restoration of this image of God, another heading of the law...should decree that the children of all Christians, girls and boys, should learn to read and write as diligently as possible. This is why the ancient holy fathers wished to have a school at every church, in which all the children consecrated to Christ the Lord through Holy Baptism should be taught the writings and the catechism of our religion.[57].

Bucer takes Christian schools and Christian schooling one stage further when he recommends that the directors of youth education must find out which of the boys have talents for acquiring greater learning and arrange that boys of this kind are instructed more liberally in literature, languages, and the fine arts and thus better prepared for a fuller service to Church and State.[58]. Could there be any

higher goal of Christian education for any Christian or any Church to aim at?

An ideal unrealised

Any assessment of Bucer's work has to take into account the fact that his ideal state was not realised. The Kingdom of Christ was not restored in England. It is true that Bucer's book made an undoubted impression on King Edward VI, to whom it was directed: the king's own small treatise on similar topics – *A Discourse about the Reformation of many abuses* – suggests that he was willing to make an attempt to put Bucer's ideas into practice. And it has been shown by Constantin Hopf that *De Regno Christi* did make some impact on ecclesiastical and social life in England.[59]. But the fact remains that Bucer's ideal never became anything more than an ideal.

Various reasons may be given for the comparative failure of Bucer's work. It was unfortunate that he died so soon after the completion of his book: still more unfortunate was the fact that two years later King Edward VI died, to be succeeded by Mary, who was determined to undo the work of the Reformation. Bucer was officially declared a heretic, and his remains were publicly burned: it is not strange that his work fell into oblivion. He does not seem to have given any indication about what he would advocate when a godly prince was no longer in office. He must have known that Edward would not live long, and that Mary would soon rule.

But there is a deeper reason for the fact that Bucer's ideal remained no more than an ideal. All that Bucer wrote, particularly his practical applications of the principles underlying the Kingdom of Christ, presupposes a Christian king and a Christian government, with power to enforce Christian legislation. This is supported by the assumption that he makes again and again in his pages that the citizens of whom he is writing are baptised members of the church. Yet he does not forget that there are those in the nation to whom his words do not apply. In the closing pages of his book he writes,

> When I began to write about the full restoration and renewal of the Kingdom of Christ, I had necessarily in mind only those men 'whom' God, as he 'selected them for himself from the world' (John 15:19), and 'chose, foreknew and predetermined them before the foundation of the world' (Eph. 1:4), also 'calls, justifies, and glorifies' in his own time (Rom. 8:29-30). For those who are of the world are wise about worldly things (Rom 8:5), not the things of Jesus Christ; they hate and kill him and all his members (John 15:18-19), so far are they from accepting his words; and so they remain in evil, and the wrath of God broods over them, for the Son does not pray for them (John 17:9). It was therefore not fitting for me, as I dealt with the Kingdom of Christ, to dwell on what the accused enemies of this Kingdom approve or disapprove or what they support or do not accept.[60].

The proliferation of texts in this paragraph indicates that Bucer is not putting

his opinions but the Word of God in opposition to the opponents of reformation. The blessings of the Kingdom are promised and its peace is promised 'only to those who subject themselves to his sovereignty, not to those who are opposed to it or do not fully accept it.'[61].

But Bucer is not content to leave unclaimed for Christ the territory into which his Kingdom has not yet come. From the Word of God the king will learn

> what things belong to the Kingdom of Christ and the best method of restoring it in this country as fully as possible...joining to himself for this purpose a distinguished council of men whom he will know to be both solidly instructed in and excellently motivated for the Kingdom of Christ; and by their service and labours he will in all counties seek for and send out to the people approved evangelists, who will preach to them with supreme faith and pious skill the whole gospel of Christ and every means of restoring his Kingdom among us.[62].

And so the wheel comes round full circle to where Bucer began his detailed exposition of the methods of restoration of the Kingdom of Christ. It is to be accomplished 'first by the plain and industrious preaching of the gospel, and then by holy and accurate persuasions.'[63].

Since the gospel is the weapon by which the Kingdom of Christ is to be restored, Bucer is supremely confident:

> Christ is accustomed to restore his Kingdom gloriously for his people and to put their enemies under their feet even by the use of the ministry of a very few men who are very weak and contemptible in the eyes of the world...For he lives, and through all things Christ our King is still like himself . . . He will do it, he will do it, this King of ours, Jesus, King of kings, and Lord of lords.[64].

Notes

1. T. F. Torrance, *Kingdom and Church,* (Edinburgh, 1956), p.75.
2. Wilhelm Pauck, *Melancthon and Bucer,* (Philadelphia, 1969). Quotations from Bucer's *De Regno* Christi are taken from this volume. Spelling has been anglicised where appropriate.
3. T. F. Torrance, op. cit., p.5.
4. John Calvin, *Commentary on the Psalms,* Calvin Commentaries, Vol.xxiii, Library of Christian Classics, (London, 1950).
5. W. A. Visser 't Hooft, *The Kingship of Christ,* (London, 1948).
6. M. Bucer, *De Regno Christi,* p.175.
7. Ibid., p.384.
8. Ibid., p.177.
9. Ibid., p.191.
10. Ibid., p.179, 180.
11. Ibid., p.180.
12. Ibid., p.181.
13. Ibid., p.182.
14. Ibid., p.182.

15. Ibid., p.185.
16. Ibid., p.186.
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18. Torrance, op. cit., p.87.
19. *De Regno Christi*, p.199
20. Ibid., p.204, 205.
21. Ibid., p.207.
22. Ibid., p.209.
23. Ibid., pp.209-210.
24. Ibid., p.212 (footnote)
25. Ibid., p.213.
26. Ibid., p.213.
27. Ibid., p.214.
28. Ibid., p.217.
29. Ibid., p.224.
30. Ibid., p.225.
31. Ibid., p.226.
32. Ibid., p.226.
33. Ibid., p.227-228.
34. Ibid., p.230.
35. Ibid., p.159.
36. Ibid., p.171.
37. Ibid., p.271.
38. Ibid., p.385.
39. Ibid., p.232.
40. Ibid., p.232-233.
41. Ibid., p.235.
42. Ibid., p.234.
43. Ibid., p.265.
44. Ibid., p.240.
45. Ibid., p.242.
46. Ibid., p.242.
47. Ibid., p.256.
48. Ibid., p.258.
49. Ibid., p.307.
50. In a personal letter.
51. *De Regno Christi*, p.257.
52. Ibid., p.280.
53. Ibid., p.280.
54. Ibid., p.333-334.
55. Ibid., p.334.
56. Ibid., p.335.
57. Ibid., p.335-336.
58. Ibid., p.336.
59. Constantin Hopf, *Martin Bucer and the English Reformation*, (Oxford, 1956).
60. *De Regno Christi*, p.388.
61. Ibid., p.389.
62. Ibid., p.390.
63. Ibid., p.272.
64. Ibid., p.392-393. (The last sentence is my own literal translation.)

THE MEDITORIAL RULE OF JESUS CHRIST AND ITS PASTORAL IMPLICATIONS

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The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Tony Blair, created a furore in the British media when he said that he would have to give account to God for taking the nation to war against Iraq. The press was cynical. Political commentators ridiculed the Prime Minister for bringing religion into politics. But Tony Blair was right – more right than possibly he realized. Like everyone else in a position of authority Tony Blair will have to give an account to Jesus Christ, not only for taking the nation to war but also for every other decision. Whether the Prime Minister realizes it or not, he is a servant of Jesus Christ, the one who possesses 'all authority in Heaven and on earth'[1]. In Proverbs chapter 8 Christ is Wisdom personified, the one who announces, 'By me kings reign..., by me princes rule....' (verses 15, 16). In the same way as elders 'will have to give an account'[2] to Christ, so also will the rulers of the nations.

To understand the rule of Christ it is important to recognize its source. As God, Jesus Christ, the second person of the Godhead, has always been king. Psalm 47 celebrates this position occupied by God:

> Sing praises to God, sing praises! Sing praises to our King, sing praises! For God is the King of all the earth; sing praises with a psalm! God reigns over the nations; God sits on his holy throne. (Ps 47:6-8)

At a point in Nebuchadnezzar's reign pride took possession of his mind, leading him to arrogantly boast of all his accomplishments. God's response was to humble him, teaching him 'that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will' (Daniel 4:32b). Thankfully Nebuchadnezzar learned from the Lord's rebuke and praised the Lord recognizing that '...His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his dominion endures from generation to generation.' (Daniel 4:3b).

The sovereign rule of God over the universe that he created is generally accepted among Christians. The advocates of open-theism, theologians who

teach that God essentially reacts to events rather than determining them, ignore the clear teaching of Scripture already cited and the historic creeds and confessions of the Christian Church. The answer to question 27 of the *Heidelberg Catechism,* 'What do you mean by the providence of God?' illustrates how the church has historically understood divine sovereignty:

> The almighty and everywhere present power of God, whereby, as it were by His hand, He still upholds heaven, earth, and all creatures, and so governs them that herbs and grass, rain and drought, fruitful and barren years, food and drink, health and sickness, riches and poverty, yea, all things, come not by chance but by His fatherly hand.[3]

It is appropriate to speak of the sovereign rule of God in a general way as applying to the three persons of the Godhead, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. There is however, a sovereignty attributed to the Son of God which is special and unique. This sovereignty is associated with his role as Mediator and belongs to him in consequence of his great work of atonement, the offering up of Himself as a perfect sacrifice at Calvary to make atonement for his people. This sovereignty which belongs to Christ, in association with his role as Mediator, is often referred to as Christ's Mediatorial Sovereignty.

The Scriptural Foundation of Christ's Mediatorial Sovereignty

While the New Testament Church, the Church Fathers and the Reformers all recognized the Lordship of Christ, it was William Symington, Covenanter Minister of Stranraer, Scotland, who clearly distinguished between Christ's kingly rule as God and his kingly rule as Mediator. He convincingly presents the Scriptural grounds and practical implications of Christ's mediatorial sovereignty in his book Messiah the Prince.

One of the key New Testament passages with reference to this topic is Philippians 2:5-11. These verses refer to Christ's humiliation and exaltation. The exaltation came as a consequence of the humiliation. This is clear from two Greek words, dio kai (therefore also) that begin verse 9. As Paul Thielman indicates, 'This is a strong way of showing that in what follows Paul describes a response to the selfless humility and obedience depicted in the first part of the passage.'[4] And with reference to this passage Peter T. O'Brien rightly points out, 'In his exalted state Jesus now exercises universal lordship'[5]

This of course begs the question: since Jesus never ceased to be God when he became flesh and dwelt among us, was he not always sovereign? This question must be answered in the affirmative. This means that there is a special sovereignty granted to the second person of the Godhead in relation to his position as Mediator. In the words of William Symington: '...Christ, besides the dominion which belongs to him originally and essentially as God, is

invested with a delegated and official dominion as Mediator...'[6]

This Mediatorial Sovereignty ought not to have taken New Testament Christians by surprise because the Old Testament Scriptures had given clear testimony to it. For example, Messiah's sovereignty is clearly in view in Jacob's prophecy in the following Old Testament reference: 'The sceptre will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his.' (Genesis 49:10 NIV). Balaam also makes references to the coming Messianic King in one of his oracles: 'I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near: a star shall come out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel; it shall crush the forehead of Moab and break down all the sons of Sheth'. (Numbers 24:17).

The clearest reference in the Old Testament to the coronation of Christ is found in Psalm 2. The Father, referring to the Son, declares: 'As for me, I have set my King on Zion my holy hill' (verse 6). The concluding verses of the Psalm go on to speak of Messiah's rule over the nations and his claim on their allegiance.

Historic Recognition of Christ's Rule

(a) Apostolic Church

The evidence in Acts indicates that the preaching of the New Testament Church was centred around the kingdom of God. After the resurrection and before the ascension Christ spoke to his disciples *'about the kingdom of God.'* (Acts 1:3). Paul and Barnabas encouraged the disciples in Lystra, Iconium and Antioch by reminding them that, 'We must go through many hardships to enter *the kingdom of God'* (Acts 14:22).

It is impossible to have a kingdom without a sovereign and the disciples clearly and unambiguously taught their listeners about Jesus Christ and his sovereign status. When Paul and Silas were preaching in Thessalonica a section of the population became angry. These enemies of the gospel provoked a riot. They dragged some of the young converts before the city authorities and accused them of supporting those who say, 'there is another king, Jesus.' (Acts 17:7). The word 'another' here is significant. It is the Greek word, *'heteros'*, meaning *'another of a different kind', in contrast to 'allos' which means 'another of the same'*. From this it is clear that the apostles preached Christ as King, a King who was utterly unique and distinct from all other rulers – another of a different kind, King of kings and Lord of lords (1 Timothy 6:15; Revelation 17:14; Revelation 19:16). They recognized him as 'Lord of all'. (Acts 10:36; Romans 10:12)

(b) Early Christian period

Prior to the reign of Constantine in the 4th century AD, many Christians suffered intensely because of their love and loyalty to their Saviour and King.

Jesus Christ. Thousands were put to death through crucifixion, by being burned at the stake or mauled by lions in the Roman arenas. The authorities kept pressing them to recognize the Caesars as possessing supreme authority, but they could not and would not deny the regal rights of their exalted King, Jesus Christ. And they kept on preaching the Lordship of Christ. As Ted Donnelly explains:

> The kingship of Jesus was preached in the teeth of bitter opposition. Rome, when she began to understand the revolutionary implications of the message, determined to sweep it from the earth by fire and sword, and the full weight of world-empire was exerted against it. The gospel pulpit was often the wild-beast arena or the place of torture. But still the message went forth, whatever the cost – "There is another king." Polycarp, that gallant old man, was stabbed and burnt for the kingship of Jesus, and when his small congregation was recording the event, they wrote – and the words leap from the page in resolute and defiant triumph – "The blessed Polycarp was martyred ... in the proconsulship of Statius Quadratus, BUT IN THE EVERLASTING REIGN OF JESUS CHRIST." As Kirsoppo Lake remarks: "The phrase is pointedly inserted instead of a reference to the reigning Emperor."[7]

Obviously Christians in the first few centuries after Christ's ascension maintained a faithful testimony to the rule and authority of King Jesus.

(c) The Era of Constantine

When Constantine came to power in Rome he recognized that Christianity, in spite of intense persecution, was adhered to by thousands of people throughout the Empire. It had also transformed society on a vast scale. Therefore in 313 AD he decided to recognize Christianity as the official religion of the Empire. He placed the sign of Jesus Christ on his battle standard and acknowledged the supreme authority of Jesus Christ. This triumph proved to be temporary, for with the emergence of *'Christendom'*, the Church increasingly took the place of Christ. The Roman 'church', through the popes, exercised a power which was not hers to wield. During the Reformation the Reformers called the Pope 'the anti-Christ' – 'anti' meaning *taking the place of* Christ, that is, *usurping the position* of Christ. Within the system of Roman Catholicism this state of affairs continues. Also in many Protestant churches in the 21st century the *will of the people* often supercedes the mind of King Jesus.

(d) The Reformation Period

Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Knox and the other Reformers rejected the false claims of the Pope and Roman Catholicism, recognizing Jesus Christ as the source of all authority. King Jesus spoke through his Word and hence *'Sola Scriptura'* became the watchword of the Reformation. Through their study of the Scriptures they rediscovered the great doctrine of justification (justification by grace alone, through faith alone in Christ alone).

While the Continental Reformers recognized the kingship of Jesus Christ, as did the Scottish Reformation of the 16th century, it was in the heat of controversy in 17th century Scotland that the implications of Christ's kingship were developed with reference to Church and State. J. D. Douglas, writing about the situation in Scotland makes the comment:

> Where the 16th century Reformers followed Luther, they took as their watchword 'none but Christ saves', those of the 17th century were forced by political developments to add a further word, 'none but Christ reigns'.[8]

The tyrannical reign of Charles I provoked the Scottish nation to take a stand against autocratic measures. They drew up a National Covenant in which they asserted Christ's claims in Church and State. This document was drawn up by Archibald Johnston (a legal expert) and Alexander Henderson (minister of Leuchers in Fife). The signing of this Covenant took place in Greyfriars Church by the ministers and nobility of Scotland on 28th February 1638 and then, within the next few weeks, by the majority of the people in the nation. Gilbert Burnet, on hearing his relative Archibald Johnston reading the document in Greyfriars Church, made the comment: 'He looked at the Covenant as the setting of Christ on his throne, and so was extremely zealous of it'. On that momentous occasion Alexander Henderson is reported to have said, 'This was the day of the Lord's power – the day of the Redeemer's strength on which the princes of the people assembled to swear their allegiance to the King of kings'.

The signing of the Covenant and the meeting of the General Assembly (November 1638) provoked royal opposition. Charles I sent an army from England to crush the Covenanters. In such circumstances the Covenanters believed that they were justified, according to the Word of God, in defending themselves. Scotland was still a separate nation, even though it shared a king with England. It was in this conflict with Charles I that the blue banner of the Covenanters was first flown. The banner displayed the national arms and also the words *'For Christ Crown and Covenant'* in gilt letters. This is an example of a nation taking a stand for the *crown rights* of King Jesus and the Covenant which defined those rights.

While recognizing that Christ as God exercised a universal dominion over all men and nations, the 17th century Covenanters believed his mediatorial sovereignty extended only over the church, as can be observed in the writings of George Gillespie and Samuel Rutherford. For example George Gillespie's position is summed up in the statement:

> Of a twofold kingdom of Jesus Christ: a general kingdom, as he is the eternal Son of God, the head of all principalities and powers, reigning over all creatures; and a particular kingdom, as he is Mediator reigning over the church only.[9]

It was not until the 19th century that theologians began clearly to articulate Jesus Christ's universal sovereignty as Mediator.[10] This is clearly formulated in Wm. Symington's classic book *Messiah the Prince* published in 1839. In the chapter entitled, *The Mediatorial Dominion Over Nations,* Symington exegetes Psalm 2 and convincingly demonstrates the subjection nations must give to Christ as Messiah. With reference to this second Psalm he concludes:

> Here, then, we have a most decided, unequivocal proof of the right of dominion over the nations of the earth which is possessed by the Mediator; for, had not such been his right, it is inconceivable that the Spirit of God should have enjoined subjection to him upon all civil rulers without exception, whether supreme or sub-ordinate, whether belonging to Old or to New Testament times. We have here a command of universal and permanent obligation; and, while it retains its place in the Word of God, it will be impossible to deny the dominion which Jesus as Mediator possesses over the nations of the earth and their rulers.[11]

Application of Christ's Universal Mediatorial Sovereignty

There are many strands of application which might usefully be taken up as this doctrine is applied to contemporary society. We could discuss the duties and responsibilities of the nations and their leaders. Full consideration is given to this in a chapter contributed by Dr. David McKay entitled *The crown rights of King Jesus to-day,* in the book *Tales of Two Cities, Christianity and Politics.*[12] We could discuss the duties and responsibilities of churches and their office bearers. We could make application to institutions of learning, to the legal profession, to home and family life, to the arts and the sciences. However in the concluding paragraphs of this article I want to apply this doctrine to Christ's work of atonement.

It is helpful to begin with the Shorter Catechism and question 23. 'What offices doth Christ execute as our Redeemer?' Answer: 'Christ, as our Redeemer, executeth the offices of a PROPHET, of a PRIEST, and of a KING, both in His estate of *humiliation and exaltation.*'

Symington sees these three offices of Christ inextricably linked in the fulfillment of his great redemptive work. He argues the case in the following manner:

> ..when as a priest he offered himself a spotless sacrifice to God, he gave to the world as a prophet a new revelation of the character of God, and of the principles of the divine moral government; at the same time that as a king he triumphed gloriously over his enemies. In like manner, his royal achievements not only manifest his majesty and his power, but serve to publish the clemency of his grace, and to recognize the merit of his atoning sacrifice as the ground on which they proceed.[13]

Of particular interest to us in this article is the vital necessity of Christ's kingly office to the completion of his redemptive mission. Symington gave considerable thought to this subject and what follows is essentially a summary of his conclusions.

• Christ as mediatorial King makes his people willing

In the exercise of his kingly office Christ makes the recipients of salvation willing to yield to the Messiah and receive him as Saviour and Lord. It is in the context of Christ's Mediatorial Sovereignty that the statement is made in Psalm 110:3 'Your people will offer themselves freely on the day of your power'. Symington makes the point:

> God, from the very perfection of his nature, could not, in his absolute character, deal with rebel sinners in any way with a view to their salvation....Hence the necessity of another being appointed, not only to purchase and to offer redemption through his blood, but to apply it, to give it effect, to bestow the benefits of grace on the destined subjects of salvation.[14]

• Christ as mediatorial King enables his people to triumph

In the exercise of his kingly office Christ ensures that his people will not be overcome by their enemies. The follower of Jesus Christ faces a formidable array of opposing forces. Some of these forces operate within the citadel of his heart and the rest arise from the forces of evil in the world opposed to Christ and his kingdom. With respect to the heart of the believer, 'indwelling corruptions wage incessant warfare against the quickening sanctifying and comforting work of the Spirit.'[15]

The apostle Paul in Romans chapter 7 speaks of this inner conflict:

> So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. [16]

Faced with such formidable enemies he asks the question, 'Who will deliver me?' The answer is close at hand, never far from his mind, 'Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!'[17]

More easily identified however, are the enemies in the world. Where Islam and Hinduism are the dominant religions, Christians are often being persecuted, with many being put under extreme pressure to deny their faith in Christ. More subtle perhaps are the charm offensives of the modern ecumenical movement or its recent clone, the multi-faith initiative. These both

put pressure on believers to deny the historical tenets of evangelical Christianity. In many colleges and universities throughout the world pressure is put on Christian students to deny the biblical account of origins and subscribe to the evolutionary creed. Then, particularly in the west in recent decades, many governments are dismantling laws that were based on Christian principles. For example, laws with respect to the preservation of human life, human sexuality and the sanctity of the Lord's Day. Such laws have increasingly isolated God's people, leading in some cases to discrimination and even victimization. What hope is there for Christians and Christianity in face of such opposition? After summarizing the forces of evil arrayed against the people of God Symington asks:

> Are these enemies to meet no resistance? Is the kingdom of the Messiah to fall a prey to their rapacious hatred, and that of his great arch-enemy to be erected on its ruins?[18]

Symington was in no doubt about the answer. Christ as the Mediatorial King ensures that no person, no political organisation, no religious system will prevent his people persevering to the end, triumphing over their enemies. The apostle Paul makes reference to the ultimate triumph of Christ at the consummation of the age and links it with his mediatorial reign:

> Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For God has put all things in subjection under his feet.[19]

Symington connects the graphic passage in Isaiah 63:1-6 with the mediatorial reign of Christ triumphing over all his enemies. The vengeance of the Mediatorial King is also described in terms of redemption. 'For the day of vengeance was in my heart, and the year of my redemption has come.' (v. 4) and 'I trampled the nations in my anger; in my wrath I made them drunk and poured their blood on the ground' (v. 6).

Two centuries before Symington's day the Westminster divines had those aspects of Christ's mediatorial reign in mind when they compiled the answer to Shorter Catechism question 26. 'How doth Christ execute the office of a king?' 'Christ executeth the office of a king, in SUBDUING US TO HIMSELF, in *ruling and defending* us, and in *restraining and conquering* all His and our enemies.'

Some Christians may consider Christ as 'gracious Saviour' incompatible with Christ as 'conquering king'. Such positions of the Redeemer are not incompatible but necessary, as Symington points out:

> The Saviour of his people, and the conqueror of their foes, are not incompatible features. The prosperity of the people of God is intimately connected with the destruction of their enemies. These things go necessarily hand in hand. At the deluge, the preservation of the true seed and the destruction of those who had corrupted their ways, were inseparably conjoined.[20]

Many Christians today are downcast. Many Christians are in a mood of despair. They have laboured long and hard for the building up of Christ's Church. They have expended much energy in being salt and light in the community where they live, work and worship, but they have seen little fruit. From their perspective it appears that the forces of evil are moving forward relentlessly, moving in like the tide. Such people need to remember that as members of the Kingdom of God, they have a king who is invincible, a king who is sovereign over all things in heaven and on earth, who will accomplish his purposes, who will enable his people to be more than conquerors, who will triumph over all his and our enemies and who will at the last day deliver the kingdom to God the Father...that God may be all in all.

'For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet'

Notes

1 Matthew 28:18. (Bible References are from the ESV unless indicated otherwise).

2 Hebrews 13:17.

3 G. I. Williamson, *The Heidelberg Catechism, A Study Guide,* (Phillipsburg, N J: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1993), p.48.

4 Frank Thielman, *The N.I.V. Application Commentary - Philippians,* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), p.120.

5 Peter T. O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians: A commentary on the Greek Text,* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991), p. 233.

6 William Symington, *Messiah the Prince : or The Mediatorial Dominion of Jesus Christ,* (Edinburgh: J. Johnstone, 1839), p.31.

7 *Christ's Church, a Covenant People,* ed. J. D. Trevor McCauley, (International Conference Committee, Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland, 1982), p.4.

8 J. D. Douglas, *Light in the North, The Story of the Scottish Covenanters,* (Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1964), p.13.

9 George Gillespie, *Aaron's Rod Blossoming; or, the Divine Ordinance of Church Government Vindicated,* (London: Richard Whitaker, 1646), reprinted in *The Presbyterian's Armoury,* vol. 2., cited by Dr. D. McKay in *Tales of Two Cities,* edited by Stephen Clarke (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2005), p.228.

10 The writings of 19th century Covenanting ministers clearly define the application and implications of Christ's mediatorial sovereignty. Most prominent were: Alexander McLeod, *Messiah, Governor of the Nations of the Earth,* 1803; James R Willson, *Subjection of Kings and Nations to Messiah,* 1819 and *Prince Messiah's Claims to Dominion over all Governments,* 1832; Samuel B Wylie, *The Two Sons of Oil; or the Faithful Witness for Magistracy and Ministry upon a Scriptural Basis,* 1850; William Symington, *Messiah the Prince: or The Mediatorial Dominion of Jesus Christ,* 1839.

11 William Symington, op. cit., p. 230.
12 *Tales of Two Cities*, ed. Stephen Clark (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press 2005), ch.6, p.210.
13 William Symington, op. cit., p.14.
14 Ibid., p.19.
15 Ibid., p.26.
16 Romans 7:21-23.
17 Romans 7:25.
18 William Symington, op. cit., p.27.
19 1 Corinthians 15:24-27.
20 William Symington, op. cit., p.28.

CONSTANTINE AND THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHURCH AND STATE

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In subtle and yet increasingly overt ways the state, in the Western world, seems to be reaching into the sphere of the church's responsibility. Inevitably there have been some minor clashes between church and state as a consequence, but it's almost certain that these will increase and may become outright confrontation. Tension between church and state is of course not new. It has appeared constantly on the pages of church history, but the question remains, how are the tensions to be resolved? In this article we will consider that vital question against the background of the reign of the Emperor Constantine in the fourth century.

The Emperor's profession of faith

The last major persecution of Christians in the early church period took place under Emperor Diocletian around 303 AD. Diocletian was convinced that the church was a divisive force in the Empire and the Mediterranean world. For him the solution was the elimination of Christianity. Diocletian introduced various decrees in an attempt to weaken the church, until finally there came the decree which made the mere profession of Christianity a capital offence. The persecution of 303 "tore apart the fabric of society in a way which had not happened before. Soldiers were put to death, among them Alban, the first British martyr."[1].

In 305 Diocletian abdicated and three rivals fought each other for the right to become his successor. Diocletian had already divided the Empire into two administrative spheres, East and West, and placed the West under the authority of a second emperor, Maximian. When Diocletian abdicated, Constantius became emperor of the West. He died after one year and in 306 his

son Constantine, with the support of the army, succeeded him. The West was itself divided between Constantine and Maxentius. For a time there was an uneasy peace, but in 312 war broke out when Constantine invaded the territory of Maxentius in Italy. The two armies faced each other across the Milvian Bridge on the River Tiber outside Rome. The significance of this for the church was that as Constantine prepared for battle he had an experience which profoundly affected the direction and character of his reign.

Eusebius records that while Constantine was "praying to the god of his father, he saw with his own eyes the trophy of a cross of light in the heavens above the sun, and an inscription 'by this conquer' attached to it. Then in his sleep the Christ of God appeared to him with the sign which he had seen in the heavens and commanded him to make a likeness of that sign and use it as a safeguard in all engagements with his enemies." Constantine's army went on to defeat the superior forces of Maxentius and Constantine promptly ordered the chi rho monogram of the Christians to be painted on the shields of his soldiers.

Early the following year the emperor issued the Edict of Milan which granted toleration to Christians living in the Empire both East and West. Constantine had persuaded his co-emperor in the East, Licinius, to agree to the Edict.

The question of Constantine's conversion has been a matter of on-going debate. His vision "bears all the marks of a superficial religiosity which affects many people in times of crisis"[2]. In the Orthodox Church Constantine has sometimes been called a "saint", but not consistently. The opposite evaluation treats him as "a politician, at the most a prudential Christian, whose primary concern is to hold the Empire together and who lets his subjects think of him as either a pagan or a Christian according to their preferences."[3].

What can be said is that the emperor never forgot his experience at Milvian Bridge. It was reflected in the policies pursued throughout his reign and has left him with the legacy of being called the founder of a Christian empire. "Constantine favoured Christianity among the many religions of his subjects, but did not make it the official or 'established' religion of the empire."[4]. The clarity of his understanding may be questioned by the fact that he was not baptised until 337, when he was on his death bed. However Constantine undoubtedly regarded himself as a Christian and carried an overwhelming sense of obligation to the Christian God. "He was conscious of some Divine mission and of the promise of Divine help and that sense of mission continued to engage his policies and propaganda."[5].

Benefits for the church

With the state now favourably disposed towards Christianity, several benefits were bound to accrue to the church. "Constantine's great achievement

had been to free the church from the burden of persecution, to give it full recognition before the law and therefore freedom to grow as it would."[6].

Several laws were passed which clearly helped the church in its work and mission. The period of persecution had not only affected individuals physically, but had often robbed them of their property. Constantine decreed that this should be rectified and that the church should no longer be deprived of the property which was rightfully hers. Writing to Anulinus, pro-consul in Africa, in 313 Constantine stated,

> It is our wish that when you receive this letter if any of these things belonging to the Catholic Church of the Christians, in any city or in other places, you shall cause them to be restored immediately to their churches. For we have decided that what these same churches before possessed be restored to their rightful owners.[7].

In addition, freedom was given to church leaders so that they would no longer be hindered from pursuing their work by having to take up public office.

> It is my wish that those within the province entrusted to you, in the Catholic Church, who proffer their services to this holy religion, who are usually called clerics, be completely exempt from public duties, that they be not drawn away from the services due to the Divinity by any error or sacrilegious falling away, but may rather fulfil the service of their own law without any hindrance[8].

Not only were the leaders of the church given increasing freedom to pursue their work, they were in some instances granted particular privileges. Bishops were given permission to adjudicate in disputes when the parties referred the case to them. "Their decisions were given the same status as decisions of civil judges."[9].

Henry Chadwick points to the effect of Constantine's support for Christianity in the legislation introduced during his reign.

> [He] endeavoured to express Christian ideas in some of his laws protecting children, slaves, peasants and prisoners. As edict of 316 directs that criminals may no longer be branded on the face 'because men are made in the image of God'[10].

In 321 a law was passed which closed the law courts "on the venerable day of the sun" which was then declared to be a public holiday. This of course was of great benefit to the church as it met for worship.

Ferguson suggests that "the greatest outward show of favour for the church was Constantine's extensive building programme."[11]. and Chadwick adds that "Constantine's benefactions to the church were on a large scale."[12]. Churches were built in several strategic sites, Bethlehem, Jerusalem and on the

Mount of Olives.

Taken together, these measures provided the church with liberty and help to pursue its mission freely in the Roman world. This is not, however, all that can be said.

Dangers for the church

Norman Bull makes this perceptive comment regarding the legacy of Constantine to the church:

> No longer was the church a gathered community of those who came out of the world to share in its faith and life. No longer was it a society of sincere believers, bound together by conviction and a strict but freely accepted discipline. Persecution had been dangerous for the church but Imperial patronage was far more dangerous.[13].

Though Constantine had not made Christianity the established religion of the Roman Empire, in practice the church was now closely related to the state. There were grave dangers in such a relationship. So close were the ties that the church at times turned to the emperor for help in its internal affairs. At other times the emperor assumed that he had the right to call the church together to deal with theological issues which were causing division within the body. It was the emperor, indeed, who summoned the famous council which met at Nicea in 325 to deal with the heresy of Arius. Constantine acted as chairman and supported the conclusion reached, which was set out in the Nicene Creed, that Christ is of the same substance as the Father.

F.F. Bruce suggests that the part played by Constantine in the life and decisions of the church helped to promote "the Eastern concept of the emperor as a sacred personage, vested with spiritual authority." He adds that "Christian leaders were so grateful to Constantine for his favour that they allowed him to have more say in internal church affairs than was his due."[14].

There was another detrimental affect, namely that the real benefits which the church, and in particular the leaders, received from the state meant that there was less likelihood that the church would be willing to resist the dictates of the civil powers. The church's prophetic witness to the nation was being muffled.

Perhaps the greatest danger to the church came simply because Constantine had made Christianity the fashionable religion. This resulted in

> [a] considerable ingress of Chistianized pagans into the church - pagans who had learned the rudiments of Christian doctrine and had been baptised but who largely remained pagans in their thoughts and ways.[15].

It remains an unsettled issue whether the church emerged from the reign of Constantine as a stronger body or one that had been deeply wounded and weakened. Many no doubt gave thanks for the relief from persecution, the liberty to meet and worship without fear and the passage of laws which did reflect biblical morality. And yet instead of becoming more vigorous in preaching and evangelism, the church in many ways grew soft and complacent and relied on the state for help and sometimes for guidance, even in matters of doctrine and discipline. What then is the solution?

Biblical balance

Many twenty-first century Christians would regard it as a great blessing to live under a government which openly supported Christianity. They pray for this and rejoice when it is the case. Indeed the 1901 Testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland, while affirming that "the church possesses spiritual independence under Christ and is subject to Him alone", also concluded that "it is the duty of the civil ruler to promote the interests of Christianity at home and abroad."[16].

The Testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America makes the additional and vital point regarding church and state "that each has its own sphere and its own functions to perform. Neither has a right to invade the territory of the other."[17].

The 1990 Testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland similarly summarises the relationship between church and state as "being two distinct institutions, each independent in its own particular sphere, but co-operating to the glory of God and the welfare of society."[18].

The separation of church and state is not, of course, to be thought of in terms of a wall, as US President Thomas Jefferson suggested.

> 'Wall' is an unfortunate metaphor because there can be no such wall between institutions which have, to so large an extent, the same constituency and which share many of the same concerns for the same national community.[19].

We would add that a wall is an incorrect metaphor for another more compelling reason. It is that both institutions are subject to the Lordship of Christ and exist for the glory of God.

The nations of the earth have been given to Jesus Christ. He is King of every nation and to him every nation owes allegiance. The state therefore has a duty to "encourage and maintain conditions favourable to the spread of the Gospel." But the church also has a responsibility to the state. Primarily it is to address the nation from the Word of God, to warn of national sins and to declare the righteousness which is to govern national affairs. In the mutual

acceptance of these responsibilities is the divine pattern for an orderly, peaceful society, within which the Kingdom of God grows and advances.

Notes

1. Gerald Bray, *Creeds, Councils and Christ* (Leicester: IVP, 1984), pp.122,123.
2. Gerald Bray, op. cit., p.123.
3. Everett Ferguson, *Church History*, Vol.1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), p.181.
4. Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church* (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1967), p.127.
5. Everett Ferguson, op. cit., p.183.
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7. Henry Bettensen (ed.), *Documents of the Christian Church* Second edition (Oxford: OUP, 1967), p.16.
8. Henry Bettensen, op. cit., p.17.
9. Everett Ferguson, op. cit., p.184.
10. Henry Chadwick, op. cit., p.128.
11. Everett Ferguson, op. cit.., p.184.
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13. Normal J. Bull, op. cit., p.173.
14. FF Bruce, *The Spreading Flame* (Exeter:Paternoster Press, 1958), p.296.
15. FF Bruce, op. cit., p.295.
16. *Testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland* (Belfast, 1901), p.108, para.9.
17. *Declaration and Testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America* (Pittsburgh, 1949), chapter 29, para.7.
18. *Testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland* (Belfast, 1990), chapter 4, p.23.
19. An essay by John C Bennett on "Patterns of Church and State Relations" in *Church and State in American History* edited by John F. Wilson, (Boston: D C Heath, 1987), p.171.

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CELTIC CHRISTIANITY: THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY

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In the notorious movie "The Good, the Bad and the Ugly" the bad guy is very bad, the ugly guy is almost as bad and the "good" guy is only relatively good. The same might be said about the current craze for Celtic Christianity: there is much that is spiritually bad and ugly about it, and even that which might be termed "good" needs to be approached with considerable caution.

Introduction

At the outset we need to be clear about what is meant by the term "Celtic Christianity". Even "Celts" is rather a vague term, as the groups so labelled never called themselves by that name and were not a unified people. To speak about a "Celtic Church" is also problematic as there were at best a number of different Celtic churches that had no single regulatory authority in charge of them. The most coherent definition that can be provided sees Celtic Christianity as a form of Christianity that was practised by the communities within Britain and Ireland that spoke the Celtic languages. It is usually understood to have maintained some degree of vibrant and independent existence into the 12th century.

This evaluation of Celtic Christianity draws upon my own familiarity with the movement here in Ireland, where the understandable desire to rediscover the "land of saints and scholars" lends an extra charm to all things Celtic. It also draws heavily upon the trenchant critique of the movement provided by Donald Meek, the Professor of Celtic Studies at Aberdeen University, in his insightful book *The Quest for Celtic Christianity*. In a thorough, scholarly treatment of the subject, which contrasts with the credulous and gullible manner in which many approach it, he exposes both the mistakes and the dangers associated with the modern quest for Celtic Christianity. He thereby sounds a note of alarm for the contemporary church, which this article seeks to summarise and reinforce. The essence of his critique, with which this author is in agreement, is that "much that is heralded as Celtic Christianity

today is neither Celtic nor Christian".[1].

The note of warning is necessary in the light of the popularity of the multifaceted phenomenon known as Celtic Christianity. Whilst its influence to date upon evangelical churches should not be exaggerated, the potential is there, given the inroads that it has made into some wings of the charismatic movement. Paul Fahy, in an admittedly somewhat sensationalistic manner, has highlighted the impact of the phenomenon upon some of the "New Churches" in Britain.[2]. In the United States, there are even churches using the Celtic label to describe themselves - the Anam Chara Celtic Church, the Church of the Culdees, etc. Not surprisingly, Thomas Cahill's very readable *How the Irish Saved Civilisation* was extremely well received in the United States.

A striking example of this phenomenon is found in the web site (one of many such web sites) of the "Celtic Orthodox Christian Church". This Church claims that it "bears witness to the original, unchanged, Christian Faith" and that it is a "continuation of the churches who originally brought God's Word and Sacraments to people in Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Americas before the year 1000". It uses the Liturgy of the Stowe Missal which, it asserts, is "one of the earliest and most complete expressions of the Christian Faith, coming directly from the tradition of the Holy Apostles". Quite a pedigree, you would agree, but would all this stand up to proper theological and historical scrutiny?

Last year in the West of Ireland there was a large gathering of charismatic believers at a "Celtic Fire" Conference. Seminars and retreats focused on this theme are on the increase and the bookshops are full of literature on Celtic spirituality, ranging from the overtly pagan to the supposedly evangelical. John O'Donohue, the Irish poet and mystical philosopher, has authored the international best-seller *Anam Chara: Spiritual Wisdom from the Celtic World* and this beguilingly lyrical tome is still proving highly influential in shaping the spiritual outlook of many post-catholic Irish people. All we need now is for some supposedly long-lost documents from the era of the Celtic Church to be unearthed in order to turn the Celtic tide into an overwhelming flood. Then we might well have something called *The Celtic Code* to rival the success of *The Da Vinci Code!*

In this article, four issues concerning Celtic Christianity will be discussed. Firstly, some of the reasons for the current popularity of the phenomenon will be highlighted. Secondly, we will examine the claims of those seeking to identify themselves with early Christianity in the Celtic lands, and the considerable difficulties in obtaining an accurate picture of early Celtic Christianity will be unfolded. Thirdly, the theological dangers for evangelicalism that are inherent in the modern craze for Celtic Christianity will be presented. Finally, some of the "good" that we might learn from authentic Celtic Christianity will be (tentatively) explored.

1. "Celtic Christianity": reasons for its popularity

A number of factors account for the current popularity of Celtic Christianity. In the first instance, it must be viewed in the light of the growing interest in all things Celtic which began to emerge in the 1970s. From Celtic crosses to Celtic holidays, all things Celtic were very much in demand. This was at least partly fuelled by a language revivalism that sought to breathe new life into ancient Celtic languages such as Irish Gaelic and Welsh. It is not surprising that this vibrant cultural interest in all things Celtic spilled over into the ecclesiastical and theological realm. A sentimental attachment to the ambience of Ireland, Scotland and Wales lies behind much of the appeal of Celtic Christianity.

The theological implications of the Celtic revival are most drastically evident in its contribution to neo-paganism. A startling example of this genre is found in the writings of the radical feminist theologian Mary Condren, once a lecturer at Harvard Divinity School. In a work entitled The Serpent and the Goddess (1989) she deals with the themes of women, religion and power in Celtic Ireland. In what is described as a "powerful indictment of patriarchal consciousness" (reviewer's comment on the back cover), she idealises the woman-centred, life-loving culture that supposedly prevailed in early Celtic Ireland.

A more subtle, but no less serious, neo-pagan agenda, inspired by his version of Celtic Ireland, is promoted in the writings of John O'Donohue. In what he claims to be the flourishing spiritual tradition that existed in Ireland for thousands of years before the coming of Patrick, O'Donohue finds "a vibrant legacy of mystical wisdom that is unique in the Western world". The following excerpt is typical of the mystical paganism which O'Donohue promotes by appealing to the Celtic tradition:

> In the Irish tradition, there is also a very interesting figure called the 'Bean Si'. Si is another word for fairy and Bean Si is the word for fairy woman. This is a spirit who cries out for someone who is about to die. My father heard her crying one evening. Two days later a neighbour from a family for whom the Bean Si always cried died. In this, the Celtic Irish tradition recognises that the eternal and the transient world are woven in and through each other. Very often at death, the inhabitants of the eternal world come out towards the visible world.[3].

This surely amounts to nothing more than superstitious nonsense!

Celtic Christianity also grew in popularity because it was viewed as a potential inspiration for environmentalism, which is itself one of the most powerful ideologies of the modern era. The Celts were portrayed as living close to nature and being environmentally friendly. Indeed, Meek persuasively argues that at the heart of "Celtic Christianity" there lies what he calls a "primitivist, peripheralist vision". In other words, the Celts are viewed as "a primitive people

who preserve aspects of culture and society which have long been lost, discarded or destroyed elsewhere". It is part of a reaction against the squalor of modern urbanised existence. As he eloquently puts it, "the beguiling simplicity of Celtic Christianity rises from the rubble of the broken icons of modernity."[4].

Therefore, it is easy to see how the supposed existence of a relatively pure "Celtic Christianity" would appeal to modern men and women disillusioned with the decadent and moribund nature of much contemporary Christianity. Herein lies part of the appeal of O'Donohue's book to an Irish society which is largely disillusioned with post-Tridentine Roman Catholicism. Meek sums up its appeal: "to escape the chill winds of harsh reality, we search for refuge in the warm shelter of retrospective spiritual romanticism". Evangelicals, longing to see a revitalisation of the contemporary church, must not be tempted to seek such a refuge. Thus, Meek, who is an evangelical, rightly refuses "to offer misleading and comforting tales of a spiritual Shangri La somewhere back in the mists of time which is overflowing with wisdom for our postmodern age."[5].

Another potent factor behind the rise of Celtic Christianity relates to its resonance with the postmodern spirit of contemporary society. Meek identifies some of its postmodern facets as consisting of its low factual base and lack of historical rationale, its tendency to rely upon a collection of snapshots and images of the past, and the localised focus of much of the material. In a masterly analysis, he describes O'Donohue's work as "an alluring concoction of Celtic chemicals which counteracts the hangovers of postmodernity". He points out that although *Anam Chara* claims to represent "spiritual wisdom from the Celtic world", it actually contains comparatively little material that is genuinely Celtic. He observes that "vast generalisations seemingly backed up by occasional references to Celtic sources are its hallmark". Being typical of the postmodern ethos, O'Donohue's writing looks well, feels soothing and "reflects the eclectic tendency of our doctrinally barren, postmodern times."[6]. And in regard to Celtic Christianity, as a whole, its undoubtedly rich use of symbolism, its attractive poetic and artistic qualities and its story-telling tradition, make it very appealing to the postmodern mind. If, for example, some story about a Celtic saint is felt to have a spiritual resonance, then it is likely to find a great measure of acceptance, irrespective of its historical reliability.

These are just some of the more powerful factors that lie behind the upsurge in Celtic Christianity. Let those of us who think that we are able to stand up against these forces take heed lest we fall.

2. "Celtic Christianity": as with beauty, it is very much in the eye of the beholder

Much that passes for Celtic Christianity has in fact very little in common with what we know about the historical reality of Christianity in the Celtic

regions in the early medieval period. Both Donald Meek, who is very critical of the whole phenomenon, and Ian Bradley, who has been a sympathetic supporter of the movement, have demonstrated this to be the case. In his book, aptly subtitled, "Making Myths and Chasing Dreams", Bradley identifies five stages in the mythmaking process concerning Celtic Christianity.[7].

The **first stage** occurred in the early medieval period when the biographers of important Celtic figures such as Patrick and Columba added legend to historical fact. They were hagiographers rather than scientific historians. In relation to Patrick, there is a great contrast between the tone of Patrick's own writings (two of which are generally regarded as being authentically Patrician, namely, his *Confession* and his Letter to the soldiers of Coroticus) and the 8th and 9th century biographies. In the latter, Patrick is represented as an all-conquering hero in possession of miraculous and magical powers.

A typical example of this exaggeration and distortion is found in an account in the *Tripartite Life* (composed c.900) of Patrick's supposed fast against God! For forty days Patrick refused all food. God sent an angelic negotiator to the saint in order to stop the fast but Patrick persisted. God then sent blackbirds to harass the saint, but Patrick sang imprecatory psalms and rang his bell to drive them away. Finally, God instructed the angel to concede Patrick's demands, which included his request to be able by his own power to save souls. Patrick then bargained hard for extras such as the promise that no Saxon would ever dwell in Ireland![8]. This portrait of Patrick is far removed from the humble, grateful servant of God portrayed in his own writings.

The **second stage** of historical reconstruction began a few centuries later. It was influenced by the desire of individual dioceses to establish their links with famous saints in order to promote their own prestige. Was Patrick really so closely associated with Armagh or is this something that was invented for the purposes of ecclesiastical empire building? This second stage of reconstruction was also generated by the fascination which some of the Norman conquerors developed with the people they had overcome. Amongst others, the legends of King Arthur and the Holy Grail arise from this fascination.

The **third stage** in the mythmaking process came at the time of, and subsequent to, the Reformation. It was generated by the desire to prove the existence of an ancient kind of pure pre-Roman Scottish or Irish Christianity. This attempt to identify in Celtic lands some precursors of the Reformation led, for example, to the myth of the Culdees being cultivated. The Culdees first appeared in the tenth century as a highly influential group within the Celtic

churches of Scotland and Ireland. Some have attempted to portray them as the 'evangelicals' in the pre-Reformation church. However, a study of the scant evidence that survives about these Culdees shows that, while they did see themselves as reformers, their "reforms" were essentially in the direction of imposing a more severe form of asceticism on the decadent churches of the time.[9].

This Protestant reconstruction of Celtic Christianity was manifested (and still is being manifested) in a variety of denominational expressions. Anglicans, Presbyterians, Baptists and, even Seventh-Day Adventists have all claimed to be the true successors to Patrick and his Celtic colleagues.[10]. One might call it the "Patrick was a Protestant" or "Columba was a Calvinist" school of historical reconstruction.

A **fourth stage** of the mythmaking process occurred in the nineteenth century and was fuelled by a romantic fascination with the virtues of antiquity. In Ireland, the literary celebration of what is known as the "Celtic Twilight" by figures such as W.B. Yeats and Douglas Hyde falls under this umbrella. Moreover, according to Meek, the current versions of Celtic Christianity owe a lot to the recent rediscovery of Carmina Gadelica. This was a large compendium of Celtic prayers and charms which a Gaelic-speaking Highlander, Alexander Carmichael, had published in 1900.

The **fifth and current wave** of mythmaking has both pagan and Christian dimensions. Most relevant to the evangelical community is the interest in Celtic Christianity that has arisen in certain parts of the charismatic movement. For example, in the influential tome, New Celts: Following Christ into Millenium, Ellis and Seaton attempt to reconstruct a Celtic Christianity which is rich in prophecy, visions and dreams, which is non-hierarchical in its ecclesiastical structure and very informal in its approach to worship.

Most, if not all, of these reconstructions, are guilty of two fundamental errors. Firstly, there is the failure to recognise the fact that we have very little reliable historical evidence concerning the Celtic churches. One expert on the period has asserted that the sources are "a tantalising mixture of the true, the dubious and the notably incredible."[11]. This has not stopped enthusiastic but ill-informed "Celtophiles" from indulging in vast generalisations based upon the flimsiest of evidence. As has been eloquently stated, "Those who appeal to bygone ages for the way, the truth and the life are often those who know least about them."[12].

Secondly, there has been a tendency to be highly selective with the evidence that does exist. The Celtic liking for penitentials, relics and the veneration of the Virgin Mary is often conveniently ignored by the current

advocates of Celtic Christianity. Meek has brilliantly pinpointed some of the common factors in these imaginative and biased reconstructions of Celtic Christianity. He asserts that they have acted as

> the ecclesiastical 'comforter' of those who wish to find a suitable pedigree for a new foundation, or to provide an existing institution with a strong historical precedent, or to create a church which has none of the vices of the more recent institution(s) with which they are familiar.[13].

All of us therefore who have an interest in, and some sympathy for, Celtic Christianity, must guard ourselves against falling into the fallacies outlined above. Otherwise, Celtic Christianity will indeed be like beauty – in the eye of the beholder!

3. "Celtic Christianity": its theological repercussions (the "bad" and the "ugly")

Some of the theological dangers associated with the chase after Celtic Christianity have already been alluded to in passing (such as the neo-paganism that is never far removed from writings on the subject), but we will now focus on some of the more pertinent threats that it poses to the evangelical community. One thing that needs to be realised is that, although Celtic Christianity may have possessed some distinctive marks (such as the emphasis on the practice of private confession to an "anamchara"), on matters of major theological importance there seems to have been no great divergence from continental Europe. Gilbert Markus argues persuasively that "Celtic Christianity is not as theologically unique as many have supposed" and that "almost all the main features of early Celtic Christianity could be found anywhere in Catholic Europe".[14].

There are at least four areas that should concern us. Celtic Christianity is, and may become even more so, the vehicle for promoting agendas relating to a false ecumenism, an unbiblical feminism, a spiritually destructive mysticism and a host of dubious worship practices within the churches.

(i). *The ecumenical agenda.* Within the broader charismatic movement there has been a dangerous tendency to promote an ecumenical agenda between evangelicalism and Roman Catholicism on a basis of a supposedly shared experience of love for Christ and the work of the Spirit. This has tended to override the concern that ought to exist about the serious doctrinal aberrations within Roman Catholicism. Celtic Christianity is being viewed by some charismatics as a means of furthering this development. Celtic Christians are portrayed as simple, uncomplicated believers, bereft of denominational

encumbrances and therefore holding a key to overcoming unnecessary ecclesiastical divisions.

In reality, the little we know about Celtic Christianity would suggest that it was far from enjoying a harmonious, undivided existence. The Celts appear to have been fairly quarrelsome and not even able to unite against a common enemy. Although there was controversy between Celtic Christianity and Rome over the dating of Easter, there was also considerable divergence about this issue amongst the Celtic Christians themselves. There was also, as time went on, a lot of competing for power and influence between various monastic foundations. To idealise them as the very models of modern ecumenism is to distort the record of history. More fundamentally, of course, all ecumenical endeavours should be based upon biblical truth and not modelled upon some ancient manifestation of Christianity.

(ii). *The feminist agenda.* Claims have been made by some charismatic writers that the Celtic culture uplifted women and released them into positions of authority. Brigit, the powerful Abbess of Kildare, is often cited as an example of this liberating spirit, but this is probably the exception that proves the rule. Moreover, the Brigit that we have evidence of is very much a composite figure, combining pagan myth with Christian folklore, and she is therefore not a reliable example upon which to build a model for leadership in the church. Again, more fundamentally, the roles and ministries of women within the church should be determined by biblical teaching and not by dubious historical precedents.

(iii). *The mystical agenda.* Some teachers have sought to encourage the imparting of a Celtic spirit within their churches. This 'adventurous' Celtic spirit is contrasted with the 'dominating' Roman spirit.[15]. This, and various other attempts to impart a Celtic spirit of some kind, represents a vague mysticism that could lead churches into all kinds of dangerous theological waters. It is contributing to a sort of elitist, mystical brand of Christianity that is not in line with biblical Christianity. Meek attributes the growing popularity of Celtic Christianity within evangelical circles to the decay of Scriptural authority.

(iv). *The worship agenda.* This decay in Scriptural authority has also permitted the incursion of 'Celtic' worship practices into the church. 'Celtic' music is probably one of the most popular expressions of Celtic Christianity. It is also often the door into a more general fascination with things Celtic for many people. It is rather ironic that many of these modern manifestations are highly

informal whereas the evidence would point to a rigid liturgical approach to worship within the early Celtic churches. Whatever about the ancient practices, the modern ones are certainly far removed from the regulative principle for public worship – that whatever God has not commanded is forbidden. Nowadays, almost anything that is evocative of Celtic culture is readily permitted. In summary, what is required in the churches today is a 'Scriptocentric'and not a 'Celtocentric' emphasis in all matters of faith and practice.

4. "Celtic Christianity": the "good" that can be found in it

It must be very evident from the references we have made to the writings of Donald Meek that he is very critical of the whole Celtic phenomenon. Nevertheless, even Meek is not wholly dismissive of the Celtic legacy. He asserts that "there is a rich and rewarding early Christian heritage within the Celtic areas of the British isles".[16]. He urges us not to throw out the Celtic baby with the mythological bath water. Another expert in the field, Loren Wilkinson, who is also very critical of the excesses and distortions, counsels us to steer a middle course between the extremes of "Celtophilia and "Celtophobia".[17].

Wherein therefore lies the "good" in Celtic Christianity? The famous case of Patrick will be considered in order to pinpoint some of the "good" that may be found. A reading of his Confession and his Letter to the Soldiers of Coroticus gives us four inspiring examples that are in line with biblical truth. These are:-

i. a grateful acknowledgement of the grace of God – This is seen in a number of ways and especially in the account of his conversion. "Whence I, once rustic, exiled, unlearned, who does not know how to provide for the future, this at least I know most certainly that before I was humiliated I was like a stone lying in deep mire; and He that is mighty came and in His mercy lifted me up, and raised me aloft, and placed me on the top of the wall".[18].

ii. a deep veneration for Scripture – His writing is dominated by quotations from, and allusions to, Scripture.

iii. a courageous commitment to mission – Despite many hardships, dangers and false accusations, Patrick dedicated his life to bringing the gospel to (or at least to parts of) pagan Ireland. He provides a good example of courageous endurance in the work of extending Christ's kingdom.

iv. a keen awareness of eschatological realities – The Day of Judgment

and the imminent return of the Lord were uppermost in his thinking. This is how he refers to the coming of Christ, "..in whom we believe, and whose advent we expect soon to be, judge of the living and the dead, who will render to every man according to his deeds...".[19].

These, and other features of Patrick's writings, (such as orthodox and eloquent statements on the doctrines of the Trinity and of divine transcendence) can be heartily endorsed. However, lest we get carried away with a misty-eyed enthusiasm for Patrick, two caveats ought to be entered. Firstly, we can detect in his writings a wholehearted endorsement of monasticism as a pathway to holiness and an implicit approval of clerical celibacy as a higher form of spiritual life. Although Patrick may on the whole be worthy of commendation, to regard him as a pure Hibernian champion of evangelicalism is a step too far.

Secondly, we must not assume that Patrick is representative of Celtic Christianity as it developed over a considerable period of time. Admittedly, some of the commendable features of the Patrician writings may be found in Columba and others, but there are also many indications that Celtic Christianity went downhill over the centuries. After all, in the ninth century, John Scotus Erigena, probably the most eminent philosophical thinker produced by the Celtic world, authored material that was later (rightly) condemned as being pantheistic and heretical. Indeed, anyone with a nose for heresy will have no trouble detecting an unpleasant whiff emanating from the murky waters of Celtic Christianity. Clearly, while there is good to be found in some Celtic Christianity, the bad and the ugly are usually there also, lurking in the background.

Concluding thoughts

Overall, therefore, whilst a discerning treatment of Celtic Christianity may provide the evangelical community with some inspiring examples to follow, the whole area needs to be approached with a great deal of caution. A fuzzy sentimentalism in relation to the matter will only produce disastrous results. Even within Roman Catholicism, despite its syncretistic tendencies, voices have been raised against the baleful influence of some advocates of Celtic Christianity. Surely, a biblically-informed evangelicalism should be able to identify its deleterious effects. However, given the anti-rational and eclectic spirit of our age, we should not be complacent in regard to the threat.

In the movie referred to earlier, the bad and the ugly guys are eventually overcome and the (relatively) good guy triumphs. With Celtic Christianity however, if we are not careful, the bad and the ugly will become increasingly

intermingled with the good to the detriment of biblical Christianity. Meek's verdict is that Celtic Christianity is a "mixed bag of orthodoxy, heterodoxy and wishful thinking"[20]. and we would do well to remember that. In I Timothy 4:7, we are exhorted to "have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales", and such a warning needs to be at the forefront of our thinking when interacting with the current enthusiasm for Celtic Christianity.

Notes

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3. John O'Donohue, *Anam Chara* (1999), p.256.
4. Donald Meek, *The Quest for Celtic Christianity* (2000), pp.80 and 36.
5. Ibid., pp.244 and 4.
6. Ibid., p.19.
7. Ian Bradley, *Celtic Christianity: Making Myths and Chasing Dreams* (1999).
8. Alannah Hopkin, *The Living Legend of St. Patrick* (1990), p.61.
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10. William McGrath, *The Old Irish Christian Church* (1990).
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13. Ibid., p.121.
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15. Paul Fahy, op.cit., p.20.
16. Donald Meek, *The Quest,* op.cit., p.238.
17. Loren Wilkinson, 'Saving Celtic Christianity' in *Christianity Today,* April 2000.
18. The Confession of St. Patrick in Appendix I, Alannah Hopkin, op.cit., p.165.
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THE ARAB CHILDREN OF ABRAHAM

Victor Atallah

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Egyptian Roots

Egyptian Christians, on the average, deny being Arab. They claim to be "Coptic." The word "Coptic" means "Egyptian" rather than "Arab." The name "Egypt" comes from the ancient word "Ecopt."

However, they usually do not realize that Arabs, as descendents of Ishmael, are actually 75% Coptic, i.e. Egyptian. Ishmael, the father of the Arab race, was born to Abraham and his wife's Egyptian maidservant, Hagar (Genesis 16:1-3). Ishmael's Egyptian mother provided him with an Egyptian wife (Genesis 21:21). Even this fact is sometimes resisted or even rejected by some Egyptian Christians when being taught the Scriptures! It is not, therefore, surprising that many find it difficult to receive the teaching from Scriptures that from the beginning God's purpose was to bless all the peoples of the world and not just the physical descendants of Abraham through Isaac.

The Lord's plan for the "blessing of all families of the earth" was made clear to Abram (meaning "father of one nation") the Hebrew, from the very start when he was called to obedience (Genesis 12:1-3). It was after the birth of Ishmael that God changed the elderly Abram's name to "Abraham" which means "father of many nations." The Lord clarified that the promised blessing for all was not going to be through the son conceived normally, Ishmael. Instead it would be through Isaac, the son to be supernaturally conceived of him and his barren elderly wife, whose name God also changed from "Sarai" to "Sarah." Still, Isaac had two sons – Esau and Jacob. One was hated and the other loved (Malachi 1:2-3 and Romans 9:13), yet descendents of both Ishmael and Esau were included in the promised blessing to all.

Roots of True Faith

In the case of Ishmael, we need to read carefully what the Holy Spirit recorded for us in the Book of Genesis. Hagar escaped Sarai's persecution. "When Sarai dealt harshly with her, she fled from her presence" (Genesis 16:6).

We don't know exactly what that entailed, but it could have involved beatings and other severe measures which Hagar viewed as life-threatening, either to herself or the baby she was bearing for Abraham. The Lord's Angel appeared to her in her lost estate. He not only instructed her to return to her mistress and submit to her, but also assured her that the Lord "will multiply your descendants exceedingly, so that they shall not be counted for multitude" (Genesis 16:10).

Among other things, the Angel of the Lord said to Hagar in Genesis 16:11, "Behold, you *are* with child, and you shall bear a son. You shall call his name Ishmael, because the Lord has heard your affliction." These statements are remarkably similar to those of the angel to Mary, Jesus' mother! The angel said to Mary, "Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end" (Luke 1:31-33).

The Angel assured Hagar of the Lord's answer to her prayer and promised her a very important name – Ishmael – for the promised son to whom she would give birth (Genesis 16:10-11). The meaning of the name "Ishmael" was connected to the statement that "the Lord has heard your affliction." Hagar was not only obedient to the Lord's instruction, but also "called the name of the Lord who spoke to her, You-Are-the-God-Who-Sees; for she said: have I also here seen Him who sees me?" From where did Hagar learn this language of faith? Abram the Hebrew lived and taught the ways of the Lord to his entire household. This included the servants and maidservants (Genesis 17:13, 23-27). That was the essence of his calling – a blessing for all.

Hagar, the bondwoman conceived through human efforts and still enjoyed God's promises. In the New Testament she represented earthly Jerusalem "which now is, and is in bondage with her children" (Galatians 4:25). Yet it is clear from Genesis that she was a believer, not an unbeliever as many Christians seem wrongly to assume. Unlike her contemporary Egyptians who believed in gods who could neither see nor hear, she heard and obeyed the true and living God of Abram – "the God who sees." Her experience of the living God led to the acknowledgement that he was the source of her deliverance as he provided her with the life-preserving water well. This acknowledgment was manifested in the abiding testimony of calling the well "Beer Lahai Roi" – the well of the God who sees. (Genesis 25:11 tells us that this well ended up being given to Ishmael's brother, Isaac. More on that later!)

The God-given name of Hagar's son, Ishmael, represented another abiding testimony to the living God of Abram's household. The name "Ishmael" affirms that the true living God not only "sees" but also "hears." Yes, Hagar experienced not only God's mercy on her state of suffering and

misery, but also the fact that he heard the groaning of her heart. She enjoyed an experimental encounter with the living God who sees what people cannot see and who hears what people cannot hear. Abram himself confirmed the divinely bestowed name. He "named his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael" (Genesis 16:15).

Human Prejudice

Sadly, the prejudice of some Christian against Arabs focuses on Genesis 16:12, which says, "He shall be a wild man; His hand *shall be* against every man, And every man's hand against him. And he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren." The problem with that is two-fold.

On the one hand, these misunderstood words are preceded by a divine promise of blessing as well as a very meaningful and faith-rooted divinely chosen name. The message of the Lord to Hagar was "I will multiply your descendants exceedingly, so that they shall not be counted for multitude" (Genesis 16:10). Isn't this synonymous with the Lord's earlier promise to Abram himself? The Lord "said, 'Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them.' And He said to him, 'So shall your descendants be.'"(Genesis 15:5) This constituted the basis for Abram's justifying faith (Genesis 16:6). Similarly, Hagar, who learned the ways of the Lord from her earthly master, Abram, trusted the promise of the Lord and obeyed to the point of returning to submission to her persecuting and oppressive mistress. This was nothing less than active faith.

On the other hand, we need to remember the description of Judah, through whom the promised seed of blessing, even Jesus himself, would come. Jacob said of him, "Judah is a lion's whelp; From the prey, my son, you have gone up. He bows down, he lies down as a lion; And as a lion, who shall rouse him?" (Genesis 49:9). Judah, the closest of all of Abraham's physical grandchildren to the promised Messiah, actually was a terrible character. Genesis 38 relates that to us in graphic detail. He was an adulterous, unjust and hypocritical person. He actually ordered the dragging out and burning to death of his widowed daughter-in-law, Tamar, because of her pregnancy. His hypocrisy was exposed when she presented the proof that he was the father of her unborn twin boys. Yet even through that horrific sin of incest, Perez, was born to continue the Abrahmic offspring for the birth of King David through whose line Christ himself would be born.

If we are to judge both Ishmael's character and works by the same standards with which we judge Judah, we would most certainly conclude that he was a much better person. Humanly speaking, Hagar, Ishmael's mother, in contrast with Sarah, Isaac's mother, seems to be a more praiseworthy person. Sarah herself does not seem to reflect either strong faith or consistent godliness.

She was harsh, quite selfish and prone to jealousy. After all, it was she who rationalized and forced a less than believing interpretation on the Lord's promise of a seed to Abram. Her understanding limited God to operating within the ordinary framework of human experience – i.e. a child can only be born to a fertile young woman. This is why she offered Hagar to Abram. In that context she went as far as blaming the Lord himself for her problem. She said: "See now, the Lord has restrained me from bearing *children.*" She went on to take things into her own hands by saying to her husband, "Go in to my maid; perhaps I shall obtain children by her." (Genesis 16:2).

A Divine Promise of Blessing

In terms of promise, the Lord confirms to Abraham what he had said to Hagar regarding Ishmael. The Lord said to Abraham, "As for Ishmael, I have heard you. Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly. He shall beget twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation" (Genesis 17:20). There is no doubt that this divine promise has been fulfilled. Ishmael's descendents even now are among the most numerous of all people groups. Numerical blessing, however, is not all that should concern us. More importantly, we need to look at the abiding spiritual blessings.

It is rather interesting that Ishmael received circumcision, the sign and seal of the Lord's covenant, at the same time with his father Abraham and prior to the birth of Isaac. Ishmael was thirteen years old (Genesis 17:23-26). He was old enough to understand what it was all about. Most certainly Abraham explained it all to his beloved firstborn son. Earlier in the chapter, as the Lord promises Abraham the birth of Isaac through Sarah (v.15-18), Abraham seems to dismiss the idea as "laughable" and expresses contentment with receiving the promised blessing through Ishmael. In other words, the growing young man, Ishmael, gave his father every reason to believe that he will do well as the son of promise. Even after the birth of Isaac, Abraham remained very committed to Ishmael. Sarah's sense of insecurity and jealously drove her to demand of her husband, "Cast out this bondwoman and her son; for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, *namely* with Isaac." (Genesis 21:10)

It is not clear exactly what is meant by Sarah "seeing" Ishmael scoffing. Still, even if we gave that the severest of meanings – mocking and/or speaking rudely – we need to remember that Ishmael was an adolescent. At such an age just about all kids misbehave in one way or another. Moreover, like any other normal human being who finds himself all of a sudden no longer at the center of attention, he had reason to be jealous of his little brother. So, he conducted himself improperly, yet, there is no indication that he represented any physical danger to his brother or to anyone else in the household. Under normal

circumstances, Ishmael's conduct would require no more than a stern scolding. With a godly father like Abraham, we would expect such punishment to be exercised with much love and tenderness, accompanied by some fatherly instruction. We are not told that Abraham did any of that, but that is not the purpose of the narrative. The actual purpose of the narrative is that Abraham was reluctant to kick out his firstborn son and his mother from the household.

The Holy Spirit tells us in v.11 that "the matter was very displeasing in Abraham's sight because of his son." In fact, Abraham would not give in to Sarah's demands. He does, however, with a broken heart heed the instruction of the Lord to carry out Sarah's wishes. The Lord's directive, however, was combined with a confirmation of the promise to Ishmael – "I will also make a nation of the son of the bondwoman, because he is your seed."(Genesis 22:13). This was the basis for Abraham's comfort and assurance as he obeyed the Lord's instruction. It is his confidence in the Lord's faithfulness to his promises that sustained him mentally and emotionally and gave the strength he needed to part with his firstborn son.

A Very Sad Farewell

Ishmael was then about 15 years old. The parting of Hagar along with Abraham's firstborn son must have been immensely heartbreaking. The expression "So, Abraham rose early in the morning" in the context of the final preparations for this painful farewell perhaps implies that the suffering father did not sleep very much that night. After all, he was going to let go of a dear son for good, not expecting to see him again on this side of glory.

The text does not tell us everything that went on. Abraham, however, must have shared the Lord's assuring promises with both Ishmael and Hagar. In fact, Abraham had an obligation to explain his position to all in his household. At face value, seen with normal human eyes, the matter must have looked cruel and unjust. After all, Ishmael was not only his firstborn son, but also for thirteen years was his only son. He had not only been guarded, protected and well-treated, but also viewed by all as the true heir of Abraham. Humanly speaking, the fact that a new son was born to his beloved wife, Sarah could not justify throwing Ishmael out of the household altogether. There was much at stake, not only in regard to his own integrity, but also in terms of bearing testimony to the true, living God as merciful, loving and just. It would have been quite a task for Abraham to persuade his household of the correctness of his action. One can't imagine the immense sense of embarrassment and shame experienced by a caring and God-fearing father like Abraham as he walked around the compound in preparation for the final farewell.

This horrific experience must have been even more immense at the time of the farewell itself. How could Abraham look Hagar in the eye at such a

moment? Hagar did not trap him to father a child for her. She willingly gave herself to him at the instruction of her mistress, Sarai. Abraham accepted her and she became the mother of his firstborn son by his wife's and his own premeditated arrangement. Abraham had already caused Hagar much suffering by allowing his wife to humiliate and persecute her. The fact that Abraham was the divinely appointed head of his household meant that he himself bore the responsibility for Hagar's pain. As a human being, Hagar found her mistreatment by her mistress unbearable. She had to run away. Abraham did nothing to protect her. Then when she returned, in obedience to God's word, he seemed happy to have her back and he too obeyed the Lord's instruction and called the child Ishmael. Now it would seem as if he were turning his back on her and on his own son.

Then, we have Ishmael himself. For thirteen years he was the apple of his father's eye. His father was grooming him to lead the household. Everything and everyone was at his service. Now, it seems that for merely saying something rude or doing something impolite, usually associated with boys at that stage in life, he finds himself totally rejected. Yes, his own father decides to abandon him to an unknown future as he throws him out with his mother into a dangerous world. Here too we can imagine how hard it was for Abraham to even say goodbye to him.

All needed preparation for that had already been completed early in the morning. Other than bread and water Abraham gave Hagar and Ishmael nothing else. They were not given animal stock or a farm. They were not even provided with an escort to a place of safety. They were left to themselves, thrown out into a very hostile environment in the wilderness, where wild creatures roamed. Despite all the pain involved, we don't have a hint of any attempt on Abraham's part of giving much thinking or evaluation to revising his plan. Abraham seems quite ready to part ways with his firstborn son.

Tested Faith

We don't know exactly what went on in Ishmael's mind. It would have been natural for him to feel betrayed by his beloved father. It would have been natural for a teenage boy to develop a sense of anger and bitterness even against God. Facing certain death, he could have wondered about the meaning of God's promises for him to be the father of a great nation. There is, however, no indication whatsoever that either he or his mother expressed any objection or bitterness. There must be some explanation. The only convincing one is that, like Abraham and other members of the household, Hagar and her son submitted to God's will and trusted that if God so willed their departure from the household, it must be for good. Abraham must have constantly taught his household to "trust and obey!" It must have also become clear to all involved

that Abraham was actually carrying out the Lord's instructions. They had all learned from past events that such divine instructions always bring about what is good for those who love God.

Still, Hagar's faith in the God of Abraham is now exposed to the severest of tests. Lost in the wilderness, Hagar and her only child are about to die of dehydration. The mother could not bear the experience of being next to her dying son. She moved across "and lifted up her voice and wept." She became convinced that her son would die. What she actually said as she cried and wept is not recorded for us, but we can imagine her pleading with God for the life of her son. She had every reason to "remind" God of his repeated promises. As Hagar's faith is tried to the limit, the Lord intervenes. She now desperately needs such a divine visitation. "And God heard the voice of the lad." (Genesis 21:17). Now Hagar's faith is uplifted. She has a fresh encounter with the God who knows, sees and hears. That was her only hope.

Divine Deliverance

The message was unmistakable in its heavenly source. The Lord condescends and speaks to Hagar through his Angel. The tender-hearted God of Abraham proves to her that he cares about her – "What ails you, Hagar?" The all-knowing God did not need an answer. He sees and hears everything. Hagar knew that very well. She in turn did not need to ascertain the identity of the heavenly voice. With renewed faith and strengthened trust in the living God who sees and hears, she also hears the words, "Arise, lift up the lad and hold him with your hand, for I will make him a great nation." This in itself renewed her energies. Her immense physical exhaustion no longer mattered.

The Lord himself opens Hagar's eyes to see his provision of water. "Lahai Roi" (the Lord that sees) himself enables her to see yet another time a water well. The entire work of salvation is of the Lord. The God of deliverance provides what is needed for the preserving of Ishmael's life. Our God never fails. His promises are sure and are "amen." Hagar also hears the ever assuring words "fear not...!" The words "fear not" are often accompanied with the promise "I am with you." Genesis 21:20 echoes that – "So God was with the lad". What else does Hagar need? The very presence of God is certified for the son from whom she had walked away as she expected him to die.

What the Angel of the Lord says to Hagar gives us sufficient reason to believe that Ishmael himself was actually praying. The angel announces, "God heard the voice of the lad where he is." This time, it was God hearing Ishmael. Dying Ishmael was all alone. Even his mother was no longer by his side. But in reality he was never alone. The Lord was not far away. He was there, "where the lad was" and he knew exactly what the lad was saying. Most importantly, he "heard the voice of the lad." Again, what was Ishmael saying?

We are not told, but he had nobody else to speak to but God. Whatever he was saying was heard by the living God who named him after the very quality that describes his need – the Lord "hears", literally "Ishmael"!

In Genesis 21:20-21 we read, "So God was with the lad; and he grew and dwelt in the wilderness, and became an archer. He dwelt in the Wilderness of Paran; and his mother took a wife for him from the land of Egypt." Thus, the establishing of the Arab nation, from mostly Egyptian roots, begins, not only with God's promise but also with his presence and blessing. What more is needed – even in the wilderness of Paran? The Lord provides everything not only for his survival but also for the process of building the promised nation.

There Was Much More to Ishmael

The story does not end here. At the end of Genesis 24 we are told that Isaac marries Rebekah and brings her to his mother's tent; thus she becomes the official mistress of the household in place of the deceased Sarah. At that point Abraham felt free to marry again. His new wife, Keturah, bore him six sons (Genesis 25:1-4). One of them, Midian, becomes quite prominent through the interactions of his descendents with the descendents of Jacob. This included Moses' marriage to one of the seven daughters of Jethro (also called Reuel in Exodus 2:18). Prior to his death, we are told that Abraham did what would seem quite unjust and unacceptable in most human cultures, especially today. He decided to give all his belongings to Isaac and send away to the east all his others sons, after he gave them token gifts. There is no mention of objections or bitterness on the part of any of them.

We don't know whether Abraham ever saw his son Ishmael again. Nothing more is mentioned of Ishmael in Genesis until Abraham's death. When Abraham dies, however, we have a surprise. Ishmael appears on the scene to co-officiate, with Isaac over their father's funeral (Genesis 25:9).

This is a very unusual human gesture towards a father who sent him away with his mother to face certain death in the inhospitable wilderness. It is also an extremely generous step towards a younger brother whose birth was the main reason for the father's cruel and unjust treatment he had received. It casts out any doubt whatsoever that Ishmael harboured any resentment against his father or his brother Isaac. This is perhaps the most remarkable description of the good character of Ishmael. It is also a very vital sign of his understanding and acceptance of God's ways. The most likely explanation of the generosity of Ishmael's conduct is that he had long understood that God's ultimate purpose is for the blessing of all families of the earth and not just Abraham's physical descendents. Already he had firsthand experimental knowledge of the fact that Jehovah is a God who is faithful to his promises. His maturity was such that he had developed a conscious self-denying conviction and attitude. The

passing worldly titles and possessions didn't seem to matter to him in contrast to the abiding blessings of God's original promise to Abraham for the blessing of "all families of the earth" (Genesis 12:3).

In the context of Abraham's funeral, the Holy Spirit records for us another very significant fact. We are told that the Lord blessed Isaac who "dwelt at Beer Lahai Roi" (Genesis 25:11). We know that well, Beer Lahai Roi, was in fact named as a result of Hagar's experimental knowledge of the living God's care and faithfulness when she was pregnant with Ishmael and running away from harsh treatment of Sarai, Isaac's mother. Ishmael had every right now to request the well of his younger brother, but he didn't even seem to be bothered by it. It didn't seem to matter to him that his brother took even that which signified the Lord's salvation for him and for his mother.

The Promise Fulfilled

At this point, the Holy Spirit records for us Ishmael's genealogy. We read in Genesis 25:13-16, "these *were* the names of the sons of Ishmael, by their names, according to their generations. The firstborn of Ishmael, Nebajoth; then Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam, Mishma, Dumah, Massa, Hadad, Tema, Jetur, Naphish, and Kedemah. These were the sons of Ishmael and these *were* their names, by their towns and their settlements, twelve princes according to their nations." Yes, like Jacob, Ishmael is blessed with twelve sons, each established a nation. The Ishmaelite federation of nations extended "from Havilah as far as Shur, which is east of Egypt as you go toward Assyria." Here again is another affirmation of the faithfulness of the promise-keeping living God of Abraham.

Then we are told, "These *were* the years of the life of Ishmael: one hundred and thirty-seven years; and he breathed his last and died, and was gathered to his people...He died in the presence of all his brethren." (Genesis 25:17-18). It is not clear what is meant by brethren here. There is a possibility, however, that Ishmael kept in contact with his brother Isaac and the other brothers who were born to Keturah, his father's last wife.

In Genesis 28:6-9 we read, "Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob and sent him away to Padan Aram to take himself a wife from there, *and that* as he blessed him he gave him a charge, saying, 'You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan,' and that Jacob had obeyed his father and his mother and had gone to Padan Aram. Also Esau saw that the daughters of Canaan did not please his father Isaac. So Esau went to Ishmael and took Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael, Abraham's son, the sister of Nebajoth, to be his wife in addition to the wives he had." This seems to indicate that Isaac looked favorable at intermarriage between his descendents and those of Ishmael. As such it would confirm the possibility of good relations between these two

branches of Abraham's offspring.

In Genesis 37:25, we are told that the Ishmaelite traders showed up in time to play a role in delivering Joseph from the murderous hands of his brothers. They were "coming from Gilead with their camels, bearing spices, balm, and myrrh, on their way to carry *them* down to Egypt." They bought him from his brothers for "twenty shekels of silver" and took him with them to Egypt. This proved to be an integral part of the divine plan for the blessing of "all families of the earth," including the Egyptians and their close relatives, the Ishmaelites.

The Ultimate Blessing of All

Isaiah's visions included "burdens" against both Egypt (Genesis 19) and Arabia (Genesis 21:13-16). In both cases, the "burden" of the Lord leads to the humiliation of the people of these nations. Tema and Kedar, two of Ishmael's sons, were mentioned by name in the burden against Arabia. Yet the purpose, as we read in Isaiah 19:22, was not annihilation but blessing – "the Lord will strike Egypt, He will strike and heal *it*; they will return to the Lord, and He will be entreated by them and heal them." This must apply to God's dealings with all nations. The living God of Abraham is the God of history. As he directs and controls the events of history, "all things", big and small, are designed to "work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to *His* purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to be* conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified." (Romans 8:28-30).

On the Day of Pentecost, among the visitors to Jerusalem who heard the gospel in the own tongues were Egyptians and Arabs (Acts 2:11). We don't know how many of them were among the "three thousand souls" that were added to the community of faith that day, yet we do know that Egyptians and Arabs heard in their own tongues "the wonderful works of God" through the promised one Seed of Abraham, the Lord Jesus Christ. They were not the only ones. Representatives of "every nation under heaven" enjoyed the same experience on that historic day which ushered in the Lord's blessing to "all families of the earth."

In Galatians 3:15-29, we have the most crucial and decisive Bible passage in understanding God's plan for blessing all nations through Abraham. We learn from it that God's covenant with Abraham for this blessing preceded the establishing of the Hebrew nation and all the laws and arrangements that were to be revealed and preserved through that nation. In verse 16 we read, "Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, 'And to

seeds,' as of many, but as of one, *'And to your Seed,'* who is Christ." Through Paul, the Holy Spirit goes on to indicate that even Moses, the mediator of the old covenant (in distinction from Christ the Mediator of the new) was not called by the one God to mediate for just one nation (verse 20). "But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe." (verse 22). All descendents of Adam, including Abraham and his physical offspring – Jews and Arabs – fell under the curse of the sin of Adam. For any of them to receive the blessing promised through Abraham, they need the coming and completed work of the one Seed of Abraham, the perfect second Adam, Christ Jesus, the incarnate Son of God.

Today, after so many generations of nations and peoples intermixing through history, nobody can be totally sure of his genetic heritage. Each generation adapts to the dominating culture and language of its region and the following generations soon forget what has come before. It is not certain how Arab any Arab is, nor how Jewish any Jew is. This applies to most racial groups! In fact, it is well-established that a large proportion, if not the majority of the "Arabs" of Palestine can be traced back to people having Jewish ethnic roots who converted to the prevailing Arab culture. In what way they are physically related to Abraham, it does not matter. What matters is their spiritual relationship to Abraham, through his Seed, the Lord Jesus. Whether Arab or Jew or any other ethnic background, if "Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." (Galatians 3:29)

Sadly, most Arab and Jewish people are trapped in a futile and life-wasting dispute over that which is passing – a piece of ordinary land which will end burnt up like the rest of the cursed earth. They need to hear the true Gospel and realize that this land served as a temporary venue for the unfolding of God's plan for blessing them and "all families of the earth." We can learn from Ishmael's lack of attachment to the passing things of this world. We can also learn from his understanding of and commitment to God's ultimate plan to call for himself a people "from every tribe, tongue, people and nation."

THEOLOGY AND TEMPTATION IN JOHN WESLEY'S WORKS

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Introduction

For almost three centuries John Wesley (1703-1791) has been a man of considerable influence in the Christian community in most parts of the world. In order to evaluate the nature of this influence it is appropriate to look for an entrance somewhere between the fields of theology and spirituality.

In our age Reformed and Presbyterian churches, as well as in their theological thinking, are challenged by the spirituality of evangelical revival movements and by the suggestive narratives of charismatic preachers. Sometimes even a sort of Reformed inferiority complex has developed when we hear testimonies of evangelical or charismatic spiritual abundance.

Historically there is reason enough for John Wesley to be granted the title of "the godfather of the evangelical movement". His collected works exhibit a great variety of themes and subjects, but relatively few systematic theological treatises. In the fourteen volumes of the "classical" edition of his works, four are filled with the journals and three with sermons. Many letters have been preserved, and especially a number of *Treatises* reveal the nature of Wesley's thinking, above all in his polemical writings. In quite a few shorter treatises, or rather "outpourings", sometimes indicated as *Thoughts on..* or *Thoughts upon..* - together with the journals, sermons, treatises and letters – we nevertheless discover the shape of a coherent systematic way of thinking.

To be honest, Wesley's ambition was not at all to be an original theologian. His passion rather was to preach the gospel and to be the spiritual guide of the large communities of followers that he considered to be his field of activity. Even into his old age he dedicated himself to this task with an impressive amount of energy. Notwithstanding that, in a vast number of theological publications on John Wesley, we find an indirect witness to the fact that indeed he was a theological thinker of great originality. He surely followed the mainline thinking of the Reformation, but with candid creativeness he also chose his own tracks in theology.[1].

In order to determine Wesley's influence more precisely – with an eye on the relevance of the questions this article wants to answer – I would point to the religious communities that came into existence in England, Wales and Scotland during his lifetime.

In the United States John Wesley's impact in the 18th century was surpassed by that of his friend George Whitefield, who, together with Jonathan Edwards, was involved in what has become known as the Great Awakening. When, however, in the 19th century in the USA the Second Great Awakening came into being, John Wesley's influence must not be overlooked. Much more than the preaching of the Calvinists Whitefield and Edwards, the Arminian thinking of John Wesley is to be recognized in spiritual guides like Charles Grandison Finney (1792-1875) and Reuben Archer Torrey (1856-1928). An essential aspect of the 19th century American and international Holiness Movement would be inconceivable without John Wesley's influence.[2].

Relevant for later developments is the fact that 20th century Pentecostalism may be considered a first degree descendant of the 19th century Holiness Movement. Donald Dayton's research into the roots of Pentecostalism gives a deeper understanding of the measure in which John Wesley's influence is absorbed in this movement.[3].

In many parts of the evangelical movement that did not follow the Pentecostal direction - or the charismatic movement that originated from there - the influence of Wesley's Methodism is still to be seen, also outside the several Methodist Churches. In the identity of many churches and groups all over the world, often to be recognised by the name 'evangelical', features that are special to John Wesley's heritage can be found.

Consequently it will be of practical and current interest to deal with the characteristics of John Wesley's thinking. In order to do justice to the subject "theology and temptation" we must not start by digging in his systematic theology, but by looking into the practice of faith in his writings. It may only be called theology in the second instance.

This fact does not place him at a large distance from Martin Luther and the other 16th century Reformers, although there is a difference. Luther certainly was interested in the definition of proper theology, as Wesley was not. For both of them, however, the practice of living by faith did have the highest priority. As far as Wesley is concerned, only by deduction we can construct the picture of a theological concept.

In order to give depth to the analysis of John Wesley's theological model, first I will make some remarks on Martin Luther's theology, and on the part temptation plays in his theological conviction. Then I will look into the connection between faith and temptation in John Wesley, and finally, as a result, I will try to characterize his theology.

Temptation in Martin Luther's theology

Luther strongly opposed the philosophical medieval concept of theology. Not an Aristotelian scholastic sort of theology should be the decisive method to deal with the knowledge of God and man, but that sort of knowledge by which a man comes to know and to hear, what is meant by "grace".[4]. At the heart of theology is no general, universal knowledge, but the confession of being a sinner before God. In Psalm 51, 6 we find it properly expressed: "soli tibi peccavi": "against you, you only, have I sinned".[5]. For Luther, theology has a double subject: God and man, man and God: man who is a sinner and God who justifies.[6].

When Aristotle speaks of God, he is convinced he is dealing with an impersonal being, that in eternal rest knows himself to be the absolute truth, and enjoys his existence as eternal bliss. For Luther this idea of God is to be characterised as "ens miserrimum", "most miserable being".[7]. Knowing God is not a matter of climbing as high as possible in the ideas of philosophy, but a matter of wisdom, experiential wisdom, "sapientia experimentalis".[8]. In order to be a theologian it is necessary to keep to the rules of doing theology properly: "oratio, meditation, tentatio" - prayer, meditation and temptation.[9].

In the same connection Luther says that the complete concept of theology is only a matter of the explanation of Scripture, and the definition of theology lies most of all in the authority of Scripture. Psalm 119 for Luther was a "matrix" in his understanding of theology. All three rules – *oratio, meditatio and tentatio* – are to be found there. His considerations when reading this psalm can be summarized, as Bayer beautifully did:

> A theologian is he, who is explained by the Holy Scriptures, and who wants to be explained by the Scriptures, and who, himself being explained, explains them to other tempted people.[10].

After having dealt with the necessity for prayer and meditation in order to be a theologian, he goes into the third condition: *Tentatio,* "Anfechtung". He considers temptation to be the test-case, that teaches you not only to know and understand, but also to experience, how just, how true, how sweet, how tender, how mighty, how comforting is the Word of God, wisdom above all wisdom.[11]. In the same connection he argues that David in Psalm 119 often complains about enemies, tyrants, false spirits and the like that make him suffer. That has to do with the fact that whoever is familiar with the Word of God will be visited by the devil, to the effect to make you a real doctor. By his temptations you are taught to search the Word of God and to love it.[12].

Luther himself experienced that the heavy attacks by "his papists" drove him with his back to the wall and in the end made him "a fairly good theologian". Without all his temptations he would not have received this grace

and privilege to learn as much as he did.

Only temptation teaches to pay attention to the Word of God. At the same time it is the Word that provides the possibility of this experience. You must be sure of the fact that the Holy Scriptures are not given to us as a quantity of paper to be read, or to speculate upon, but to experience who is God, and to live. When Luther says, "Experience only makes a theologian",[13]. he clearly excludes the possibility that theology could be a theoretical way of knowledge. Furthermore, he is not speaking of experience in general, but of the experience of the Scriptures.

These conditions in Luther's personal spirituality show how deeply his concept of theology is rooted in faith alone. It is this faith, that entirely depends on the Word, and that experiences all kinds of temptations, that is the secret source of theology. One of the most essential aspects of experience is that it knows how faith alone - even faith without experience! – is the way to know God in Christ. This *sola fide* makes a theologian.

An essential aspect of this concept of theology is Luther's "theologia crucis". To know Christ for Luther means to know his cross. This idea has been a main motif in the whole of Luther's theological history. The temptations come to an end in this consolation. Salvation is not within us, but outside ourselves, only in Christ. Where man is captured in his deepest, and most heavy temptations, there is real redemption from those: in Christ alone. Our salvation is not in what *we* experience through and with Christ, but in what Christ alone on the cross did for us.[14].

We will see how the experiential character of theology in John Wesley, is of quite a different nature.

Faith and temptation in John Wesley's works

Wesley's conversion

In order to get on Wesley's theological track we must start with his biography. What happened on May 24, 1738, to him was the dividing-line between being lost and being saved. Before that date he knew he was not saved, as he makes clear in his lengthy account.[15]. However, already in his time as a student in Oxford he was one of the leaders in the "Holy Club", and after that he spent a number of years in Georgia, America, and was deeply touched by the Moravian preacher Peter Böhler. The influence of Böhler gave Wesley the conviction that a true and living faith cannot possibly be distinguished from a *feeling* that all sins from the past are forgiven, and that a freedom is *felt* from all present sins.[16]. Without this feeling there can be no salvation.

This conviction gives some depth to the description of the 1738 experience in Aldersgate Street in London. The preface of Luther's

Commentary on Romans was read in that meeting.[17]. According to Wesley this experience was the moment of his justification, as put in his own narrative:

> About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation: And an assurance was given me, that he had taken away *my* sins, even *mine*, and saved *me* from the law of sin and death.[18].

The certainty with which Wesley identifies this moment as his conversion, has been questioned. More important for our aim is the fact that Wesley only finds the proof of his conversion in his *felt* experience. He connects this experience explicitly with the testimony of the Holy Spirit. This testimony of the Spirit is not related to any act of faith, and no reference is made to the anchorage of faith in the Word of God. It is just an "inexplicable" and "directly" given experience. To Wesley this implies that no guarantee is received of definitive salvation in the future. "The assurance whereof I speak [...] relates wholly and solely to present pardon, not to future salvation."[19].

The proof of his assurance of salvation lies in what he convincingly feels. As soon as there is a lack of this feeling, that lack serves as proof of the opposite.

Consequently for Wesley *faith* is the proper temptation of assurance, because faith as a matter of fact is not sufficient. The affirmation of faith must be found in experience. That is the proper ground of faith. This consequence is illustrated by what Wesley notes down in his journal when he comes home that very evening of May 24, and writes about the temptations he experiences.

> After my return home, I was much buffeted with temptation, but cried out, and they fled away. They returned again and again. I as often lifted up my eyes, and He "sent me help from his holy place." And herein I found the difference between this and my former state chiefly consisted. I was striving, yea fighting with all my might under the law, as well as under grace. But then I was sometimes, if not often, conquered; now, I was always conquerer.[20].

In this reasoning we recognize what remained the pattern of Wesley's conviction on faith and assurance: If there is no experienced victory, there is nothing at all!

He himself entirely accepted this consequence, as can be found in what he testified eight months later. On January 1, 1739, he and his brother Charles had come together for a "love-feast" with a number of friends - among them also some Moravian brothers with whom already some tensions had developed. Those present in the Fetter-Lane Society were about sixty brothers. John Wesley writes:

> About three in the morning, as we were continuing in prayer, the power of God came mightily upon us, insomuch that many cried out for exceeding joy, and many fell to the ground. As soon as we were recovered a little from that awe and amazement at the presence of his Majesty, we broke out with one voice, "We praise thee, o God; we acknowledge thee to be the Lord." [21].

Three days later, January 4th, 1739, we find in Wesley's journal the almost unbelievable statement that he is no Christian, because he feels that at that moment he does not love God.

> I affirm I am not a Christian now. Indeed, what I might have been I know not, had I been faithful to the grace then given, when expecting nothing less, I received such a sense of the forgiveness of my sins, as till then I never knew. But that I am not a Christian at this day, I assuredly know as that Jesus is the Christ.[22].

I conclude that according to John Wesley no assurance of faith and forgiveness is present unless a sense of forgiveness is experienced.

Wesley and the "sola fide"

In spite of what is said so far there is reason enough to deal with Wesley's relationship with the *sola fide*. We may be reminded of Wesley's appreciation of Luther, since the Aldersgate Street experience, even since the influence of Peter Böhler, who was a disciple of Count Zinzendorf. When between Zinzendorf and Wesley hard feelings developed, the appreciation of Böhler was still there.

Wesley used the words *"sola fide"* quite often. That brought some scholars to the conclusion that there was a fundamental agreement between Wesley's concept of soteriology and that of the Reformers. In an article about this matter W. Klaiber defends the position that Wesley's use of *"sola fide"* points to the decisive role of grace in his theology.[23].

It has, however, to be made clear at least why a number of times Wesley cried out words like: "Once more, beware of Solifidianism; crying nothing but 'Believe, believe!'"[24]. The background to his speaking against a certain use of sola fide was that he wanted to resist the antinomian tendency found in the Moravians. Evidently Wesley's opposition to that sort of sola fide also hit the sola fide of the Lutheran Reformation, and that was because this opposition was rooted in the legalistic tendency in his own thinking.

When John Wesley used the words *sola fide* this had a very special, in fact a limited, meaning. In his doctrine of justification he stressed the fact that our faith is imputed to us as righteousness. Because of his fear of antinomianism, he refused to admit that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us as righteousness. I must add to that, that the theme of justification for Wesley had a different significance from that given to it by the Reformers in the 16th

century. For Wesley justification is important as the only source of good works. Before justification, no good works at all can exist. When Wesley deals with justification, his treatment of it is nearly always aimed at sanctification. Sanctification is the most important theme in Wesley's theology. It can perhaps rightly be said that justification points at a relative change, and sanctification at a real change. The accent always is at the latter. H. Linström properly characterized this as the "teleological tendency of Wesley's soteriology".[25].

For salvation, according to Wesley, it is not justification that is the decisive condition, but sanctification.

That is different from the conviction of Luther and Calvin. They saw the forgiveness of sin as the main point, although Calvin stressed that justification and sanctification are indissolubly connected. It is one grace – a *duplex gratia.* The Holy Spirit does not give the one without the other. For Wesley forgiveness and justification lie at the beginning of religion, but then the essential part of being a Christian, sanctification, still has to come.

When, against this background, we try again to focus on the meaning of faith, it is possible to say a few things:

(i). Faith is a work of God. In order to explain why some people believe and others don't, according to Wesley we must not think of divine predestination, as was Calvin's conviction and also Whitefield's. The reason for this distinction lies only in the free responsiveness of human nature, that has not been taken from man.[26]. To that idea Wesley adds that the existence of a free will is a free gift of grace. According to his opinion this grace was given to all men. That is what he calls "preventing" or "prevenient" grace.[27]. Wesley's doctrine of this "prevenient grace" as a matter of fact serves the cause of escaping the Calvinist doctrine of predestination, and yet allows him to maintain that salvation is a matter of grace.

Wesley is convinced that human nature in itself is thoroughly sinful, and has no power for conversion.[28]. Still he stipulates that repentance and the good works that go with it are a condition of faith and justification.[29].

It is clear that speaking about the meaning of faith alone has become rather limited in Wesley's theology. This must be seen in the following two respects.

(ii). In the light of Wesley's own conversion experience, we conclude that faith only is of significance if we can lay hold of some experiential effect of faith. As soon as those effects are gone, faith itself has disappeared also. For this reason temptation can be very dangerous: it hazards the entire foundation of being a Christian. If the feeling of faith is gone, faith itself is gone. No "yet" is left, that in spite of the lack of experience clings to the promises of the gospel.

(iii). In the light of Wesley's doctrine of sanctification, we can also conclude that faith is limited by good works. He admits, "Faith is the condition, and the only condition, of sanctification, exactly as it is of justification."[30]. What he really means by that "condition", however, is clear in his description of faith in his *Brief Thoughts on Christian Perfection.* "As to the manner, I believe this perfection is always wrought in the soul by a simple act of faith: consequently in an instant."[31].

Meanwhile, the element of good works is entirely connected to that conviction. Sanctifying faith according to Wesley can only be produced in people that find themselves under the discipline to do good works. Exactly this combination between faith and the exertion to do good works is characteristic for a Methodist.

Peculiar faith

Faith brings about sanctification, and even "Christian perfection", in an instant. Wesley's conviction in this respect is dependent on the character of faith as "peculiar faith". This expression is used by Wesley in order to make clear that faith always goes for results. The essential character of a Christian is not to be found in the attitude of faith in itself, but in an effective faith.

When Wesley stresses the importance of faith, he exclusively directs his reasoning to the achievement of a certain experience. Faith for Wesley is not the foundation of the Christian existence, an attitude to life conditioned by trust in God's promises, in the Scriptures, in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Faith to him rather means being directed to something that can be received, or that can happen, "even now".

It is characteristic of this faith that its main interest is not the knowledge of and community with Christ, but the possibility of attaining something. The verb "to attain" is found very frequently in John Wesley's writings.

Faith as the "gate to religion"

Connected to idea of "peculiar faith" is the description of faith as the "gate to religion". In order to define the religion of a Methodist properly, in a treatise *A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists* (1748) Wesley points to two aspects:

1. "religion...is nothing short of, or different from, 'the mind that was in Christ'; the image of God stamped upon the heart; inward righteousness, attended with the peace of God; and joy in the Holy Ghost."

2. Faith is "the only way under heaven to this religion."[32].

We may conclude that faith is not essential to the spiritual being of a Christian; it is only the means to reach that standard of being a Christian.[33].

It is understandable that Wesley's pastoral care for the leaders of the "bands" that had come into existence in many places, mostly consisted of a number of questions put to them, such as:

> Do you pray always? Do you rejoice in God every moment? Do you in every thing give thanks? In loss? In pain? In sickness? In weariness, disappointments? Do you desire nothing? Do you fear nothing? Do you feel the love of God continually in your heart? Have you a witness in whatever you speak or do, that it is pleasing God?[34].

Temptations of other kinds

So far we have found that Christian life is approached by Wesley on the basis of an anthropocentric framework, and not from the relationship between God and man. This appears to have consequences for the manner in which temptations can interfere with a Christian's life.

The dangers that can be a threat to a Methodist have to do with the risk of losing his experience, or losing his state of Christian perfection. These dangers are not identified as an obscuration of peace with God, at least if that peace with God is described in terms of the relationship of faith.

A long tradition in the Reformation says that when temptations are dealt with, then all sorts of oppressions and distress can be answered by the promises of the gospel. God's promises provide a key that fits all doors.

Temptations of the kind that were relevant to Wesley were different. The promises of the gospel do not answer those. The biblical connection between the Word of God and the functioning of faith is hardly understood in the Wesleyan way of thinking. Methodists of Wesley's type were not directed to a living by faith, but to a living by sight.[35].

It could be elaborated how this desire to live by sight has remained a characteristic feature for large parts of the evangelical movement, albeit predominantly in Pentecostal and Charismatic currents. I indicate only in passing how consistently and with conviction Wesley wanted to be an Arminian. The paper he edited for many years purposely was named *The Arminian Magazine*.

It is to be considered a great pity that, normally, Wesley used to speak of "a Christian" and of "a Methodist", but that the word "believer" can hardly be found in his writings.

Theologia gloriae

The range of a theological concept

The decisive reality of the work of God's Spirit is not changed when someone holds a rather anthropocentric and Arminian view of being a Christian. Yet the described ideas of the Christian character result in a theological concept. If we feel obliged to criticize the concept, not only a theoretical discussion is at stake. A wrong doctrine can lead to wrong practices and misled Christians. Biblical warnings, directed to the conservation of the "sound doctrine" – especially in Paul's pastoral letters – are not only meaningful to the mind, but also to the heart.

Errors that could have as an effect that "your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:3), definitely constitute a spiritual risk. In that same chapter Paul speaks of the strategy of Satan, who himself masquerades as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14). Paul is dealing there with doctrines that remove Christ out of the centre of our attention. If with the word "temptation" we focus implicitly on the reality of strategies of Satan in our days, we had better also explicitly speak of the fact that errors in doctrine result in something that leads the soul astray.

Since the age of the early church and since the days of Luther and Calvin it has been understood that doing theology is something more than just mental gymnastics.

The spiritual dimension of a theologia gloriae

In Luther's concept of theology, we saw how far-reaching is the thrust of a *theologia crucis.* Luther clearly understood what happens if instead a theologia gloriae should be developed.

Comparing Luther and Wesley shows a clash on a very existential level. For Luther the treasures of "glaubst du so hast du"[36]. stand for the always tempted and nevertheless unassailable nearness of God's promises. Temptations for Wesley always contain the threat of losing the heights that one thought to have attained.

For Luther there was the tempted treasure – but nevertheless a treasure - of the *theology of the cross.* Temptations are always there, but by no means can they undo what is received in the promises of God. For Wesley there was the poverty of his *theology of glory.* Temptations could take away the very essence of it.

When Wesley looked at the fruits of his preaching, he felt compelled to warn against "enthusiasm". As early as 1741 in Bristol there was an outbreak of "enthusiasm" in the ranks of his followers.

> ...a spirit of enthusiasm was breaking in upon many, who charged their own imagination on the will of God, and that not written, but impressed on their hearts. If these impressions be received as the rule of action, instead of the written word, I know nothing so wicked or absurd but we may fall into, and that without remedy.'[37].

It is remarkable how strongly Wesley warns against enthusiasm. At the same time Methodism itself repeatedly was accused of enthusiasm. For that reason the use of Anglican churches was denied to them. Many times we find sobriety and clearness in Wesley's language, and sharp discrimination, e.g. in a treatise *Advice to the People Called Methodists.* He stresses that enthusiasm has to be avoided; dreams of men must not be ascribed to God. We must stick to the means of grace and the revelation that the Lord gave us.[38].

Wesley admits, that revivals such as occurred repeatedly after his preaching of holiness and perfection, e.g. in London, 1762, brought the risk of tares among the wheat. At the same time he uses the words "pride" and "enthusiasm."[39]. There were five to six hundred enthusiasts saying that the world would perish on February 28, 1762. Wesley spoke sharply against them. The performance of a group of spiritualists from France, the so-called "French prophets", was rejected radically by John Wesley as well as by his brother Charles. Furthermore, the writings of mystic writers like the Germans Jakob Böhme and F.C. Oetinger filled him with horror.[40].

On the other hand there is Wesley's tendency towards a *theologia gloriae.* When during his own preaching all sorts of violent bodily and emotional reactions occurred, he mostly did not recognize the strong temptation that those reactions contained. He often himself describes scenes of great disorder. The cries of people who fell down under deep conviction of sin were drowned by the shouting for joy by other attendants. Sometimes Wesley appears to be uncertain about these "outward signs", but he is rather inclined to exclaim: "What a day of Jubilee was this."[41].

Once he asked the Scottish preacher Ralph Erskine, one of the 'Marrowmen', for his comment on these signs. Erskine answered that Satan could also manifest himself like that, aiming at the destruction of the good work of God. He also said that the fruits of righteousness and conversion would prove what was from God and what not.[42]. In his *Journal* Wesley indicates that he does not feel this advice to be of much use to him.

It apparently was difficult for Wesley to look critically at the phenomena that appeared in his own ranks. Even the fact that in an uproar destructions occur, and a number of pews in a church are damaged, and a man is filled with the love of God to such a measure that he is not able to work for some time, is mentioned by Wesley under the heading "The work of God exceedingly increased."[43].

Looking at Wesley's situation and at his own comments, I arrive at the sober inference that, because of his *theologia gloriae,* Wesley had a serious

lack of discernment. It was not possible for him to look critically at the devices and temptations of the evil one that were a reality among his followers and among his own work. This had to do with his fixation on the attained and attainable heights of men, more than that his eye was fixed on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.

The biblical standard of walking by faith and not by sight, will not function as a sort of charm or magical sentence when we are confronted with temptation or blinding. These words, however, do indicate the way of faith, looking for communion with Christ. Where he is, there will be temptations, but at the same time there will be his promises. Not promises of our victory, but of his grace. The temptations we face in our times, among others, when we are confronted with the spiritual offspring of Wesley, in new forms of a theology of glory, may be answered in faith. That will be enough.

Notes

1. See e.g. Melvin Dieter's opinion: "It is becoming increasingly evident, however, that behind all his evangelistic passion and ministry of discipling lay a full-orbed theological understanding." Melvin E. Dieter, "The Wesleyan perspective", in idem (ed.), *Five Views on Sanctification*, (Grand Rapids 1987), p.12.
2. In my dissertation *Geloof en ervaring. Van Wesley tot de Pinksterbeweging (Faith and experience – from Wesley to Pentecostalism)*, Leiden 1992, I dealt with this influence extensively.
3. See Donald W. Dayton, *Theological Roots of Pentecostalism.* Studies in Evangelism, No. 5, (Metuchen, N.J. / London 1987). In his index of persons John Wesley's name has by far the most references. Dayton's book was commended exuberantly by the grand old man of research in Pentecostalism, Walter J. Hollenweger, in a review in *Theologische Literaturzeitung*, Vol. 113/9 (1988), p.682.
4. In the *Weimarer Ausgabe* of Luthers Works we find him saying this, when he considers the theological importance of Psalm 51: "Haec [peccata] cum in animo sic sentiuntur, tunc debet sequi altera pars cognitionis, quae quoque non speculative, sed tota practica et sensitiva esse debet, ut homo discat et audiat, quid sit gratia..." *WA*, 40 II, 327, 26-28.
5. *WA*, Deutsche Bibel 1522-1546, 3. Band, 52: "Coram hominibus will ich leichtlich iustus esse, sed 'soli tibi peccavi' ." In the Latin translation *(Vulgata)* Luther used, this was Psalm 51,6.
6. "Homo peccator et deus iustificans". See for a profound but condensed discourse on Luther's concept of theology by Oswald Bayer, *Theologie* (Handbuch Systematischer Theologie Bd 1), (Gütersloh 1994), pp.36-126.
7. *WA*, Tischreden 1, 73, 19-74, 16.
8. See Bayer, *op.cit.*, p.55.
9. In his *Works*, we only find these three words together in *WA* 50, 658, 29-659,4, indicating that these three make a theologian. Bayer, *op.cit.*, p.61, argues that the idea is found more often in Luther's writings.
10. Bayer, *op.cit.*, p.61.
11. *WA* 50, 660, 1-16.
12. Ibid.
13. "Sola experientia facit theologum", *WA*, Tischreden I, 16, 13 (46).
14. Books on this *theologia crucis* in Martin Luther are, among others: Walther von Loewenich, *Luthers Theologia Crucis*, (Witten, 1967), and E. van der Veer, *Cruciale verborgenheid. Een*

studie naar de reikwijdte van Luthers theologia crucis (Crucial concealment. A study in the range of Luther's theology of the cross), (Kampen, 1992).

15. See his Journal on May, 24, 1738, in: John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley.* Third edition. Complete and unabridged, I, (Grand Rapids 1978, reprinted from the 1872 edition), pp.98-104. Further cited as *WW.*
16. *WW* I, 102.
17. A.A. Dallimore, *George Whitefield. The Life and times of the great Evangelist of the Eighteenth Century Revival,* Vol. I, (Edinburgh/Carlisle 1979), p.186, considers it more likely that the preface of Luther's *Commentary on Galatians* was read.
18. *WW* I, 103.
19. *WW* IX, 9; cf. WW I, 160 and WW VII, 377.
20. *WW* I, 103f.
21. *WW* I, 170.
22. *WW* I, 170f.
23. See W. Klaiber, "Aus Glauben, damit aus Gnaden. De Grundsatz paulinischer Soteriologie und die Gnadenlehre John Wesley's" in: *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 88 (1991), pp.313-338.
24. In his treatise *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection,* WW XI, 431.
25. H, Lindström, *Wesley and Sanctification. A Study in the Doctrine of Salvation,* (Grand Rapids, 1980), pp.99, 101, 126. See for the connection between faith and justification also J.W. Maris, *Geloof en ervaring,* pp.27ff.
26. "He did not take away your liberty, your power of choosing good and evil; He did not force you; but, being assisted by his grace, you, like Mary, chose the better part.' Cited by W.R. Cannon, *The Theology of John Wesley. With Special Reference to the Doctrine of Justification,* (New York/Nashville, 1946), p.107.
27. *WW* VI, 512. Cf. Cannon, op.cit., p.108; Linström, *Wesley and Sanctification,* pp.44-50.
28. Cf. Lindström, *op.cit.*, pp.25-37, 45.
29. See the *Minutes* of the Conference of 1744, *WW VIII,* 275f. When the question was put: "But must not repentance, and works meet for repentance, go before faith?' the answer was: "Without doubt: if by repentance you mean conviction of sin; and by works meet for repentance, obeying God as far as we can, forgiving our brother, leaving off from evil, doing good, and using his ordinances, according to the power we have received."
30. *WW* VI, 49.
31. *WW* XI, 446.
32. *WW* VIII, 249.
33. This also is to be applied to Wesley's conviction regarding Christian perfection. He "postulated the complete annihilation and eradication of both kinds of sin (sc. outward and inward, JWM) in the empirical reality of the perfect Christian now." K.H. LaRondelle, *Perfection and Perfectionism. A dogmatic-ethical study of biblical perfection and phenomenal perfectionism,* (Kampen, 1971), p.314.
34. *WW* I, 114.
35. Cf. 2 Corinthians 5,7.
36. If you believe, you have.
37. *WW* I, 318.
38. *WW* VIII, 357.
39. *WW* XI, 406-408.
40. *WW* I, 376; II, 46, 467.
41. *WW* II, 484.
42. *WW* I, 207f.
43. *WW* II, 282ff.

BOOK REVIEWS

Tales of Two Cities: Christianity and Politics, Stephen Clark, ed., Inter-Varsity Press, 2005, pbk., 294 pp, £14.99

This book contains the substance of six papers presented at a theological study conference organized by Affinity to explore the relationship of the Christian and of the Church to political life. A variety of viewpoints is represented and each chapter contains material worthy of careful consideration.

Gordon Wenham begins by looking at 'Biblical ethics in a multicultural society' and suggests that Old Testament law served to establish a tolerable ground floor for human behaviour in a fallen world, enough to protect the weak and vulnerable and to prevent society from imploding. In Genesis 1-9 he sees five major principles for the governing of society: monogamous marriage, the protection of human life, the benevolent management of the rest of creation, the Sabbath and (more controversially) a preference for vegetarianism.

Steve Wilmshurst gives an affirmative answer to the question 'Was Jesus political?' and shows how his kingdom collides constantly with the kingdoms of the earth. With its tension between 'already' and 'not yet', it cuts across all other loyalties and throws down a gauntlet to rulers to abandon pretensions, recognize the true source of their power and move away from tyranny and oppression to justice and mercy.

In the third chapter, described as 'a layman's guide to *Lex Rex'*, David Field analyzes Samuel Rutherford's seminal work around the author's own framework of Aristotle's four causes, asking: What is the purpose or goal of government? Who or what brings civil government into being? What is the essence of government? What is civil government made out of? In an exceptionally stimulating essay, Field uses Rutherford to expose the modern myths of neutrality and pluralism, points out that helping to form Christian culture in the wider society is inherent in the church's task rather than a deviation from it and challenges conservative evangelicals to return to the neglected theological sub-discipline of Reformed political thought and to stop their docile cowering before civil government. His conclusion is noteworthy: 'What drove Rutherford's political theory was love for his King Jesus and jealousy for his glory' (p.146).

'A Victorian prophet without honour' outlines the critique offered by the now little-known Edward Miall of what he saw as a culture-bound 19th century church, in thrall to the establishment and perceived by the increasingly alienated working classes as guardian of an unjust social status quo. David Smith portrays an undoubtedly courageous man, willing for example in a

proudly imperial age to describe British colonization as a story of 'fraud, injustice, cruelty and fiend-like atrocity' (p.164). Although doctrinally confused, Miall's awareness of a developing recession from the Christian faith and his plea for what would now be termed holistic mission are relevant to our contemporary society, in which believers find themselves marginalized and ignored.

This reviewer found the fifth chapter disappointing. Paul Helm, in 'Christianity and politics in a pluralist society' argues that Christians ought to be content with pluralism as being the option most likely, in all foreseeable political circumstances, to respect freedom, promote tolerance and provide for the testing of truth claims. Wheat and tares will certainly grow together until the *parousia,* but Professor Helm's approach seems almost a counsel of despair. It is true that Christians are so divided among themselves that achieving a uniform believing consensus on how society should be governed seems highly unlikely. But, as another contributor points out, we are people of hope and one would have expected a more nuanced comment than 'the whole thing is crazy and I will not discuss it any further here' (p.200). To support the claim that the Bible countenances pluralism by asserting that Paul did not seek to have the Stoics and Epicureans of Athens prevented by law from expressing their views (p.202) is not, to put it mildly, the author at his cogent best.

David McKay, in 'The crown rights of King Jesus today', provides a thoughtful and attractive outline of the Reformed Presbyterian position. Contrary to modern claims, all voices in the public square are ultimately religious and it is a category mistake to exclude from the 'big picture' the voice of Christ. While early Covenanters understood, and many died for, his mediatorial kingship over the church, later theologians such as Alexander McLeod and William Symington saw more clearly that his rule extends over all things. That he is a crucified king has implications for how Christians should conduct themselves in the public arena and it should be obvious that national recognition of Christ will not happen apart from a mighty outpouring of the Spirit and a widespread turning to God. Dr. McKay recognises the complexities and apparently insurmountable difficulties surrounding an implementation of the Covenanter vision, but, as he concludes, 'a start needs to be made if a disintegrating culture is to be brought back from the brink of disaster' (p.259).

The volume's editor, Stephen Clark, rounds off the symposium with 'What has Jerusalem to do with Westminster?', although his answer is not as radical as Tertullian's, but an identifying of key issues and suggestions of areas for further consideration. He mentions the continuity/discontinuity balance between Old and New Testaments and the dangers of equating Israel with a modern nation or of confusing the kingdom of God with the kingdoms of men. Since law cannot guarantee righteousness, should we regulate evil practices

rather than forbidding them? Might the latter prove counter-productive? In light of Romans 8:18f, is it proper to speak of the 'redemption' of any part of the created order in this present age? He closes with the timely reminder that the church's calling is to serve God by using his weapons, supremely the preaching of the gospel.

This is a thought-provoking volume, short on answers but thorough, eirenic and avoiding the deceptive pleasures of over-simplification. As such, it is a useful contribution to a discussion in which evangelicals have, of late, played too little part.

Edward Donnelly

Old Light on New Worship – Musical Instruments and the Worship of God, a Theological, Historical and Psychological Study, John Price, Simpson Publishing Company, 2005, hbk, 256 pages, $15.99 (available from bookshop@rpc.org)

When we pick up a book we are interested in what motivated the author to write. John Price informs his readers in the preface. A question that has often puzzled him is, *"Why do we, as Reformed Christians, use only the piano while the modern evangelical church very often employs such a variety of musical instruments?"* In his book he satisfactorily answers this question.

Price begins with Scripture. A thorough examination of the Old Testament leads him to study such texts as Numbers 10:1-10, and 2 Chronicles 29:25-27. He invites his readers to consider not only his own exegesis, but also that of respected exegetes like John Gill, Matthew Henry and John Calvin. The conclusions of John Girardeau, who published a major volume on this subject in 1888, are also considered. His research leads him to the following conclusion with respect to Old Testament worship:

David's command was God's command. Even the great king and prophet David had no liberty to alter God's worship because of his own personal desires or musical inclinations. Neither could he make any additions because he believed they would enhance the experience of worship and make it more joyful and glorious. David could act only by divine authority. (p.25)

Price recognizes that the use of musical instruments in the Old Testament Church was specified and regulated by the Lord. As such their use or disuse is determined by the reformed principle that governs Christian worship in every age: the Regulative Principle of Worship.

What about the use of instruments as an accompaniment to praise in the

Christian Church today? To answer this question Price has to determine whether they belong to what has *continued* in the new covenant age or what has *discontinued.* Price's study of the New Testament Scriptures leads him to recognize that musical instruments belonged to Temple worship, that is, the Old Testament ceremonial, all of which has found fulfilment in Christ. Price concludes that musical instruments are not authorized to accompany praise in the Christian Church. This was a difficult decision for him to reach since it meant having to introduce a change of practice in the worship of the congregation where he ministers.

A very interesting section in the book is the long chapter entitled 'The History of Musical Instruments'. In this chapter we find Price checking his conclusions historically. For example, he discovered that it was not until the 13th century that the organ began to be more common, having met with considerable resistance until then. After the Reformation the Reformed Church returned to unaccompanied Psalm singing. We are introduced to the testimony of the Reformers, Puritans and Covenanters of the 16th and 17th centuries. Musical instruments became fashionable again in the 19th century, the campaigns of Moody and Sankey being the means of eroding the convictions of many churches. Charles Spurgeon, Price reminds us, was an exception to the general drift and he gives us several telling quotations from 'the Prince of Preachers'. For example: *'What a degradation to supplant the intelligent song of the whole congregation by the theatrical prettinesses of a quartette, the refined niceties of a choir, or the blowing off of wind from inanimate bellows and pipes! We might as well pray by machinery as praise by it.'* (Spurgeon, The Treasury of David, Vol.1, Part 2, p.272).

Another helpful chapter is provided on 'The Psychology of Music', which points out how instrumental music can have the most powerful effects on the human emotions. This alone should cause those who wish to persist in accompanied singing occasion to reflect upon the practice. Arguments in favour of instrumental music are treated sensitively and fairly. Each is answered, in the mind of this reviewer, convincingly and consistently with the Regulative Principle of Worship.

In the conclusion the author gives helpful guidance to church leaders who are struggling with this issue. He gives practical suggestions on how change might be made to reform the praise of the Almighty and the all holy God.

As the first extensive study on this topic for over a century this material makes a very valuable contribution to the current debate on worship. An excellent foreword by Prof. Edward Donnelly provides added value to a book that should be a 'must buy' for Christians who realize how crucially important worship is for the Christian Church.

Robert McCollum

John Williamson Nevin. High Church Calvinist, D.G. Hart, P. and R. Publishing, (Distributed in the UK by Evangelical Press), 2005, hbk., 271 pages, $22.99

This biography is the second volume in the American Reformed Biography series. The series seeks to 'maintain general interest in biography as a way of learning about and from the past'. Its subject is a man who, though a graduate of Princeton Theological Seminary who also taught briefly there as deputy for Charles Hodge, is not well known within Reformed circles today. This book is in fact the first biography of Nevin in over a century.

The author's contention is that Nevin ought to be better known than he is because 'his assessment of popular Christianity in the United States was arguably the most astute from the perspective of historical Protestantism ever formulated'.

Nevin taught briefly at Princeton but also at the Presbyterian Western Theological Seminary and finally at Mercersburg Theological Seminary, a school of the German Reformed Church to which Nevin moved. He was teaching at a time when the emergence of revivalism was causing great changes to take place in the church in the United States. Hart states that 'the democratic or populist character of religion prompted a severe reduction in clerical status.' Ministers and the services they performed were no longer considered central to the church's life. 'Protestant Christianity in the United States,' says the author, 'became a religion of the people, by the people and for the people.' Old School Presbyterians did offer a critique of this new revivalism, but were not so critical of it as Nevin would have wished. His great concern was that revivalism was diluting the importance of the church in the life of the people of God. For him the official ministry of Church officers through worship was crucial to Reformed devotion. The place of the sacraments, he felt, was being downgraded.

Nevin's ideas reflected the federal theology he had learned at Princeton, but before that, within his own family. This theology was in clear distinction to the religious individualism which characterised much of American Protestantism in the mid nineteenth century. Nevin stressed the covenantal nature of the work of grace in the life of the individual. Parents should pass on their faith to their children 'with the church performing those religious ceremonies and functions that mediated the Christian religion and supported the care of the parents.'

One of the difficulties with Nevin is that he begins to sound sacramentalist. 'Low views of the sacrament,' he said, 'betray invariably a low view of the mystery of the incarnation itself and a low view of the church also.' He turned to Calvin for support. However, his former colleague, Charles

Hodge, was highly critical of the route which he perceived Nevin to be following.

Nevin was undoubtedly making a valuable point, which has relevance also at the beginning of the twenty-first century. There is a real danger in the spread of individualism and its effect on the life of the church. The church can be seen by many as a kind of optional extra to be used when the need for it is felt. The place of the sacraments as a means of grace can also easily be lost or misunderstood. Nevin was addressing these dangers. He is, however, rather like the motorist who has temporarily lost concentration and has veered across the white line in the middle of the road. In the attempt to correct his error, he over steers and finds himself bumping the kerb.

The author has written a very comprehensive biography and has faithfully identified the criticisms which were directed at Nevin by his contemporaries. A greater insight into the piety of Nevin and a deeper evaluation of him as a preacher would add to the usefulness of this interesting and challenging, if mildly disturbing, biography.

Knox Hyndman

Theology in America. Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War, E. Brooks Holifield, Yale University Press, 2003, pbk., 617 pages, £11.99

This is the paperback edition of a very important survey of American theology between the years 1636 and 1865. Holifield, who teaches at Candler School of Theology, Emory University, has provided a masterly survey of the riches and diversity of theological thought in the first two centuries of America's existence since the arrival of European colonists.

In the first section he examines the Calvinist origins of American theology, beginning with the New England Puritans such as Cotton and Shepherd, tracing reactions to Puritan theology in the later seventeenth century, and outlining the contribution of Jonathan Edwards, one of the greatest Reformed thinkers of any period. The section ends with the fragmentation that characterized New England theology after Edwards.

In the second, and largest section, Holifield examines in turn the development of theology in the different denominations which sprang up in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Here are to be found Deists, Unitarians, Universalists of various kinds, Episcopalians, Methodists, Baptists, Restorationists, and a number of varieties of theologians who designated themselves 'Calvinists'. Almost every variety of theology is to be found in this period. Of greatest interest to readers of this journal will probably be the

development of 'Princeton' theology, associated with names such as Archibald Alexander and Charles Hodge, and the responses to it within the Reformed family. Whilst there was undoubtedly continuity with what went before, there was also a degree of discontinuity. The attitude of the Princetonians to the views of Edwards, for example, was not always positive, and there were considerable tensions between Princetonians and Southerners such as Thornwell. It is a fascinating story.

The third section surveys the contributions to theological thinking of a number of groups and individuals: Lutherans, Roman Catholics, Transcendtalists, Horace Bushnell and the Mercersburg Theology of Nevin and Schaff. A chapter on 'The Dilemma of Slavery' and an Afterword bring the book to a suitable conclusion on the eve of the Civil War.

Holifield seeks to provide more than a simple chronological narrative, which would run the risk of confusing rather than enlightening the reader. He states that 'The overarching theme of this book is the claim that a majority of theologians in early America shared a preoccupation with the reasonableness of Christianity that predisposed them toward such an understanding of theology.' (p.5). Hence the interest of many in, for example, the 'evidences' for Christianity which could be thought to assist or even compel belief. Holifield also weaves five other themes into the book which help to give it coherence: insistence on theology's 'practicality' and ethical functions, the importance of Calvinism, the interplay between Americans and Europeans, the denominational setting of theology and the distinction between academic and popular strands of thought. Some of these served to give the theology of the New World a distinctively 'American' texture.

This is an outstanding work of scholarship, impressive in both breadth and depth. The notes testify to Holifield's engagement with a vast array of original sources, whilst also being familiar with secondary studies. At the same time it is readable and clear in its presentation. Opinions will differ on particular issues covered, but this is an essential starting point for an understanding of the first two centuries of American theology.

David McKay

BOOK NOTICES

Systematic Theology. Biblical and Historical, Robert Duncan Culver, Mentor, 2005, hbk., 1258 pp., £29.99.

This weighty tome aims to combine exegetical and historical approaches to the construction of systematic theology. It is comprehensive in scope and clearly written. It shares with such recent works as the *Systematic Theology* of Robert Reymond the virtue of setting out the biblical argumentation for the positions held. This was a particular weakness in some older textbooks of Reformed theology, which were too prone to listing 'proof texts' without sufficient explanation. Culver's approach allows readers to assess the writer's views much more satisfactorily, and highlights where there are real disagreements. There is much in Culver's Reformed theology with which we would agree, and in many areas he is a helpful guide. His presentation is clear and straightforward, accessible to a wide range of readers. It must be kept in mind, however, that Culver is Baptist in his view of the sacraments, premillennial in his eschatology, and on several issues he presents an even-handed account of possibilities, without clearly opting for one of them, as in the case of church government. In his view, on some of these issues Scripture does not mandate one exclusive position. The major weakness of Culver's book, in the estimation of this reviewer, is his wholesale rejection of Covenant Theology as a framework for understanding biblical revelation. He is quite explicit in this rejection, for example with respect to the arrangements put in place by the Creator in Eden (see pp.295-6). This weakens his treatment of a wide range of theological topics, since the theme of covenant permeates Scripture. Nevertheless, used in conjunction with other systematic theologies which correct these defects, Culver's book will prove to be helpful reading.

A Treatise of the Covenant of Grace, John Ball, (facsimile reprint from the 1645 edition), Peter and Rachel Reynolds, 2006, pbk., 364 pp., £15.00.

Available at www.peterreynoldsbooks.com

John Ball (1585-1640) is rightly regarded as one of the pioneers of covenant theology in the English speaking world. Indeed the appearance of *A Treatise of the Covenant of Grace* in 1645 may have exercised a significant influence on the covenantal perspective of the Westminster

Divines. It is therefore a particular pleasure to have this facsimile reprint of Ball's treatise readily available. In the First Part, Ball considers in turn the significance of the word 'covenant', the Covenant of Grace in general, and the revelations of the Covenant of Grace to Adam, Abraham, Moses, Israel, David and in the period after the exile. In the Second Part he considers the New Covenant, concentrating especially on the role of Christ as the Mediator of the New Covenant and the fellowship which he provides for his people. Regarding the Covenant at Sinai, Ball departs from the usual Reformed view by arguing that the difference between Old and New Covenants is not that of promise and fulfilment, but simply one of degree and intensity. The nature of the Sinai covenant is an issue that has been widely debated in Reformed circles, with a diversity of views resulting. Ball's position can now be assessed from the original source. The print in this facsimile is remarkably clear and a little practice will enable the reader to cope with seventeenth century typography.

The Theology of William Tyndale, Ralph S. Werrell, James Clarke and Co., 2006, pbk., 242 pp., £20.00.

The name of William Tyndale is rightly associated with Bible translation, and his role in the development of the English language has been well documented. His significance as a theologian, however, has been neglected. This comprehensive study by Anglican Ralph Werrell will do much to rehabilitate Tyndale as an important influence in the development of Reformed thinking in England in the sixteenth century. Werrell states at the outset that Tyndale's theology has often been forced into preconceived moulds which in fact distort it seriously. His goal, therefore, is to let Tyndale, as far as possible, speak for himself, and so his study quotes at length from the words of Tyndale himself. Drawing on such key texts as *The Obedience of a Christian Man and A Pathway into the Holy Scripture*, together with Tyndale's biblical expositions, Werrell presents Tyndale as a thorough-going covenant theologian. For Tyndale the Covenant of Grace is the unilateral act of the Triune God by which the elect are saved. He had a strong sense of the unity of Old and New Testaments and this shaped his covenant theology, especially in relation to the sacraments. This is a most useful and original study which makes valuable contributions to both historical and systematic theology.

The Covenant Theology of Caspar Olevianus, Lyle D. Bierma, Reformation Heritage Books, 2005, pbk., 203 pp., $22.00.

Caspar Olevian and the Substance of the Covenant. The Double Benefit of Christ, R. Scott Clark, Rutherford House, 2005, pbk., 257 pp., £14.99.

By any reckoning Caspar Olevianus (1536-87) was a significant figure in the formulation of the Reformed tradition of Covenant Theology. Some have claimed that he was in fact the originator of this theological school, and much debate has resulted. These two studies help in understanding Olevianus' covenantal perspective and in assessing his historical significance. Rather than competing, they complement one another and both are welcome additions to a field of study which has burgeoned in recent years.

Bierma's book, first published in 1996, first sets Olevianus in his sixteenth century European context, next surveys his understanding of the various aspects of the Covenant of Grace, including its relevance to the sacraments, and then focuses on several areas of controversy, such as the pre-temporal covenant, the Covenant of Creation and the relationship between Old and New Covenants. In the final chapter Bierma draws some historical conclusions, the most significant being his opinion that, although the concept of covenant pervades Olevianus' theology and gives it unity, it does not serve as the *organising principle* of his theological system.

Scott Clark writes his study in order to fill out the outline of Olevianus' theology provided by Bierma with a survey of the theologian's whole system of thought. This Olevianus termed 'the substance of the covenant' or its 'double benefit', both phrases offering a summary of his soteriology. The double benefit consists of two things which Christ has obtained for his people by his redemptive work, namely justification (his work *for* the sinner) and sanctification (his work *in* the sinner). After chapters examining international Calvinism in the sixteenth century and charting Olevianus' life and career, Clark considers in turn Olevianus' Scholastic Humanism, his trinitarian doctrine of God, his federalist Christology and finally the 'double benefit' of justification and sanctification.

Dawkins' God. Genes, Memes and the meaning of Life, Alister McGrath, Blackwell Publishing, 2005, pbk., 202 pp., £9.99.

Richard Dawkins, Oxford scientist, author and broadcaster, has become

one of the most prominent defenders of atheistic Darwinian evolutionary theory and, with increasing virulence, a vigorous opponent of every form of Christian belief. Alister McGrath, Oxford theologian, and a scientist by training (doctorate in biophysics), has now produced the first book-length examination of Dawkins' views, and in this volume subjects them to thorough and devastating scrutiny. He begins with an autobiographical account of his engagement with issues of science and religion and in particular the work of Dawkins, from his school days at Methodist College, Belfast, to his present teaching responsibilities. His growing dissatisfaction with Dawkins' case for atheism led, over a period of almost thirty years, to the formulation of this comprehensive response. Readers should be aware that this is not a rebuttal of Darwinian evolution nor is it a theological critique of Dawkins' views. Instead McGrath's aim is to evaluate 'how Dawkins proceeds from a Darwinian theory of evolution to a confident atheistic worldview, which he preaches with messianic zeal and unassailable certainty.' (p.10). With clear and incisive argumentation, McGrath takes Dawkins on and exposes many of the weaknesses in his case for atheism. It is interesting that another of McGrath's recent publications is entitled *The Twilight of Atheism.* This is a worldview which, in McGrath's opinion, has had its day. *Dawkins' God* is an important critique of one of the most strident defenders of atheism today: yet another emperor is shown to have no clothes after all.

Epistemology as Theology. An Evaluation of Alvin Plantinga's Religious Epistemology, James Beilby, Ashgate, 2005, hbk., 262 pp., £47.50.

Until relatively recently philosophy was a field into which few Reformed thinkers entered, unless it was to dismiss the whole enterprise as misguided. That situation has changed radically, and one of those responsible for the change is Alvin Plantinga, a philosopher of world stature by any reckoning. Plantinga's interests have centred on epistemology (the philosophy of knowledge), and in particular on the warrants for Christian belief. Often philosophers have dismissed Christian belief as having no warrant according to the canons of current philosophical thinking. Plantinga has mounted a sophisticated and powerful challenge to those canons, arguing that in fact Christianity has sufficient warrant and that theistic beliefs are 'properly basic', to use his own terminology. This book by a philosophy professor at Bethel College, USA, provides a comprehensive overview and evaluation of Plantinga's epistemological enterprise. Part I considers in turn the background to Plantinga's religious epistemology, the early versions of that epistemology and then the most recent formulation developed in the 'Warrant Trilogy'

culminating with *Warranted Christian Belief.* Part 2 moves to an evaluation of Plantinga's proposals, dealing with the task of religious epistemology, Plantinga's theory of epistemic warrant, which is crucial to his position, and, considering finally what is termed the 'Extended A/C (Aquinas/Calvin) Model'. This book is inevitably demanding reading, but is also a valuable study of a very important Christian voice in the field of philosophy.

Sex, Marriage and Family in John Calvin's Geneva. Volume 1. Courtship, Engagement, and Marriage, John Witte Jnr., and Robert Kingdon, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005, pbk., 544 pp., $32.00/£18.99.

In many respects John Calvin was a revolutionary. Whilst most people will think of the theological revolution which he brought about in Geneva and subsequently around the world, his genius touched many other areas. One of the most significant was marriage and family life. Calvin and his fellow Reformers established nothing less than a new theology and law of domestic life in sixteenth century Geneva, and this volume begins to provide the materials on which an assessment of the revolution can be based. In each chapter the authors provide an overview of one aspect of courtship, engagement or marriage, and then give an extensive selection of translations of primary documents to support their arguments. These documents comprise excerpts from Calvin's commentaries and other theological writings, from his letters, from Genevan legal sources and, perhaps most interestingly, from cases tried by the Genevan Consistory. The latter in particular give a 'human' touch to what might otherwise be abstract arguments and legislation. Most of these translations are available nowhere else. Issues addressed include consent, impediments, delayed weddings and premarital relations, along with economic implications of marriage. This is a fascinating volume on areas of life which still generate controversy even among Christians, full of wisdom and surprises. We await subsequent volumes with anticipation.

Majesty in Misery, C. H. Spurgeon, Banner of Truth Trust, 2005, hbk.
Volume 1 *Dark Gethsemane,* 279 pp., £14.00
Volume 2 *The Judgment Hall,* 311 pp., £14.50
Volume 3 *Calvary's Mournful Mountain,* 392 pp., £15.00

These three volumes contain a selection of sermons by C. H. Spurgeon on a range of texts from the four Gospels all relating to the final hours of the earthly ministry of the Lord. Volume 1 covers the period of the Last Supper

and the time spent in Gethsemane; Volume 2 deals with Jesus' trials before Annas, Herod and Pilate, culminating with the mocking of the soldiers; Volume 3 has as its focus the crucifixion, from Jesus' bearing his cross to the burial in Joseph's tomb. Spurgeon's tone is reverent and warmly devotional, especially appropriate given the subject matter. Since the sermons were preached at widely separated times, they do not form a consecutive exposition, but the (modern) selection has been well made. We may wish, however, that the series had been extended to cover the resurrection victory of the Saviour. These volumes will appeal to all who enjoy Spurgeon's sermons, and may well make new 'converts' to the work of the Prince of Preachers.

David McKay

TOPICAL INDEX TO MAIN ARTICLES

Reformed Theological Journal 1985-2005

The Editors greatly appreciate the work of Dr. Rowland Ward of the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia in producing this Topical Index.

There is a logical arrangement within each main topic.
Slight abbreviation of original titles has been made in some instances.

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