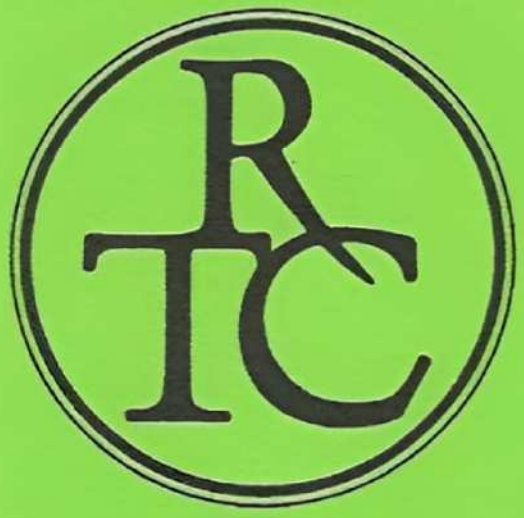

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CONTENTS

BOOK REVIEWS

BOOK NOTICES

A GOD WHO RESPONDS?

A Biblical Evaluation of Open Theism

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Traditionally, orthodox Christian theology has spoken of a God who is almighty, omniscient, beyond time and space, a God who never changes, a God who knows the future exhaustively because his sovereign plan determines all things that come to pass in his creation. To take but one example, we read in the Westminster Confession of Faith the following statement at the beginning of chapter 2 'Of God, and of the Holy Trinity':

> There is but one only, living, and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure sprit, invisible, without body, parts or passions; immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, most wise, most holy, most free, most absolute; working all things according to the counsel of His own immutable and most righteous will, for His own glory...

Although the statement reflects the Reformed tradition, much of its content regarding the nature of God could be found readily in other traditions.

This widely accepted position, however, has frequently come under attack, one of its most significant antagonists being Open Theism, a theological movement which originated in the 1990s and which has continued to exercise considerable influence even with Evangelicalism. Open theists, or 'free will theists' as they are also known, claim that such statements as the one already quoted are in some respects unbiblical and seriously misrepresent God, leaving us with a God who is in fact unable to enter into real relationships with free, morally responsible human beings. Theologians such as Clark Pinnock, John Sanders and Gregory Boyd, together with philosophers such as William Hasker and David Basinger, have argued that a thorough revision of the traditional doctrine of God is essential if theology is to be biblical and Christian living healthy.

The 'open' view of God may be summarised concisely thus:

> *God, in grace, grants humans significant freedom to cooperate with or work against God's will for their lives, and he enters into dynamic, give-and-take relationships with us. The Christian life involves a genuine interaction between*

> God and human beings. We respond to God's gracious initiatives and God responds to our responses... and on it goes. God takes risks in this give-and-take relationship, yet he is endlessly resourceful and competent in working toward his ultimate goals. Sometimes God alone decides how to accomplish these goals. On other occasions, God works with human decisions, adapting his own plans to fit the changing situation. God does not control everything that happens. Rather, he is open to receiving input from his creatures. In loving dialogue, God invites us to participate with him to bring the future into being.[1]

The central theological principles informing Open Theism are well stated by philosopher James Spiegel in these terms:

> Open theists maintain that: (1) God is bound by time and does not entirely know the future, (2) God's power is limited by human freedom, (3) God fundamentally opposes all human suffering, while (4) God himself suffers as his involvement with the world leads to divine surprise, disappointment, sorrow, anger, and other real passions.[2]

In this study we will begin with the case made for Open Theism by its proponents, proceed to a biblical evaluation of the main tenets of this view of God and his relationship to his creation, and conclude by identifying some of the dangers posed by Open Theism to Christian belief and practice.

1. The alleged need for Open Theism

It must be stated at the outset that open theists are Arminians who accept such fundamental Arminian doctrines as God's universal love for humanity and his desire that all should be saved, his creation of human beings with genuine 'libertarian' freedom (to be defined below), and the necessity of such freedom for true worship, genuine love for God and moral accountability.

Open theists, however, part company with classical Arminian theology at a number of significant points. In particular they reject belief in exhaustive divine foreknowledge, the belief that God knows all things future as well as past and present. In the language of Open Theism God's 'omniscience' refers only to his comprehensive knowledge of past and present, not to such knowledge of the future. The open theist argues that much of the future is necessarily undetermined by God, and that this uncertainty includes all future free choices and actions by human beings. The future has not happened. It is therefore not real and is consequently logically unknowable, even by God. This crucial insight, it is argued, has been lost in much theologising, Arminian as well as Calvinist.

Open theists furthermore argue that the Bible supports their view, and they would indeed claim to hold a high view of Biblical authority. The Bible is not to be dismissed as the source-book for theology, but is rather to be

exegeted with greater care than has often been the case. In this regard open theists make much of the claim that earlier theologians have generally allowed Greek philosophy to shape their exegesis rather than letting the Bible speak for itself.

As far as scriptural support for their position is concerned, open theists claim that, whilst some passages teach that God determines specific future events, others show that he learns from, and indeed changes his mind as a result of, the events of history. God is a God who responds in love to his creatures and who enters into significant relationships which profoundly affect all parties involved, including God. Open theists argue that the understanding of the Bible characteristic of 'classical theism' evacuates God's relationship with his creatures of real love and significance. If God is not affected by a relationship, can he meaningfully be said to 'relate' at all? The open theist answers 'No. In writing of the life and death of Jesus, Richard Rice writes,

> A careful look at the center of Christian faith, the life and death of Jesus, thus supports the idea that God is intimately involved in the creaturely world and experiences it in a dynamic way. He is aware of, involved in and deeply sensitive to human events. His inner life is not static or impassive at all. It surges with powerful emotions.[3]

Open theism has arisen, in part, because of perceived inadequacies in the classical Arminian view of God, especially in two particular interrelated aspects of its understanding of divine providence:

(i) Foreknowledge

Open theists argue that the classical Arminian view of God's comprehensive knowledge of the future as 'simple foreknowledge' lacks any ontological grounding. How, it is asked, can God foreknow the future exhaustively when much of that future will be constituted by the free choices and actions of moral agents which, even in principle, God cannot know? It is impossible to predict a truly free choice and so God cannot know exhaustively what free agents will do. Open theists agree that God does know a portion of the future, namely events which are logically entailed by the present and from which human free will is excluded, but he does not and cannot have exhaustive knowledge of the future. He cannot foreknow the free choices and actions of his moral creatures: he may make astute and accurate guesses as to what they will be, but he cannot foreknow them.

(ii) Freedom

Since the issue of human freedom looms large in Open Theism, it is necessary at this point to define briefly two conflicting views of human freedom and its relationship to God's sovereignty and knowledge.

Libertarian freedom: this view, held for example by Arminians, states that an agent is free with respect to a given action if at the time it was performed it was within the agent's power to perform the action or to refrain from it. This view is not compatible with a belief in God's sovereign control of all events in his creation, and is also referred to as 'incompatibilist freedom'.

Compatibilist freedom: this view, associated with the name of Augustine and with such Reformed theologians as John Calvin and Jonathan Edwards, states that an agent is free with respect to a given action if at the time it was performed the agent could perform the action if he decided to do so or refrain from performing it if he decided not to perform it. On this view the agent is free to act according to his nature and is not compelled to act by forces outside himself. His decision to act or not to act may be entirely determined by factors existing within the agent, but he is free if not externally compelled against his will. This view is compatible with God's sovereign control of all things, including the factors which resulted in the agent's free action.

The open theists argue that for meaningful relationships and moral responsibility to exist, human beings must be created with libertarian freedom, as do all Arminians. They part company with classical Arminians, however, in their contention that if comprehensive divine foreknowledge were true, then genuine human freedom would be impossible with regard to future choices and actions. They assert that human beings cannot be genuinely free if God knows precisely what choices they will make. If God knows that a person will make a particular choice and if his knowledge is infallible (as it is by definition), then that choice must be made and the agent is *not* free. The open theists' solution is to deny God's exhaustive foreknowledge and sovereign control.

2. The alleged benefits of Open Theism[4]

(i) Relationship

Open Theists claim that only on their view is a real relationship between God and others possible. The idea of a comprehensive divine decree which governs all events, as held by classical theists, is said to make a mockery of human choice and action and so render significant relationships impossible. If God really is in absolute control, then people are in reality only carrying out the 'script' that God has written for them. Even the classical Arminian view of divine foreknowledge renders human choices meaningless. If such views are true, says the open theist, there is no real relationship between God and his people, he never learns from them and they never affect him.

Open Theism, in contrast to classical theism, claims to offer the possibility of real, meaningful relationships between God and human beings. The 'open view' of God is described thus by Richard Rice:

> It expresses two basic convictions: love is the most important quality we attribute to God, and love is more than care and commitment; it involves being sensitive and responsive as well. These convictions lead the contributors to this book to think of God's relation to the world in dynamic rather than static terms. This conclusion has important consequences. For one thing, it means that God interacts with his creatures. Not only does he influence them, but they also exert an influence on him. As a result, the course of history is not the product of divine action alone. God's will is not the ultimate explanation for everything that happens; human decisions and actions make an important contribution too.[5]

John Sanders, one of the major proponents of Open Theism, states that 'God's project is to develop people who love and trust him in response to his love and manifest their love of God in effective action to others'.[6] In grace God persists in the pursuit of that relationship despite the sins and failures of human beings. Sanders notes how Paul saw himself as God's fellow worker (I Corinthians 3:9) and encouraged Christians to see themselves as working together with God (2 Corinthians 6:1) to fulfil the divine project. Sanders writes,

> According to Paul, God has chosen to be somewhat dependent on us to accomplish the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:18-20), for God desires our collaboration in this task. God is seeking to create a people of whom he is proud to be their God ... God has never given up on that project despite our sin.[7]

As a specific example of this project Sanders cites Abraham:

> Abraham's faith in God matures by fits and starts, and God's confidence in Abraham grows. The divine goal of developing people who love and trust him in such a way that they collaborate with God toward the fulfilment of the project finds success in this patriarch.[8]

God is one player in the historical process, but not the only one. He knows all that can logically be known, but like us awaits future events and learns from them. Thus when God tests Abraham in Genesis 22, it is in order to have information that he did not previously have. In Sanders' words,

> God needs to know if Abraham is the sort of person on whom God can count for collaboration toward the fulfillment of the divine project. Will he be faithful? Or must God find someone else through whom to achieve his purpose ... Now it is God seeking assurance from Abraham.[9]

When God says in Genesis 22:12 'For now I know that you fear God ...', he means exactly what he says: now he knows, previously he did not. Such a relationship, say the open theists, is real and significant for both parties.

(ii) Risk

In creating a world where rational beings have significant ('libertarian') freedom, God took significant risks. He did not know what the future would hold and he still does not. It was not necessary for God to take these risks:

> God does not risk for risk's sake. Divine risk must not be divorced from the creational project, which desires a relationship of love. Furthermore, God was under no compulsion to take any risks whatsoever. God did not have to create a world at all and could have created a very different world from the one we have.[10].

The point for open theists is that God, having decided to make a world where creatures had libertarian freedom, could not control how that freedom might be used. He chose to risk: he set in motion a chain of events whose end he did not control and which he could not know. Philosopher William Hasker asks the rhetorical question which he believes sums up God's action:

> Does God make decisions that depend for their outcomes on the responses of free creatures in which the decisions themselves are not informed by knowledge of the outcomes?[11]

The answer for Hasker is clearly 'yes' and the conclusion is that God risks.

We may ask, however, *why* God adopts this risk-laden course of action. How can the idea of God taking risks be regarded as one of the beneficial aspects of Open Theism? In classical theism, including classical Arminianism, God knows that he will fulfil his plans and keep all his promises, and he knows precisely how he will do this. The open theist, however, argues for the superiority of his idea of a God who is not fully in control of the future, who does not know how history will unfold and who cannot guarantee the fulfilment of his plans. This is how Gregory Boyd argues for the preferability of a God who risks:

> [D]on't we normally regard someone who refuses to take risks as being insecure? Don't we ordinarily regard a compulsion to meticulously control everything as evidencing weakness, not strength? Of course we do. Everyone who is psychologically healthy knows it is good to risk loving another person, for example. You may, of course, get hurt, for people are free agents. But the risk-free alternative of not loving or of trying to control another person is evidence of insecurity and weakness, if not sickness. Why should we abandon this insight when we think about God, especially since Scripture clearly depicts God as sometimes taking risks?[12]

It is not that God could not control every detail in his creation: rather he has chosen not to, in order to create human beings with libertarian freedom which they should use to love and serve him. As Sanders says, 'The biblical model of God as a personal being who enters into genuinely reciprocal relations

with us fits nicely with human libertarian freedom'.[13] Of the classical theists' idea of God's absolute sovereignty Clark Pinnock asks, 'Who admires such dictatorial power? One can submit to, but not love, such a despot.'[14] Pinnock continues:

> [God] works out his purposes resourcefully and does not depend on manipulation ... He has chosen to create beings with the capacity for choice. In such a world, God does not exercise a sovereignty of total control. He resorts to a higher kind of power, one that requires more by way of competence. More wisdom is surely required to govern creatures that are in a personal relationship than those that are under all-determining control. God make himself vulnerable by creating the universe and took risks in wanting loving relationships.[15]

On the open theist view, when he created man God knew that there was a risk that freedom could be misused, although he could not know if it would be. Consequently he did not know whether hell and the redemptive work of Christ would be needed: it all depended on what man did. If that is the case, we may have considerable reservations regarding the open theists' assertion that God, like a supremely skilled chess player,[16] will be able to guide history to the ends he desires.

(iii) Change

Open Theism allows for a God who changes his plans in the light of new information and who may even repent of some of the things he has done. Such a view is necessary if God does not exercise absolute sovereignty or possess exhaustive foreknowledge. It is inevitable that many events in history will catch him by surprise and that he will have to change course to keep his plans on track. Inevitable, too, will be regrets that some of his actions have not produced the desired results. This is how Pinnock expresses the openness view:

> How history will go is not a foregone conclusion, even to God, because he is free to strike in new directions as may be appropriate. If we take divine repentance language seriously, it suggests that God does not work with a plan fixed in every detail but with general goals that can be fulfilled in different ways. God is faithful to these goals, but flexible as to how to fulfil them. Although repentance is a metaphor, which should not be pressed too far, it is revelatory of the way God exercises sovereignty ... God is able to remain faithful to his purposes even while altering plans to fit in with changing circumstances.[17]

In the course of a lengthy 'Excursus on Divine Repentance' John Sanders considers several passages to which open theists often turn for support on the issue of change and repentance in God, including God's repentance at having made Saul king (I Samuel 15), God's revoking of his threat to end Hezekiah's life (2 Kings 20) and God's removal of the promised perpetual priesthood from the house of Eli (I Samuel 2). He concludes:

> The metaphor of divine repentance signifies God's ability to remain faithful to his project while altering his plans to accommodate the changing circumstances brought about by the creatures ... divine repentance is a significant controlling metaphor in the biblical narrative.[18]

Gregory Boyd also refers to passages in which God is said to repent, including his repentance over the creation of the human race (Genesis 6:6), and also notes texts in which 'God Confronts the Unexpected'.[19] The latter include the 'wild grapes' produced by his vineyard Israel (Isaiah 5), his use of 'I thought' in relation to Israel's failure to respond to his entreaties (Jeremiah 3) and the statements in Jeremiah (7:31; 19:5 and 32:35) that 'it did not enter my mind' with reference to Israel's idolatry.

Such texts, open theists assert, indicate the dynamic relationship that God enjoys with his people, such that we affect him just as he affects us. Furthermore they demonstrate that the prayers of Christians may lead the God who values their hopes and fears to alter his plans. Sanders, for example, considers Moses' prayer of intercession for Israel in Exodus 32:11-13 which has the result that 'the Lord relented from [or 'changed his mind about' or 'repented of'] the disaster that he had spoken of bringing on his people (v14). Sanders comments:

> The real basis for the change in God's decision comes from a forceful presentation by one who is in a special relationship with God. With Moses' prayer, the decision-making situation is now altered for God.[20]

Only the open theist position, it is argued, offers a sound basis for the meaningfulness of Christian prayer.

(iv) Grief

The God of Open Theism is as grieved by suffering as we are. It is evident, on open theist presuppositions, that many things occur which are contrary to God's good and loving desires and plans. That is reflected in God's repentance and the adjustments which he makes in his plans. Given the fact of human libertarian freedom, with which God will not interfere, we must not blame God for the suffering and tragedy that are in the world. Within the 'rules of the game' as he has set them, God cannot put an end to p ain and suffering where they result form human beings' use (or misuse) of their libertarian freedom. In exposing the weaknesses of the open theist case, Bruce Ware states with reference to God's inability to prevent suffering:

> The statement that God is helpless and unable to prevent suffering has in mind, then the open theist's commitment to the notion that God values libertarian freedom so much that he will rarely interfere in its operation. By self-constraint, then, God is faced with the reality of being helpless to stop suffering that he wishes did not happen.[21]

Open theists will hasten to add that the God who is in a responsive relationship of love with his children stands with them in their suffering and gives them strength to get through hard circumstances which he wishes they did not have to face. Open theists often provide specific accounts of tragic events and experiences to illustrate this point. Gregory Boyd, for example, relates the story of Suzanne, a Christian woman whose husband, training with her to be a missionary, had deserted her. Boyd seeks to help her by telling her that her husband had freely sinned and rejected God's plan for him. 'This, I assured Suzanne, grieved God's heart as deeply as it grieved hers'.[22] She did not have to try to believe that somehow God intended these hard experiences 'for her own good'. This, Boyd believes, is the only way to help Suzanne face her (open) future. To speak of a God in sovereign control of the sad events she has passed through would be of no pastoral help at all. She can go forward assured of God's love for her despite the experiences he wishes she had not had to endure.

One implication of this view of God's providence as general and not specific, is that there are many pointless evils in the world which God cannot prevent and which contribute nothing to God's loving plans for his people. Although God is love and cares deeply for us, pointless tragedies do happen and we do experience utterly gratuitous evil. In John Sanders' words:

> God does not have a specific divine purpose for each and every occurrence of evil ... When a two-month-old child contracts a painful, incurable bone cancer that means suffering and death, it is pointless evil. The Holocaust is pointless evil. The rape and dismemberment of a young girl is pointless evil ... God does not have a specific purpose in mind for these occurrences.[23]

Open theists believe that their loving responsive God is preferable, in the face of such evil, to the distant, immutable, absolute Sovereign on classical theism. Bruce Ware sums up their view, we believe accurately, as:

> God is love; never doubt this. Suffering often is pointless; learn to accept this. And be consoled with the realization that God cares deeply about our pain even as he watches tragic events unfold, helpless and unable to prevent the suffering he so deeply bemoans and regrets.[24]

3. Responding to Open Theism

In evaluating Open Theism we may note that the goal of its proponents is a worthy one, namely to preserve an understanding of God's relationship with his people as loving, responsive and dynamic. Their case is that the view of God that is characteristic of classical theism renders such a relationship impossible. A God who is immutable and timeless, who is absolutely sovereign and possesses exhaustive foreknowledge cannot have such a relationship with

human beings. In providing a critical evaluation of Open Theism we do not decry the open theist's goal, but we do reject their claims regarding classical theism.

Before considering two substantive issues regarding the doctrine of God, we comment first on two more general matters.

The first is the pre-eminence given by open theists to the love of God. Richard Rice, for example, comments, 'From a Christian perspective, *love* is the first and last word in the biblical portrait of God'.[35] This leads to his assertion, 'The crucial importance of love requires us to revise a great deal of conventional thought about God'.[36] This gives to God's perfections of love a controlling position with regard to theology which it ought not to have. God is indeed love (I John 4:8), but he is also holy, almighty, omniscient and many other things. In treating the subject of the unity of God, Wayne Grudem reflects the overall biblical witness more faithfully than the open theists when he defines that unity thus:

> God is not divided into parts, yet we see different attributes of God emphasised at different times.[37]

This has also been referred to as the 'simplicity' of God, a concept which open theists dismiss as the product of Greek philosophy, a subject to which we will turn below. Grudem, we believe correctly, argues that the unity of God entails the equal ultimacy of all God's perfections, such that our doctrine of God is not to be constructed on the basis of one of them, whether that be God's love, God's sovereignty, or any other perfection. As Grudem writes,

> Moreover, the doctrine of the unity of God should caution us against attempting to single out any one attribute of God as more important than all the others.[38]

There is in actuality no conflict or tension between any of God's attributes, although our limited understanding may on occasion perceive conflict.

The second general matter requiring attention is the role of Greek philosophy in the formulation of Christian theology. Open theists lay the blame for much that they consider to be wrong with classical theism on theologians' readiness to use Greek philosophical ideas as a framework for presenting (or misrepresenting) biblical theology in systematic form, especially the doctrine of God. John Sanders, for example, argues for this view of the early fathers. Although accepting that they 'did not sell out to Hellenism', he does believe at key points they used Greek philosophy to explain and defend the Christian concept of God to their contemporaries. He states,

> In what follows I will document the manner in which I believe the Greek metaphysical system 'boxed up' the God described in the Bible and the

> tremendous impact this had in shaping the Christian understandings of the nature of God, the Trinity, election, sin, grace, the covenant, the sovereignty of God, prayer, salvation, and the incarnation.[29]

It seems that nothing was left untouched as the fathers read Scripture through Hellenistic spectacles. In Sanders' exposition the main culprits are, unsurprisingly, Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics.

How should we respond to this view? The subject is too big for extended consideration in this paper, but a few comments must be made. A number of proponents of classical theism have demonstrated convincingly that the arguments of the open theists do not in fact prove their case. Theologian Steven Roy, for example, points out that 'Greek philosophy' is a multifaceted concept and asks the question, 'Which Greek philosophy?'[30] He goes on to argue that conceptual similarities between Greek ideas and Christian theology do not necessarily indicate a causal influence, and that where causal influences can be proven, they should not automatically be written off as uniformly negative. Christian theologians, in Roy's view, have been very selective in their appropriation of Greek ideas.

Probably the most helpful rebuttal of the open theist case comes from theologian and patristic scholar Gerald Bray.[31] He notes that the open theists are not offering anything new in their arguments about the appropriation of Greek philosophy by Christian theologians. They are in fact recycling the views of early nineteenth century Germans such as Baur and Neander, and later Ritschl and Harnack, views which were comprehensively refuted by scholars such as J. N. D. Kelly and H. E. W. Turner. Open theists appear to be unaware of that unfortunate line of descent.

Among the many telling points which Bray makes is his argument that, whilst Christian theologians undoubtedly borrowed vocabulary from Greek philosophers as they pursued the necessary task of systematising biblical truth, those terms generally had no fixed meaning in Greek thought. As Bray states,

> On the contrary, they were used in ways which were often vague and imprecise, causing problems for subsequent interpreters and allowing the competing schools of disciples to claim that they were all following their chosen master(s).[32]

Not only is that the case, but, as Bray contends,

> Precision in vocabulary did not come until Christians imposed it on themselves, because they had a definable God whom they needed to describe accurately.[33]

Terms used with reference to God such as *ousia* ('being') and *hypostasis* ('substance') were filled with biblical meaning, and of the resulting doctrine of the Trinity, which states that God is one ousia in three *hypostases*. Bray says

that 'no pagan philosopher could have spoken in these terms'.[34] He sums up the principle that was at work in Christian appropriation of Greek vocabulary thus: 'The reality which is being described defines the parameters of meaning appropriate to the terminology used to describe it'.[35] Whilst we are not obliged to endorse every use of Greek terminology, we may certainly say that Christian theology, particularly the doctrine of God, has not suffered wholesale contamination by alien philosophy. Furthermore it is not inappropriate to question, as Roy and others do, the philosophical influences shaping Open Theism.[36]

We turn now to consider two particular aspects of the doctrine of God which have received considerable attention from open theists as they have sought to overthrow the consensus of classical theism, namely the immutability of God and his exhaustive foreknowledge.

(i) The immutability of God

For open theists one of the greatest obstacles to a proper understanding of God's dynamic relationship with his people is classical theism's doctrine of the immutability of God. How can a God who is considered to be utterly unchanging, who is static and devoid of emotion, really engage in real, loving relationships?

We may begin our response by pointing out that the criticism offered by open theists is in significant respects a caricature of classical theism. It may be conceded that there have been proponents of the latter position who have used language that suggested God is a static and emotionless being, unable to change in any respect, but that is not an accurate description of the tradition as a whole. Gerald Bray's comment on the open theists' view is apposite:

> They supposed that God's infinite flexibility in dealing with us must indicate that his being is somehow changeable. It did not seem to occur to them that it might be possible for the creator to relate to his creatures without changing...[37]

A helpful definition of the unchangeableness of God is provided by Wayne Grudem:

> God is unchanging in his being, perfections, purposes and promises, yet God does act and feel emotions, and he acts and feels differently in response to different situations.[38]

This definition clarifies the respects in which God is unchanging – being, perfections, purposes and promises. God will always be the God he reveals himself to be in his Word. In these respects, it may be said of God 'You are the same, and your years have no end' (Psalm 102:27). His purpose to bring all things into subjection to Christ the Mediator (Ephesians 1:10) cannot fail and

his promises, as the word of an almighty and unchanging God, will be fulfilled. Such truths are of great consolation to God's people: 'I the Lord do not change; therefore you, O children of Israel, are not consumed' (Malachi 3:6).

Grudem's definition is also consistent with Scripture with regard to God's 'infinite flexibility' (to use Bray's phrase) in his dealings with his creatures. God is constantly responding, in ways entirely consistent with his nature, to the changes that take place in his creation and in particular in his rational creatures. Indeed, it is the unchangeableness of God that allows us to predict, in some degree, how he will respond to changing events and circumstances.

Open theists argue that classical theists cannot consistently hold this view because of their belief in the timelessness of God.[39]. This belief, it is claimed, renders real relationships between a timeless God and time-bound creatures impossible. We cannot here enter in to this complex subject, beyond saying that Scripture indicates that God is outside of time as far as his own being is concerned, indeed he existed before time began with the creation of the universe, yet he also acts in time and acts differently at different points in history, as the historical books of the Old Testament and of the New amply demonstrate. Wayne Grudem's definition of God's eternity brings these diverse elements together:

> God has no beginning, end, or succession of moments in his own being, and he sees all time equally vividly, yet God sees events in time and acts in time.[40]

There may be much about God's relationship to time that we do not understand and there may be scope for legitimate differences on some of the philosophical issues involved, but God's existence outside time does not prevent dynamic loving relationships with his people, nor indeed answers to their prayers.

Does God change his mind? As we have seen, open theists are very ready to say that he does as he wrestles with the unforeseen free actions of human beings. The God of Open Theism even, on occasion, repents of actions which he regrets. Texts such as Genesis 6:6, I Samuel 15:10 and Isaiah 38:1ff are frequently cited with regard to God's repentance. Classical theists respond to this idea by describing biblical language concerning God's changing his mind and repenting as 'anthropomorphic'.[41] This means that God, in order to convey to us important truths regarding his actions in terms that we can understand, uses the language of human actions. Very often God is represented in Scripture in terms of human physical activity or emotional experience. Although there are great differences between the divine and the human, there are also crucial points of comparison. Thus God's strength may be spoken of in terms of his 'right arm', although he does not have physical arms and his strength is infinite. In this way our limited understanding can grasp important divine truth.

Often in texts cited by open theists we are presented with expressions of God's present attitude to particular situations. When the situation changes, so does God's attitude. Thus, for example, God does not fulfil his threat of judgment when the people of Ninevah repent (Jonah 3:10). For God not to have changed in these circumstances would have been inconsistent with his unchanging nature and word. When divine threats against Israel (Exodus 32:9-14) and against Hezekiah respectively are part of the changed situations to which God responds, and were indeed within his sovereign plan. His 'regrets' too are a means of expressing his just displeasure at sin in terms we can grasp. Although God knew that these situations would arise, he may, as Ware puts it, *'experience inwardly and express outwardly appropriate moral responses to these situations when they occur in history'*.[42] As Steven Roy points out at the conclusion of his discussion of anthropomorphism, these metaphors are 'reality-depicting' but there are significant differences between divine and human 'repentance'. In Roy's words,

> Absolutely crucial ... is the fact that God's repentance does not necessarily imply a lack of foreknowledge on his part. Nor does it imply any admission of mistake on the part of God.[43]

Does God experience emotions? At times some classical theists have been afraid that to speak of God experiencing emotions would suggest that he is changeable and so they have denied that God has an emotional dimension to his being.[44] Open theists have regularly attacked classical theists on this score. Recalling Grudem's definition of God's unchangeableness quoted above, however, we may note that God may be unchanging in his 'being, perfections, purposes and promises'[45] without our having to conclude that he is a being devoid of emotion.

The Scriptures are full of emotional language with reference to God: he rejoices, he is angry, he is grieved, and so forth. If we are to take the biblical texts seriously, we must conclude that these statements mean *something*. At the very least we can say that they are 'anthropopathisms', analogous to anthropomorphisms. They tell us that there are experiences of God which are best explained to us in the language of human emotions.

There will of course be profound differences between emotion on God's part and on ours, not least because he is infinite and timeless whilst we are finite and time-bound. For God there will be no physical accompaniments of emotion – no raised heart rate, no tears, no nausea. Similarly God will never be directed by or controlled by emotions as we often are. Some emotions would also be inappropriate to God, such as anxiety about the future. These qualifications, however, do not indicate an absence of emotion in God. As eminent classical theist Charles Hodge has said,

> Love of necessity involves feeling, and if there is no feeling in God, there can be no love.[46]

We must beware lest we reduce God to a kind of celestial slot machine dispensing appropriate blessing or punishment upon good and evil action, whilst feeling nothing within himself about either. God experiences joy when his law is obeyed and anger when sin is committed. To evacuate either of emotional content is to render language meaningless.

As far as the issue of emotion and changeability in God are concerned, the comment of John Frame is helpful:

> ...although God's eternal decree does not change, it does ordain change. It ordains a historical series of events, each of which receives God's evaluation. God evaluates different events in different ways. Those evaluations themselves are fixed in God's eternal plan. But they are genuine valuations of the events. It is not wrong to describe them as responses to these events.[47]

Frame sees the emotional and the intellectual coming together perfectly in God, so that he can argue that

> ...without emotions, God would lack intellectual capacity, and he would be unable to speak the full truth about himself and the world.[48]

(ii) The foreknowledge of God

A central tenet of Open Theism is a denial of God's exhaustive foreknowledge of the future. It is argued that God knows all things about the future that can be known but that the free actions of human beings cannot be foreknown. The future is partly settled and partly open. As Gregory Boyd puts it,

> the sovereign Creator settles whatever he wants to settle about the future and knows the settled aspects as settled *to this extent*. He leaves open whatever he leaves open and hence he perfectly foreknows the future as open to *this extent*.[49]

The Bible, however, demonstrates that God has in fact exhaustive foreknowledge, including knowledge of all future choices of human beings. The latter are not unknowable, in principle or in actuality. The evidence is abundant and so only a few items can be selected for mention.[50]

Psalm 139. God's knowledge embraces our words before we ourselves know them: 'Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O Lord, you know it altogether' (v4). Every aspect of life is thus included. All our days were known to God before our birth (v16), information that embraces numerous contingent events and free human choices. All these factors are evidently within God's sovereign control.

Isaiah 40-48. Although many prophetic passages could be selected for consideration, these chapters, as Bruce Ware says, are 'the single richest and strongest portion of Scripture supporting God's knowledge of the future'.[51] Ware identifies nine sections in these chapters which make the same point:

> Yahweh, the God of Israel, is known as the true and living God in contrast to idols, whose pretence to deity is evident on the basis that *the true God knows and declares the future* (including future free human actions) before it occurs, while *those impostor rivals neither know nor declare any such thing*.[52]

The range of God's knowledge is astounding, right down to naming Cyrus some 200 years before he was born (44:28). The number of free human decisions involved just in the lineage of the Persian king is incalculable, yet the Lord knows precisely what the outcome will be. It becomes clear in this portion of Isaiah that not only is God's foreknowledge exhaustive and embraces the future free choices and actions of human agents, but 'God has chosen to vindicate himself as God by declaring what the future will be'.[53] By this means he demonstrates such perfections as his faithfulness, truthfulness, sovereignty, wisdom and righteousness. Without exhaustive foreknowledge he is *not God.*

Gospel of John. It is striking in the light of Isaiah 40-48 that Jesus makes his ability to predict future events an evidence of his deity. In John 13:19 he says, with reference especially to his betrayal, 'I am telling you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place you may believe that I am he'. This harmonises with 6:64, 'Jesus knew from the beginning ... who it was who would betray him'. The free action of Judas was exhaustively known by Jesus, as were Peter's repeated denials (13:38). Jesus also knew what death Peter would die (21:18-19) despite the vast number of free human choices that would contribute to it. He was of course fully aware of the death he himself would die and frequently sought to warn the disciples of what would happen.

Both Old and New Testaments present a God who possesses exhaustive foreknowledge of all things, including the free choices and actions of human beings, and on this basis requires men and women to exercise faith in this sovereign God.

4. The dangers of Open Theism

The debate with Open Theism is much more than a piece of abstract academic theologizing. There are very significant practical implications for various aspects of Christian living, such that Open Theism poses dangers which must be identified in order to safeguard the people of God. How we live is a function of what we believe. Defective views of God will lead to defective spirituality. By way of a brief conclusion to this study we note several ways in

which Open Theism poses dangers. Following the analysis of Steven Roy,[54] we mention the following:

(i) Worship

Worship is of supreme importance to Christians because it is supremely important to the God who made and redeemed us. In order to worship God aright, we must have as fully biblical a view of him as possible. Any diminution of his glory will prove detrimental to worship, as will any deviation from what he says of himself in his Word. God must be worshipped as he reveals himself to be.

Despite the claims of open theists to the contrary,[55] the classical theist description of God as absolutely sovereign, possessing exhaustive foreknowledge and able to fulfil his purposes in every detail, presents a view that is consistent with Scripture and offers a God who is far more glorious and worthy of worship than is the infinitely resourceful chess-player of Open Theism. To worship according to the tenets of Open Theism is not to worship 'in truth' (John 4:24).

(ii) Prayer

The classical theist prays in the belief that God hears and responds to his prayers, knows the future as fully as the present and the past, and is able to answer prayers in the best possible ways. Open theists argue, we believe unsuccessfully, that the God of classical theism is unable to respond meaningfully to petitionary prayer and indeed those prayers are futile since the future is unalterably determined. In stark contrast, the classical theist derives encouragement in prayer from God's sovereignty and knowledge, and the awareness that his prayers are included in the divine decree.

Open Theism, however, weakens commitment to prayer in a number of ways. The open theist is addressing a God who does not know the future fully and who is entirely unable to control the free choices of his creatures which may be essential to the granting of a particular prayer. Indeed God is capable of misjudgements and mistakes due to lack of knowledge. Prayer in the give-and-take relationship envisaged by Open Theism is very different from the joyful, confident intercessions exemplified in the prayers recorded in Scripture.

(iii) Guidance

Christians have been accustomed to seek God's guidance in matters small and great in the belief that he has planned their future course and is working out his infinitely wise and loving decree. God's people willingly turn for guidance to a sovereign God who knows the future in exhaustive detail.

The God of Open Theism will certainly try to help his people through life in the ways he believes to be best, but, as we have seen already, much of the future is as unknown to him as it is to us, and the free decisions of human beings are entirely beyond his control. The guidance he is able to give amounts in practice to his 'best guess' as to what is the best way ahead. It may be informed by great wisdom and the full knowledge of past and present, but it could prove to be entirely wrong and could lead to disaster if unforeseen events change the situation radically. God's guidance today could have to be revised fundamentally tomorrow, a possibility which robs a child of God of any confidence in approaching the Lord for direction.

(iv) Suffering

The people of God have been accustomed to find comfort in the face of loss and suffering in the assurance that, however limited their understanding of it may be, God is in control and he is working out his loving purpose through the hard experiences. They may never, at least in this life, have an answer to their agonised 'Why?' but they can rest in the assurance that there is an explanation and God has not been taken by surprise or forced to change course. Even the actions of evil men, and indeed of Satan and the demons, are within the Lord's sovereign purpose. Unanswered questions may remain, but the existence of full answers is certain.

Open Theism removes all such assurances. When suffering comes, it must be concluded that God did not know, or at least did not know for certain it was coming. Where the free actions of humans are concerned, God had no control over them and may well have been taken entirely unawares. Perhaps even worse is the open theist view that suffering and evil do not serve some 'greater good'. Although God as the great chess-player may bring some good out of the situation, he had no plan or purpose in its arising. Assurances of God's help and care do not suffice to lift the burden of knowing that a hard experience was out of God's control and served no good purpose. Equally, on such a basis, there can be no confidence regarding the future.

(v) Hope

Classical theists find in the Bible an assurance that God is working out his sovereign purpose towards the goal of final glory in the new creation, a goal which is sure to be reached. 'Hope' in the Bible is sure, not tentative, and the prophetic descriptions of the new creation are cast in terms of what *will* come to pass. Individual perseverance to the end, by God's grace, is also a matter of certainty.

Although open theists may speak of their confidence that God's cause will ultimately triumph, their theology provides no sound basis for confidence. God may be like a chess-player who knows all possible moves and who is able

to respond to whatever the future throws up, but as long as he refuses to override free human decisions and remains ignorant of the future, he cannot guarantee to bring about the final state of affairs which he desires. If he does intervene unilaterally and sets aside man's libertarian freedom, all that Open Theism has to say about God's responsive relationship with human beings falls to the ground. The dilemma seems insoluble.

The God of classical theism is absolutely sovereign, possesses exhaustive foreknowledge and responds to his people in a relationship of love. The price paid for the God of Open Theism is too high, and entirely unnecessary.

Notes

1. Clark Pinnock, Richard Rice, John Sanders, William Hasker and David Basinger. *The Openness of God: a Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God*, (Downers Grove and Carlisle: Intervarsity Press and The Paternoster Press, 1994), p.7.
2. James S. Spiegel, *The Benefits of Providence. A New Look at Divine Sovereignty*, (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2005), pp.40-41.
3. Richard Rice, 'Biblical Support for a New Perspective' in Pinnock et al, *Openness*, p.46.
4. For a fuller treatment see Bruce A Ware, *God's Lesser Glory. A critique of open theism*, (Leicester: Apollos, 2000), pp.41-61.
5. Richard Rice in Pinnock et at, *Openness*, pp.15-16.
6. John Sanders, *The God Who Risks. A Theology of Providence*, (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1998), p.124.
7. John Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, p.125.
8. John Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, p.50.
9. John Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, pp.52-53.
10 John Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, p.170.
11. William Hasker, *God, Time and Knowledge*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), p.197.
12. Gregory A. Boyd, *God of the Possible. A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), pp.57-58.
13. John Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, p.222.
14 Clark H. Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover. A Theology of God's Openness*, (Carlisle and Grand Rapids: Paternoster Press and Baker Academic, 2001), p.95
15. ibid.
16. The analogy is used, for example, by Gregory Boyd, *God of the Possible*, p.127.
17. Clark H. Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, pp.43-44.
18. John Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, p.72.
19. Gregory A. Boyd, *God of the Possible*, p.59ff.
20. John Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, p.64.
21 Bruce A. Ware, *God's Lesser Glory*, p.55, fn.33.
22. Gregory A. Boyd, *God of the Possible*, p.106. The whole account is to be found on pp.103-106.
23. John Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, p.262.
24. Bruce A. Ware, *God's Lesser Glory*, p.55.
25. Richard Rice in Pinnock et al, *Openness*,p.18.
26. Richard Rice in Pinnock et al, *Openness*,p.21.
27. Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology. An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*. (Nottingham: Intervarsity Press, 2007), p.177.

28. Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p.180.
29. John Sanders, 'Historical Considerations' in Pinnock et al, *Openness*, p.60.
30. Steven C. Roy, *How Much Does God Foreknow?* (Downers Grove and Nottingham: IVP Academic and Apollos, 2006), p.198. Roy's treatment of the subject (pp.195-219) is most instructive.
31. Gerald Bray, *The Personal God. Is the classical understanding of God tenable?* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1998).
32. Gerald Bray, *The Personal God*, p.50.
33. ibid.
34. Gerald Bray, *The Personal God*, p.52.
35. ibid.
36. Steven C. Roy, *How Much Does God Foreknow?*, pp.211-219.
37. Gerald Bray, *The Personal God*, p.74.
38. Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p.163.
39. The implications of various views of God's relationship to time are considered in Gregory E. Ganssle (ed), *God and Time. Four Views* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2001).
40. Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p.168.
41. A very helpful discussion of anthropomorphic language and its relationship to God's 'repentance' is provided by Steven C. Roy, How Much Does God Foreknow?, pp.159-176.
42. Bruce A. Ware, *God's Lesser Glory*, p.92.
43. Steven C. Roy, *How Much Does God Foreknow?*, p.176.
44. This may seem to be the case with Westminster Confession of Faith II.1, which states that God is 'without body, parts or passions'. One possible interpretation of the statement notes the Latin origin of 'passion' in the verb 'patior' ('I suffer') and argues that the Confession is stating that God is never under the control of any feeling, or indeed of anything outside himself, and hence the framers of the Confession were not denying an emotional dimension to God's existence.
45. Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p.163.
46. Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977), 1.428-9.
47. John M. Frame, *No Other God. A Response to Open Theism*, (Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 2001), pp.182-183.
48. John M. Frame, *No Other God*, p184.
49. Gregory A. Boyd, 'The Open-Theism View' in James K Bielby and Paul R Eddy, *Divine Foreknowledge. Four Views*, (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2001), p.14. The whole collection offers valuable expositions of approaches to divine foreknowledge.
50. Fuller considerations can be found in Bruce A Ware, *God's Lesser Glory*, p.101-143, and Steven C. Roy, *How Much Does God Foreknow?*, pp.27-123.
51. Bruce A. Ware, *God's Lesser Glory*, p.104.
52. Bruce A. Ware, *God's Lesser Glory*, p.104.
53. Bruce A. Ware, *God's Lesser Glory*, p.123.
54. Steven C. Roy, *How Much Does God Foreknow?*, p.230-278.
55. Gregory A. Boyd, *God of the Possible*, pp.127-128, provides one example.

EDWARD NANGLE AND REVIVAL ON ACHILL

Knox Hyndman

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Achill Island lies off the west coast of Ireland. It is a small place, now reached by a bridge from the mainland. In the mid nineteenth century this island was the scene of a remarkable work of God's grace in which hundreds of islanders were drawn to saving faith in Christ. The ethos of the island was transformed.

Conditions on Achill in the early part of the nineteenth century

Before missionary work began, Achill island did not have a regular school. Those who could read had learned from itinerant teachers commonly known as the 'hedge schoolmasters.' The Bible was an unknown book. When Edward Nangle arrived on Achill he noted, 'I could only discover one man who had so much as a copy of the New Testament.'

Nangle's biographer, Henry Seddall, made this observation, 'It would have been hard to find anywhere a larger amount of gross ignorance and degrading superstition.' Typical of those superstitions was the practice of hanging round the neck a small piece of cloth folded and containing a piece of paper on which the first verse of John's Gospel was written in Latin. This was blessed by the priest and was supposed to protect those who wore it against the fairies!

It was to this island, a stronghold of Roman Catholicism and pagan superstition, that Edward Nangle felt compelled to take the gospel. He believed that God had called him to the work and that in his sovereign purpose that gospel would bear fruit among the islanders. In one of his unpublished papers he expressed the belief that 'God had a chosen remnant among the long neglected inhabitants of Achill.'

The years of preparation

Edward Nangle was born near Athboy in County Meath. His father was a commissioned officer in the army, the Sixteenth Regiment of Infantry, and

held the rank of captain. The family had settled in Ireland during the reign of Henry II. Among the knights who accompanied Strongbow were Gilbert de Nangle and his two sons. Edward Nangle seems to have had no inclination to join the army, but, as his biographer states, 'was content to be a good soldier of Jesus Christ rather than bear arms as many of his predecessors had done.'

Edward was educated at the Royal School in Cavan. Part of that education required him to repeat by rote the Church Catechism. However the catechism was never explained and no attempt was made to apply it to the lives of the young students. In later years Nangle used to tell his friends that for a long time he thought that 'and thirdly' was a woman's name which he took to be Anne Thurley!

Nangle had an artistic temperament and was also a keen sportsman and was known as a 'fearless horseman.' When very young Edward was deeply affected on hearing of the 'happy death of a young Methodist peasant' in his village. It prompted serious thoughts about what true religion was and that there must be something enjoyable in the service of God. However these impressions were short lived and Nangle finished his college education as an unconverted man.

His original intention was to study medicine, but strangely his closest friends persuaded him that he should pursue a different profession. They suggested that he 'enter the church,' which was regarded at the time as a very respectable career for a well educated young man. Nangle agreed with this suggestion which in the Providence of God was used to lead him to saving faith in Christ. The thought of becoming an ordained clergyman prompted in Nangle a desire at least to possess a copy of the Bible and begin to read it. Through this reading of Scripture the Holy Spirit enlightened the young student and he experienced true conversion.

Nangle was ordained as a minister in the Church of Ireland in the summer of 1824 and began his ministry in Athboy. In those early months he lamented how little he knew about the Bible and how little experience he had of Christian living. He did, however, describe himself as being 'full of zeal to live for God's glory and to win souls for Christ.' This zeal was not tempered with wisdom and within a relatively short time he was drained emotionally and physically and had to resign his post. 'He seems to have formed the opinion that the care of the bodily frame was altogether unworthy of the attention of a true Christian. Frequently his breakfast consisted only of a crust of oaten bread and a glass of water. His evening meal was the rest of the oaten bread and another drink of water.' During the years when he was unable to serve as curate the vision for mission work in Achill was taking root in his heart. Nangle's biographer is surely right in saying that while the withdrawal from his work was a severe trial for the young man, it 'was part of God's providential dealing and discipline by which Edward Nangle was gradually being prepared for a more important

sphere of service.'

His theological understanding was changing too. Initially he held to an Arminian understanding which, given the prevalence of Methodism in the area where he lived and worked, is not surprising. But through conversations with Rev. William Krause in Dublin, Nangle came to an understanding and acceptance of Reformed doctrine. Later he testified to the fact that he was often helped through periods of trial and difficulty by the doctrine of election, which he described as very full of 'sweet, pleasant and unspeakable comfort.'

On a journey by horseback Nangle spent the time meditating on the words of Isaiah 'by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many.' These words seemed so glorious, he says, that he longed to communicate this truth to the whole world.

The Achill Mission

Nangle's desire to take the Gospel to Achill was strengthened by reading Christopher Anderson's book *Historical Sketches of the Native Irish*. He was moved by the realization that so little had been done to bring the gospel in their own language to the Irish speaking population.

His first visit to the island was in 1831 as a passenger on a steamer which was taking supplies of food to the inhabitants at a time of severe shortage – a precursor of the great famine which occurred not many years later. He found the people 'in an appalling state of destitution.' 'My knowledge of the Irish language was very imperfect; I therefore found much difficulty in expressing myself. I spoke however with stammering lips about Christ, His tender love to poor sinners and His great salvation and the people heard me with the most reverential attention.'

Nangle's initial attempts to raise the necessary finance to begin mission work on Achill were unsuccessful. He had added discouragement in other ways too. Some regarded planting a church on the island as 'wild speculation.' Others were adamant that it would be irresponsible to take his family to such a wild place and it would also mean that he would lose any opportunity of making progress in the church. Some of course warned of the opposition he would undoubtedly encounter from the local Roman Catholic priests. One of those issuing this warning was a prominent evangelical minister. 'You will not be six weeks in the island until the priest will have blown you into the Atlantic' was his dire prediction. Nangle as undeterred: '"God," said I, "is stronger than the priests."'

Nangle took up residence on the island in 1834 in one of two very simple dwellings which had been built by the authority of the Achill Mission Committee of the Church of Ireland. A schoolmaster and a Scripture reader were appointed to work alongside Mr. Nangle.

Living conditions were primitive and food was scarce, with meat only very rarely on the menu. The mission workers soon came to prize highly stew made from rabbit or curlew. Henry Seddall comments that the missionaries' adventures resembled those of Robinson Crusoe on his desert island.

Preaching began in August 1834 and Nangle found a people who listened willingly and showed great respect for the Bible.

Facing opposition

Nangle's strategy included the establishment of schools. The first was opened at the end of 1834 in Slievemore and within the first two days had an attendance of fifty three. Almost immediately the local priest started a rival school in an attempt to undermine Nangle's work. This opposition did affect the numbers attending the mission schools. Appearing before an inquiry in the House of Lords, Nangle presented the evidence. In 1835 four hundred and twenty were in attendance at the school, but just four years later the number had dropped to two hundred and forty three. When asked the reason for this decline, Nangle gave this answer, 'I attribute it to the violent persecution of the Roman Catholic priesthood as detailed in a petition presented to this House by the Bishop of Exeter.' The priests also encouraged islanders to pour verbal abuse on the missionaries, while shopkeepers were urged not to sell anything to the 'heretics.'

Opposition came also from other quarters. Liberal churchmen, such as the Bishop of Norwich, denounced Nangle's work and others 'resented as impertinent all allusion to the errors of the Church of Rome.' The prestigious journal *The Athanaeum* wrote against the Achill Mission and, while claiming to be impartial, still refused to give Nangle the right of reply to its criticisms.

In spite of opposition the Mission progressed and in 1835 the foundation was laid for a church building – the first Protestant church ever erected on Achill. In December of that year Nangle installed a printing press which had been paid for by supporters in London and York. He began to publish a monthly paper, *The Achill Missionary Herald and Western Witness*. Because this paper was 'a stamped publication' it was entitled to free circulation through the Post Office. Circulation initially reached six hundred copies each month, but soon the Roman Catholic authorities attempted to have the right to free circulation cancelled. This attack only served to raise the profile of the *Herald* and circulation soon reached the astonishing figure of three thousand.

Nangle's vision was wide ranging and in 1838 another arm of the Mission was in place when an orphanage was established 'for the education of destitute children.'

By now attendance at the church was around one hundred and twenty. Five years before there had not been a professing Protestant believer on the

island. The converts began to show evidence of growth and maturity. In October 1844 several expressed the desire to make their profession of faith in Christ in public. On successive Sundays small groups of about ten or twelve came forward before the congregation and answered questions on their faith put to them in both English and Irish. Remarkably that same year saw the first stone laid for the building of a house for priests who had renounced Roman Catholicism and were now preparing for work in the Church of Ireland.

The effects of the Famine

1846 was a dark year in Ireland. In the early part of the year Nangle wrote, 'We regret to have the painful task of stating that the potato disease is making rapid strides in this island.' Nangle regarded the famine as a special judgment on the nation. He identified those national sins which he believed had called down this divine judgment – 'unatoned for blood [murders for which no-one was brought to justice], idolatry in the professing people of God; and the profane neglect of the House and ordinances of God.'

Nonetheless Nangle displayed a deep compassion for the people in their need. He travelled to England to raise funds for a shipload of meal he had ordered in faith. This became in fact a great test of his faith, and he began to fear that he had made a great mistake. However, through his reading of the Report of George Muller's work, his faith was strengthened. This reading prompted him to spend a whole night in prayer and acquaintances said that 'from that moment he never faltered in his faith.'

Achill suffered from famine for two years, but Nangle made the following observation as he later reflected on that terrible time: 'We are thankful to say that a gracious movement of God's Holy Spirit on the hearts of the people seems to accompany the heavy calamity with which He has visited them.' Nangle could write of many conversions which took place during those years.

An island transformed

Dr. McIlwaine, Rector of St. George's in Belfast paid a visit to Achill in the autumn of 1849. He was there at the time the foundation stone was being laid for another new church building and reported the event: 'Mr. Nangle addressed the people at considerable length in Irish. There were altogether no less than twelve hundred present.' Dr. McIlwaine's assessment of the blessing which had come on this missionary work is significant:

> Seventeen years ago there was not a solitary instance of a member of the Protestant Established Church among the thousands of native inhabitants on Achill. It was then that the Providence of God sent forth His servants to labour in this most barren and dry land. A process of evangelization goes on throughout

> the whole island; five places of Protestant worship are established; fifteen hundred children are in constant attendance at Scriptural schools. The demoniac beings who raged against the Gospel sit clothed and in their right minds to hear its joyful sound.

Nangle himself on a return visit to Achill from Screen, Co. Sligo, where he had gone as rector, commented,

> Looking at the dangers and difficulties with which the missionary work in this island was encompassed and contrasting the state of things now with the state of things as they were then, we may well exclaim, "What hath God wrought!"

An imperfect servant

Nangle himself, like all gospel preachers was a mixture. He was impulsive and often harsh in his judgment of others. He often refused to be guided by other men who were in many respects wiser than he was. There could be no doubt however that he had a burden for the glory of God and the salvation of his fellow Irishmen on the island of Achill. In the pursuit of this he was, according to a friend, 'self-sacrificing and self-denying to the last degree.' When Nangle found that he could support and educate his family by the publication of *The Herald* and by the sale of his books, he gave up his salary of £150 per year. For forty years, rather than be a burden to the mission, he preferred to 'feed his children out of his inkstand.' Nangle often expressed heartfelt thanks that he would die a comparatively poor man.

His own diary records long rides on lonely roads and small congregations assembled in school houses or farm houses. He dealt on a personal basis with people who sought his help in their spiritual need. He distributed copies of the Bible and numerous tracts. He sought to ensure that the people would be able to read when the Bible was placed in their hands. He lived with a deep awareness of the presence of God. The revival on Achill came of course in the sovereign purpose and at the time of God's appointing. It lasted for his appointed time.

The ministry of Edward Nangle on Achill has several lessons which continue to search the church and its mission today. We are challenged by his confidence in God's sovereign grace which kept him labouring in a remote and hostile locality; by his deep love for people who had been overlooked by the church; by his perseverance in the face of unwarranted criticism and open hostility. Revival on Achill in the nineteenth century testifies that the gospel is always in jars of clay so that the excellent power is of God and not of men.

Source Material : *Edward Nangle, The Apostle of Achill: A Memoir and a History* by Henry Seddall and Lord Plunket (1884).

'HISTORIA SALUTIS' AND PSALM 89

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This psalm is labelled a Maskil of Ethan the Ezrahite. The term 'maskil' usually indicates wisdom and is found fourteen times in the titles of the psalms. The term is translated by *suneseōs*, in the LXX, which indicates the faculty of comprehension and intelligence. Psalm 89 serves the function of teaching something, something which is difficult to understand, verse 38 [Hebrew 39].

> Psalm 89:38 'But now you have cast off and rejected; you are full of wrath against your anointed.'[1]

The psalm is the final selection in Book III. At the beginning of Book III, we find Psalm 73, which starts with a doubting faith. Psalm 74, which follows, is a lament that ends in a supplication. The book ends with two difficult psalms, Psalm 88, a stark and bleak expression of lament, with very little light in it at all (verses 1-2). Finally, we have Psalm 89, which begins with praise, followed by lament, and ends in supplication. There is no resolution in this psalm. We are left waiting along with the psalmist.[2] The doxology of the psalm, v. 52 [Hebrew 53], closes the book, not the psalm. The Anointed's Crown and Covenant is both established and reproached in this psalm.[3]

For Gerald Wilson, this Psalm forms the central pivot point of the entire Psalter.[4] Wilson argues that Book Four (Pss 90-106) has a high proportion of "untitled" psalms (13 out of 17). He shows in his book that untitled psalms are 'frequently subject to editorial manipulation.'

> The curious conjunction of such a large number of "untitled" pss in Book Four, as well as its other distinctive features, lead me to suggest that this book is especially the product of purposeful editorial arrangement. This impression is heightened by the close interweaving of theme and verbal correspondences in these 17 pss...In my opinion, Pss 90 - 106 function as the editorial "center" of the final form of the Hebrew Psalter. As such this grouping stands as the "answer" to the problem posed in Ps 89 as to the apparent failure of the Davidic covenant with which Books One - Three are primarily concerned. Briefly summarized the answer given is (1) Yahweh is king; (2) He has been our "refuge" in the past, long before the monarchy existed (i.e., in the Mosaic period); (3) He will continue to be our refuge now that the monarchy is gone; (4) Blessed are they that trust in him![5]

I will argue below that the "answer" to the problem in psalm 89 is in the coming of the Messiah.[6] The New Covenant is the solution to the disobedience

of the sons of David and to the wrath of God.

Foundation of the Psalm

The foundation for this psalm is the promise made through the prophet Nathan to David in 2 Samuel 7:16 – 'And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever.'

This promise is repeated in the opening verses of the psalm. The psalm introduces two major and related themes. The faithfulness that belongs to the Lord (vv.1-2) and the covenant promise made to David (vv.3-4). These themes are woven all the way through the psalm.

After this introduction, we find a hymn of praise about the faithfulness of God in vv. 5-16. The two following verses, 17-18, can be seen as a transition.

> Psalm 89:17 'For you are the glory of their strength; by your favor our horn is exalted.[18] For our shield belongs to the LORD, our king to the Holy One of Israel.'

Following this hymn, we find a vision of the covenant promises to David, in the form of an oracle that elected David and made promises to him, vv.19-37. This makes up the greater part of the Psalm. After this oracle we are presented with a lament and at the end, a supplication. The psalm ends on the note that the faithful God of heaven seems to have become unfaithful toward his anointed. This is a hard and difficult issue that finds no resolution in the psalm. Luther said of this psalm that in it we find the greatest contradiction. I will argue that in the context of the revelation of God's plan through the ages, the *historia salutis*,[7] we do not.

Qualities of the Psalm

There is great movement through this psalm. The themes are presented, developed, questioned. Expressions are repeated to unify the work. The main ones include the 'faithful love' *hesed* of Lord and his 'faithfulness' *hasdê Yahweh*.. We also find striking antithetical verses in the psalm. For example, verse 3 and verse 39:

> Psalm 89:3 You have said, 'I have made a covenant with my chosen one; I have sworn to David my servant:'
> Psalm 89:39 You have renounced the covenant with your servant; you have defiled his crown in the dust.

Others include verses 4, 29, and 44; verses 21-26 and 42-43; verses 34-35 and 38-39. This is a tightly integrated work. It is a very thoughtful work. The apparent contradictions force our souls to ponder, to reason with God, to pray, just as the psalmist does. He ends the psalm waiting for his prayer to be answered.

What qualities do we prize most about our God? The Psalmist begins by

praising the mercies and faithfulness of the Lord. The Hebrew term translated 'steadfast love' is *hesed*, often found in the plural string, *hasdê yahweh,* which constitute the first two Hebrew words after the title. This term has been translated into English by 'mercies, steadfast love, lovingkindnesses, great love.' The theme of *hesed* , continues at verse 2. At verse 14 [Hebrew 15] the psalmist praises God's *hesed,* as one of the qualities of his reign, reflecting his very character. At verse 24 God the faithful repeats his promise to his anointed, and he does so again at verse 28 and at verse 33. But at verse 49 [Hebrew 50] the psalmist is asking God where his mercies have gone *´ayyë hásädêkä*, 'Lord, where is your steadfast love...?' The psalm moves from praise to lament, from affirmation to question. This is to stand the Psalter on its head, since the book moves from lament to praise. And this is accomplished by piling up the evidence of God's *hesed,* 'steadfast love,' which suddenly seems to have evaporated.

The psalmist uses the same narrative process with respect to God's *'emunah* 'faithfulness, truthfulness.' He begins with praise for the faithfulness of God in vv. 1, 2, 5, 8, 24, 33 and then in verse 49 [Hebrew 50] he asks where it has gone.

> Psalm 89:49 [Hebrew 50] Lord, where is your steadfast love of old, which by your faithfulness *be´émûnätekä* you swore to David?

Then we find love and faithfulness combined: covenant and truth. And yet, the covenant is apparently broken. Is truth true? Here is the question of the psalmist.

But the psalmist knows God. So he sings a praise of God's nature and being, from the heavens, vv. 5-7, to the sea, vv. 9-10, to the world, vv. 11-12, and in the church, vv. 15-18. God is praised in the heavens, verses 5-7. The 'assembly of the saints' in the Psalms always refers to the worship assembly, except for Ps 26:5, which mentions 'the assembly of evildoers.' The worshiping assembly in Psalm 89 is in the heavens. It is the one which John was privileged to see as reported to us in the Revelation. At verse 6, the question is raised: Who can be compared to the Lord? The skies here signify 'the clouds,' as in:

> Psalm 36:5 Your steadfast love, O LORD, extends to the heavens, your faithfulness to the clouds.

The 'council' in v. 7, *sôd* is a different word than the 'assembly' in v.5, *qahal.* In verse 7 it is a 'council,' of those around him, 'in the council of the holy ones.' Together with v. 6, we have a theistic critique of polytheism. Yahweh is God of gods, 'Who among the heavenly beings is like the LORD, among the sons of the mighty?' These are literally 'the sons of gods' *bibenê ´ëlîm.* Yahweh is ruler of the universe. This is the psalmist's version of Paul's statement:

> 1 Corinthians 8:5 For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth--as indeed there are many 'gods' and many 'lords,' 6 yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

Verse 8 addresses God directly: who? Notice the faithfulness of God, and the faith confession of the psalmist.

We move to the sea in verses 9-10. The first statement about God's power undermines the polytheism of the people around Israel, who corrupted Israel's worship so many times. The second statement undermines their main gods and beliefs about creation: the sea and the monster that lives in it.[8] God's enemies are destroyed. Some see a reference to Egypt and the Exodus here, but the psalm undermines all pagan claims, not just Egypt's. There is no wrestling with primeval forces. God stills the waves, and smashes Rahab.

Now for the earth and the world, verses 11-12. The heavens, the earth, the inhabited world and its fullness are Yahweh's by virtue of his creating them. The compass points: in every direction you will see the Lord's land. The mountains: Hermon in the east, Tabor in the West. These are not given to Canaanite gods. God rules with his power from his throne, verses 13-14. This is not 'raw' power, that of brazen kings or despots. It is the power of goodness: *cedeq ûmišpät* 'righteousness and justice' and *hesed we'émet,* 'steadfast love and faithfulness.' The throne represents the very character of God. His strength is in service to these principles. He faithfully rules the creation and he faithfully rules Israel.

How blessed are God's people! They know the 'festal shout' v.15. This is a reference to Jewish festivals and the call of the trumpet, the shofar. The psalmist has led us from the council in heaven to the congregation on earth. The significant affirmation is to 'know.' They know the Lord. Notice all the 'you' and 'your' pronouns in vv. 5-17! But then, in verse 18 it is 'our.' Our king on earth represents the rule of heaven. He is 'ours' and he is 'yours.' So we are yours. We have reached the end of the hymn of praise.

God's Covenant with His Anointed

A key term in verse 1[Hebrew 2] is *`ôläm* 'forever.' As the psalm begins, the psalmist is confident in Yahweh's *hesed*, his 'steadfast love.' In the next verse this love shall be 'built up forever.' This is not a single event, but a process ongoing through history. At verse 4, the theme of building continues. It is paralleled with 'establish' in both verses. This is quite a promise given to David! The covenant theme emerges at verses 4, 28, 34. God's covenant is made with David. It will stand firm forever. God will not break his covenant. Yet at verse 39 [Hebrew 40] the psalmist tells God that he has rejected his covenant. Is God unfaithful, after all? How can that be?

God himself spoke the covenant into being, as recorded in verses 19-37. He did it through many prophets, v. 19, 'your godly ones', a phrase which is plural in Hebrew. These include Samuel, (1 Samuel 13:13-15; 15:26-28; 16:1,

12); Nathan, (2 Samuel 7:12-17); Gad (2 Samuel 24:11; 1 Chronicles 21:9). Compare Acts 3:24, where Peter makes a broad statement:

> And all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came after him, also proclaimed these days.

God himself spoke and the psalmist quotes him. Here is the origin of the close relationship between God the king in heaven and David the king on earth. David is chosen, exalted, anointed, and strengthened. He is given protection from his enemies and victory over them: verse 23 [Hebrew 24]. In the next verse we find again the phrase 'faithfulness and my steadfast love.' Then at verse 25[Hebrew 26] David even rules the waters! What a great fulfilment of the command in Genesis 1:26. At verses 26-27 [Hebrew 27-28], he calls God his Father and his God. God names him his firstborn, and the King of kings. Perhaps these verses can be interpreted prophetically, as we see in this section the promises that will be fulfilled in Christ alone, the true Seed of David.

Yet, David's sons will be disciplined. Unfaithful children will be disciplined. This fact affects the reading of 'seed' in verse 29. It is true of David's seed and it is true of Christ's seed. History reports how seriously God punished the sinning descendants of David, verse 32 [Hebrew 33]. Our own experience tells us how seriously he disciplines the seed of his eternal Son, when we wander off (Revelation 2:5). When bad things happen to us it may be due to our being bad people, who need correction. The Bible tells us not just that sin abounds, but that sin rebounds. God disciplines but he does not abandon his own, verse 33 [Hebrew 34]. His steadfast love and faithfulness are exalted again. God is faithful, verses 34-37 [Hebrew 35-38]. The promise is for David's race and for his throne. God has established witnesses in heaven!

Christ's Crown and Covenant are Established

Because of his steadfast love and in his faithfulness, Yahweh has revealed himself to Israel. He is not a hidden God who manipulates godlets to win his way, as all polytheistic systems view their pantheons. With the true God, the word spoken is the word fulfilled. Because of his steadfast love and faithfulness, the Lord has made a covenant with his anointed. This is of such weight that the psalmist is overwhelmed to think this covenant might be renounced. The covenant of God stands on his steadfast love, righteousness, and faithfulness. If God is not like this, a covenant means nothing. But the psalm has already given us hints that we are looking toward the New Covenant.

> Jeremiah 31:33 But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

> Luke 22:20 And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, 'This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.'

We can trust this word because God and his Anointed are faithful. His steadfast love and faithfulness moved him to send his Only Begotten Son, the Seed of David, to save us, and to defend us from our enemies (Luke 1:71, 74). Because of his steadfast love and faithfulness, the Lord's people can rejoice all day long. What a joy to know the King of the universe! What a joy it is to know that we are embraced by his covenant! What a joy it is to be free from subjugation by powerful forces and beings because they are all under the command of the Lord's Anointed!

Because of his steadfast love and faithfulness, the Lord has given us this Psalm. Imagine if he were a God who would not tolerate questions, doubts, fears and confusion? Imagine if he were a tyrant. One slip and you are gone, off into the pit of burning sulphur. But here he gives us reasons for praise: a psalm about his steadfast love and faithfulness, about his power and glory, about his sovereign power over all the things in the universe that can harm us. And then he gives us reasons for assurance: a review of the Word that he spoke, which he will not alter. He has established the throne of his Anointed: verse 36 [Hebrew 37].

It may not always look this way (Hebrews 2:8). There is conflict all around us. There may even be conflict in our own souls. But it is indeed this way. And we can pray and ask God for understanding, when it looks otherwise, God himself teaches us in this psalm how to resolve this: with praise, then lament, then supplication, and then we wait.

> Habakkuk 3:17 Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines,
> the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from
> the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, [18] yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will
> take joy in the God of my salvation.

Christ's Crown and Covenant Reproached

We have reached the lamentation of this psalm, verses 38-45 [Hebrew 39-46]. Here we find a crushing blow to the Davidic monarchy. The anger of God has been provoked, verse 38 [Hebrew 39]. Now we are faced with renunciation of the covenant and the crown, v. 39 [Hebrew 40]. What the psalmist means is that God seems to have brought the curses of the covenant on the king. His enemies have won the war, verses 40-43 [Hebrew 41-44], perhaps an allusion to the Babylonian defeat of Jerusalem.[9] A king who cannot defend his people has failed in his first duty to them. God has removed all royal splendour, which is tied to authority, v. 44 [Hebrew 45]. He has even shortened his life and shamed him, verse 45 [Hebrew 46].

Who is this king? It would seem to be David, verse 3 [Hebrew 4], but the circumstances do not fit the life of David. He never suffered such defeat. Perhaps these are David's sons, verses 30-32 [Hebrew 31-33], in later generations, who are being disciplined. This happened, of course, and the psalm is thought to refer to the fall of David's house at the time of the deportation to Babylon. However, there is a problem with this interpretation:

who is Ethan the Ezrahite, the psalmist? He is a contemporary of King Solomon as we can see from 1Kings 4:31 [Hebrew, 1Kings 5:11] and 1Chronicles 2:6. If he did write the Psalm, it cannot deal with the Babylonian captivity, except prophetically, which is not a problem and is assumed by many of the early Fathers and by Calvin.[10] Another possibility might be that this Psalm is attributed to him by some later poet in his tradition.[11] After all, the ancients did not have the attitude toward intellectual property that we have today.

A firmer foundation for interpretation is to see this king as the Messianic King, verses 26-27 [Hebrew 27-28]. God guarantees his faithfulness, verses 28-29 [Hebrew 29-30]. God spoke twice from heaven stating he was well-pleased with Jesus (Matthew 3:17 and 17:5). He raised Jesus from the dead and set him at his own right hand. God has never broken covenant with his true Anointed, his Christ. He does not deceive, he cannot lie (Psalm 101:5, 9). With David as king and as type of Christ, the assurance that God will keep his covenant is very strong, see verse 3 [Hebrew 4] and verse 34 [Hebrew 35]. And he is faithful to David's seed, verse 29 [Hebrew 30]. David's 'seed' here is singular. This does not merely refer to Solomon, but to Christ. Compare the words of the angel:

> Luke 1:32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David.

David never actually called God 'Father.' In John`s Gospel we find Christ doing so more than 60 times. It is not David but Christ who says:

> Psalm 2:7 I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, 'You are my Son; today I have begotten you.'

Christ is declared to be first born six times in the NT, at Romans 3:29; Colossians 1:15, 18; Hebrews 1:6; 12:23; and Revelation 1:5. So the psalm truly deals with the most horrifying thought of God's breaking covenant with Christ. Is this a real thought or is this a nightmare? Has God changed? In verses 38 ff. [Hebrew 39 ff.], we read: you, you, you, you...' is this the way to talk to God? Some ancient commentators thought not, and so had difficulty with the place of this psalm in the canon of Scripture. Yet this is not the only psalm where this type of searching question is asked:

> Psalm 44:9 [Hebrew 10] But you have rejected us and disgraced us and have not gone out with our armies.
>
> Psalm 44:22 [Hebrew 23] Yet for your sake we are killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.

And there are many other such questions. It is impressive that in the living God's true religion, people are free to ask God hard questions. People are free to go to God as to a Father, with puzzles, confusions, complaints, tears,

and struggles. This is because of Christ:

> Hebrews 2:17 Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

And also:

> Hebrews 4:16 Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Is there a greater time of need to run to our Father in heaven than when we think that God has abandoned his Christ (Psalm 22:1)

The Supplication

At verses 46-51 [Hebrew 47-52], we have the psalmist's supplication. What does the psalmist really believe? Note verse 46 [Hebrew 47] and verse 49 [Hebrew 50], and the appeals he makes to God. He believes that God is real, that God is true. He believes that the covenant was not just words and tradition. He believes that God hears prayer even if the circumstances show that he is not blessing. He believes that God is the same yesterday, today and forever, and that he can appeal to him on that basis. He believes that prayer may move God to act and change things. He believes that the living God who seems like he is hiding will not remain that way forever.

He prays for mercy for himself, verses 47-48 [Hebrew 48-49]. He longs to see the salvation of God. 'How long? Will I die before you act?' He is expecting God to act, and appeals to him on the basis of his creatureliness. 'Did you really make us for nothing?' We are all going to die. 'Do I have to go through this covenantal experience of death too?' He appeals to the person and character of God, in verses 49-51 [Hebrew 50-52], and to his covenant jealousy. He appeals to God to identify with his people, 'how your servants are mocked,' 'the insults of all the many nations,' 'your enemies mock,' 'they mock the footsteps of your anointed.' This psalm is a realization of the words Geerhardus Vos:

> The prospect of the future is God-centered in the highest degree. What is characteristic of the Psalter is that besides eschatology evoking worship, the elemental urge of worship summons the last great realities to its aid. Need and desire and prayer for help in distress never loses sight of the fact that Israel's salvation is subservient to the glory of God. The prayer for salvation inevitably embodies praise of the Savior. The psalmist succeeds in forgetting his own woes for the woes or for the hopes of the people as a whole, but he also is able to forget them for the overwhelming thought of the glory of Jehovah. The gloria in excelsis which the Psalter sings arises not seldom from a veritable de profundis and...mounts before Jehovah in the serenity of a perfect praise.[12]

We end this psalm waiting. Faithfulness will not exempt us from difficult trials. On the contrary, it will bring them on. God will refine us and bring us to prayer and supplication. This Psalm is followed immediately by Psalm 90. See Psalm 90, verses 7-8; verses 11-12; verse 13. If God were not faithful, the whole world would collapse, not just the kingdom, not just the church. He sustains all things by his faithfulness and power.

> Psalm 96:10 Say among the nations, 'The LORD reigns! Yes, the world is established; it shall never be moved; he will judge the peoples with equity.'

We find the answer to this prayer in the coming of Jesus Christ. It is a long way off for Ethan the Ezrahite. Christ is the firstborn from the dead, Psalm 89:44-45 [Hebrew 45-46]. How amazing is the gospel! And it alone is the answer to this psalm. This psalmist speaks as if he were standing at the foot of the cross, watching Jesus, the King of the Jews, squirm in pain, his life draining from his veins. This is the one who was welcomed into Jerusalem as the King of Israel. Where are you God? We join Christ himself in lament:

> Psalm 22:1 My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning? [2] O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, and by night, but I find no rest.

And the answer to the prayer:

> Psalm 22:31 They shall come and proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn, that he has done it.

How utterly surprising it would be to Jewish believers in the psalmist's day that the reproach of God's Messiah is exactly what will be needed to free his people from their enemies and God's!

> Luke 18:32 'For he will be delivered over to the Gentiles and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon. [33] And after flogging him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise.' [34] But they understood none of these things. This saying was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said.

> Luke 24:10 Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles, [11] but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.

This is the situation of Ethan the Ezrahite. At the time he was writing this psalm, this all was hidden from him. But he remained faithful to the Lord and pleaded with him and then waited. He had composed a prophetic psalm that he could not fully understand, but in God's great plan of history, his *historia salutis*, his prophecy would be fulfilled:

> Luke 24:25 And he said to them, 'O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! [26] Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?'

Notes

1. Biblical quotations are from the ESV unless otherwise noted.
2. David Howard comments: 'Within the larger contours of the Psalter, the juncture between Psalms 89 and 90 forms a significant turning point, since the mood changes dramatically after Psalm 90.' Westermann has pointed this out, as has Wilson. In fact, Westermann has noted that laments dominate the first half of the Psalter, psalms of praise dominate the second, and Psalm 90 functions as the pivot. David M. Howard, *The Structure of Psalms 93–100* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1997), p.167. Claus Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*, trans. Keith R. Crim and Richard N. Soulen, reprint, 1965 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark Ltd., 1981), pp.252, 257 (cited by Howard).
3. For a review of the various critical approaches to this psalm, including the many attempts to posit how the psalm came to be assembled, see Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 20. (Dallas, Tex.: Word Books, 1990), pp.413–18.
4. Gerald Henry Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1985); Gerald H. Wilson, 'The Shape of the Book of Psalms,' *Interpretation* XLVI, no.2 (April 1992): pp.129 - 42.
5. Gerald Henry Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter*, pp.214 - 15.
6. Brevard Childs, cited in Tate p.418. These psalms 'were treasured in the Psalter for a different reason, namely as a witness to the messianic hope which looked for the consummation of God's kinship through his Anointed One.' Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), p.517. Terrien also agrees with this hypothesis: Psalm 89 'offers a most somber image of the Davidic dynasty and can be used as a conclusion for Collections I-III. It admits that the covenant with Yahweh is now broken (vv. 39-46); this statement radically transforms the promise of a role for Israel in the history of the future (Psalm 89:27-30, 35-38); it foresees the Messianic hope.' Samuel L. Terrien, *The Psalms Strophic Structure and Theological Commentary*, Eerdmans Critical Commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2003), p.23. So also Leupold, 'This is a psalms that informs us indirectly as to how deeply the Messianic hope was embedded in the thinking of at least the faithful in Israel.' H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of the Psalms*. (Columbus, Ohio: Wartburg Press, 1959), p.632. Jacquet also favors the Messianic reading: Louis Jacquet, *Les Psaumes et le Coeur de l'Homme Étude Textuelle, Littéraire et Doctrinale* (Gembloux: Duculot, 1975).
7. This use of the term comes from Gaffin, who adopts the term from Ridderbos. Richard B. Gaffin, *By Faith, not by Sight: Paul and the Order of Salvation* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster Press, 2006), p.18.
8. See Isaiah 27, Leviathan, serpent, dragon, he is a ferocious enemy, who persecutes the Church, Rev 12. See also the prayer in Isaiah 51:9.
9. Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, p.416.
10. Theodoret of Cyr and Augustine in Quentin F. Wesselschmidt, ed., *Psalms 51–150*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture. (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2007), pp.162–64. John Calvin *Commentary on the Psalms* Vol. III.
11. So Terrien, Terrien, *The Psalms Strophic Structure and Theological Commentary*, p.635.
12. Geerhardus Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), p.339. The quotation is found in his essay 'The Eschatology of the Psalter.'

THE JOURNEY OF METRICAL PSALMODY FROM STRASBOURG TO IRELAND

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As the Earls were preparing to leave Ireland for the last time, the migration of people in the opposite direction had already started.[1] The movement of people into Ireland from England and Scotland, as a result of the Hamilton and Montgomery settlement and then the Plantation, brought with it cultural and religious traditions, some of which have survived relatively unscathed to the present day. One of those, the subject of this paper, is that of the exclusive singing of unaccompanied metrical psalms in the worship of God.

Although this tradition was practised by the mainline Presbyterian Church in Ireland along with smaller denominations until well into the 19th century,[2] exclusive psalmody now remains only in the Reformed Presbyterian Church. A relatively small denomination, they have around 3000 members and adherents attending 39 centres of worship throughout Ireland (32 in the North and 7 in the South[3]). As the psalm singing is unaccompanied, each congregation has one or more precentors who are responsible for leading the singing. They usually sound a note on a tuning fork or pitch pipe before starting the singing. Some will sing out the starting note or the key note so that members of the congregation will be able to start together.

During a service, there would normally be three or four singings, each being a portion of a psalm, typically four to six stanzas in length. The singing is in four part harmony and, although most of the congregation will sing the melody, many will sing one of the other parts. The psalter has a split-leaf format, which allows a variety of tunes to be selected for each psalm. To facilitate the selection of tunes, the tunes are grouped according to metre and the metre is printed above each psalm; there is a list of suggested tunes for each psalm.

The Reformed Presbyterian Church is sometimes known as the Covenanter Church and its members as Covenanters. The name results from their adherence to the National Covenant of 1638 and the Solemn League and

Covenant of 1643.[4] The purpose of the latter in particular was to bring together the three kingdoms of Scotland, England, and Ireland in a civil and religious bond of union. It was subscribed to by the people throughout Scotland and England in 1643 and by the people in Ireland in 1644.[5] The modern day Covenanters maintain that the covenants are still binding as they were a solemn agreement made between the nations and God. It was the adherence of the Covenanters to this principle, when other Presbyterians were prepared to abandon it, that caused a separation into two parties in 1679.[6]

To trace the history of the pattern of exclusive psalm singing in worship and the psalters with which to perform it, it is necessary to go back to the 16th century and trace the development from its origins in Strasbourg, through Geneva to England and Scotland, and onwards to Ireland. The story has previously been well documented from a Scottish perspective[7] and the current paper makes extensive use of this material while seeking to focus on those matters of relevance to the extant practice in Ireland.

Reformation Origins

One of the key Reformation principles was that the people should have a part in the singing of praise in worship. Since the fourth century, when the Council of Laodicea had banned congregational singing in worship, the singing of praise had become the responsibility of the clergy. Psalm singing continued, however, being kept very much alive by the daily exercises in the monasteries.

The language of the church, as of all educated discourse at the time, was Latin and developments in music over the previous few centuries had resulted in the musical compositions becoming very complex. Thus both language and music were beyond the capabilities of the common people. The Reformers sought to provide a means for the congregation to sing in their common tongue, a language they could understand, and in a musical style that was simple enough for them to access. The result was versified text set to simple music.

Luther and Calvin had different theologies that resulted in different styles of worship. Luther developed hymns that were largely based on the psalms and various New Testament passages with words that portrayed the truths of the faith as interpreted by Lutheran doctrine. Luther had a measure of talent in both poetry and music and he started the work of hymn writing himself. He worked with others to write tunes based on music from both the church and popular song. In the days before stringent copyright laws, he was free to make up tunes based on fragments selected from various sources. His tunes were strong and rhythmic and covered a wide range of metre.[8] They were predominantly modal with a strong melodic style rather than a dependence on harmony. It is reported that he could be heard playing over his compositions on the flute as he worked on them.

Luther's first hymnbook was published in 1524 with 14 hymns by himself and 4 by others. Others joined him and by his death around 60 collections of hymns had appeared. The style was ecstatic and the hymns proved very popular. In fact, they are credited with the turning of many from the orthodox Catholic faith to Protestantism.

It is not to Luther, however, that we turn for the origins of metrical psalmody but to Calvin. He took a more searching approach to his theology of worship and looked back to the days of the early church. In those days psalm singing was the norm and, while hymns did exist, there is little, if any, evidence that they were used in worship. When hymn singing did come to the fore in the fourth century it was as a counter to heresy: the hymns were not originally intended for use in worship but such was their popularity that they gradually made their way into the worship services. In fact it was the excesses in such singing that led to the ban on congregational singing mentioned above.

Calvin was not content, however, with merely observing and following the early practice. He reasoned along the same lines as Augustine[9] that the only material fit for use in praising God was that which had been received from him in the first place, i.e. the Psalms of the Old Testament. This was a sure way of protecting worship from the false doctrines that easily crept in through the practice of man-made hymns. This line of thought has now become known as the Regulative Principle. Simply stated, it asserts that whatever God has commanded for worship in his Word is to be done and all else is forbidden.[10] Moreover, in contrast to Luther's hymns, Calvin's psalm tunes were more disciplined, reflecting his desire for worship to be orderly and reverent.

Beginnings in Strasbourg

Having renounced the Catholic Church in 1534, Calvin set to work immediately to capture the fundamentals of Reformed theology and published the first edition of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, a systematic summary of religion, in 1535. He was called to Geneva in 1537 but left again in 1538 for a brief period of exile in Strasbourg; it was while there that he produced his first psalter, *Aulcuns Pseaulms et Cantiques, mys en chant*, in 1539.

He had gathered together a number of psalm versions that were ready to hand and added some of his own creation. Among these were versions of psalms that had been put into verse by a courtier by the name of Clémont Marot, although at this point Calvin was unaware of their origin, and in fact some of them had been modified before Calvin came across them. The psalms in the 1539 psalter adhered to the syllabic rule with one musical note for each syllable. Thus, they were in keeping with the principle of emphasising the words over the music and using the music as a simple vehicle of expression.

Marot, although one who enjoyed the excesses of life, was dedicated and

committed to the Reformed faith and prepared to suffer for it. He had versified a number of the Psalms and these became popular among those of the Court of King Francis I of France.[11] He went on to publish *Trentes Pseaulmes de David, mis in francois par Clemont Marot, valet de chambre du Roy* in 1542.

In 1541 Calvin returned to Geneva and immediately introduced the Strasbourg psalter to the congregation there. Shortly afterwards, Marot was indicted for heresy as a result of his strong belief in the Reformed cause and he fled to Geneva. It was not long until the two men met and Calvin became aware of the authorship of the psalms he had collected in Strasbourg and of the modifications that had been made. He corrected the psalms in his psalter and commissioned Marot to continue the work of versifying the psalms.[12]

The Genevan Psalter

In 1543 Marot's work culminated in the production of a psalter containing the first 50 psalms. Calvin made a submission to the Council in Geneva for a grant to complete the remainder of the psalter. However, this was unsuccessful and Marot, who in any case found the strict regime in Geneva rather distasteful, decided to leave. He did not have much time to enjoy a less stringent lifestyle as he died a year later: it is believed that he was poisoned.

The work on the psalters then stalled until in 1548 Theodore de Bèze (or Theodore Beza) arrived in Geneva after becoming convinced of the Reformed cause. When Calvin discovered that he too had an interest in versifying the psalms, he was commissioned to complete Marot's work. The result was the publication of the complete Genevan Psalter in 1562. Beza was a theologian rather than a poet and his work did not have the poetic merit of Marot. However, he was a scholar of many talents, among which was a knowledge of Hebrew[13] and his work stood the test of time, becoming the standard psalter of the Protestant Church in France for centuries.

The task of providing the tunes for the psalter fell to the cantor at Saint Pierre in Geneva, Louis Bourgeois, who had arrived in Geneva at about the same time as Calvin had returned from Strasbourg. Some of the tunes were collected from various sources while others he wrote himself. The collection of tunes is of interest as they were written at the time when the modern major and minor keys were beginning to emerge from the ancient system of modes. Thus some of the tunes are modal in character while others are starting to take on the characteristics of the major and minor keys. One of Bourgeois' tunes that has stood the test of time is the tune "Old Hundredth" which is to this day sung, in only a slightly altered form, to the English version of Psalm 100 ("All people that on earth do dwell..."), although Bourgeois wrote it for Psalm 134.

Louis Bourgeois' work was not without opposition. At one point he was put in prison because he dared, without permission, to alter one of the Strasburg

melodies. It is interesting that his editing of existing tunes made them easier to sing as he produced melodies that supported an underlying harmony. He was not able to go as far as producing harmonies for the tunes in his psalter: the use of harmonies in the singing was still something of a novelty and, probably for this reason, Calvin did not allow it in the worship services.

Louis Bourgeois was somewhat frustrated that his musical gifts were thus being stymied and he left Geneva in 1557 and returned to Paris. He did publish some harmonies to the Genevan psalm tunes for the first 50 psalms in Lyons and Paris in 1547, but these appear not to have been popular. Although there is no definite evidence, it is generally assumed that the work of furnishing the tunes for the psalter was carried on by Pierre Dubuisson, Bourgeois' successor.

Somewhat more popular than those of Bourgeois were the harmonies created by Claude Goudimel.[14] He produced a complete psalter with harmonies in 1565. These were not intended for use in worship but for private use and were in popular use for many years. Goudimel died a martyr to the Reformed (Huguenot) cause in Lyons in 1572, a few days after the massacre of St. Bartholomew's Day. This has added significance when it is noted that the psalter is said to have had as strong an association with the Huguenot cause as Luther's hymns with his.

The First English Psalter

The work of writing metrical psalm versions in Geneva was to come together with parallel activity that had been going on in England.[15] There too, there had been an interest in putting the psalms into a form that could easily be sung by the masses. Miles Coverdale, well known translator of the Bible and prose versions of the psalms for the Prayer Book, had attempted to produce a small number of metrical psalms in ca.1537. The book *Goostly Psalmes and Spiritual Songs* contained 13 psalms, but the book was suppressed and ordered to be destroyed.

Thomas Sternhold was a gentleman of the privy chamber of Henry VIII and the first Englishman to succeed in producing popular metrical psalms. He was a deeply religious person and had a desire that his fellow courtiers would have something to sing other than the crude ballads of the day. Thus, he set himself to putting the psalms into verse using a similar style to the popular ballads but with the sacred words.

One day, as he was singing some of these at the organ, the young Prince Edward appeared and was much moved by what he heard. Therefore, the first publication of psalm versions was dedicated to him.[16] In all, Thomas Sternhold produced only 37 psalms before he died. However, the work was taken up by a clergyman and schoolmaster by the name of John Hopkins, who continued the task and, at that stage, produced a further 7 psalms.

It was then that the event occurred that brought together the English work with that which had been going on in Geneva. In 1553, as a result of the persecution under Queen Mary, many Protestants fled to the continent. One group of these, led by John Knox, formed a congregation in Geneva. They had available to them the 44 psalms of Sternhold and Hopkins and to these added a further 7 by William Whittingham, a close companion of Knox, to make up the first edition of the Anglo-Genevan Psalter in 1556.

Further editions were published up to 1561 culminating in a total of 90 psalms, with the additional versions mainly by William Whittingham (a brother-in-law of Calvin, later to become Dean of Durham), and William Kethe. Both Whittingham and Kethe struggled to try to translate the psalms into English using the metres of the tunes in the French Genevan psalter. These were well suited for their original purpose but their variety of metre contrasted sharply with the monotonously uniform ballad metre used by Sternhold and Hopkins. It was difficult to force an English translation into metres designed for the French language with its different patterns of accent and word endings. As a result, the versification was rather rough and little of it survived in the later English psalters. However, some versions were of good quality and a couple of examples of those that are still in use today are Psalm 100 by William Kethe and Psalm 124 by William Whittingham.

On the return of the Reformers from Geneva after the death of Queen Mary in 1558, the psalter development continued in both England and Scotland but each followed their own path. In England, those who returned from exile set to completing the work, and the result was the Daye Psalter published in 1562; a further edition in 1563 contained four part harmony. The aim was to have a psalter that could be used in conjunction with the Book of Common Prayer, and the Daye Psalter was bound with the Bible until the 19th century. The psalms proved popular after the return of the exiles, with large groups meeting in public to sing them, to the extent that Protestants became known as "psalm-singers".

There was a very definite move towards dropping the style developed in Geneva and making the psalter more English. The metre moved back towards a predominance of the ballad style double common metre (DCM), thus losing much of the grandeur of the Anglo-Genevan Psalter. All 44 of the psalms of Sternhold and Hopkins were included along with a further 20 from the Anglo-Genevan Psalter. The remainder were new versions.

Some of the Genevan tunes were retained and some altered to fit the DCM verses. Others were based on ballad tunes of the day. In addition, the tunes moved away from the old modal tonality to the more modern use of major and minor keys. The tunes retained a simple style with one note per syllable and all four parts moving together. As on the continent, the freedom from copyright laws allowed much improvisation and the use of musical clichés or stock phrases. In some cases, tunes evolved from other tunes as a result of

extemporisation.

Many of the tunes in today's psalters are named after places and this practice started in the 1592 Este's Psalter. Many different psalters were produced, all using the same words but adopting different tunes and harmonies. During this development, there was a further smoothing out of the rhythms in the tunes and by the time of the Playford Psalter of 1677, most of the rhythms were simplified to give notes of equal value.

The First Scottish Psalter

In Scotland, there was a parallel development of psalmody. Luther's hymns influenced the first metrical psalms of Scotland known as *The Gud and Godlie Ballitis*. Three brothers called Wederburn translated Luther's psalms into the Scottish vernacular metrical verse and set them to popular tunes. They were not sung in worship but were met with favour by John Knox, a key leader in the Scottish Reformation as noted above. The first complete Scottish psalter was published in 1564. This made use of the work of those who had remained in Geneva to continue work on the Anglo-Genevan Psalter. As a result it retained many of the modal melodies, including some written by Bourgeois, as well as tunes written in the more modern style. It contained all of the psalms from the Anglo-Genevan version, 42 of the new versions created for the English Psalter and 21 further new versions.

The music was initially written for unison singing and the emphasis was on encouraging everyone to sing the psalms in worship. Around 70 editions were produced between 1564 and 1644, most of which were words-only editions. The printers each exercised a degree of latitude in deciding the content of the psalters and various other passages of Scripture were metricated. In some cases prayers were also included with the psalms. Doxologies were written to be sung as a verse at the end of a psalm and these appeared in the 1595 edition. The Scottish Psalter became part of the Book of Common Order adopted by the Church of Scotland.

The Development of Tunes

A perceived error of the Church of Rome was that the people had been denied a part in the singing in worship. In their attempt to stamp out this error, the Reformers were zealous in destroying not only organs and libraries but also the song books and song schools that were used to train the church choirs. The consequence of this was a rapid decline in musical education. The Earl of Moray had the foresight to see that musical ability was on the decline and sought to mitigate the effect of this on the church by commissioning the harmonisation of the psalm tunes.

The task of providing harmonisations of the tunes for the Scottish Psalter was assigned to David Peebles, one of the Earl's canons. His instruction was to maintain the simplicity of the music without ornamentation and he was not very enthusiastic about having to carry out such a mundane task. However, he was prevailed upon and the resulting harmonies were compiled into part books by Thomas Wood, a vicar in Fife. Unlike the situation in Geneva, the part singing became part of the practice in the churches. There is evidence of this in contemporary records within 10 years of the completion of the Scottish Psalter.[17]

The psalter with perhaps the greatest musical interest is the 1635 edition. This was produced by Edward Millar, a graduate of Edinburgh University and a teacher in Blackfriars Wynd. His interest was in defining a common set of harmonies to be used by all to replace the sometimes cacophonous results of extemporisation. He claimed only limited musical credentials himself but sought to engage the help of those better fitted to the task in compiling the best set of tunes for the psalms while eliminating errors in their harmonisations. The tunes were sorted under three headings: Proper Tunes, Common Tunes and Tunes in Reports. The Proper Tunes were an attempt to give each psalm its own tune, this being a necessity in some cases as, unlike the 1562 English Psalter, there was a variety of metres and many of the French melodies were still included. The result was a collection of melodies that were collected from a number of sources but with harmonies that were all by Scottish musicians.

The Common Tunes were a set of simple tunes that could be grasped and learnt by heart by those who had little musical education. Thus, at the most basic level, all of those psalms set to be sung in CM (Common Metre) could be sung to a single tune. In fact there were 31 tunes of this form, the first 12 of them having appeared in the 1615 edition. As the link between psalm and tune was broken by the practice of using common tunes, it became necessary to give the tunes names to identify them. The Tunes in Reports were a departure from the simple one syllable per note form of the majority of the tunes and appear to be an allowable indulgence for those who had more than the most basic musical ability.

In all of the tunes, as was the custom of the time, the melody is in the tenor part, in the form now known as a *Faux Bourdon*. The Proper Tunes were written above the words of the psalms for which they were to be sung. In contrast, the Common Tunes and Tunes in Reports were on separate pages with the tenor and contra on one page and the treble (tribble) and bass (bassus) on the opposite page upside down so that four people facing each other in pairs could sing the four parts from the one book.

As the standard of singing declined, the lofty aims of the 1635 Psalter were not to be met. Song schools were established to improve matters and there are accounts of public psalm singing in four part harmony by all the people. However, persecution led to a further loss of musical education, putting the

singing of harmony beyond the grasp of most. In fact, as many were unable to read either words or music, the practice of lining out was introduced whereby a line was sung by the precentor and then repeated by the congregation, all in a slow tempo. The precentor was sometimes known colloquially as the "up-taker of the psalms". In the Highlands, the number of tunes that could be managed was reduced to 5, while in other parts they were able to retain between 10 and 12.[18]

A Second Iteration

Although the publication of the 1564 psalter marked the completion of the work to provide churches with all 150 psalms in a form that could be sung by the people in worship, it had a few failings. As the standard of musical education had deteriorated, the variety of metres and their related tunes were very difficult for congregational singing. Also, it was recognised that the poetry of the 1564 version was rather rough and that improvements could be made. Several writers worked on their own versions of the psalms but none dared to try to replace the 1564 psalter just yet, as another work of revision was underway by none other than the king.

King James had taken it upon himself to produce his own revision. His attempts to have it accepted were ignored during his lifetime but after his death, his son Charles showed himself to be a loyal son by making it his ambition to have the King James Psalter adopted. Sir William Alexander, the Earl of Stirling, was given the commission of completing and editing the work of the late king. This he did and the version was published in 1631. Comparison of the published version with some of the original work of the king will show that significant changes had been made for the better.

The psalter was recommended for use in worship but it met with much disapproval and was not taken up. Therefore, in 1634 Charles ordered the church to make the use of his father's psalter mandatory. This was quietly ignored, despite a further revision being published in 1636. Ultimately, the controversy came to a head when the imposition of the psalter, along with the English church structures and liturgy, was attempted in St. Giles Church, Edinburgh. One, Jenny Geddis, is reported to have given her response by picking up her stool and throwing it at the speaker, the Dean of Edinburgh, John Hanna.

The riot that followed and subsequent events led to the rejection of the English impositions and the signing, in 1638, of the National Covenant and the formation of the Scottish Parliament and General Assembly. This cleared the way for an official revision to be considered by the church. However, the route to an acceptable, revised psalter was to prove a tortuous one.

Francis Rous, Provost at Eton College, took early advantage of the

situation and published a psalter that he had already completed, first for a limited circulation and then in a public edition in 1641. Although there was some opposition, Rous prevailed and a parliamentary instruction was made to print the psalter for general use. However, the psalter had other hurdles to overcome. The Assembly of Divines had been set up by both the Lords and the Commons "to be consulted with by the Parliament, for the settling of the government and liturgy of the Church of England; and for the vindicating and clearing of the doctrine of the said church from false aspersions and interpretations."[19] It was assisted by commissioners from the Church of Scotland and had as an aim the achievement of uniformity of religion throughout Scotland, England and Ireland.

This body was asked to ratify the use of the psalter throughout the land. They had reservations about the quality of the work and set up committees to review and revise the psalter. The Scottish commissioners then insisted on a review by the Church of Scotland to ensure its acceptability north of the border. This resulted in many more revisions and, in 1645, the "Rous" Psalter finally reached a stable state. Rous felt moved to accept that it was not the psalter he had published and accordingly he removed his claim to authorship and his preface. However, it continued to be known by his name.

In the meantime a psalter had been published by William Barton which met with the favour of the House of Lords, while the House of Commons continued to favour the "Rous" Psalter. The Assembly of Divines could not accept both psalters as that would have gone against its aspiration for uniformity of religion. The resulting stalemate was never resolved. The House of Commons decided to act unilaterally and published the psalter in 1646, ordering its exclusive use. However, it did not meet with favour on either side of the border. The English thought that it had become too Scottish in its style and the Scottish General Assembly went against their commissioners' advice and refused to accept it without further revision.

The psalter was then submitted to a further and very thorough revision. Finally, in 1650 the Scottish Metrical Psalter was completed. It contained words only, perhaps a reflection of the decline in musical education mentioned above. This version has stood the test of time and continues in use today, although in more recent years it has been recognised that the langauge has become antiquated and words have changed their meaning. Accordingly, versions in modern English have been published. Whether their quality and style would prove acceptable to the Assembly of Divines could be questioned but what is sure is that each new psalter is a step further away from the uniformity of religion for which they worked so hard.

That aim was always doomed as the English and Scottish were never to agree. In England, there were many further attempts to create psalters. None had any significant success until a version was brought out by two Irishmen.

Nahum Tate and Nicholas Brady, in 1696. It became known as the New Version. It sacrificed fidelity to the original Hebrew text for smoothness of poetry, thus abandoning one of the Scottish Reformation principles. It was, in fact, a step on the way to the freer style of hymn writing that evolved over the following centuries. It continued in use until the 19th century.

Conclusions

During the early 17th century, the influx of people from England and, more particularly as far as this paper is concerned, Scotland, brought with it the books they used in worship. It is unlikely that metrical psalters were printed in Ireland during this period. Families migrating to Ireland would have carried their psalters along with their other possessions that they brought with them to Ireland.[20] It is also likely that there was a significant trade from Scottish booksellers to Ireland as a result of the movements backwards and forwards between the two countries. A particular example of the psalters that made their way to Ireland is that of Thomas Wood's part books (see above). Of the five part books, one ended up in Trinity College, Dublin, one was obtained at a sale in Dublin and two others were once in the possession of a past Vicar-Choral of St. Canice Cathedral, Kilkenny.[21]

Four hundred years on, the words have recently been updated and more modern tunes have been introduced but the principle and practice of unaccompanied psalm singing in worship continues in the congregations of the Covenanters of today. Despite this modernisation, words such as those of William Kethe's Psalm 100 to the variation of the Louis Bourgeois tune Old Hundredth have been retained and can still be heard week by week.[22] There is an unbroken line from Strasbourg in 1539 to Ireland in the early 17th century and ultimately to Ireland in 2010.

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Finally, thanks are also due to the Canadian Reformed Church for granting permission to use the text of their Book of Praise to illustrate the example from the French Psalter.

Notes

1. James Seaton Reid, *History of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland* (3 vols Belfast, 1867, A New Edition with Additional Notes, by WD Killen), I.83-9.
2. The Presbyterian Church in the 19th century admitted hymns along with their psalm singing and as time has gone by the hymns and more modern worship songs have taken over to the extent that many Presbyterian churches no longer make use of the psalter in their worship at all.
3. The geographical distribution of the congregations can be seen at the denomination's web site, http://www.rpc.org/directory/.
4. The text of these is appended to: *The Confession of Faith* (Belfast, 1933 edition), 265-78.
5. Reid, op. cit., 437-56.
6. Adam Loughridge, *The Covenanters in Ireland* (Belfast, 1984).
7. Millar Patrick, *The Story of the Church's Song* (Edinburgh, 1927); Millar Patrick, *Four Centuries of Scottish Psalmody* (London, Glasgow, New York, 1949).
8. There is an analysis of the musical developments for congregational singing in: Erik Routley, *The Music of Christian Hymnody* (London, 1957).
9. E.g. "...on which account the Donatists reproach us with our grave chanting of the divine songs of the prophets in our churches, while they inflame their passions in their revels by the singing of psalms of human composition, which rouse them like the stirring notes of the trumpet on the battle-field...", from Augustine, Letter LV to Januarius, Chapter 18, *The Catholic Encyclopaedia* (1914). This is now available on-line at http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1102055.htm.
10. John Calvin, *The Necessity of Reforming the Church* translated by Henry Beveridge, (Philadelphia, 1844), 16.
11. Rowland E. Prothero, *The Psalms in Human Life* (London, 1903), 168.
12. An authoritative account of the development of the French Psalter is given in: O. Douen. *Clemont Marot et le Psautier Huguenot* (Paris, 1878).
13. Hebrew scholarship continues to be important to the Reformed Presbyterian Church, and all its ministers are given a thorough grounding in the language during their training. In the context of psalmody, a recent example of this was demonstrated in the work to revise the metrical psalter, during which each translated verse was carefully checked against the original Hebrew as well as those English translations considered to have the greatest accuracy.
14. The Claude Goudimel psalm versions with harmonies have been reproduced in their entirety, with notes by Pierre Pidoux, by the Institute of Mediaeval Music in: *Claude Goudimel – Oeuvres Complètes* (New York, 1967).
15. An authoritative account of the development of the English and Scottish psalters is given in the set of dissertations written by Neil Livingston as an introduction to his facsimile copy of: *The Scottish Metrical Psalter of AD 1635* (Glasgow, 1864).
16. The dedication included the words, "Trusting that as your Grace taketh pleasure to hear them song sometimes of me, so ye will delight not only to see and read therein yourself, but also to commande them to be song to you of others, Thomas Sternholde, grome of His Maiesties Robes, wisheth encrease of health, honore, and felicitie." See Henry Alexander Glass, *The Story of the Psalters* (London, 1888), 16.
17. James Melville, in his diary of 1574, recounts how he learned the treble part and was able to sing it in church: *The Diary of Mr. James Melvill 1556-1601* (Edinburgh, 1824), 23.
18. Millar Patrick lists the five tunes as French, Martyrs, York, Dundee and Elgin. See *The Story of the Church's Song*, op. cit., 108-9. The other seven were Common Tune, King's Tune, Duke's Tune, English Tune, London, Dunfermline and Abbey. See *Four Centuries of Scottish Psalmody*, 111.

19. *The Confession of Faith*, 10.
20. Raymond Gillespie, *Reading Ireland: Print, Reading and Social Change in Early Modern Ireland* (Manchester, 2005), 66.
21. David Laing (ed.), "Account of the Scottish Psalter of A.D. 1566, Containing the Psalms, Canticles, and Hymns, Set to Music in Four Parts, in the Manuscripts of Thomas Wode or Wood, Vicar of Sanctandrous", *Proceedings of the Society of the Antiquaries of Scotland* vii (April 1868), 445-58 (and Plates LII-LVI).
22. The latest psalter of the Reformed Presbyterian Church contains further tunes from the Genevan psalters: Old 29th, Old 124th and Old 134th. Of the 303 tunes in the book, 40 date back to the 16th and 17th centuries. See *The Psalms for Singing, A 21st Century Edition*, (2004), 389-95. The psalter also retains, as alternatives to the modern versions, several psalm portions in the form used in the 1650 Scottish Metrical Psalter.

"HOUSTON, WE HAVE A PROBLEM."

Thomas Houston: Covenanter and Evangelical

Stephen Steele

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Thomas Houston remains one of the best known Covenanting ministers. He was minister of the Knockbracken congregation from 1828 until his death 54 years later and his influence on both his congregation and the nineteenth century Reformed Presbyterian Church was huge. He is probably best known today for the leading role he played in defending the church's historic position on the role of the civil magistrate – a controversy which eventually led to a split in the church. However Houston's greatest legacy is perhaps his ability to combine such deeply held principles with a winsome broadmindedness which characterised his life, writings and ministry. As one obituary put it: 'The tenacity with which he held by the distinctive principles and position of the Reformed Presbyterian Church never hindered him from co-operating in any good work with evangelical men of other denominations, when he could do so without compromising himself.'[1]

This is surely a highly desirable achievement – but is it an accurate picture? Did Houston really succeed in achieving this distinction? What, in fact, did it mean to be a Covenanter in the nineteenth century? Was Houston a typical Covenanter or was his stance unusual? What limits did his broadmindedness have? Why did he still oppose union with other denominations? What support did his approach find from other Covenanters and from the denomination's written standards? Above all, what did it mean for the foremost Irish Reformed Presbyterian of the century to be both a Covenanter and an evangelical?

Background

Early years

Thomas Houston was born in 1804, at a time when the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland was undergoing considerable expansion. A

Synod was formed in 1811, and in the early decades of the century the church received accessions from both the Synod of Ulster and the Seceders – the largest two Presbyterian bodies in Ireland at this time.[2] According to the Presbyterian historian James Seaton Reid, however, 'the grand secret' of the progress of the Covenanters was 'the fidelity with which their ministers preached the peculiar doctrines of the Gospel'.[3] By 1835 the Synod of Ulster had 229 congregations and the Seceders, 123. The Associate Synod, as the Seceders were officially known, had split from the Church of Scotland in 1733 over the issue of patronage, and arrived in Ireland thirteen years later – joining the Covenanters in their criticism of the laxity of the mainstream Synod of Ulster. The Seceders renewed the Covenants in 1746, but 'shied away from the theocratic language of the seventeenth-century Kirk'. Before 1820, they were the 'growth sector' of Irish Presbyterianism, but their acceptance of the *Regium Donum* led to a considerable number of their members joining the Covenanters.[4] The Covenanters also received accessions from the Arianism-troubled Synod of Ulster. By 1830, however, Henry Cooke had forced the Arians to withdraw from the Synod, and in 1840 it united with the Seceders to form the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. Mainstream Presbyterianism in Ireland was now both theologically orthodox and actively promoting its Covenanting past.

Houston's life has been covered in some detail elsewhere,[5] but a brief summary of his years of preparation may prove useful. From the age of eight, after his parents moved to Cullybackey, he sat under the ministry of William Stavely, 'the apostle of the Covenanters'. His 'first-remembered yearnings and impressions were those of true religion'.[6] He later wrote that as a boy of thirteen, 'the preaching of the Word and the other ordinances of the sanctuary made a deep and I trust saving impression on my mind. I was led to see the excellency of the Saviour, and the suitableness of his finished salvation to my necessities.'[7] In 1819 he went to study at Belfast Academical Institution and this was followed by brief periods of teaching in Ballymena Academy, Portora in Enniskillen and the Belfast Academical Institution. However 'from an early period [he] had been led to desire the office of the ministry.'[8] In 1825 he went to study at the Theological Hall of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland at Paisley, under the instruction of Rev. Andrew Symington. He was licensed to preach by the Eastern Presbytery of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland on 25 December, 1826, preached in Knockbracken the following Sabbath and received a call there the next year, eventually being ordained on 8 April, 1828. He had received, according to their own testimony, a 'poor, dispirited people' but within twelve years, under his pastoral care, their condition had been 'completely reversed' and they had been increased 'into a great multitude'. Similarly, it did not take Houston long to make his presence felt on a denominational level – and even further afield.

Source material

Resources on Houston are plentiful. Within two years of his ordination, Houston had launched the Reformed Presbyterian Church's first periodical – *The Covenanter*. In 1834 Rev. James Dick, Houston's best friend, joined him as a co-editor, a role filled by various others at different times in the years that followed until Houston finally retired as editor in 1866. Until that time however, the periodical was 'under the editorial management, exclusively or in part' of Thomas Houston.[9] Indeed, Houston's successor, Rev. Robert Nevin of Londonderry, declared on taking over that it was 'very nearly the whole truth to say there was but one' former editor.[10] All articles published in *The Covenanter* between 1830 and 1866 can therefore be considered to a large degree to represent Houston's views.

His contributions to *The Covenanter* aside, Houston was perhaps one of the most prolific authors in the history of the Reformed Presbyterian Church and was described by an Irish Covenanter in 1896 as 'by far the most voluminous of our more recent writers.'[11] The ten books he wrote, in 'occasional intervals of leisure,' before 1876 were included in the four-volume *Works doctrinal and practical of the Rev. Thomas Houston D.D.*[12] These included theological topics such as 'The adoption of sons', practical works such as 'The fellowship prayer-meeting', and historical treatments of the Covenanters John Livingstone and James Renwick. 'A practical treatise on Baptism', included in his *Works*, was complemented by a book on *The Lord's Supper: its nature, ends, and obligation* in 1878 – which argued for a weekly administration of the sacrament. Never one to argue for a novelty, however, Houston cited the support of John Calvin, Puritans such as John Owen and Stephen Charnock, and more recent theologians such as Jonathan Edwards.[13] Two more works followed, *The dominion and glory of the Redeemer* in 1880 and *The intercession of Christ*, published posthumously in 1882. According to one modern theologian, the latter deserves to be ranked alongside similar works by Hugh Martin, the first minister to be licensed by the Free Church of Scotland, and fellow Covenanter William Symington.[14] At the time, his books were reviewed enthusiastically in both the secular and religious press.[15] Houston also published a number of sermons, most of which had been preached at the funerals of his fellow Covenanter ministers, as well as various pamphlets on controversial issues such as revivalism, exclusive psalmody and the role of the magistrate. As well as in *The Covenanter* and his writings, Houston's role in the church throughout his ministry can also be traced by an examination of the minutes of the annual meetings of the Reformed Presbyterian Synod of Ireland.

As well as his published writings, Houston has also left us an unpublished journal. This is a valuable and intimate record of his first five years as a minister, entitled 'A diary of God's dealings and providences with a most

unworthy sinner'. Houston began the journal on the day of his ordination in Knockbracken and it runs until 1832. Two articles have been published by Edward Donnelly which also make use of this resource. The first focuses on the diary and provides extracts of about a quarter of the material, and the second comprises a short life of Houston.[16] Houston's role in the controversy with Rev. John Paul of Loughmourne and Carnmoney over the civil magistrate has been analysed in Prof. Robert McCollum's M.Th. dissertation and is also the subject of an unpublished essay by Peter Brooke.[17] Houston also receives a brief mention in Brooke's Ph.D. thesis on 'Controversies in Ulster Presbyterianism'.[18] However, as Prof. F. S. Leahy wrote in 2004, there is still 'scope for research into the theology of Thomas Houston: that would be one way to honour his memory and to benefit further from his insights.'[19]

A Covenanter of Covenanters

Thomas Houston was first and foremost a Reformed Presbyterian, or Covenanter. It was to the ministry of the Reformed Presbyterian Church that he devoted his life, from the day he was licensed to preach the gospel at the age of twenty-three in 1826, to his death in active service fifty-four years later. It was for the cause of the distinctive principles of the Reformed Presbyterian church that he launched *The Covenanter*, a periodical he continued to edit for thirty-five years. It was the Covenanting Church he served as its first Professor of Exegetical and Pastoral Theology and Ecclesiastical History. Many of his pamphlets were written in support of distinctive Reformed Presbyterian beliefs. He was acclaimed soon after his death as the church's most 'faithful witness of Christ in doctrine, worship, discipline and government' in the nineteenth-century.[20] A more recent assessment similarly concludes that even today 'his name stands highly in the annals of the Church he loved, and rightly so'.[21] Was Houston, then, the very definition of a Covenanter? What were the key beliefs of Covenanters in the nineteenth century, and did Houston embody them? And how did they affect his view of Christians who held different views?

The Covenants

Following the withdrawal of the Arians from the Synod of Ulster in 1829, and the restoration of the necessity of full subscription to the Westminster Confession of Faith for ministers and licentiates in 1835, Houston's *Covenanter* reported that, 'We cordially rejoice in this and every other step of reformation of the Synod of Ulster, and we hail their return in any measure to the good old path of our Covenanting Forefathers.'[22] The Reformed Presbyterians, however, were not the only body in the nineteenth century to look back to the Covenanters as their forefathers in the faith. During Houston's ministry, the Synod of Ulster, and later the Presbyterian Church in Ireland,

celebrated the bicentenaries of the Second Scottish Reformation of 1638 and the formation of the first Presbytery in Ireland in 1642, as well as the tercentenaries of the Scottish Reformation of 1560 and the death of John Knox in 1572.[23] *The Covenanter* therefore was not left alone to defend the Covenanters from the criticisms of those such as Sir Walter Scott, but received help, albeit unsolicited, from Synod of Ulster ministers, such as John Brown of Aghadowey.[24]

Much of what Houston published in *The Covenanter* therefore would have been well-received by a wider audience, including the frequent *Lives* of key Covenanting figures such as Alexander Henderson and Robert Blair, as well as commemorations of the various martyrs. However, articles on 'The duty of public social covenanting', 'National covenanting', 'Reasons for the perpetual moral obligation of the British covenants' and 'The advantages of Covenanting' would not have met with such widespread acceptance.[25] This was despite the fact that the National Covenant of 1638 and, particularly, the Solemn League and Covenant of 1643 had been embraced by Presbyterians in Ulster when they were first drawn up. In 1644, Scottish ministers were sent to Ireland to administer the Solemn League and Covenant to the Scottish forces in Ulster, and reported to the General Assembly of the same year that alongside the army, 16,000 people had signed the Covenant in Antrim and Down alone.[26] By 1650, signing the Covenant had become a requirement for Presbyterian ordination, but following the Restoration of Charles II it was publicly burnt by an act of the Irish parliament in 1661.[27] Those Presbyterians who maintained their attachment to the Covenant began to hold separate 'Society' meetings and eventually became the Reformed Presbyterian Church.[28]

With less separating the Covenanters from the Synod of Ulster theologically, following the expulsion of the Arians, the continued adherence of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in the nineteenth-century to the covenants of the seventeenth became an even more important distinctive. This became yet more pronounced after 1840, when the Secession Synod gave up its explicit recognition of the perpetual obligation of the covenants to unite with the Synod of Ulster to form the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.[29] For Houston, the remembrance of the covenants was an 'all-important duty', and 'at no time in his life did he manifest more profound delight' than when his denomination formally renewed the covenants in 1853, largely at his initiative.[30] In the words of a letter published by Houston as the lead article in *The Covenanter* at the time, God was clearly behind the fact that the Reformed Presbyterian Synods in Ireland, Scotland and North America had 'simultaneously, without previous arrangement with each other, as if moved by the same spirit, had the subject under their serious consideration'.[31] 'These memorable deeds', he declared of the covenants, in a book he produced to mark the occasion, 'must be regarded as being of permanent obligation.'[32] In the words of the Synod's official 'Act

of Covenant Renovation', 'these federal deeds, being moral and scriptural in their nature, and entered into by these nations through their representatives, are and will be binding upon them till the latest posterity'. For the nation to have rejected the covenants was a sin, and by renewing them, the Covenanters sought 'to be free of any participation in its guilt'.[33] Houston had no time for those, such as Seaton Reid, who 'expressed respect for the Solemn League and Covenant, and admiration of those who entered into it in a bypast age, and yet, at the same time, altogether refused to admit its permanent obligation'. In opposition to Reid, Houston quoted with approbation the Scottish Seceder minister Thomas M'Crie who argued that the 'great design' of the covenant was not temporary but permanent, and would still be binding even if its aims had been achieved, and even more so when 'its grand stipulations remain to this day unfulfilled'.[34] In 1843 the Irish Covenanters cherished the hope that the newly formed Free Church of Scotland would embrace the Covenants. In anticipation of this therefore, *The Covenanter* could describe who formed the 'Free Protesting Church' as 'excellent men' – while being withering in its condemnation of 'Presbyterian ministers in this country, who are fond of claiming to be the successors of martyred forefathers, while they have no idea whatever of acknowledging the moral nature and descending obligation of the British Covenants'.[35]

The Kingship of Christ

Reformed Presbyterians' adherence to the seventeenth-century covenants, however, was only one part of the 'grand leading article of the Covenanted Testimony'; the headship of Christ over the nations.[36] The classic work on this doctrine remains the Scottish Reformed Presbyterian minister William Symington's *Messiah the Prince*, first published in 1839 to a predictably enthusiastic reaction from *The Covenanter*: 'we have received high gratification from the perusal of every part of this admirable Treatise'.[37] To Houston and other nineteenth-century Covenanters, Christ's headship over the nation meant that the 'whole civil polity of the nation should be conformed to the Scriptures' and rulers should 'submit to Christ the Lord' and be 'possessed of a due measure of scriptural qualifications' for their role.[38] According to the Synod's 1837 *Declaration on Civil Government*, these qualifications included professing and exemplifying Christianity as well as recognising the inspiration of the Scriptures, the perpetual obligation of the moral law and 'the Word of God as the supreme standard of government'.[39] If a political system fell short of this, and was thus 'opposed to entire allegiance to Messiah the Prince', Reformed Presbyterians saw their 'distinct separation' from it as a positive duty.[40] Covenanters in the seventeenth-century had therefore protested that the Revolution Settlement did not recognise the kingship of Christ over the nation or the supreme authority of the Bible in civil affairs, a protest that 'remained in

full force' when the Irish *Historical Testimony* was published in 1868.[41] As part of their 'distinct separation' in the nineteenth century, Covenanters were to abstain from voting in elections, serving on juries, taking oaths of allegiance and signing parliamentary petitions – or face church discipline.[42] They would however, at the same time, as Houston pointed out, 'continue to promote the ends of public justice, and give [their] support to whatever is for the good of the commonwealth in which we dwell, when this can be done without any sinful condition.'[43] Again, 'the Presbyterian Churches that claim descent from the covenanting reformers and martyrs' came in for criticism from Houston, for 'compromising a faithful testimony and encouraging national apostasy by incorporating with a civil system that refuses homage to the reigning Mediator.'[44] Such views, according to the *Belfast News-Letter*, were 'truly humiliating'.[45]

These beliefs on civil government were not just a bone of contention between Reformed Presbyterians and those outside their denomination however. In 1840 the church suffered its own disruption over the issue, with a young Thomas Houston at the forefront of the battle. The dispute was over the power of the civil magistrate *circa sacra*, or the extent of the civil ruler's responsibility to establish true religion. The controversy began in 1831 when the defender of orthodoxy, John Paul, wrote a letter to the *News-Letter* taking issue with several statements regarding magistracy in Houston's recently launched *The Covenanter* and claiming that they did not represent the views of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in either Ireland or Scotland.[46] The authors of the articles had argued, as did Houston in a number of pamphlets he subsequently published on the subject, 'that it is the Christian Magistrate's duty to restrain and punish obstinate heretics and idolaters'.[47] Houston claimed that his views were merely those of the Westminster Confession of Faith, the doctrinal standard of the church, but Paul offered a different interpretation of the Confession which seemed at odds with the plain meaning of the words:

> The Westminster Divines, when they wrote the 20th chapter of their Confession, had not the slightest idea that the civil magistrate should punish a heretic or an idolater as well as a thief, a murderer, or a traitor – they had not the faintest conception that heresy should be suppressed by the sword of the civil magistrate.[48]

For Paul, if a magistrate actually put the views of 'our zealous young friend' into practice, 'human blood would flow like water' and 'the globe we inhabit would become a howling wilderness'.[49]

The Synod strove for peace and its 1833 meeting seemed to have brought the matter to an amicable conclusion.[50] Three years later though, the controversy was reignited by a 'memorial' from the Knockbracken congregation, which led to the Synod issuing a *Declaration on Civil Government* in 1837. This supported the view of Houston that 'authoritative

restraint of the open violation of the first, second, or any other commandment of God is not persecution; for, as no man has a right to violate the Divine Law, no right is invaded'.[51] Paul and his supporters, who had refused to take part in discussing the *Declaration*, spent the next three Synods issuing memorials complaining about Houston's published doctrines and the Synod's treatment of Paul, in addition to trying to get the denomination to adapt the *Testimony* and terms of communion of the Scottish Reformed Presbyterian Church.[52] On the penultimate day of the 1840 Synod, Paul's party, which had been threatening separation for the last two years, read out a document protesting against the decisions of the Synod regarding the civil magistrate and declining its authority. They handed in a copy of this 'Declinature and Protest' signed by five ministers of the Eastern Presbytery, along with twelve elders, and withdrew from the Synod. Three years later they constituted themselves as 'The Eastern Reformed Presbyterian Church'. In 1902 the Eastern Synod united with the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, but half of its congregations took independent action and returned to the Reformed Presbyterian Church.[53]

In 1842 the Reformed Presbyterian Synod set up a committee to issue a conclusive statement on the whole affair. While expressing the opinion that the editors of *The Covenanter* 'should have more carefully endeavoured to avoid every expression that might furnish occasion for any of the calumnies' that had been poured out on them, the committee 'simply and solemnly declare[d] the Rev. Thomas Houston, – not guilty' of the 'awful' charges he faced of advocating persecuting principles.[54] Some of the Reformed Presbyterian Church's clearest distinctive principles had come under attack, but as the most recent analysis of the debate concludes: 'Rather than loosen the church's attachment to its historic position...Paul's controversy with Houston actually strengthened it.'[55]

The Glorious Revolution

Reformed Presbyterian beliefs on the Kingship of Christ were also seen in the Covenanters' continuing disapproval of the Revolution Settlement of 1688. The church's *Historical Testimony* of 1868 contained a section entitled 'Grounds of dissent from the Revolution Settlement', which in the intervening period 'instead of being diminished have been increased'.[56] Houston would therefore have taken issue with fellow Irish Presbyterian minister, Rev. John Brown of Aghadowey, who in a sermon in Glasgow in 1838 'with ease conflated the story of the Covenanters with that of the Glorious Revolution'.[57] When Houston published the life and letters of James Renwick, he included an appendix to oppose claims, 'common in some quarters of late', that had they lived to witness the Revolution, the martyrs 'would have joyfully hailed it as the realization of their eager aspirations, and would have incorporated readily with the national society.' On the contrary, claimed Houston, the Revolution

Settlement was 'a deliberate abandonment' of the Second Reformation and 'the civil and political system established in these countries' was 'diametrically opposed to that which was set up at the era of the Reformation, and was contended for by the Scottish martyrs'. This was because the act condemning the covenants remained in force, civil rulers no longer had to be possessed of scriptural qualifications, the whole civil system was based on expediency and popular will and the Revolution Church was Erastian.[58] While Houston often claimed the Covenanters as the founders of Britain's civil and religious liberties – many of which became ascendant at the Glorious Revolution – he had no time for definitions of liberty by which 'the authority of God, and the claims of Messiah, are set at nought.'[59]

The Worship of God

If Reformed Presbyterian beliefs regarding covenanting and civil government were the longest standing differences between themselves and other Presbyterian churches in Ireland at the time, the most easily discernible differences to those in the pews during Houston's lifetime would have been in the area of public worship. Irish Presbyterian praise, like that of other Presbyterians around the world, had been traditionally confined to the singing of metrical versions of the Book of Psalms, unaccompanied by musical instruments. From the 1760s, however, hymns began to be introduced by non-subscribing and liberal Presbyterians, especially those residing in Dublin. In the early nineteenth century, the rise of evangelicalism, with its stress on the centrality of Christ, saw more orthodox ministers introducing hymns, 'which could explicitly mention Christ and the believers' personal relationship with him'. This included a collection of paraphrases published in 1821 by Henry Cooke, 'complete with a vigorous defence of the use of hymns and paraphrases in public worship'. By 1836, while the Covenanters and Seceders still used only the metrical psalms, in the Synod of Ulster 'a collection of hymns had of late got partially into use'. The Unitarians exclusively used hymns, usually with instrumental accompaniment. The rise of hymns was checked, however, by the union of the Synod of Ulster and the Seceders in 1840 to form the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, with the articles of union excluding the use of anything but the psalms in worship in order to satisfy the Seceders.[60] Hymns remained illegal in the new church until 1896, fourteen years after Houston's death, but this did not stop some churches introducing them. Although the General Assembly reaffirmed their commitment to exclusive psalmody in 1879 and on a number of other occasions,[61] it failed to take action against congregations that violated the law of the church.[62]

One congregation which sought to introduce hymns was Townsend-Street Presbyterian Church in Belfast. The resulting controversy caused its minister, Rev William Johnston, to preach a sermon entitled *Psalms and Paraphrases*

which Houston took as 'an open challenge to those whose sentiments it pretends to controvert' and sought to subject it to 'an honest and fearless criticism' in an 1861 pamphlet entitled *Divine Psalms against human paraphrases and hymns*.[63] He began by attacking ministers and congregations who claimed 'liberty' to introduce hymns in the face of their denomination's constitution. Houston ridiculed Johnston's arguments, accused him of setting up straw men, traced the history of the paraphrases back to the reign of theologically suspect Moderatism within the Church of Scotland, and concluded: 'that a production so weak and irrelevant should have emanated from a man of Mr. Johnston's acknowledged talent and standing, we can only ascribe to the circumstance, that he had a lurking feeling, that his case was indefensible.'[64] In 1861 Houston was one of those sought to provide prefaces to a British edition of an American work entitled *The True Psalmody*. Significantly, one of the other prefaces was written by Henry Cooke, who by this stage, after having gone through a period of illness in which he found 'the most celebrated hymns of uninspired men [to be] miserable comforters', had embraced the psalms as 'an unfathomable and shoreless ocean' in which he could see Christ clearly.[65] Irish Presbyterianism faced a similar dispute over the use of instrumental music, but it was not as big an issue during Houston's lifetime, as the first reported use of an instrument by a church belonging to the General Assembly was not until 1868. In the year of Houston's death, 1882, the Assembly formally prohibited the use of organs, although again it failed to take action against recalcitrant congregations.[66]

'A Standard Bearer indeed'

The use of hymns and instruments were two areas targeted by the Covenanters in a pamphlet produced in 1873 entitled *The voice of the Reformed Presbyterian Church*, which also contained articles on family religion and the Fellowship Prayer-Meeting. The production of the pamphlet came at Houston's instigation. Houston was the first name proposed by the Synod to contribute to the publication and he was appointed convener of the committee. The other contributors entrusted with the task included two other significant figures within the Synod, Rev. Robert Nevin, who by this time had succeeded Houston as editor of *The Covenanter*, and Rev. J. A. Chancellor, later Professor of Theology.

That the pamphlet was produced at the suggestion of Houston is no surprise as Knockbracken's minister was behind many of the major initiatives of the Synod in the nineteenth-century. It was Houston who first suggested that the denomination produce its own periodical,[67] and Houston who made the first proposal, in 1842, that the covenants be renewed.[68] When a Jewish mission was set up in 1858, it was at Houston's instigation,[69] and it was Houston who led the campaigns in the Synod for Temperance and against National

Education. When the Synod needed a reliable guide, it was to Houston that they turned. In 1847 Houston, along with his best friend, James Dick, and Robert Nevin, were appointed as a committee on Sabbath observance, and when the Synod issued a pamphlet entitled *Testimony against social evils* in 1868, Houston was chosen to tackle the issue of 'Sabbath desecration'. On the issue of the Sabbath, Houston once again held firmly to the official teaching of the church, arguing in his own writings that those who 'profaned it by idleness and by worldly conversation, employments and recreations' should be excluded from the Lord's Supper.[70] In 1854 Houston was one of the first two Professors of Theology appointed to teach Reformed Presbyterian ministerial students.[71] Four years later, he was one of four ministers appointed to rewrite the church's Historical Testimony with specific reference to Ireland, as until then the Irish Church had been using the Scottish version. The church was also largely indebted to him for its book of discipline and other synodical publications.[72] In 1872, Houston was one of those chosen to reply to a letter from the Presbyterian Church in Ireland regarding union.[73] At the first meeting of Synod after his death, the court noted that 'for more than half a-century Synod has enjoyed the benefit of his wise counsels' and lamented the fact that 'we shall no longer have his matured judgment to help us in our courts.'[74]

Although deeply respected in the Synod, Houston did not always have his own way. On a number of occasions, the Minutes of Synod record Houston dissenting from decisions taken by the church's highest court. This was an action traditionally regarded by Reformed Presbyterians as being a serious step, and, apart from in the years around the church's split, was an infrequent occurrence in the period. On almost every occasion Houston dissented, he was opposing a move from a traditional Reformed Presbyterian position, however minor. For example, in 1876, Houston registered his dissent from the decision of a committee set up to consider whether Reformed Presbyterians should still be disciplined for serving on juries. The committee had decided that although previous Synods had deemed it still a censurable offence, 'inasmuch as this usage has not been at all uniform, but has rather been a subject of very frequent inquiry and discussion...we do not consider that it is now necessary to give to this usage the force of a binding law in the Church.'[75] For Houston, however, it was 'inexpedient at present to make any alteration on the well-known and lengthened general position of this Church with reference to serving on juries.'[76] In 1878, nearly forty years after his opponents in the Eastern Presbytery had left the church, the issue was still apparently a sore point for Houston. He tried to stop a committee being appointed to enter negotiations for union with the Eastern Reformed Presbyterian Church and he asked that his dissent be recorded when his amendment was defeated.[77] Subsequent events seemed to justify Houston, as two years later negotiations broke down when it became clear that the Eastern Church would not warn or discipline their

members who voted in elections.[78] These incidents nevertheless serve to exemplify the words of the Clerk of Synod, that 'Dr. Houston, however highly esteemed both within his own community, and by all who know him outside, is not the R.P. Church, nor his writings to be regarded as superseding her Testimony.'[79]

Thomas Houston, then, was a Covenanter *par excellence*. He not only believed in the perpetual obligation of the Covenants, he led his denomination in renewing them and wrote a book to commemorate the event. He not only treasured the Scottish Covenanters, but perpetuated the memory of Livingstone and Renwick in books and that of numerous others by articles in *The Covenanter*. He not only held to the Covenanters' strict views on civil government, he opposed any defection from the church's position so strongly that it forced an entire Presbytery to leave the church.[80] He often expressed a desire for unity, but not at any cost. 'We cannot unite in church fellowship', he wrote, 'with those who refuse to own, or who have cast off the covenant of the Lord God of our fathers.'[81] He lived at a time when both secular historians and those in other churches were starting to speak and write favourably of the Scottish Covenants. While welcoming the change, he could not ignore the fact that 'many in the purer evangelical churches who win some applause by applauding the Covenants, hold views diametrically opposite to the leading principles of the Covenants.'[82] And through his books, pamphlets and actions in Synod, he did not intend to let them forget it, or see his own church move an inch from its historic position. In the words of J. A. Chancellor in 1858:

> It is because they cannot yet be identified with any other church in the land, without forsaking that testimony from which others have so manifestly departed, that they continue to this day a separate community, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and martyrs did say before them.[83]

Such a sentiment would have been wholeheartedly endorsed by Thomas Houston, who did more than anyone else in the nineteenth century to promote the distinctive principles of the church. 'In him,' wrote the Synod in their annual letter to their fellow Covenanters in America on his death, 'our church has lost a standard bearer indeed.'[84]

Houston the Evangelical

Thomas Houston, then, was unwaveringly committed to the principles of the R. P. Church. Far from being likely to compromise on any of them, Houston did more than anyone else in the century to defend them. What then of his broadmindedness? Did he maintain a respectable difference from those in other denominations? Were his beliefs about unity just theories, or did they

make a practical difference to his life and ministry? He played a central role in his own denomination, but were any of his energies directed towards a wider evangelicalism?

Context

In the eighteenth century, the various Presbyterian groups in Ireland, although sharing a similar theological language, had 'either related to each other in a business-like manner or ignored each other.'[85] During the nineteenth century, however, evangelicalism became ascendant within Ulster Presbyterianism and provided an opportunity for this to change.[86] This movement of renewal and reform has been famously defined by David Bebbington in terms of a fourfold emphasis on personal conversion, the final authority of the Bible, the cross of Christ, and religious and social activism.[87] As well as these theological emphases however, evangelicalism could also be defined by a number of its cultural or associational aspects. These included respectability, membership of benevolent and missionary societies and anti-Catholicism. As evangelicalism transcended denominational boundaries, it had the ability to unite the different strands of Ulster Protestantism. Indeed, 'evangelical movements were by their very nature inter-denominational.'[88] The formation of voluntary evangelical mission societies in the nineteenth century, for example, 'enabled Presbyterian evangelicals to emphasise their Christ-centred doctrines over ecclesiological issues, allowing them to associate with evangelicals of other denominations and in other countries to engage in what they believed was the more important task of spreading the Gospel.'[89]

Unity in theory

As with his political outlook, Thomas Houston's attitude to the worldwide church was ambivalent. Houston believed in the 'catholic or universal' church which, in the words of the Westminster Confession of Faith, consisted of 'all those, throughout the world, that profess the true religion'.[90] 'Never has the Covenanted Church held the doctrine of exclusive salvation', he wrote in the first article ever published in *The Covenanter*.[91] He often lamented the fact that there were so many divisions in the Christian Church. It was Houston's desire 'that all the genuine friends of the Redeemer throughout the earth [would be] comprehended under one common denomination'. The divisions of the church, rather than just being undesirable, were 'its reproach and weakness and sin.'[92] A year into his ministry in Knockbracken he asked himself, in regard to the Church of Christ in general, 'what have I done to heal the breaches, and promote uniformity and peace?'[93] At the same time, Houston had also been the key author of the church's Historical Testimony which could with 'all right-hearted men...lament the divisions in the Reformed Church' and express its love for 'all who love Christ the head', while having sections

testifying against the Established and Presbyterian churches, Anabaptism, Congregationalism, Methodism, Plymouthism, Millenarianism, Voluntaryism and Latitudinarianism.[94] An article in *The Covenanter* of 1859 on the revival lamented that there was a widespread belief that Arminians, Methodists, Baptists and Brethren joining with Presbyterian ministers in conducting revival meetings was proof of the 'decay of sectarian feeling'. On the contrary, the result of such unity would be 'the most sectarian of all parties – the Baptists and Plymouthists – gaining a rich harvest, in large accessions, from the Presbyterian Church in this country.'[95] Unity, said Houston, should not be at the expense of non-essential truths, even if such proposals were 'sure to elicit the applause of the audience' at meetings of the Evangelical Alliance.[96] To him it was evident 'that no proper union can be formed on the sacrifice of any Scriptural principle.'[97]

For Houston, the answer to the question of unity was, as with most problems, the seventeenth-century covenants. Part of the reason why he wrote *A memorial of Covenanting* was to argue for the continued obligation of the covenants, so 'that those who are desirous of union throughout the churches' would have 'an approved basis of scriptural fellowship, and co-operation for the advancement of the Redeemer's kingdom.'[98] 'A prominent object of the covenants', he wrote, had been to bring about uniformity.[99] The Solemn League and Covenant in particular bound its adherents 'to endeavour to bring the churches of God in the three kingdoms [England, Scotland and Ireland] to the nearest conjunction and uniformity in religion' in doctrinal standards, church government and worship.[100] For Houston therefore, 'the felt necessities of the Church for revival and a bond of union and co-operation in Christian effort' would all be met by accepting the continued obligation of the covenants.[101] 'In marked contrast with many contemporary schemes for union', the Solemn League sought 'a union in the Spirit, in truth and love.'[102] As J. A. Chancellor argued, all Presbyterians in Ulster had been 'formerly one in principle and covenant', they should never have been divided, and the fact that they were was 'no fault of ours.'[103] Much of the groundwork for achieving the aims of the Solemn League and Covenant had been carried out by the Westminster Assembly, convened by the Long Parliament in 1643 to produce doctrinal documents 'that churches in the three kingdoms might be united in the fullest concord.'[104] It was by these Westminster Standards, wrote the Reformed Presbyterian Synod to the new Free Church of Scotland two hundred years later, 'that the too long divided friends of the Saviour' and 'all true Presbyterians, at least' would be united.[105]

Unity in practice

Although Houston argued in theory for a strict uniformity, in practice he was 'a man of broad sympathies.' 'The tenacity with which he held by the

distinctive principles and position of the Reformed Presbyterian Church never hindered him from co-operating in any good work with evangelical men of other denominations, when he could do so without compromising himself.'[106] One lesson Houston took from the life of James Renwick was that 'while firmly holding fast all Scriptural attainments...we should rejoice in the evidences of grace in Christ's servants wherever we find them, love them as brethren...and pray for the coming of the happy period when divisions and animosities shall cease.'[107] So while he could advocate the 'Apostolic tradition' of Presbyterian church government as opposed to the 'despotism' of Prelacy or 'disorder and disunity' of Congregationalism,[108] Houston could also speak of 'the great and the good of various names, Episcopalians, Independents and Presbyterians.'[109] While previous generations of Covenanters had written off George Whitefield as an 'abjured prelatick Hireling of as lax Toleration Principles, as any that ever set up for the advancing of the Kingdom of Satan',[110] to Houston he was 'a burning and a shining light' to whom he looked forward with 'high delight' to meeting in Heaven and 'conversing on the preciousness of redeeming love'![111] The journal he kept for the first four years of his ministry contains records of him preaching in various Methodist, Independent and Seceder churches.[112]

This spirit was particularly manifest in one of the great passions of Houston's life, the formation of a new Reformed Presbyterian congregation in Killinchy. In contrast to the Arianism which had marked the area for a long period until Cooke's victory in the Synod of Ulster in 1829, Houston could in 1848 'unfeignedly rejoice in the spirituality and efficiency of every portion of the Protestant family and in the increasing evidences of brotherly love prevailing among them'.[113] When the fledgling congregation sought financial aid from Scotland to complete its meeting house, a number of endorsements of Houston's character by respected ministers of different denominations were included to 'show that the attempt is not regarded as sectarian'.[114] The impressive list included Rev. Henry Cooke, William Gibson and James Morgan of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and R. J. Bryce of the Seceders. It also included Rev David King of the United Presbyterian Church, a co-founder of the Evangelical Alliance, who at the time 'was renowned as one of the most outstanding church orators in Scotland.'[115] The testimony of Bryce, Principal of the Belfast Academy, is a glowing tribute to Houston's broad-mindedness:

> I do not know, in any denomination, a man of more Catholic spirit than Mr. Houston, nor one who unites more perfectly a firm adherence to his own conscientious convictions, with the kindest and most brotherly feelings towards all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, even in the denominations of Evangelical Christians who differ most widely from his own.[116]

As the most recent assessment of Houston's life has concluded, he was 'an admirable blend of denominational commitment and evangelical

catholicity.'[117]

Evangelical societies

One way in which Houston sought to unite with Christians of other denominations was through missionary and philanthropic societies. In the early 1820s, while still a teenager, he set up Sabbath Schools in Enniskillen, while teaching at Portora Royal School, and in Belfast, while studying at the Academical Institution.[118] In Belfast he advocated the founding of the Destitute Sick Society and participated in its management.[119] In September 1824, 'at a time when the subject of missions created but little interest in Ireland', Houston and some others founded the Belfast Juvenile Society, 'with the view of drawing in the young of different evangelical denominations, and raising funds for the cause of Bible Societies, Evangelical Missions, and Scriptural Education.'[120] Auxiliaries were soon formed in other parts of the province, and as a result 'a missionary spirit was excited and diffused among...the evangelical churches., '[121] Houston was assisted in the organisation of the Juvenile Society by Alexander Henderson, Librarian of the Linen Hall Library and later Presbyterian minister in Lisburn.[122] The two followed this with the formation of the Belfast Town Mission in 1827,[123] at a time when new industrial centres, such as Belfast, were 'the greatest challenge to evangelical ardour throughout the British Isles.'[124] According to one obituary of Houston, it was 'a work which it was worth while having lived for, if he had done nothing else.'[125] The Town Mission, later Belfast City Mission, sought 'the promotion of Christ's cause among the poor, the careless, and the Churchless.'[126] It was founded at the same time that David Naismith founded the Town Mission in Glasgow, the first in the British Empire.[127] Admittedly, Houston is barely mentioned in the official history of the Belfast Town Mission, apart from being listed as serving on its first committee, however the reason for this may be the paucity of available records for the early years of the society.[128] According to his own testimony at least, he had been 'concerned in originating the Belfast Town Mission.'[129]

Parachurch?

Houston's involvement in such societies did not stop when he became a minister, and two days after his ordination in Knockbracken, he was appointed to serve on the committee of the newly-founded Belfast branch of the British Reformation Society.[130] As well as involvement in this society, his journal records him preaching at meetings of Sabbath School unions, auxiliaries of the Juvenile Society and for the Ulster Missionary Society.[131] From the start of its publication, *The Covenanter* contained reports of the progress of numerable societies, such as the London Hibernian Society, British and Foreign Bible Society, London Missionary Society, Wesleyan Missionary Society and the

Irish Evangelical Society.[132] While the periodical sought to inform its readers of all 'movements in the nations and the churches', the 'proceedings of Bible and Missionary, and Tract and Temperance Societies' were held out as being especially interesting as they were thought to 'encourage the Christian to hope that the day is rapidly approaching, when "the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea."'[133]

Despite the caveat that the editor was 'by no means to be understood as fully approving' every method used by these societies, this was certainly enthusiastic support for organisations working outside of the official structures of the church. It is unclear to what extent Houston's fellow Reformed Presbyterians shared his enthusiasm for involvement in the type of societies which had perhaps not always had Reformed Presbyterian backing,[134] and had been shunned by figures such as Thomas M'Crie. M'Crie believed that:

> the Church, in her judicial capacity, is the true Missionary Society; that to her alone belongs the duty of examining the qualifications of the Gospel missionaries, appointing them their respective spheres, sending them forth on their mission, superintending their personal and ministerial conduct; and that every other plan of operation differing from this was in so far an encroachment on the proper business of the court of Christ's house, tending to perpetuate division, and carrying in the very principle of their association, the seeds of their own dissolution.[135]

Certainly, the United Societies, in which the Covenanters met during the persecution of the seventeenth century until a Presbytery could be formed in 1743, had 'refused, at great personal cost, to usurp the authority of a church'[136] – and would doubtless have been slow to participate in any society they saw as doing the same. Some Scottish Covenanters had been disciplined in 1796 for their attendance at a meeting of the Glasgow Missionary Society – however the main reason for this was 'no opposition to the Society itself', but other 'weighty reasons' – most likely the act of hearing a sermon preached by a member of the Established Church.[137] By the nineteenth century, Houston's most distinguished Scottish R.P. contemporaries, Rev. Andrew and Rev. William Symington, were supporting and preaching on behalf of evangelical causes such as Sabbath schools, temperance, home and foreign missions and 'the great catholic societies'. Both were widely known and respected outside their own denomination, and Andrew was 'an enthusiastic leader in the Evangelical Alliance.'[138] In Ireland, unsurprisingly perhaps, Houston was joined on the platform of a meeting of the Ballymena Juvenile Society by his closest friend James Dick. Interestingly, the President of the Society was another Covenanter, Rev. Clarke Houston, who later joined the Eastern Reformed Church.[139] The 'W. Toland' on the first Belfast Town Mission committee may well have been William Toland, future minister of Kilraughts.[140] Whether the Reformed Presbyterian Church has ever had a

defined position in regard to parachurch organisations is therefore unclear; and Houston's involvement in them raised no controversy.

Revival

Undoubtedly the greatest outpouring of evangelical fervour in the North of Ireland in the nineteenth-century was the religious revival of 1859. This movement, in which many gained a new urgency about spiritual concerns, 'mobilised and affected more people than any other event in Ulster in the years between 1798 and 1913.'[141] For William Gibson, the chronicler of the Revival and one of Houston's close friends, 1859 was 'The Year of Grace.'[142] 'The whole movement, in its various aspects, tends to give striking and vivid illustration of the great doctrines of the gospel, as they are set forth in our Catechisms and Confession of Faith', reported the General Assembly's State of Religion committee in 1860.[143] The Reformed Presbyterian reaction, while largely positive, was slightly more mixed. Like their fellow Presbyterians, and as in all transatlantic revivals, Covenanters had been promoting revival and making preparations for it in the previous decades.[144] The Synod of 1847 had established a 'concert of prayer' in order to 'seek the divine blessing upon the ministry, the eldership and people of the Church and the revival of true and undefiled religion.'[145] However, like the General Assembly's Isaac Nelson, the Covenanters had their own ministers who were openly critical of the movement when it finally arrived.[146] In fact, only a few ministers gave it unqualified support, with Houston's friend James Dick noting that more women than men were affected by the Revival, and that those 'honoured to convert sinners were men of a peculiar type, and that the most silly, artful or eccentric carried away the prizes'.[147] If the emergence of new evangelical associations and hitherto uncommon religious experiences during the revival 'forced Presbyterian ministers to confirm their congregations in traditional doctrine', this was an even higher priority for Reformed Presbyterians.[148] Particularly, correction was needed in the areas of lay-preaching, physical manifestations, assurance and, of course, purity of worship. Rev. Josias A. Chancellor of Bready, a keen supporter of the revival and later a colleague of Houston at the denomination's Theological Hall, initially expressed a desire to write a pamphlet on the impact of the revival on the Reformed Presbyterian Church. However, after a fellow minister urged caution in preparing such a pamphlet, he wrote one on two perceived excesses of the movement instead.[149]

Despite these caveats, the Synod's official verdict on the revival, given at their meeting in 1859, was largely positive. On the Thursday evening of the Synod, Rev. James Kennedy of Limavady preached a sermon on 'Religious awakening and revival' from Isaiah 32:15 to 'a large and deeply interested audience.'[150] Then, on the Friday morning, a special private session was held at 7 a.m. to confer on the matter of the religious awakening. Before the Synod

was dissolved in the afternoon, Houston, according to a previous arrangement, addressed the court on 'the position and present duty of the ministers and members of the Covenanting Church in relation to promoting the revival of religion.' At the close of his address, the clerk submitted a number of resolutions on the subject which were unanimously adopted. In them the Synod said that 'without expressing any opinion with respect to the circumstances originating this movement, or the manner in which it may have been conducted in some quarters,' it could not but 'regard it as a reason for the most devout gratitude to the God of all grace' that there was now an increased earnestness in spiritual things among Christians, and that many of the ungodly and wicked had, it was hoped, been converted. That there should be 'marks of human imperfection on any work in which man is engaged as an instrument' was unsurprising, and errors and extravagancies were no reason to stand aloof, but a 'great reason why Gospel ministers should interfere' to endeavour to give 'a proper tone and direction' to the movement. Furthermore, 'every encouragement' was to be given to those who had a desire to unite with evangelical Christians of any denomination 'so long as Scriptural order and purity in such acts of worship are adhered to.' As these resolutions were agreed upon with Houston's address still ringing in their ears, it is unsurprising to see them warmly welcomed in the next issue of *The Covenanter*. 'It is most gratifying', declared its report, 'that the Synod has declared itself decidedly in favour of Scriptural revival – and has given every encouragement to its members and people, by every Scriptural means, to help forward the great movement.'[151]

Temperance

In terms of the cultural and respectable emphases of evangelicalism, Houston took a keen interest in the Temperance movement, evangelical Protestantism's 'most sustained and ardent attack' on working-class diversion.[152] He later recalled that before a cheap edition of Beecher's *Six sermons on temperance* had been circulated in 1828, there had been little interest in temperance in the North of Ireland, with efforts in its favour in America having generally been ignored by the press. Ministers were expected to partake of strong drink during visits to families and on all social occasions if they did not want to face unfriendly remarks or endanger their influence, and ministers of 'one of the Presbyterian bodies' were deposed for drunkenness almost annually.[153] The success of temperance movements in America however encouraged the Seceder minister Rev. John Edgar to take up the cause in Ireland in 1829. Despite initially being written off as 'demented' by a Belfast newspaper, Edgar, later the third moderator of the Presbyterian General Assembly, became 'the leading advocate in Ireland of the temperance movement' and helped transmit America's temperance enthusiasm to Britain.[154]

On 24 September, 1829, Edgar, Houston and four others signed the first temperance pledge in Ireland. The other four signatories included another Presbyterians minister, an Independent minister and an Episcopalian.[155] Again, for Houston, 'the unsectarian character of the movement formed one of its strongest recommendations' as 'those whom we laboured to benefit were convinced that our only aim was their temporal and spiritual good.'[156] Four years after this first pledge was signed, there were 15,000 members of temperance societies in Ulster.[157] Houston set up the Knockbracken Temperance Society in 1830, and maintained a keen interest in the temperance cause throughout his life, being honoured, 'just as his voice began to fail', to give a historical sketch of the movement in Ulster at the Temperance Jubilee Celebration held in Exeter Hall, London.[158] The temperance cause was fully endorsed by the Reformed Presbyterian Church and lengthy reports on the subject were read to Synod annually.

Mission

The greatest passion of Houston's life, however, was 'the great work of making known [Christ's] light and salvation throughout the nations.'[159] He had fallen under the 'spell' of the ideal of converting the world to Christ while a student, and became 'more and more' convinced of the importance of missions with each passing year.[160] J. A. Chancellor, who had grown up under Houston's ministry, spoke of how without ever having to be instructed to do so by any court of the church, 'an annual sermon on missions became one of the standing and most attractive features of his ministry.'[161] '[I] have been trying a little to excite a missionary spirit,' Houston wrote in his journal after a year in Knockbracken.[162] At the first meeting of Synod he attended following his ordination, Houston's 'missionary zeal' was recognised and he was appointed one of the secretaries of the Synod's Missionary Association.[163] For the rest of his life he presented 'full, hearty and stimulating' reports of the association's work to the Synod.[164] In 1831 he assisted in the ordination of William Sommerville as a missionary for Nova Scotia and New Brunswick.[165] Houston had read a paper annually at Synod on the subject of foreign missions for many years before the court finally set up a Foreign Mission in 1843.[166] In 1859, Houston addressed the Synod on 'the expediency and importance of this Church establishing a Mission to the Jews'. Houston's proposals were accepted and a Jewish Mission was established, with Houston as secretary.[167] As a Professor at the Church's Theological Hall, 'he never failed to bring the duty of missions and some view of the progress of the work before the class.'[168] In 1871, Dr. James Martin was sent as a medical missionary to Syria 'mainly through Houston's instrumentality.'[169] Indeed, the Synod declared on his death that Houston had been 'the very heart of our Church-life in our action towards Syria.'[170] 'In heaven's estimate', he had proclaimed 'the most distinguished

name of honour is that of a missionary.'[171] Undoubtedly then, the cause of missions was the 'cause which, of all others, lay nearest to his heart.'[172]

Houston's interest in missionary activity was not divorced from his Covenanting convictions but in fact firmly rooted in the doctrine of the headship of Christ and Presbyterian eschatological expectation. While Covenanters confessed it as a sin that 'multitudes have lived and died ignorant of Christ and his salvation, without adequate efforts on our part to enlighten them,' their primary motivation for mission was the character of Christ,[173] the 'sovereign, universal headship' of Christ that was the church's 'grand warrant for engaging in Christian missions for the conversion of the nations.'[174] This belief, that Christ was not just king of the church, 'but also King over all the earth, and that his glory is destined yet to fill the whole world', also meant that Houston and the Covenanters could have 'the fullest assurance of ultimate success and glorious triumph.'[175] In line with other nineteenth-century evangelicals, therefore, Covenanters believed that 'by disseminating the gospel they would bring about the millennium.' For Presbyterians this expectation was enshrined in the Westminster standards, and would be achieved pre-eminently through preaching.[176] The coming triumphant conclusion, however, could still be hastened through the covenants. The Reformed Presbyterians' renewal of the covenants in 1853 pledged them to pray and labour 'that whatever is contrary to sound doctrine and the power of godliness may be removed, that thereby a free course may be opened up for the diffusion of the Gospel throughout all nations.'[177] Through the covenants, then, they could best follow the call of John Knox who had 'solemnly pledged the Reformed Kirk "to preach the glaid tydinges of the kingdom through the hail world."'[178]

Comparison with Cooke

Finally, as in any study of Houston, it is 'tempting to compare' him with Henry Cooke.[179] For our purposes, such a comparison is illustrative of the unity Houston could have with other evangelicals, and yet the separate stand his covenanting convictions sometimes forced him to take. As Peter Brooke has pointed out, similarities between the two men are not difficult to find. Both defended the written standards of their respective churches against innovations and were initially regarded as trouble-makers, but eventually triumphed. It could be added that in each case their opponents were forced to leave the church, and that both men played a key role in the formation of their denominations' first periodicals.[180] Both also looked back with horror to Presbyterian involvement in the 1798 Rebellion.[181] A comparison of Houston's evangelicalism with that of Cooke therefore is also intriguing. After all, 'few have articulated as effectively as Henry Cooke the distinctive and emotive emphases of nineteenth and twentieth-century Ulster Protestantism,' the foremost of which was evangelicalism.[182] The two men were both involved at

an early stage in the work of the Belfast Town Mission and the Belfast Juvenile Society.[183] They both contributed to a book on psalmody, and Houston liked to quote Cooke's condemnation of 'namby-pamby' hymns.[184] For his part, Cooke spoke of his 'long and intimate acquaintance' with Houston.[185]

As is to be expected of two staunch churchmen of different denominations, there was still much that divided the two men. 'Dr Cooke, after all his exertions in favour of orthodoxy, Mr. Houston would punish by the sword of the civil magistrate', declared John Paul after Houston had declared some of Cooke's beliefs on civil government as erroneous in *The Covenanter*.[186] Although such a statement by Paul was written off by the Reformed Presbyterian Synod as 'vindictive, malicious and malevolent', and designed to 'excite the odium of persons of education and rank,' the gulf between the two regarding the implications of the headship of Christ cannot be disguised.[187] As this was the key principle that divided their respective denominations, neither thought the other's continued separate existence was justified. In 1858, Cooke prophesied union. He was quoted in the *Banner of Ulster* as saying 'the Covenanting Church will soon not be a distinct Presbyterian Church in Ireland.'[188] For his part, Houston would doubtless have shared Chancellor's thoughts on the issue: 'it was no secession that gave the RP church its separate existence...but a rejection of the covenants by the majority.'[189] For Houston, the headship of Christ meant he could not vote, as it would have meant recognising the legitimacy of a state which had rejected Christ.[190] 'Let the political partisan pursue his bubble and trust in man who is but a worm', he wrote in his journal, but 'may I ever follow Him who has his vesture dipped in blood, and who is Prince of the Kings of the earth!'[191] On the other hand, Cooke's extensive involvement in politics led to criticisms from those within his own denomination. 'There can be no more humiliating spectacle,' wrote D. G. Brown of Newtownhamilton after Cooke's famous appearance at Hillsborough, 'than to see a man whose powers of argument and eloquence would do honour to any cause, descending from the pulpit, where the gospel of reconciliation should be preached, to a noisy platform of party politicians.'[192] The main motivation for such attacks however was undoubtedly Cooke's Toryism which flew in the face of the Presbyterian liberal tradition. To most Presbyterians, Covenanter political principles were merely, in the words of John Edgar, 'splitting hairs.'[193]

The Limits of Unity

Despite disagreeing strongly with others on some subjects, there can be little doubt that 'there was nothing small-minded or sectarian' about Houston. His funeral was attended by 'ministers of various denominations, some of whom took part in conducting religious services in the manse and the church.'[194] His life had been marked by religious and social activism in unity

with those of other denominations who shared his beliefs in the authority of the Bible and the centrality of the cross of Christ. Despite the unity he experienced however, he longed for something more, complete uniformity in worship, doctrine and practice. In the year of revival, J. A. Chancellor wrote that 'if there is a man anywhere laid under an unavoidable necessity to be the friend and promoter of revivals at all times and in all places, it is the Covenanting minister.'[195] The fact that Chancellor penned those words in an attack on some of the methods of the revival however highlighted that though the Covenanters could participate in wider evangelical movements, the unity they desired remained a long way off. In his desire to bring about such unity, Houston continually pressed the claims of the seventeenth-century covenants, 'the rallying standard around which the scattered sections of the Protestant churches will be gathered.'[196] Once this desired unity came, the church would be freed from any distraction in its great mission to bring 'the whole world...into willing subjection to Christ.'[197] In the meantime, the Covenanter Church would not come down from the high ground where it had stood since the Second Reformation. A comparison of Houston with Henry Cooke highlights that attitudes to political involvement remained the key difference between Covenanters and mainstream Presbyterians. When the General Assembly came looking for union, as it did in 1872, Covenanters would 'gladly reciprocate...sentiments of Christian good will and respect,' declare their 'earnest concern and desire to have the divisions of the Church speedily healed' and express their 'utmost satisfaction in witnessing the labours of the General Assembly for the advancement of the kingdom of our common Lord and Master at home and abroad'. However, as they had publicly embraced terms of communion which included the covenants, 'with all respect for the General Assembly, and a deep sense of their Christian kindness and love of union in initiating this proposal,' no union that did not include the covenants could ever be expedient.[198] In words uttered by Covenanter martyr William Guthrie on the scaffold in 1661, and quoted often by Houston, 'The Covenants will yet be the reviving of Britain.'[199]

Conclusion

When Thomas Houston died, he was 'widely known and greatly respected by every branch of the church of Christ.' Indeed, he had been 'identified with the religious life of the North of Ireland for more than the last half century' and 'respected by all who knew him.'[200] 'Had he connected himself with a state-paid church,' wrote Rev. David King of Glasgow when Houston was yet in his early forties, 'I have no doubt that his qualifications would have secured him ready access to its emoluments and distinctions.'[201] Nothing, however, could match the place that the Covenanting church had in

Houston's affections, or the esteem in which he was held by members of his own denomination. He had 'stood at their front ranks as a leader and guide,'[202] and the Synod took the earliest opportunity to put on record 'their sense of the great bereavement which they and the whole church have sustained in the demise of the Rev. Thomas Houston D.D.'[203]

Thomas Houston was indeed the very definition of a Covenanter. He was passionately committed to the distinctive principles of the denomination. He was often at the forefront of debates in the Synod, even if occasionally he did not get his own way. He was the key figure in the denomination's establishment of a periodical and Theological Hall, and their renewal of the covenants and missionary endeavours. His position as editor of the denomination's magazine for thirty-five years gave him further opportunity to shape the beliefs of the ministers and members of the denomination. At the same time Houston was also a broad-minded and catholic individual. He played a formative and leading role in many of the great evangelical societies of the day. In this he shared the respectable, temperate emphases of evangelicalism within mainstream Presbyterianism. No Covenanter of his century 'preached with more fervid earnestness the unsearchable riches of Christ' or 'had a more intense zeal for the cause of Missions.'[204] Houston had a keen interest in the history of the Scottish Covenanters, as can be seen by his writings, but so did the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. The major obstacle to any institutional unity, however, was the Reformed Presbyterian application of the doctrine of the headship of Christ. For Houston and other Covenanters this meant maintaining a 'distinctive testimony in reference to fundamental evils in the British Constitution' and continuing adherence to the Covenants of the seventeenth-century.[205] Houston saw the covenants not as a barrier to unity but as 'the best and most approved means of union throughout the Churches.'[206]

The life and writings of Thomas Houston show that Reformed Presbyterians in the nineteenth-century were not just an ultra-conservative group with no interest in or influence over the wider evangelical scene. Houston became fully involved in every cause he saw as worthwhile, with evangelicals from various denominational backgrounds, as long as it did not mean lowering his Covenanting convictions. His influence was felt far beyond the small groupings of Covenanters in Ireland, Scotland or even America. *The Covenanter* had reason to declare that 'the memory of Dr. Houston will long be cherished beyond the limits of the Reformed Presbyterian Church.'[207] As he wrote in the introduction to his *Works*, four years before his death, 'the author...would ever unfeignedly rejoice that, while the points on which evangelical Christians differ are not immaterial, those on which they are agreed are numerous and fundamental.' In the belief that these divisions would soon be healed, undoubtedly through the Covenants, he could subscribe 'towards brethren of the household of faith, of whatever name, the fervent aspiration of

his heart, "Grace be with all of them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity."'[208]

Notes

1. 'The late Rev. Thomas Houston, D.D.' in *The Covenanter*, xv (1882), p.142.
2. Andrew R. Holmes, *The shaping of Ulster Presbyterian belief and practice: 1770-1840* (Oxford, 2006), p.59.
3. James Seaton Reid, *The history of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland*, ed. W. D. Killen (3 vols, 2nd edn, Belfast, 1867), iii, 422.
4. Andrew R. Holmes, *Shaping*, pp.4-5; Adam Loughridge, *The Covenanters in Ireland* (Belfast, 1984), p.51.
5. Edward Donnelly, 'Thomas Houston of Knockbracken', *Bulletin of the Presbyterian Historical Society of Ireland*, xxxiii (2009), pp.62-71.
6. Josias A. Chancellor, *Jehoiada's memorial among the kings: a sermon on the death of the Rev. Thomas Houston, D.D.* (Belfast, 1882), p.21.
7. Journal, 8 Apr. 1830.
8. Journal, 8 Apr. 1828.
9. Thomas Houston, 'The Covenanter – a retrospect', *The Covenanter*, ix (1865), p.362.
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GOD'S FREE GIFT OF RIGHTEOUSNESS: ROMANS 3:19-26

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We all know the difference between disobeying parents and disobeying the law. If a child disobeys his parents, he will be forgiven when he confesses his sin. He may be disciplined, but he continues to enjoy his privileges as a child; he is not condemned. But if a child disobeys the law and is found guilty, he must be punished; he must pay the consequences of his disobedience. Justice must be satisfied.

The paradigm of the disobedient child and the law-breaker demonstrates the two ways men and women look at their relationship with God. There are those who apply the family paradigm to God; they think that God is a loving father, who accepts all men as they are.

But the Bible teaches that God is a just judge who says that the soul that sins must die (Ezekiel 18:4) and that after death comes judgment: "It is appointed for men to die once and after this comes the judgment" (Hebrews 9:27). In other words, before one can have God as father, his justice as judge must be satisfied. Because of this truth, one of the most important questions for a person to answer is, "How can I be right with God?" Some suppress their conscience when it testifies of judgment and prompts this question by denying the existence of God; while others labour to convince themselves that there is no existence after death. Both of these attempts go against the grain of the testimony of the conscience, which is like dragging fingernails across a chalkboard, because we possess immortal souls. Our whole being testifies that there is something more than this present life and thus the persistent question, "What do I do about the life to come?" or "How can I be righteous before a holy God?"

Even though a few suppress the question, the greater number answers it incorrectly. Some say, "As long as I sincerely seek God, whoever he might be, then I know that all is well." Others say, "If I do good to my neighbour or if my good deeds outweigh my bad deeds, all is well between God and me." Still others say, "I am trusting in my church and the sacraments to make me acceptable to God." Paul, however, gives the correct answer in Romans 3:19-26:

> Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, that every mouth may be closed, and all the world may become accountable to God; because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin. But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifest, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God he passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

The Letter to the Romans is Paul's treatise on the gospel. He summarizes the gospel in 1:16, 17, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'But the righteous man shall live by faith.'" In verse 18 he introduces the section that demonstrates the need of the gospel, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness." He develops this theme by indicting both Jew and Gentile as guilty sinners under God's condemnation. He summarizes his indictment in 3:9-18, quoting a number of Old Testament passages to seal the verdict that all are guilty. None of us can deny his guilt before God. Each person's conscience consents to the verdict. This verdict brings us to the most important question we can ask, how can anyone be right with God? Is there any hope for the sinner? Paul answers this question in our text: we may be right through the free act of justification.

Paul teaches in Romans 3:19-26 that a sinner may be right with God through the gift of righteousness purchased by Christ and received by faith alone. I will open up these verses under three headings: the gift of God's righteousness; the reception of the gift of God's righteousness; and the basis of the gift of righteousness.

The Gift of God's Righteousness

First then, Paul discusses the gift of God's righteousness. He writes,

> Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, that every mouth may be closed, and all the world may become accountable to God; because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin. But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifest, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets (v.19-22).

By the term righteousness, Paul is dealing with how a sinner is to be right with God; how we who are alienated can be brought back into a proper relationship with God. In verse 21, Paul begins to formulate his answer with a contrast, "But now apart from the law." The contrast takes us back to verses 19, 20. In these verses, Paul is discussing what this righteousness is not. It is not something that can be accomplished by any human effort. "Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, that every mouth may be closed." The law is God's perfect standard of obedience. Paul says the demands of the law are designed to leave us without excuse; the law teaches us that we are sinners who have fallen short of God's righteous standard and thus are under his wrath and condemnation. God in his first covenant with Adam laid down the principle that one received eternal life through perfect obedience and if one disobeyed, he would be under God's wrath and punishment. Adam disobeyed the law, plunging all his descendants into the morass of guilt and corruption. But Adam's disobedience did not nullify the condition for eternal life; namely, perfect obedience. The demands of the law hold this condition before us; we all are under the demands of God's law. But we cannot meet those demands; hence, the law exposes our guilt and leaves us without excuse, "that every mouth may be closed, and all the world may become accountable to God."

Because of this indictment of those under the law, Paul teaches us that "by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin." The term justified is very important. Here is the first time Paul uses it in the Book of Romans. It is a legal term, meaning not guilty; it is the opposite of condemn as we see in Deuteronomy 25:1, "If there is a dispute between men and they go to court, and the judges decide their case, and they justify the righteous and condemn the wicked..." It means more than to pardon; it means that the person is not guilty. We use it personally when we say to someone in an argument "all you are trying to do is to justify yourself." We mean that they are arguing to prove that they are not at fault. It is another way of speaking of being right with God or being righteous.

Paul quotes Psalm 143:2, "For in thy sight no man living is righteous" (see also Job 4:17; 19:2). Paul uses the term "flesh" to emphasize that he speaks of sinful men and women. This truth is obvious for two reasons: none can obey perfectly (Galatians 3:10; James 2:10) and obedience cannot satisfy for disobedience. It would be like someone arrested for drunk driving saying to the judge: "Your honour, since I have received no speeding tickets, please do not find me guilty of drunk driving."

By his reference to the law, Paul is referring to God's moral standard as found in the Ten Commandments, for he says, "for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin." Obviously he is speaking of more than ceremonial law because it is the revelation of the law that demonstrates our guilt; through law

comes knowledge of sin. This is the first purpose of the law. Such was Paul's experience; he thought he was righteous until the law began to do its work and he was convicted of covetousness (Philippians 3:6; Romans 7:7, 8).

If you are not trusting in Jesus Christ for salvation, the law has but one purpose in your life and that is to show you your sin. The law exposes your sin and your conscience bears witness with it that you are under God's condemnation as a lawbreaker. No flesh can be justified by law keeping.

If one cannot be justified by law keeping, how can one be right with God? Notice the contrast in v. 21, "But now apart from law." Paul states that there is a way to be righteous before a holy God, which is not by law keeping and human effort. It is by a righteousness of God that has been manifested. The word "manifested" means "revealed"; by this phrase, Paul is referring to what he said in Romans 1:17 "For in [the gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed."

In other words, the revelation of righteousness is the great message of the gospel. The gospel is good news; good news to those who know they are under God's condemnation; good news because it declares that God has provided a righteousness. Paul says in verse 24 that this righteousness is a gift of God's grace. Notice the emphasis on the gratuitous nature of the gift. The righteousness of God is a righteousness planned, purchased, and accepted by God; a righteousness freely bestowed upon sinners.

When Paul says, however, there is a righteousness apart from the law; he does not want us to think that the law of Scripture had some other way of salvation. In the Greek, the term "law" does not have the definite article. Paul is not talking about the law as part of Scripture, but a system of trying to earn salvation by the law.

The Bible's message of salvation is unified. There was not another way of salvation in the Old Testament. Paul makes this clear when he writes, "being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets." Paul uses the phrase "law and prophets" to refer to the Old Testament. Sometimes the Bible uses the phrase "law, writings, and prophets."

Although the gospel message of the gift of righteousness is most fully revealed in the New Testament, it is the Bible's one message of salvation. Paul demonstrates the principle by confirming his doctrine of the gift of righteousness from the Old Testament Scriptures: he quotes the law, Genesis 15:6; the writings, Psalm 32:1, 2; and the prophets, Habakkuk 2:4.

This gift of righteousness is justification. We already have seen that justification is primarily a legal term, referring to innocence before the law. God's gift of righteousness is the free act of justification by which he not only pardons all our sins, but also constitutes us as righteous in his sight, by imputing to us Christ's righteousness. We find a succinct statement of this truth in the Westminster Shorter Catechism Q33, "Justification is an act of God's free

grace, wherein he pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone."

The Reception of the Gift of God's Righteousness

How then does one receive this gift? The second thing we learn from this text is the reception of this gift of righteousness. Paul answers this question in verses 22, 23:

> even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

We use the short-hand phrase "justified by faith alone", meaning that faith is the sole instrument by which we receive justification. What does Paul mean by faith? And why has God appointed faith as the instrument of receiving justification? Because faith is not something we do; it is the means of receiving the gift; it is the hand the stretches out to receive what God offers. God designed salvation to be obtained in this way to demonstrate that we contribute nothing to our acceptance with God; no work, no self-righteousness. When someone offers you a gift and you extend your hand to receive it, you have not demonstrated yourself worthy of the gift or done anything to merit it.

Moreover, the Bible makes it clear that faith itself is a gift: Ephesians 2:8, 9 "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast." The Greek grammar makes it clear that not only salvation is a gift, but faith also is a gift.

Imagine a beggar on the corner of the street; a man of unfortunate circumstances, who has nothing. A wealthy gentleman stops and says to him, "My friend, if you will give me a pound, I will give you a hundred thousand pounds." The beggar says, "Go away, quit mocking me." Whey did he respond in this manner? Because he did not have a pound; he did not even have 50 pence. But then the benefactor reached into his pocket and gave him the pound.

God says believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved, but you know in your heart that you are unable to believe; by nature you hate God. God says that is right you cannot believe and then gives you the gift of faith.

The text also teaches us about the nature of faith. Many parrot the gospel message, "only believe." They teach that faith is some formless, ambiguous act, like closing your eyes and jumping off a cliff. Others teach that faith itself is what constitutes us as righteous. Paul teaches that faith is shaped by Scripture and has three parts: cognition, acceptance of truth, and trust. First, faith demands content; it must have an object. Paul is clear about the object of

faith; he says it is faith in Jesus Christ. In other words, one must understand who Jesus Christ is in order to believe. By the titles "Jesus" and "Christ" Paul communicates a great deal about the one who is the object of faith. He is Jesus; namely, Jehovah who saves, Emmanuel. By this name, Paul teaches that the Saviour is God incarnate. He is the Christ, which indicates that he is God's anointed prophet, priest, and king, who in the exercise of these three offices has and is doing everything necessary to accomplish our salvation. In other words, faith needs to know about the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Faith also needs to understand what the righteousness of God is. Luther's great problem was a misunderstanding about God's righteousness. He hated God's righteousness, because he thought he was condemned by it. Only when he came to understand that it was a free gift of righteousness did he trust in God for salvation. So faith must have knowledge, cognition. It may never be divorced from facts of Scripture; faith must be informed.

Moreover, true faith must assent to the truth of the facts. You must believe not only that the Bible teaches that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who died to save sinners, but you must also assent to the truth of that statement, as well as the truth of what the Bible says about you and your lost condition. You also must believe as true that God will receive all sinners who come to him through Jesus Christ.

But there is one more aspect to saving faith. Some of you know the facts of the Bible and confuse belief of the truth of the Bible with saving faith. You might know and believe a great deal of biblical doctrine; you might have memorized the catechism and on the basis of your knowledge assume you are saved. But historical faith, although necessary, does not save. Saving faith has the third aspect of trust. Notice the preposition, faith **in** Jesus Christ. Saving faith is an act of trust, of resting in Christ. You throw yourself with abandon on Christ the way a tired man throws himself into his bed. This trust is the acting of faith that receives God's righteousness.

Paul also writes of the exclusiveness of faith. Roman Catholic critics say that the words "faith alone" are not found in the Scripture. True, the phrase is not in the Bible, but Paul clearly teaches the concept: "for there is no distinction, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (v. 22b, 23). When Paul says there is no distinction, he is referring to Jew and Gentile and to the outwardly righteous and the morally corrupt. He confirms that statement in verses 28-30, "For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law. Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since indeed God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith is one."

He proves his point in verse 23, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." The first word "sinned" is in the past tense. Here Paul points out that we all sinned in father Adam and are born dead in sins and trespasses.

under the wrath of God. The second verb, "fall short", is in the present tense; daily we are falling short of the perfect standard of God's righteousness by our sins of transgression and omissions. In other words, because of our condition and our daily actions, we must come to God by faith and by faith alone.

There is only one way to God. There is only one way for covenant youth; family or church membership cannot save you. There is only one way for the moralist, who is outwardly blameless in his life; by nature you are a sinner and daily you fall short of God's glory. But there is no other way for a wicked, gross sinner. You cannot prepare yourself to receive Christ; neither should you fear that you are too sinful to come to Christ. Your sin is your qualification. If you recognize your lost condition, flee to Christ Jesus, and God will receive you.

The Basis of the Gift of Righteousness

But a gift, although it costs the recipient nothing may be very expensive. Paul now, in the third place, discusses the basis of the free gift:

> being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God he passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus (verses 24-26).

Many think all God had to do to forgive sin was to snap his fingers and say you are forgiven. But if God did so he would cease to be God. He is holy; he has said that the soul that sins must die. In Proverbs, he says, "He who justifies the wicked, and he who condemns the righteous, both of them alike are an abomination to the Lord" (Proverbs 17:15). How can God justify the ungodly and maintain his justice? We get upset with liberal judges who let criminals go free. How much worse would it be for God to let guilty sinners go free? God in his wisdom justifies sinners in a way that vindicates his justice; he paid the penalty for us.

In verse 24, Paul writes that justification is "a gift of His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus." The price of justification was paid by Jesus Christ. The term "redemption" refers to that which is paid as a ransom. If someone is redeemed, a ransom price is paid. For example, shipping companies pay Somalian pirates a ransom to free their crew and cargo.

The concept of redemption is used in a twofold way in the Old Testament: to deliver from guilt and punishment of transgression (Ex. 21:29-32) and to restore a lost inheritance (Leviticus 25:24, 25). Christ, as our Redeemer, paid the price (his perfect obedience, death, and resurrection) to deliver us from the

guilt and bondage of sin and to restore us to God's family. He offered himself to God as the ransom.

Paul expands on the price of this redemption in v. 25, "whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith." Christ publicly satisfied God's wrath by the shedding of his blood on the cross of Calvary. The term "propitiation" means to turn away wrath. While Christ hung on Calvary's cross, God imputed the guilt of the sins of his people to Christ and punished him for the guilt of sin. Propitiation means that Christ became a wrath-bearer that he might be a wrath-deflector. This Jesus Christ who is God in the flesh, who obeyed the law of God perfectly, offered his perfect soul and body as a sacrifice to atone for the sins of his people. In this public event, he satisfied the justice of God. God punished him on the cross; he paid the price of eternal condemnation as he cried out, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" He bore the wrath of God; he drank the cup to its dregs; he satisfied the justice of God.

Hence the consequence:

> This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God he passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Paul uses the term righteousness here to refer to God's holiness and integrity; his justice. Christ's propitiation vindicated the righteousness of God in two ways. First, it was the basis of God's forbearance in the Old Covenant. Some take this phrase to refer to God's pardoning his Old Covenant people by the sacrificial system, and surely God bore long with them on the basis of what Christ would accomplish. But also God bore long with all sinners since the Flood. He promised never again to destroy the whole human race in that manner. He could do so because one day he would deal with sin in a way that would far surpass what he did in the Flood. He has born long with you and me. He is bearing long with some of you now as you refuse to repent.

Second, God demonstrates his righteousness presently, by maintaining his justice as he justifies those who believe in Jesus. All those whom God justifies have been redeemed by Christ; hence, God's justice has been satisfied.

Hence, the basis or ground of our justification is the completed work of the Lord Jesus Christ. So there is a way to be right with God. Paul teaches in Romans 3:19-26 that a sinner may be right with God through the gift of righteousness purchased by Christ and received by faith alone. We have seen the nature of the gift, the manner in which we receive it, and its grounds.

How we should marvel at the wisdom and love of God that from eternity planned so great a salvation. All things, even the fall, lead up to this great free justification of sinners. In this act of God's grace, we see the beauty and glory

of our God. We should marvel, like the angels in Revelation 5:12, as they considered the redeeming work of Jesus Christ, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing."

But I also remind you that this act of God's grace is at the very centre and heart of our gospel message. It is our privilege as the Church to proclaim this message of free justification. It is a magnificent message; no man could have invented such a message; there is nothing more powerful to save sinners than this glorious message. Let us keep it at the centre of our evangelism; keep it the heart of our preaching. Let us resolve with Paul to know nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified (1 Corinthians 2:2).

OUR GLORIOUS ADOPTION

Trinitarian Based and Transformed Relationships

Joel R. Beeke

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Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure. (1 John 3:1–3).[1]

The Triune God delights in family planning. Unlike most modern human family planning, which is restrictive and limiting, God's plans for his family are expansive and enlarging. Spiritual adoption - the wonderful teaching that every genuine Christian is an adopted child into God's family - is a foundational and vital factor that God uses to fulfil his family planning.

The glorious doctrine of spiritual adoption is addressed in several places in the New Testament. Romans 8:14–16 and Galatians 4:4–6 will be the most familiar to us, but adoption is also a frequent theme in 1 John. Particularly in 1 John 3:1–3, the apostle John lays before us the central and major New Testament themes of the fatherhood of God and the corresponding sonship of the believer. We don't have to read far in the New Testament before we realize that this is of critical importance for the entirety of the Christian life. Where there is some degree of spiritual maturity, some realization of our sonship to the heavenly Father, this Father - son relationship will undergird our prayer, indeed, control our entire outlook on life. Much of what Christ taught us can be summarized in the precious doctrine of the fatherhood of God. The revelation of the fatherhood of God to the believer is in a sense the climax of the Scriptures and one of the greatest benefits of salvation.

In this article, I aim to first, show the wonder of our glorious adoption; second, expound its Trinitarian foundation; third, and most extensively, consider particularly in the context of 1 John 3 how a right appropriation of this doctrine will transform all our relationships in life; and finally, conclude with

adoption's blessings and responsibilities.

The Wonder of Adoption

John begins the third chapter of 1 John with a call for believers to drop everything and consider the great doctrine of adoption. "Behold!" is John's opening cry; "Look at this!" The apostle is so overwhelmed with the wonder of God's adoption of believers that he is determined to direct everyone's attention there. He asks us to gaze with him upon this wonder: "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the sons of God!" (v.1). It is as if John asks, do you know the wonder of this precious truth? Have you, by faith, comprehended this magnificent doctrine of adoption?

John's sense of astonishment is more evident in the original Greek, which implies, "Behold, from what country or realm does such love as this come?" Matthew 8:27 uses similar phraseology to describe how astonished the disciples were when Jesus calmed the winds and the sea: "What manner of man is this (literally, 'from what realm does this man come') that even the winds and sea obey him!"

God's adoption of believers is something unparalleled in this world, John is saying. This fatherly love has come upon us from another realm. The world does not understand such love, for it has never seen anything like it. It is beyond the realm of human experience.

John is astonished because God showed such amazing love even though we were outcasts, rebels, and enemies against him and his kingdom. God "calls" us sons of God; that is, he brings us into his family, giving us the name, the privileges, and all the blessings of his own children. He invites us to know him as Father and to dwell under his protection and care, and to come to him with all our cares and needs. John is overwhelmed at the thought of being a full member of God's family.

Have you ever considered what a stupendous wonder adoption is? Wilhelmus à Brakel put it this way:

> From being a child of the devil to becoming a child of God, from being a child of wrath to becoming the object of God's favour, from a child of condemnation to becoming an heir of all the promises and a possessor of all blessings, and to be exalted from the greatest misery to the highest felicity - this is something which exceeds all comprehension and all adoration.[2]

Do you stand in awe at this wonderful love of the Father? Holy wonder and amazement is an important part of Christian experience. One of the devil's tactics is to dull our sense of wonder, convincing us that we only feel such wonder in the initial stages of becoming a Christian. It is true that the sinner

experiences a special sense of joy and wonder when he first comes to know Christ. We often refer to that time as one's "first love."

But John is writing here as an elderly man who has been a believer for more than sixty years. Yet his heart is still filled with amazement at being a son of God. He has never gotten over his initial sense of wonder at God's fatherly love. He is still asking the question: "From what realm does this amazing love come that has broken in upon my soul and made me a child of God?"

Has the wonder of your salvation and adoption in Christ Jesus grasped your soul? Do you, too, cry out in amazement:

And can it be that I should gain
An interest in the Saviour's blood?
Died He for me, who caused His pain –
For me, who Him to death pursued?
Amazing love! How can it be,
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

The psalters, hymns, and poems of our forefathers, especially in seasons of revival, were often filled with this glorious sense of wonder. Such wonder is the heart's response to the saving truths of the gospel. It is evoked in us through the Spirit's sanctifying grace as we meditate upon and embrace the glorious truths of sovereign grace (Psalm 104:34). Often God's people experience too little wonder and awe over the gospel because their lives are so rushed that they do not stop long enough to wait upon the Spirit as they meditate on the glorious truths of the gospel.

We must meditate on Scripture and all that accrues to us in Christ Jesus - including our adoption - if we would have our hearts burn within us. That is what the pilgrims on the way to Emmaus said to each other after Christ had opened Scripture to them. "Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?" (Luke 24:32) they asked in astonishment.

The way to a burning heart is through diligent meditation upon the Word of God. Scripture is the primary means of grace that God blesses by his Spirit. Is it any wonder that some believers have lost their sense of wonder and amazement over the gospel when they so seldom study the Bible prayerfully and meditatively?

The Trinitarian Foundation of Adoption

Believers are not sons of God by nature because we have lost the status and privileges of sonship in our tragic fall in Paradise. Adoption is only made

possible when God's gracious choice calls us into all the privileges and blessings of being his children. When we are born again, God delivers us from Satan's slavery, and by his astounding grace, transfers us to the Father's sonship. He calls us sons; we are adopted into his family.

Adoption in the time of John usually took place in adolescence or adulthood, not infancy. Under Roman law, adoption was a legal act by which a man chose someone outside of the family to be an heir to his inheritance. Likewise, believers become children of God through the gracious act of God the Father, who chooses them to be his heirs.

Sometimes adoptive parents announce receiving their son with words, "chosen son." God the Father, dear believer, set his heart upon you while you were a stranger and rebel, no member of his family. He called you, drew you to himself, brought you into his family, constituted you to be his child, and now reserves for you the eternal inheritance of the kingdom of God.

The story is told of a king who finds a poor man's child, takes him out of the gutter, and makes him a prince in the royal household with all its status and privilege. This gospel story is not fiction, however, for like that king, the Almighty God and Father has set his heart upon you, raised you up out of a horrible pit (Psalm 40:2), brought you into his home, and given to you all the privileges and blessings of being his child.

"Beloved, now are we the sons of God," says John in verse 2. This is not merely legal language. We believers are, indeed, God's chosen ones, as Ephesians 1:5–7 says. How astonishing that we as God's adopted children share the same privileges that belong to God's only-begotten Son! Have you grasped the incredible truth of what Christ prays in John 17: "The love with which thou hast loved me, thou hast loved them"? This love is the essence of God's fatherhood. It shows us how far God is willing to go to adopt us into his family.

Now we become children of God, i.e., God becomes our Father, by substitution or as John calls it, propitiation: "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10; cf. 1 John 2:2). Propitiation may seem like a strange term to us, but it is a vital term, for it contains the heart of the gospel.

Let me explain. We are not sons and daughters of God by nature. Many live under this false idea. They think that everyone is a child of God, coming from the same Father. It is true, of course, that we are all creatures of the one Creator, but the Bible nowhere tells us that we are all children of God by nature. Rather, it tells us that by nature we are children of wrath. We are the objects of God's wrath, anger, and judgment by nature. As Thomas Watson writes,

> We have enough in us to move God to correct us, but nothing to move him to adopt us, therefore exalt free grace, begin the work of angels here; bless him with your praises who hath blessed you in making you his sons and daughters.[3]

God has only one Son by nature and that Son is the Lord Jesus Christ. Now God's amazing love to sinners lies in the way he makes children of wrath to become the sons of his love. His only begotten Son is the Son of his love. The Father loves the Son, but in the astonishing substitution that God made in the atoning sacrifice of Christ, the wrath of God which was directed to us, was now poured upon is only begotten Son who thereby became the propitiation for our sins. The way by which we who were sons of wrath became the sons of love, is that the Son of God's love and the Child of his glory became the Bearer of his wrath on the cross. All the judgment of God was poured out on him in order that we, dear believers, might be made the children of God and sons of his love.

This is the astonishing biblical doctrine of substitution. Jesus Christ who deserved eternal heaven, bore my eternal hell as an ungodly sinner (but now by grace a believer), so that the gates of hell may be eternally closed for me and the gates of heaven be eternally thrown open. Oh, what a price Christ had to pay to accomplish this task! He had to hang in the naked flame of his Father's wrath and be cast into outer darkness, crying out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" - all so that God could take us, for Christ's sake, who are by nature estranged and rebellious sinners, and bring us into the family of God and constitute us as his children.

This is the only way to become a child of God - only through Christ being the propitiation, the sacrifice, the substitute, the atonement of God, for our sins. Only for Christ's sake does God become the Father of his people. What country does this love come from - a love that would cause the holy God of all eternity to make this transaction on behalf of poor, hopeless, hell-worthy sinners - like we are?

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us that we should be called children of God - we who deserve his judgment, dethroned him from our lives, spurned his love, and defied his laws. We can never earn God's love, yet he graciously lavishes love upon us in Christ. Here, surely, is the great assurance of the child of God, that he was not chosen for any good in him but that God the Father loved him when he was bound for hell. God loved the sinner who had no thought of God in his heart, and God adopted him to be his. Oh, what wonder is the assurance of the Father's words: "I have loved thee with an everlasting love." (Jeremiah 31:3)!

All the members of the Trinity are involved in our adoption. Adoption is the gracious act of God the Father whereby he chooses us, calls us to himself, and gives us the privileges and blessings of being his children. God the Son earned those blessings for us through his propitiatory death and sacrifice, by which we become children of God (1 John 4:10). And the Holy Spirit changes us from children of wrath, which we are by nature, into children of God by means of regeneration or the new birth.

John refers to this new birth in 1 John 2:29, explaining the relationship between regeneration and adoption. If in adoption we would only receive the privilege and status of being God's children, something would still be missing. The adopted child retains the nature of his natural parents, not the nature of the adoptive parents. God, in his amazing grace, not only gives us the status and privileges of being his children by adoption, but he also gives us the nature of God, which abides within us by Spirit-worked regeneration. The Holy Spirit implants God's nature within us. As 1 John 3:9 says, "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin (i.e., no one born of God goes on committing sin); for his seed remaineth in him (i.e., for God's nature abides in him)."

Are you a child of God? Do you know what it means to have a new nature that cries out for the living God and lives under his fatherly love, fellowship, and protection? Have you been transferred from Satan's slavery to the Father's sonship by God's astounding grace?

Transformed Relationships Resulting from Adoption

Adoption brings blessings into every part of a believer's life. It affects his relationships to God, to the world, to his future, to himself, and to brothers and sisters in God's family. The biblical doctrine of adoption is central to a proper understanding of every major area of the Christian's life. All relationships are put into proper context only when believers grasp what God has done in adopting them as his children.

Christ himself is the best proof of this truth. Jesus' consciousness of his unique sonship with the Father controlled all of Christ's living and thinking. As Jesus says in John 5:30, "I seek not mine own will, but the will of my Father which hath sent me," and in John 10:30, "I and my Father are one." "If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not," Jesus says in John 10:37, and "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you" (John 20:21). More than thirty times in the Gospel of John Jesus speaks of "my Father."

Though the relationship of God the Father and God the Son is an obvious truth in the Gospels, what is not so obvious is how Jesus urges his disciples to let their thoughts and lives be controlled by the conviction that God is now their Father and they are his children. Jesus repeatedly urges kinship with the Father as the foundation of Christian discipleship. He tells his disciples that they are to be examples of trusting their Father, asking them, "Why are you anxious about what you should eat or drink or about your future - your Father knows that you have need of all these things." Because their whole lives must be directed to do their Father's glory and obey his will, Jesus teaches his disciples to pray: "Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed by Thy Name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." The child of God is to live his whole life in relation to his Father, remembering that the Father

has promised each child his kingdom.

Practically speaking, the significance of adoption has great implications. It transforms the following:

Our relationship to God

When the gospel breaks in upon us, we are led by the Spirit to discover the amazing truth that God is our Father in Christ Jesus. The heartbeat of daily Christian experience is to live in fellowship with the Father and the Son. A true Christian lives under God's fatherly love, wisdom, care, guidance, and discipline.

People are hungry for security today. They look for it in all kinds of places, but they often go about it the wrong way. The only place in the universe where true security can to be found is in the household of the heavenly Father, who is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. There is no security outside of fellowship with God the Father through the Lord Jesus Christ.

So many people are discovering that the things that once gave them security are now falling apart. They are facing failure in business, jobs, or relationships with family members and friends. They are beset with financial insolvency, terrorism, and war. So much in life is uncertain; so much is crumbling away. The most powerful company on earth may fold in the next recession. We learn that nothing in life is secure except God. He alone does not change (Malachi 3:6).

Are you looking for security in the fatherhood of God? Are you daily being led deeper into his faithfulness as your Father? Jesus taught his disciples this truth in many ways . For example, he urged his followers to think about God's fatherly love by comparing it to the love of a human father. He said in Matthew 7:11, "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?"

The comparison is between the fatherhood of earthly fathers, who are evil (i.e., they have fallen natures and show flaws and failures and sins) and the fatherhood of God, who is steadfast in love that never falters or changes, even when we sin. God's fatherhood is flawless. I will show you a love, says Jesus, which is expansive and glorious beyond imagination. It is the love of your Father in heaven.

I don't know what your experience of human fatherhood has been. Some of us have had little relationship with our earthly fathers; some have had good experiences, and others have had disappointing, even bitter, experiences. Everything that fails in human fatherhood is corrected in God's fatherhood. Everything good we experience in human fatherhood is a mere shadow of the full and perfect fatherhood of God.

If you are a father, you know how your heart sometimes aches and cries

out for your children in love. Imagine multiplying that love by infinity. Then realize how even that falls short of the love of God for his people. Do you succumb to the embrace of your heavenly Father? Oh that you would allow yourself to partake of his unspeakable fatherly love!

To increase His people's appreciation for God's fatherhood, Jesus urges his people to think of his own relationship to God the Father. We need to ponder the wonder of this especially in the context of daily afflictions, remembering that Jesus felt his Father's love in the afflictions he underwent. When you are under God's discipline and he is permitting trials to fall upon you, remember that these difficulties are evidence of your Father's love (Hebrews 12:5–11). God has a plan, a purpose, a vision for his people as a loving Father that embraces every affliction and heartache.

As parents, we dream of what our children might become when they grow up. Likewise, God also has a vision for his children. He knows precisely what he wants them to be. He knows how he will mould and train them according to his plan, and inevitably, that involves discipline because God will not permit his believers to be less than what e intends them to be. He uses his fatherly discipline for their welfare (Lamentations 3:31–33). If we are born again believers, we must ask for wisdom to see everything in our life as a blessing from God our Father, who adopts us as his own.

Our relationship to the world

The believer's adoption by God the Father also affects his relationship to the world. First John 3:1b tells us that this relationship is a troubled one: "Therefore the world knoweth us not, because it On the one hand, the believer shares with Jesus the unspeakable love of the Father, but on the other hand, he shares with Jesus the hostility, estrangement, and even hatred of the world. The reason the world does not know the children of God is because it does not know Jesus.

The world is baffled by what happens to God's people for it cannot understand why they love what they love, and hate what they hate. This reaction of the world is evidence of the believer's adoption into God's family, for the world did not know Jesus either; he came unto his own and his own received him not. He was in the world, which was created by him, but the world knew him not. The world did not recognize him as the Son of God. Ultimately, it crucified him.

When a sinner is born again and brought into God's family, he comes to know the great blessings of deliverance in Christ. But the believer also discovers that worldly people no longer understand him. For example, when God converted me at age fourteen, I had to break some of my closest friendships to remain faithful to God. One friend was puzzled. "I thought I knew you, but I do not know what has happened to you," he said. "I cannot

understand you. Suddenly we are living in two different worlds."

Believers and unbelievers live in different worlds, in different kingdoms, in different families. That cannot help but bring consequences. But adoption into God's family means that we must be willing for Christ's sake to walk in the world even if we are misunderstood, unwanted, despised, even hated, all the while giving no unnecessary offence to the world.

Our relationship to the future

John goes on to say, "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2). The prospects for God's adopted family are great, for his children will receive a glorious inheritance. They cannot even imagine the extent of that inheritance.

Here in this world, we are God's children, even though the world does not understand us. But we have something much greater in store for us - the infinite glory that God the Father is laying up for us in Christ Jesus. God's child is like a poor peasant who has been taken out of the mire and raised to the position of prince of the realm. The adopted prince lives in the palace, has free access to the king, and enjoys the king's favour, love, and protection. The prince tells the king he cannot comprehend the greatness of the king's love. It is unspeakably great to him. The king responds: "You have not begun to see the extent of it. Your inheritance is still coming to you."

If our present privileges as God's adopted children are so great that the world cannot grasp them, our future prospects are so glorious that even we cannot grasp them. As 1 Corinthians 2:9 says, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." Because God is our Father and we are his adopted children, we have a full inheritance awaiting us. The best is yet to be. Today we experience great blessings, despite our infirmities and sins, but one day we shall be in glory, free from sin and in perfect communion with God. Our heavenly Father keeps the best surprises for his children until the end, when he shall turn all their sorrow into joy.

Likewise, today we look at Christ by faith. Though what we see is shadowy and dim, we are being changed from glory to glory by the Spirit of the Lord (2 Corinthians 3:18). One day all shadows will be removed. We will see Christ as he is, in all his glory. Moreover, God is shaping us to share in the glories of our Lord Jesus Christ. As 1 John 3:2 says, "When he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." God is changing us now, but then we shall be so changed that we will fully bear his image without spot or wrinkle. Paul tells us in Romans 8 that the whole creation waits for the day when the inheritance of the children of God will be given to them. What a future!

Our relationship to ourselves

The children of the heavenly Father know his will and purpose for them. Every adopted child of God also knows that holiness is an important part of God's purpose for his happiness in God's family. As 1 John 3:3 says, "And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure."

In holiness, the child of God identifies himself with his Father's purposes. Sometimes children resent their father's purposes, but the true adopted son of God identifies with his Father's purpose for him. He does not try to find himself apart from his Father in heaven, but in his Father's will. Because seeking God's purposes for the believer's life is inseparable from the pursuit of holiness, the believer gives himself to the purpose that his Father has for him.

John tells us, "Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself" (3:3). So we are to purify ourselves daily. As Colossians 3 tells us, holiness means putting off everything that is dishonouring to our Father, who has loved us, and the Saviour, who has died to save us. It means putting on "mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, and longsuffering" (3:12). Purifying ourselves involves "the whole man," says John Cotton, including what we do with our minds, affections, will, thoughts, tongue, eyes, hands, disappointments, injuries, and enemies.[4] Purifying ourselves involves loving all that the Father loves and hating all that the Father hates. From the moment of conversion to the time we take our final breath, we have one pursuit: to purify ourselves before our Father in order to be more like Christ.

The Greek word for *purify* refers to undivided allegiance, or having one's eyes on one thing. It implies wholeness and singleness of purpose. It means having undivided motives in our living and our service, being wholly dedicated to living to glorify Jesus Christ. The way that Christians become known as sons of God is that they have a new goal for themselves, a new relationship toward themselves. By God's grace, they purify themselves even as Christ is pure.

Our relationship to the family of God

If we rightly understand that we are adopted into God's family (note the usage of the plural throughout 1 John 3:1-2), our attitude toward our brothers and sisters in the family will be affected (3:14–18). We have not been adopted to live apart from that family but to live within that network of relationships. God's purpose in adopting children is to create a family, in which God reflects his gracious purpose that will one day be fulfilled in heaven. He wants the love that exists between the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit to be extended through the love between brothers and sisters in Christ.

The communion of saints is so essential to the gospel. That is why it is so grievous when people in the church do not show love to one another. If we profess a Saviour that laid down his life for us and we are part of his family, we

ought to be willing to lay down our lives for other members of the family. We should uphold them, love them, and sacrifice for them. We should not grieve each other, wound each other, or gossip about each other. The way we behave toward other Christians proves whether or not we are adopted children of God (3:14–15).

If we show little love to other children of God, we prove that we have tasted little of God's love in our life, for those who have experienced much love from him cannot help but love others. Those who have not tasted the love of God will not love the brethren.

Concluding Privileges, Responsibilities, and Applications

What about you? Have you become a child of God through the Triune God's glorious adoption of you into his family? Do you live under God's fatherly grace of love, fellowship, and protection? Do you know experientially the amazing transition from slavery to sonship so ably expressed by a poet?

"Abba, Father," we approach Thee
In our Saviour's precious name;
We, Thy children, here assembling,
Now the promised blessing claim.

From our guilt His blood has washed us,
'Tis through Him our souls draw nigh;
And Thy Spirit too has taught us
"Abba, Father," thus to cry.

Once as prodigals we wander'd
In our folly far from Thee;
But Thy grace, o'er sin abounding,
Rescued us from misery:
Clothed in garments of salvation,
At Thy table is our place;
We rejoice, and Thou rejoicest,
In the riches of Thy grace.

Thou the prodigal hast pardon'd,
"Kiss'd us" with a Father's love;
"Kill'd the fatted calf," and call'd us
E'er to dwell with Thee above.
"It is meet," we hear Thee saying,
"We should merry be and glad;

I have found my once lost children,
Now they live who once were dead."

"Abba, Father!" we adore Thee,
While the hosts in heaven above
E'en in us now learn the wonders
Of Thy wisdom, grace, and love.
Soon before Thy throne assembled,
All Thy children shall proclaim
Abba's love as shown in Jesus,
And how full is Abba's name!

Pray that God will empower us to understand the transforming *blessings and implications* of adoption in relation to the Triune God, the world, our future, ourselves, and the family of God. Then we will understand better the greater privileges and benefits of adoption. Privileges like these:

● Our Father cuts us off from the family to which we naturally belong in Adam as children of wrath and of the devil, and ingrafts us into his own family to make us members of the covenant family of God. "Adoption translates us out of a miserable estate, into a happy estate," writes Thomas Cole. "God is in covenant with us, and we in him."[5]

● Our Father gives us freedom to call on him by his Father-name and gives us a new name, which serves as our guarantee of admission to the house of God as sons and daughters of God (Revelation 2:17; 3:12).

● Our Father gifts us with the Spirit of adoption. Believers are, by grace, partakers of the Holy Spirit. This Spirit, Jeremiah Burroughs tells us, enlightens our mind, sanctifies our heart, makes God's wisdom and will known to us, guides us to eternal life, yes, works the entire work of salvation in us and seals it to us unto the day of redemption (Ephesians 4:30).[6]

● Our Father grants us likeness to himself and his Son. The Father imparts to his children a filial heart and disposition that resemble his own. Roger Drake writes, "All God's adopted children bear their Father's image, as Gideon's brethren did his (Judges 8:18). They are like God, in holiness [and] in dignity" (Matthew 5:44-45; Romans 8:29; Hebrews 2:7; 1 John 3:2–3).[7]

● Our Father especially strengthens our faith through his gifts of promises and prayer. "If we are adopted," writes Thomas Watson, "then we have an interest in all the promises: the promises are children's bread." They

are like a garden, Watson goes on to say, in which some herb is found to cure every ailment.[8]

● Our Father corrects and chastens us for our sanctification. "He chasteneth and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth" (Hebrews 12:6). All chastisements involves discipline that comes from our Father's hand and works together for our best welfare (2 Samuel 7:14; Psalm 89:32–33; Romans 8:28, 36–37; 2 Corinthians 12:7). Our sufferings are "for our education and instruction in his family," writes John Owen.[9]

● Our Father comforts us with his love and pity, and moves us to rejoice in intimate communion with him and his Son (Romans 5:5). He does that in several ways, as Samuel Willard notes: "He applies the precious promises to their souls, he gives them cordials of comfort, communicates unto them the sips and foretastes of glory, [and] fills them with inward joys and refreshings."[10]

● Our Father offers us spiritual, Christian liberty as his sons and daughters (John 8:36). This liberty releases us from bondage (Galatians 4:7). It delivers us from the slavish subjection, the servile pedagogy, the condemning power, the intolerable yoke, and the thundering curses of the law as a covenant of works (Galatians 3:13), though not from the law's regulating power.[11]

● Our Father preserves us and keeps us from falling (Psalm 91:11–12; 1 Peter 1:5). He restores us from every backsliding way, recovering and humbling us, always preventing our hypocrisy.[12] Samuel Willard says, "God's Sons in this life are like little Children, always tripping, and stumbling, and falling, and so weak that they could never get up again but for him: but by reasons of his hand that is upon them, his everlasting Arm that is under them."[13]

● Our Father provides everything that we need as his children, both physically and spiritually (Psalm 34:10; Matthew 6:31-33), and will protect us from all harm. He will defend us from our enemies - Satan, the world, and our own flesh- and right our wronged cause. He will assist and strengthen us, always lending us a helping hand to carry us through every difficulty and temptation (2 Timothy 4:17). We may safely leave everything in his fatherly hands, knowing that he will never leave us nor forsake us (Hebrews 13:5-6).

Then, too, adoption involves *responsibilities and duties*. The Puritans taught that every privilege of adoption had a corresponding responsibility or duty, each of which transforms the way believers think and live. These may be summarized as follows:

● Show childlike reverence and love for your Father in everything. Reflect habitually upon your Father's great glory and majesty. Stand in awe of him; render him praise and thanksgiving in all things. Remember, your holy Father sees everything. Children sometimes commit dreadful acts in the absence of their parents, but your Father is never absent.

● Submit to your Father in every providence. When he visits you with the rod, don't resist or murmur. Don't immediately respond by saying, "'I am not a child of God, God is not my Father, God deals harshly with me; if he were my Father, he would have compassion on me; he would then deliver me from this grievous and especially this sinful cross' - to speak thus does not befit the nature of an upright child," writes Brakel. Rather, "it is fitting for a child to be quiet, to humbly submit, and to say, 'I will bear the indignation of the LORD, because I have sinned against him'" (Micah 7:9).[14]

● Obey and imitate your Father, and love his image-bearers. Strive to be like him, to be holy as he is holy, to be loving as he is loving. We are to be "imitators of God" (Ephesians 5:1) to show that we bear the family likeness.

● Rejoice in being in your Father's presence. Delight in communing with him. Burgess writes, "A Son delights to have letters from his Father, to have discourse about him, especially to enjoy his presence."[15] Resist every hindrance, therefore, that keeps you from relishing your Father's adopting grace.

In heaven, this joy will be full; our adoption will then be perfected (Romans 8:23). Then we will enter into the Father's "presence and palace," where we will be "everlastingly enjoying, delighting, and praising God."[16] Let us wait and long for that, as children who eagerly anticipate our full inheritance, where the Triune God shall be our all in all.[17]

Meanwhile, let us seek grace to live as children of God in the midst of this fallen world. Then we too will often confess with the apostle John, "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure" (1 John 3:1–3).

Notes

1. Portions of this article are adapted from the present author's *The Epistles of John* (Darlington, U.K.: Evangelical Press, 2006), pp.111–20, and my *Heirs with Christ: The Puritans on Adoption* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008), pp.75–102.
2. Wilhelmus à Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, trans. Bartel Elshout, ed. Joel R. Beeke (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 1999), 2:419.
3. Thomas Watson, *A Body of Practical Divinity* (London: A. Fullarton, 1845), p.160.
4. John Cotton, *An Exposition of First John* (reprint, Evansville, Ind.: Sovereign Grace Publishers, 1962), p.331.
5. Thomas Cole, *A Discourse of Christian Religion, in Sundry Points... Christ the Foundation of our Adoption, from Gal. 4. 5* (London: for Will. Marshall, 1698), p.351.
6. Jeremiah Burroughs, *The Saints' Happiness, Delivered in Divers Lectures on the Beatitudes* (reprint, Beaver Falls, Penn.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1988), p.196.
7. Roger Drake, "The Believer's Dignity and Duty Laid Open, in the High Birth wherewith he is Privileged, and the Honourable Employment to which he is Called," in *Puritan Sermons 1659–1689: Being the Morning Exercises at Cripplegate, St. Giles in the Fields, and in Southwark by Seventy-five Ministers of the Gospel in or near London* (reprint, Wheaton, Ill.: Richard Owen Roberts, 1981), 5:333.
8. Thomas Watson, *A Body of Practical Divinity*, p.160.
9. John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (reprint, London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1966), 16:257.
10. Samuel Willard, *The Child's Portion* (Boston: Samuel Green, 1684), p.22.
11. *The Complete Works of the Late Rev. Thomas Boston, Ettrick*, ed. Samuel M'Millan (reprint, Wheaton, Ill.: Richard Owen Roberts, 1980), 1:625; Cole, *Christ the Foundation of our Adoption*, pp.352–53.
12. Thomas Ridgley, *Commentary on the Larger Catechism* (reprint, Edmonton: Still Waters Revival Books, 1993), 2:136.
13. Samuel Willard, *The Child's Portion*, p.17.
14. Wilhelmus à Brakel, *Christian's Reasonable Service*, 2:437.
15. Anthony Burgess, *Spiritual Refining: or A Treatise of Grace and Assurance* (London: A Miller for Thomas Underhill, 1652), p.240.
16. Thomas Manton, *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton, D.D.* (London: James Nisbet, 1870), 12:125.
17. Roger Drake, *Puritan Sermons*, 5:342; cf. Willard, *The Child's Portion*, p.71.

BOOK REVIEWS

We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry, G. K. Beale, Apollos/IVP Academic, 2008, pbk., 341 pages, £14.99.

The question of how the O.T. interprets itself and in particular how the N.T. interprets the O.T. has engendered much controversy of late. So it is refreshing to come across a work that develops a crucial (if neglected) biblical – theological theme through the O.T. and the N.T., based on sound presuppositions (the divine inspiration of the Scriptures, their unity and perspicuity), using not only sound grammatical – historical exegesis, but a sound approach to 'intertextuality' (a popular buzz- word in current O.T. scholarship). Based on these principles Beale, who is currently Professor of N.T. at Wheaton College Graduate School, has written a fresh and tremendously stimulating biblical theology of idolatry. He argues that the heart of the scriptural understanding of idolatry is that 'we become what we worship' or 'what you revere you resemble, either for ruin or for restoration,' i.e. we take on the characteristics of what we worship.

His starting point is not Exodus 20 or 23, as we might have expected, but Isaiah 6:9 – 13 a passage he views as foundational to the above thesis, a thesis he then uses as 'a lens through which to see other key passages in a way not otherwise seen.' (p.33).

Beale's initial definition of idolatry, adapted from Luther, is helpful: an idol is 'whatever your heart clings to or relies on for ultimate security.' However, the discussion in his Introduction is a little sketchy. He does see the Second Commandment as interpreting the First, but while Calvin's insight on the regulative principle of worship (enshrined in the Shorter Catechism's statement, 'The Second Commandment forbids the worshipping of God by idols or by any way not prescribed in His Word') is mentioned, its implications could have been teased out more. After all is this not what is happening in that *locus classicus* for idolatry in Israel, the Golden Calf incident of Exodus 32?

What then of Beale's exposition of his foundational passage, Isaiah 6: 9 – 13? Verses 9 – 10 are usually interpreted as the Lord's judicial hardening of Isaiah's hearers (as mentioned by Christ in Matthew 13: 14 – 15). Beale's 'unexplored perspective' is that the reason for this is Israel's idolatry. As punishment Israel will become as lifeless, deaf and blind as their idols. Thus 'Isaiah 6: 9 -10 is a just judgment from God, not a capricious happening out of the divine blue.' (p.47; cf. p.40). Is the present reviewer convinced of this thesis? For a start we believe Beale needs to be careful in the use of the term 'capricious' to demonstrate the sovereign working of the Lord. However we think that, while we are not convinced that Beale's view should be taken as an

alternative to judicial hardening, there may well be merit in seeing it as an adjunct to it, further describing it and perhaps even explaining it – though we feel there must have been more to Israel's covenanted disobedience than idolatry.

Beale somewhat controversially goes further. Whereas the usual interpretation of the end of verse 13 is to see a remnant hope in the comparison of Israel as the remaining stump of the tree, the "holy seed" – especially in light of 11:1, where a shoot will come from that stump – Beale rejects this traditional interpretation as 'impossible,' opting rather to see the stump as 'an image of a destroyed idol' and the 'holy seed' as 'an unfaithful remnant.' He admits his interpretation is 'radical,' and indeed it is at this point too radical for the present reviewer!

Having said this, the rest of the book can be read with much profit as Beale looks at idolatry elsewhere in the O.T. (though here again we differ from him in his interpretation of the shining of Moses' face). The exegeses of Genesis 1 – 3 and Ezekiel 28 are particularly stimulating. He then comes to a fascinating assessment of the subtle idolatry at the heart of Judaism, the Exile having cured God's people of it in the narrow sense. He then has helpful chapters on the cure for idolatry as by God's grace his people come to reflect God's image. The final two chapters are very helpful as they apply his theme to issues of contemporary life and show that the author has a pastor's heart of concern for the Church of Jesus Christ.

As an example of how to do biblical theology this book is to be commended and will repay careful study.

Norris Wilson

Atheist Delusions. The Christian Revolution and Its Fashionable Enemies, David Bentley Hart, Yale University Press, 2009, pbk., 253 pages, £14.99

Many scholarly critiques of the so-called New Atheism associated with writers such as Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens have been produced in recent years, but very few have been written with the panache of David Bentley Hart. His style is vigorous and arresting, it forces the reader to sit up and take notice, yet the effect is never produced at the expense of scholarship. *Atheist Delusions* is the work of a well-informed historian and theologian whose abilities easily match and generally exceed those of his opponents. Hart has a fine gift for the telling phrase, and his grasp of language is outstanding.

The New Atheists have, among other charges, alleged that Christianity has had profoundly detrimental effects on the societies where it has become influential. Hart strongly disagrees and aims to set the record straight. He does

not try to argue that Christians have not made mistakes, some large, or that they never made acted inconsistently. Rather, as he states, 'When I come to the defense of historical Christianity, it is only in order to raise objections to certain popular calumnies of the church, or to demur from what I take to be disingenuous or inane arraignments of Christian belief or history, or to call attention to achievements and virtues that writers of a devoutly anti-Christian bent tend to ignore, dissemble or dismiss.' (p.x). His focus is on the early church – the first four or five centuries, when Christianity emerged from the culture of late antiquity. In particular he aims to explain how Christianity a great transformation 'of thought, sensibility, culture, morality, and spiritual imagination', liberating multitudes from 'fatalism, cosmic despair, and the terror of occult agencies', conferring dignity on the human person, subverting the cruellest aspects of pagan society, (partially) demystifying political power and creating moral communities where none existed before. A demanding task, but one to which Hart proves himself equal.

There is also a negative aspect to Hart's agenda – his rejection of the myth of the Enlightenment, the grand narrative which western culture has devised for itself, portraying its intellectual history as a record of the triumph of critical human reason over religious superstition and dogma. Hart will show that in fact the fruit of the Enlightenment has been barbarism, intolerance, violence, nihilism and despair. Far from being a force for good, the Enlightenment has dehumanized those it professed to exalt. His assault on the New Atheism is nothing if not head-on.

It would be impossible, and indeed superfluous in a review, to summarize the content of the book's seventeen chapters. The first section (two chapters) surveys the current attacks on Christianity and describes our general cultural context under the title 'Faith, Reason and Freedom: A View from the Present.' The second section (seven chapters) is entitled 'The Mythology of the Secular Age: Modernity's Rewriting of the Christian Past.' Hart deals with the main charges levelled against Christianity by the New Atheists, such as their claims that it was the enemy of reason, destroyed what was good in pagan culture, discouraged scientific endeavour and engaged in widespread persecution. With a thorough knowledge of the history of the early Christian centuries, Hart demolishes myth after myth in a manner that is enlightening (in the best sense) and even exhilarating.

Hart turns in the third section, 'Revolution: The Christian Invention of the Human' (six chapters), to consider how Christian principles conferred on men and women a dignity which no pagan philosophy could provide, any more than can modern atheism. The failure of Christians at times to live up to the principles which they professed is recognised – no claims to perfection are countenanced – but the social effects of Christianity are clearly shown to be nothing short of revolutionary. The final section, 'Reaction and Retreat:

Modernity and the Eclipse of the Human (two chapters), brings the story full circle with further consideration of the current western intellectual malaise and some thoughts regarding the future.

Atheist Delusions is an excellent reply to Christianity's present-day 'cultured despisers.' Hart demonstrates that there is no need for Christians to be cowed by the assaults of Dawkins and the rest. Good historical scholarship can blast their arguments to dust (although they will never be caught acknowledging it). There is room to dispute some of Hart's assertions and his own theological position favours Orthodoxy, but this is a book which should be read and digested by theologians, apologists, evangelists and indeed any Christian concerned to be a light for God's truth in what is presently a very unsympathetic culture. New Atheists would do well to read it, but they more than likely will not.

David McKay

The Elder – Today's Ministry Rooted in All of Scripture, Cornelis Van Dam, P&R Publishing (Distributed in the UK by Evangelical Press), 2009, pbk., 283 pages, £12.75

A good book on the office and duties of 'the elder' is a rare treasure and in this volume Cornelis Van Dam has provided the Christian Church with a spiritual gem. The author, as his name implies, is of Dutch extraction and has been able to draw upon the rich Dutch sources that are available on this subject. Since these sources are not as accessible to British or North American scholars this is a specific strength of the book. A further strength is the author's ability, as an Old Testament professor, to show how the office of elder in the Christian Church has its roots in the Old Testament.

The book is well organised into 5 parts, with 2 chapters in each. In a very useful introduction the reader is given an overview of the office of elder and is guided through a discussion about the appropriate age to enter the eldership. A Levite, before assuming all the responsibilities of the weighty levitical office, had to be 30 years of age. Van Dam doesn't conclude that this regulation is to be legally binding for the New Testament elder. Rather he wisely points to the qualifications listed in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 where the emphasis is on spiritual maturity.

The second part of the book explores the Old Testament origins of the eldership. In this section the reader is taken on a spiritual journey through the Old Testament, showing the office and function of the elder prior to the monarchy, during the monarchy and during and after the exile.

When we come to the section handling the office of elder in the New Testament Van Dam points out that Christ is 'the ultimate reason and source of

authority for the ecclesiastical offices.' He then demonstrates how that authority was mediated through the apostles and that it was through the apostles that a functioning eldership was established in each Christian church.

After recognising that there are essentially two roles within the eldership, teaching (the minister) and ruling, Van Dam opens up the debate as to whether there are two offices in the New Testament Christian Church or three. He informs the reader that 'the classic Presbyterian and Reformed understanding is that there are three church offices; the teaching elder or minister of the Word, the ruling elder, and the deacon.' Van Dam leans towards this position because he believes the minister of the Word, teaching elder, fulfils the function of the Old Testament levitical priest. He points, for example, to Malachi 2:7 to support such a conclusion. 'For the lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and people should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts.' Although believing that there are two offices within the eldership, Van Dam recognizes 'the underlying unity in the offices of teaching and ruling elders.' This section of the book should open up useful discussion between those who hold to a different position.

An extremely helpful section of the book handles the subject of church discipline and carefully explains the meaning of 'the keys of the kingdom' (Matthew 16:18, 19). We are instructed as to what this term meant for the apostles and then for their successors, the elders of the Christian church. Wise advice is given as to how cases of discipline are to be handled by the elders and the congregation. In a very balanced way he warns against a pharisaical legalism that can so easily creep into churches that are concerned for purity.

The final section of the book considers two subjects – 'female elders' and 'elders for life,' the former being a debating point in many Presbyterian churches world-wide. With respect to the question of female leadership Van Dam takes us through the relevant Scripture texts. He shows us how these texts have been interpreted by the advocates for woman elders. However, in a gracious and skilful manner he pinpoints the flaws in their exegesis and the weakness in their method of interpretation.

With respect to 'term eldership' we are taken back to Calvin, who in Geneva favoured elders serving for one year. That position was reflected in Scotland in the *First Book of Discipline* (1560). The influence of Andrew Melville is in evidence in the Scottish *Second Book of Discipline* (1578) where the office of elder is recognized as perpetual. All this and many more interesting facts are brought to light in this discussion.

The last chapter brings this excellent book to a fitting conclusion with a look at 'The Privilege of the Eldership.' The eldership is a privilege for those called to occupy the office and a privilege for those church members who experience the oversight of biblically qualified, wise and supportive elders.

Without hesitation this book is highly recommended. Every elder in the

church would profit from this scholarly and attractively written publication.

Robert McCollum

Illuminated Preaching : The Holy Spirit's vital role in unveiling His Word, the Bible, Jeffrey Crotts, Day One Publications, 2010, pbk., 138 pages, £7.00

In the spiritual battle to establish and maintain the Holy Spirit's crucial role in giving us the Scriptures (divine inspiration) there has been a tendency to overlook or minimize the importance of the Holy Spirit's part in casting light on the Word he has given. Jeffrey Crotts, in this excellent book, seeks to redress this imbalance and presents to his readers a biblically balanced theology of illumination.

A very important introductory chapter places the Biblical theology of illumination in its historical context. He recognized how the Reformers, Martin Luther and John Calvin, understood the reality and importance of the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit. The Puritan preachers and writers of the 17th century demonstrate in their published works how they were profoundly influenced by it. In Jonathan Edwards, he points out, 'we have an 18th century preacher and theologian who is an illustration of a man of God, whose thoughts were permeated with this doctrine.' In this historical survey it is clear that Calvin is the theologian who has been of most help and indeed a sure guide to the author. In fact he states that John Calvin is the man who stands out as a forerunner in crystallizing the theology of illumination.

The author uses 2 Corinthians 4:1-6 as his foundation text and launching pad in the development of his subject. In this passage he recognizes (verses 1 and 2) as giving us the context; verses 3 and 4 as revealing 'condemnation without illumination'; v.5 'communication for illumination', v.6a 'conversion by illumination', v 6b 'convictions through illumination.' From his careful exegesis he shows how vital the work of the Holy Spirit is in opening the eyes of those who are spiritually blind to the truth of the gospel. The four topics emerging from his study of 2 Corinthians 4:1-6 became the subject of each succeeding chapter. In handling each topic the author bases his discussion on the wider context of Scripture and in each case presents convincing biblical arguments for his conclusions.

A very helpful section which concludes each chapter is entitled 'Implications for the Preacher'. An illustration of this comes at the end of the chapter on 'Condemnation without illumination'. The author raises the question that perplexes many preachers, 'Why prepare expository sermons when most of the people who hear me will never change?' Crotts answers that query in a very balanced manner. 'Instead of thinking that, think about this: the

pressure actually disappears with the realization that life-change for the hearer is not won and lost by the preacher's performance. How well he communicates is not the determining factor as to whether or not people spiritually grasp truth. This does not mean there is a free pass to become a lazy Bible student or sloppy communicator. On the contrary, knowing that illumination is God's work frees the preacher to focus on preaching with clarity as opposed to focusing on style or relevance. Practically, this leads to great freedom in the pulpit, since the preacher's heart is focused on being faithful, handling the truth with integrity, and trusting God with the results - regardless of whether God chooses to convict or condemn, bring spiritual life or death, wound or heal. Whatever the result, the Lord gets glory (2 Cor. 2:15-16).'

This book makes a valuable contribution to the vitally important subject of both 'preaching' and 'hearing' the Word of God. Its publication is timely and it is hoped that the truths presented will impact the preachers of the 21st century to the benefit of their listeners and to the glory of God.

Robert McCollum

BOOK NOTICES

Our Secure Salvation: Preservation and Apostasy, Robert A. Peterson, P & R Publishing (Distributed in the UK by Evangelical Press), 2009, pbk., 239 pages, n.p.

This book, by the Professor of Systematic Theology at Covenant Theological Seminary in St Louis, is one in a series of which he is also the general editor. 'Explorations in Biblical Theology' is designed to provide substantial treatments of biblical themes in an accessible style. Early offerings focus on the empowering of the Holy Spirit, substitutionary atonement and the theology of 1 and 2 Samuel, Psalms and Mark. The present volume deals with the twin themes of preservation and apostasy. The Bible assures us that God keeps believers unto final salvation, while at the same time warning us of the danger of falling away from the faith. How are these topics related and what is their pastoral purpose? Dr. Peterson begins with an overview of relevant Old Testament passages, recording the dynamic interplay between God's preservation of Israel and their frequent apostasy and examining individual examples such as Jacob and David, Esau and Saul. He then turns to the New Testament, working through eighteen preservation passages in the Gospels, Paul and the General Epistles. This is followed by a similar examination of twenty-four warning texts. In a final chapter the author concludes that God's preservation of believers assures us and encourages us to give our lives to him. His preservation causes our perseverance. '"We keep on because God keeps us, and as a result our keeping on is evidence of his keeping us' (p.203). Warnings about apostasy are to help the church distinguish true believers from false, to show that God hates sin and to underscore the necessity of perseverance. Questions for study and reflection complete the book. Here is a valuable study on a complex theme. While some texts could have merited a more detailed treatment, there is much help here for ministers and thoughtful church members.

Edward Donnelly

Christian Apologetics Past and Present. A Primary Source Reader. Volume 1: to 1500, edited by William Edger and K. Scott Oliphint, Crossway, 2009, hbk., 498 pages, $39.00

This, the first of two volumes, aims to provide a selection from the main defenders of the Christian faith from the first centuries up to the present time. Too many students of apologetics rest content with reading a textbook that tells

them how to do apologetics and never have any first-hand exposure to the actual writings of the great apologists of the past. That is not a healthy approach and editors Edgar and Oliphint, both well-known contemporary Reformed apologists, have done a valuable service in putting together this anthology. In the first section selections are provided from the outstanding apologists of the early Church such as Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Origen and, above all, Augustine. The second section covers the Middle Ages and covers Boethius, Peter Abelard, Anselm, Aquinas, Raymond Lull and Savonarola. Few readers will have access to the writings of some of the lesser known yet significant medieval figures. The selections are substantial and offer the possibility of assessing the writer's arguments fairly. Of course nothing can really substitute for the reading of entire works, but not many will be eager to tackle, for example, Augustine's *City of God* in all its magnificence, and so a well-selected anthology is a practical necessity. for most readers.

Heresy, Alister McGrath, SPCK, 2009, pbk., 282 pages, £12.99

For many people the concept of 'heresy' is a relic of a bygone day – in a postmodern age 'truth' is an infinitely flexible category. Some recent popular novels have also propagated the idea that what was once regarded as 'heresy' merely expresses the views of those who failed to gain power in the church. Alister McGrath's study should serve to discredit some of these current misconceptions about heresy in the early Church. The book is divided into four sections. The first considers 'What is heresy?' and examines the origins of the idea of heresy. The second section is entitled 'The Roots of Heresy' and considers' among other matters, the early development of heresy. In particular McGrath demolishes the argument popular among some German scholars of an earlier day, yet still influential, that a wide range of views was to be found in the early Church and that ideas later designated 'heresy' were just as valid as what came to be termed 'orthodoxy'. The third section, 'The Classic Heresies of Christianity', then surveys the main heresies of the first five centuries: Ebionitism, Docetism, Valentinism, Arianism, Donatism and Pelagianism. The final section considers 'The Enduring Impact of Heresy', and includes some comments on the Islamic view of Christianity. There is much useful material in this study, and used with care it will prove a valuable resource. It must be kept in mind that McGrath writes within the limits of scholarly conventions and so tries to avoid passing any judgments on particular heretics. This means that, on his telling of the story, no heretic set out deliberately to try to destroy the truth, something which sits uneasily with the descriptions of, for example, the Apostle Paul, who readily saw malice and the hand of Satan in the false teaching which he sought to oppose.

The Works of William Tyndale, edited by Henry Walter, The Banner of Truth Trust, 2010, hbk., 2 volumes, 532 and 680 pages, £33.00

These two volumes contain the three volumes of the nineteenth century Parker Society edition of Tyndale's works. As well as being a pioneer Bible translator, William Tyndale (1484-1537) was a significant theologian and expositor among the English Reformers. These volumes are a treasure house of early Reformed thought and will amply repay careful study. Here will be found the great treatises by Tyndale: *A Pathway into the Holy Scriptures*, *The Obedience of a Christian Man*, *The Practice of Prelates* and *An Answer to Sir Thomas More's Dialogue*, together with numerous other lesser-known works, including prologues to various biblical books and expositions of the whole of I John. This reprint is most welcome, not only on account of its historical significance, but also because of the spiritual value of Tyndale's writings.

The Christian in Complete Armour, William Gurnall, Hendrickson Publishers/Alban Books, 2010, hbk., 589 and 656 pages, £21.99

Although thoroughly Puritan in his outlook, William Gurnall (1616-79) is not a name generally heard in the annals of Puritanism. Unlike many others, he conformed to the Act of Uniformity in 1662, avoiding the Great Ejection of Puritan ministers from the Church of England, and as a result was considered suspect by both conformists and non-conformists. Nevertheless in lectures and sermons he produced an exposition of Paul's description of the Christian warfare in Ephesians 6:11-13 which has stood the test of time and which has been of great help to generations of Christians. *The Christian in Complete Armour* examines with Puritan thoroughness the attacks of the enemy and the provision which God has make for his people so that they may wage war victoriously. Readers should not be put off by the complex division of the treatise into seven 'Directions' with a number of parts, divisions, branches, doctrines, arguments and points in each. This is searching yet encouraging and comforting reading which repays thoughtful study. Spurgeon described it as 'the best thought-breeder in all our library' – high praise from a great preacher. This is a reprint of the two volume nineteenth century edition with a biographical introduction by J. C. Ryle.

The Church's Book of Comfort, edited by Willem van 't Spijker, translated by Gerrit Bilkes, Reformation Heritage Books, 2009, hbk., 291 pages, $30.00

The sixteenth century doctrinal standards of the Continental Reformed churches are sadly little known among those raised on the Westminster

Assembly's documents, yet that is a great loss given the theological riches contained in the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dort. This volume of essays may help to remedy our lack of knowledge. Under the editorship of Willem van 't Spijker, emeritus professor at the Theological University of Apeldoorn, a number of scholars have contributed essays on the historical background to the Heidelberg Catechism, the history of its composition and the people involved, the theology of the catechism, the reception of the catechism in the Netherlands, its place in preaching and teaching and its continuing relevance. The volume is beautifully produced, with a wealth of illustrations from contemporary sources, including portraits of significant figures in the catechism's history. This is a book which ought to bring lovers of the Reformed Faith from different traditions closer together, as they grow in mutual understanding.

The Sovereign Spirit. The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit in the writings of John Calvin, Gwyn Walters, Rutherford House, 2009, pbk., 253 pages, £14.99

Can the publication of a doctoral thesis written in 1949 be justified? In the case of the late Gwyn Walters' study of Calvin's doctrine of the Holy Spirit, the answer is a resounding 'Yes!' As J. I. Packer says in his foreword, 'Still. After more than fifty years, this is the fullest exploration of a very central theme in Calvin that has so far been made, and other advances in Calvin scholarship have not reduced its relevance and value.' Calvin was rightly known as 'the theologian of the Holy Spirit', and it is surprising that so little scholarly attention has been devoted to this subject since Walters produced his thesis, yet that is the case. *The Sovereign Spirit* is therefore a most welcome study. The first part of the book considers Calvin's teaching on the Holy Spirit in six chapters: 'The Holy Spirit and the Inner Life of God', 'The Spirit of God in Action', 'The Holy Spirit and the Word', 'Salvation in Christ', The Holy Spirit and the Individual' and 'The holy Spirit and the Fellowship.' Together the whole range of the Spirit's activities is well covered. The remaining parts of the book consider Calvin's doctrine in comparison to that of the Puritans and Quakers, and in relation to Calvin's own life and experience. This is a fine study of an important subject which will advance our understanding not only of Calvin, but, far more importantly, of the work of the Spirit. Rutherford House are to be congratulated for the publication of such a neglected resource.

A Reader in Contemporary Philosophical Theology, edited by Oliver Crisp, T & T Clark, 2009, pbk., 379 pages, £25.00

Philosophical theology – the philosophical analysis of doctrine – has

undergone a remarkable revival in the last thirty years, and is now receiving the attention of some of the most able philosophers of our day. This anthology, edited by theologian and philosopher Oliver Crisp, brings together contributions to philosophical theology by a number of outstanding thinkers in this field. Among the familiar names are Alvin Plantinga, Nicholas Wolterstorff, Paul Helm, Peter van Inwagen, Eleonore Stump, Thomas V. Morris, Marilyn McCord Adams and Richard Swinburne. They represent a wide spectrum of views, but the number of contributors who may be identified, broadly, as 'Reformed' is significant. The essays are divided into five sections, dealing with revelation and Scripture, the Trinity, the incarnation, sin and original sin and the atonement. The eighteen pieces brought together here provide stimulating and stretching reading, and help readers to wrestle with some of the fundamental philosophical issues raised by theology. For anyone who is interested in, or who has to be interested in, philosophical theology, this volume will prove extremely valuable.

Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms. A Study in the Development of Reformed Social Thought, David Van Drunnen, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2010, pbk., 476 pages, £23.99

The Reformed Objection to Natural Theology, Michael Sudduth, Ashgate, 2009, hbk., 238 pages, £55.00

Although natural law and natural theology are sometimes confused, the two are profoundly different, and the Reformed tradition has viewed them in very different ways. These two substantial studies consider Reformed thinking on natural law and on natural theology respectively, and serve to provoke thought and a measure of revaluation of received ideas.

In *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms* David Van Drunnen, a professor at Westminster Seminary California, seeks to trace the history of Reformed attitudes to both natural law and to the doctrine of the two kingdoms. It has generally been assumed that Reformed theology and social ethics have been hostile to both of these concepts. Van Drunnen, however, argues that for some four centuries Reformed thinkers made use of both concepts and sought to root political and cultural life in God's work of creation and providence, not in his work of redemption and eschatological restoration in Christ. Only in more recent times has there been a strong Reformed reaction against natural law and the two kingdoms doctrine. In the course of his book Van Drunnen surveys a wide range of Reformed writers, from Calvin, through the age of Reformed Orthodoxy and the New England Puritans, to Abraham Kuyper (significantly termed 'an ambiguous transition') and then on to Karl Barth, Herman

Dooyeweerd and North American Neo-Calvinism, and finally to Van Til and his disciples. There is much to ponder in this scholarly study. In his reconsideration of the Reformed tradition Van Drunnen is formulating a position on theology and social ethics which will have to be evaluated carefully and which may well force a revision of received 'wisdom'.

Many of the same figures occur in Michael Sudduth's examination of the objections raised by Reformed theologians to the concept of natural theology. Broadly speaking 'natural theology' designates 'what can be known or rationally believed about the existence and nature of God on the basis of human reason or our natural cognitive faculties' (p.1). Reformed theologians have, in Sudduth's estimation, raised three main objections to natural theology: the alleged innate character of the natural knowledge of God possessed by human beings; the alleged implications of the noetic effects of sin; the alleged logical problems associated with arguments for the existence of God. Sudduth evaluates the views of many Reformed thinkers, seeks to distinguish two different formulations of natural theology and concludes that the traditional objections raised by the Reformed against natural theology can all be answered satisfactorily. He then proposes his own model for natural theology set in the context of dogmatic theology. This is a book guaranteed to stir debate and controversy, and to stimulate some hard thinking on the part of opponents of natural theology.

David McKay