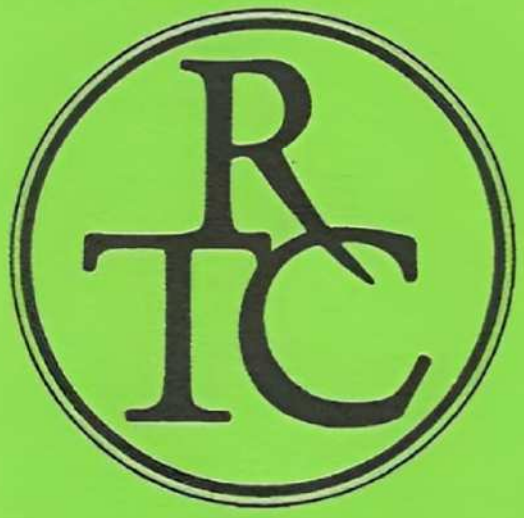

NOVEMBER 2012

REFORMED THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL

REFORMED THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE
FOUNDED 1854

Theological Seminary of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland
37 Knockbracken Road, Belfast, Northern Ireland, BT8 6SE

Vol. 28 **NOVEMBER 2012**

REFORMED THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL

Edited for the Faculty of the

REFORMED THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE

by

EDWARD DONNELLY
KNOX HYNDMAN
DAVID MCKAY

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

Editorial Address:
Articles, books for review and correspondence should be addressed to Reformed Theological Journal, 37 Old Holywood Road, Belfast, BT4 2HJ, Northern Ireland.

Subscriptions:
Not posted £5.50. Posted to UK address £6.25. Rest of the World Surface Mail £6.85, $US 12.00, $Can 16.00, $Aus 19.50, €10.50.
In common with most periodicals, subscriptions run until cancelled.
Cheques to be made payable to Reformed Theological Journal. Subscriptions should be sent to Reformed Theological Journal (Subscriptions), 85 Shore Road, Greenisland BT38 8TZ, Northern Ireland.

The Reformed Theological Journal is on microfilm at Widener Library, Harvard Divinity School U.S.A. and is available for purposes of research.

ISSN 0268 - 4772
www.rpc.org/college/rtj
Email: rtj@rpc.org

CONTENTS

BOOK REVIEWS

BOOK NOTICES

JAMES RENWICK - COVENANTER MARTYR - FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH

Robert L. W. McCollum

Robert McCollum is Professor of Pastoral Theology and Homiletics at the Reformed Theological College, Belfast, and Minister of Lisburn Reformed Presbyterian Church.

On 17th February 1688 James Renwick was martyred. He was the last of the Scottish Covenanters to die a public and judicial death for his faithful allegiance to the royal prerogatives of Christ in Church and State. He may have been the last but he was by no means the least. Of him it was said that 'he was of old Knox's principles'[1] and to his fellow Covenanters 'he was their dearest, kingliest, best, whom the scaffold had taken.'[2]

Renwick was born on 15th February 1662 (350 years ago) at Moniave, Dumfriesshire, to a godly couple, Andrew and Elizabeth Renwick. The previous children had all died in infancy and although Andrew was content in the assurance that his little ones were with Christ, Elizabeth prayed for another son. The Lord answered her prayers and in gratitude the boy was dedicated from infancy to the ministry of Christ's Church. He was endowed with a vigorous, reflective mind and from childhood he was devoted to reading and study. Of him Dr. Thomas Houston wrote,

> If James Renwick was not sanctified from the womb there was clear evidence afforded that, in the early childhood, he was the subject of the gracious motions of the Spirit. At two years of age, he was observed to be aiming at secret prayer, and as his childhood advanced he evinced love to the ways of God, by reading and pondering the Scriptures, delighting in secret prayer, and by reverential regard to the authority of his parents.[3]

Persecution Times

Although poor, family and friends managed to send James Renwick to the University of Edinburgh. He contributed to his own maintenance by serving as tutor to children of the nobility. At university he passed through a period of doubt and was tempted to atheism. He felt so strongly assaulted that he said, 'If these hills were all-devouring furnaces of burning brimstone, I should

content to go through them all if so be I could be assured there was a God."[4] Renwick found a way of escape from this severe temptation and not only did he gain assurance regarding God's existence but also of his own salvation. In due course Renwick qualified for his Master of Arts degree, but refused to have it publicly conferred because that would have required him to take the Oath of Allegiance which acknowledged the supremacy of Charles II over the Church.

This incident is a grim reminder of the times in which Renwick lived. Soon after Charles II was restored to the throne in 1660, he claimed total and absolute supremacy over Church and State. The Act Rescissory of March 1661 declared all the parliamentary Acts and Deeds from 1640 to 1648 (the high watermark of the second Reformation in Scotland) to be null and void. Thus in one Act the great attainments of the Second Reformation in Scotland, which had established the Church on a Presbyterian and Covenanted basis, were at one stroke repealed. More than 300 ministers refused to comply with the King's wishes and as a consequence were ejected from their pulpits. They continued to preach to large congregations at open-air meetings called conventicles. In an attempt to suppress these gatherings, the State engaged in a ruthless policy of persecution. This policy alternated with subtle offers of conciliation in the form of indulgences, or royal offers to permit some of the ejected ministers to resume their ministry under certain State regulations. Under the pressure of hardship and persecution many of the ejected ministers accepted the indulgences, becoming known as 'the indulged', yet the stricter Covenanters rejected them, not being prepared to accept any form of Erastianism. It was to this group that Renwick became attracted while pursuing his studies in Edinburgh, and after witnessing the martyrdom of Donald Cargill in July 1681 he became identified with that particular Covenanting remnant known as the Society People.

Theological Training

In October 1681 we find Renwick, although only 19, holding conference with the representatives of the United Societies. To them he expressed his grief that the martyrs were disdainfully spoken of, revealed his anger at those who attended the curates and his disapproval of those who paid the 'cess' (a tax imposed to raise funds to support persecution forces) and those who in any way recognised the authority of Charles II. (The Covenanters, in the Sanquhar Declaration (22nd June 1680), had declared that Charles II had forfeited his right to govern because of his tyrannical rule and therefore they would no longer give allegiance to him). His gifts for the ministry were soon recognised and so the Society People, now bereft of any ministers, sent him to Holland to complete his studies for the ministry. Such was Renwick's aptitude for study

that in six months he had reached such a standard that the Dutch Church considered him fully qualified to receive ordination. His ordination was unusual in that, although it was according to the usage of the Dutch Church, Renwick was permitted to subscribe to the standards of the Church of Scotland. Following the ordination, the president of the Classis (Presbytery)

> declared the great satisfaction all the brethren had in Mr Renwick; that they thought the whole time he was before them he was so filled with the Spirit of God, that his face seemed to shine, and that they had never seen or found so much of the Lord's Spirit accompanying any work of ordination.[5]

Letters written by Renwick in Holland give us a keen insight into his spiritual outlook. For example, writing from Groningen in March 1683, his humility regarding his ministerial calling is evident in the words:

> And why is he calling poor unworthy me to such a great and glorious work: ...I offer myself in all trembling, fear and humility; yet having great reason to believe in Him for all things though I am together unfit.[6]

Conscious of the dangers awaiting him in Scotland, he was nevertheless keen to return, as a letter dated June 1683 illustrates: 'My longing and earnest desires to be in that land and with that pleasant remnant are very great.'[7]

Call to the Ministry

His wish was granted when in September 1683 he arrived back in Scotland. He expressed his gladness in a letter when he wrote, 'if the Lord could be tied to any place, it is to the mosses and muirs of Scotland.'[8] Having satisfied a General Meeting of the United Societies held at Darmead in October he received and accepted a formal Call to the ministry. That Renwick was accepting the mantle that fell from the martyred Cargill is obvious from the fact that he chose as the text for his first sermon the same passage as had been expounded by Cargill on the eve of his departure: Isaiah 26:20. With a stirring and comforting message Renwick embarked upon his public ministry and became a prince among the Covenanters. He accomplished more in four short years than most men do in a lifetime. He said, 'When God's heritage is being ravined by wolves, is this the hour for compromise?'[9] He was undaunted in his ministry, despite his slightness of stature, the rigours of open-air preaching and the relentless pursuit of enemies. He once wrote to his great friend, Sir Robert Hamilton, exiled in Holland,

> My business was never so weighty, so multiplied, and so ill to be guided ... and my body was never so frail. Excessive travel, night wanderings, unseasonable sleep and diet, and frequent preaching in all seasons of weather, especially in the

> night, have so debilitated me that I am often incapable for any work.[10]

It was said of him that he worked so hard and rode so swiftly that he seemed to be in all parts of Scotland at once.

Public Witness

James Renwick was outspoken in his condemnation of the errors of his day. The nation had entered into solemn covenant with God in 1638 and 1643 and yet the Parliament under Charles II passed the 'Abjuration Act' in 1662 which declared that these covenants were unlawful. Such legislation made little impact upon Renwick and his fellow Covenanters. In the 'Apologetical Declaration', published in October 1684, Renwick and his followers proclaimed, '...we are a people by holy covenants dedicated unto the Lord in our persons, lives, liberties and fortunes, for defending and promoting this glorious work of reformation.' Like his predecessors, Richard Cameron and Donald Cargill, Renwick concluded that the king had become so tyrannical in the exercise of his powers that he had forfeited the right to govern. Therefore when James II came to the throne in 1685 and charged Renwick with treason, he answered,

> No, I own all authority that hath its prescriptions and limitations from the Word of God; but I cannot own this usurper as lawful king, seeing both by the Word of God such a one is incapable to bear rule, and also by the ancient laws of the kingdom which admit none to the Crown of Scotland until he swear to defend the Protestant Religion, which a man of his profession cannot do.[11]

James Renwick's leadership of the Covenanters filled the government with dismay and fury. In 1684 the Privy Council issued a decree forbidding anyone to furnish him with 'meat, drink, house, harbour, victual, nor no other thing useful or comfortable to him.'[12] Yet, despite constant threats, he was protected and nourished. Further attempts to apprehend him were made in 1686, when a reward of 100 pounds was offered to anyone who should bring in 'James Renwick, dead or alive', but it did not induce any of his followers to betray him. In fact Renwick would see a kind providence in these actions:

> Indeed, if I may term it so I am much obliged to my enemies; for, though they purpose my misery, yet they are instrumental in covering many a fat table to me: and while they are pining away in dusk, envy and pale fear, I am feeding in peace.[13]

He had many hair-breadth escapes. On one occasion he actually guided the officer who was hunting for him to the very midst of a conventicle gathering! Then, addressing the anxious congregation, he said, 'Our enemy

here wished to put his hand into that of James Renwick. He hath even paid me to do him this service. I do him the service, but return his money. I am James Renwick, sir.' The soldier was taken aback and declared, 'James Renwick! Impossible! A man so harmless and discreet, and so well informed; if you are James Renwick, I for one, will pursue you no longer![14]

Preaching Pattern

Lest we conclude that James Renwick was only concerned with matters of public debate in Church and State, we need to consider his preaching. When we examine the forty-four sermons preserved by his friend and colleague, Alexander Shields, in his biography of Renwick, we discover that they are full of evangelical passion and tender appeal. It is evident that Renwick was enraptured with the loveliness of Christ. Hence his great themes were: salvation through Christ and the great matters of practical godliness. Speaking of Christ in a sermon on Song of Songs, chapter 1 verse 7, he said, 'O how lovely is he in his majesty; and lovely in his glory; how lovely in his beauty, and in all his properties.'[15] Similar sentiments are expressed in a letter to a friend, 'Now that which I mainly desire is to commend unto the world the loveliness of Christ, the preciousness of His cause, the easiness of His yoke, and the sweetness of his cross.'[16] When the person of Christ had been set forth in all His glory, Renwick then pressed home the need of the sinner to come to the Saviour as illustrated in a sermon on Song of Songs, chapter 5 verse 16,

> And now, my friends, ye must love Christ with a sincere love, with a new love, with an entire love, with a superlative love; and ye must love him for himself, and not for anything ye get from him otherwise he will reject your love, and will not take it off your hand. Now what say ye to it, man or woman, lad or lass, are ye content to take Christ for the object of your love?[17]

The searching manner by which he addressed the conscience is also illustrated in the application of a sermon preached from Song of Songs, chapter 1, verse 7,

> Oh, what say ye to it? Friends, will ye close with Christ? I obtest you by his own Excellency, I obtest you by the joys of heaven, and the torments of hell, that you close with Him. All of you come, whatever you have been or are; none of you shall be cast out. Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely.[18]

His theological precision comes through in the testimony of one of his hearers, Ebenezer Nesbit:

> The latter end of this year, I heard that great man of God, Mr James Renwick, preach on Song of Songs, chapter 3 verses 9 and 10, when he treated greatly on

> the covenant of redemption agreed on between God the Father and God the Son, in favour of the elect; as also on the covenant of grace established with believers in Christ. Oh, this was a great and sweet day of the gospel! For he handled and pressed the privileges of the covenant of grace with seraphic enlargement, to the great edification of the hearers. Sweet and charming were the offers which he made of Christ to all sorts of sinners.[19]

It is obvious from this and other references that Renwick was no mean theologian and as such he illustrates the spiritual depth which characterised the Puritan preachers in seventeenth century Britain.

The relevance of his preaching is illustrated in his famous sermon on Isaiah 26 verse 20: 'Come my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut the doors about thee: Hide thyself, as it were, for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast.' From this text, Renwick warned his hearers of continued persecution but assured them that a faithful remnant would be spared to maintain Christ's cause in Scotland. His emphasis on 'the remnant' is illustrated by the many sermons he preached from Isaiah and Zechariah.

A notable feature of Renwick's sermons was his attitude towards the Indulgences offered to the ejected ministers by the Stuart kings and those who accepted them. Renwick, adopting the position of Cameron and Cargill, preached against the Indulgences, recognising that acceptance of them involved accepting a measure of State interference in the Church. He also urged upon his followers the absolute necessity of total separation from the indulged ministers. He compared his enemies to a great oak tree and those who compromised with them were like people sheltering under its branches who would be crushed by the falling tree when God came in judgment upon it.[20] His attitude to the indulged was tempered by a very gracious spirit, as a passage in his last sermon, on Isaiah 53 verse 1 demonstrates. 'I grant that many of them are godly and gracious men but their accepting of this Anti-Christian liberty is no part of their godliness.'[21]

The verdict of history vindicates the position Renwick adopted towards the Indulgence. The historian, Hetherton, could say of it,

> It was offered on a principle clearly subversive of the Presbyterian Church, and that ... not one of the ejected ministers ought to have accepted of it because it was impossible to do so, without sacrificing the fundamental and essential principle of the Presbyterian church - that which constitutes its glory and its life - the sole sovereignty of Christ.[22]

Renwick's view of preaching and his own approach to this vital ministry is best described in words which he proclaimed in his final sermon:

> And a minister that would be faithful to his Master and free of the blood of souls, should, and must make particular application of his doctrine to the sins, snares, duties and dangers of the time, whoever be offended. For oftentimes the life of preaching lies in the application of the doctrine.[23]

Pastoral Programme

The extensive preaching programme pursued by Renwick was matched by a wholehearted commitment to pastoral duties. For almost four years he was the sole pastor of about 7,000 souls and his parish stretched over vast areas of the Scottish lowlands. The extent of his labours and the diligence with which he pursued them is apparent from several references in his letters. For example, on 3rd May 1686 he wrote:

> I have not been near Edinburgh since the 16th October 1685 and I have travelled since through Clydesdale, Eskdale, some of the Forest ... and in all these places I examined the societies as I passed through, several other persons coming to hear, and I found my work greater this last journey than ever before.[24]

Renwick was greatly loved by the persecuted remnant of Covenanters and his preaching and pastoral care were much appreciated. A contemporary described him as, 'a young man endued with great piety, prudence and moderation.'[25] An example of this counsel is illustrated in the advice he gave to one of his correspondents:

> Let zeal be accompanied with meekness that you may be free from passion and prejudice, and let meekness be backed with zeal that you may be free of lukewarmness and indifference.[26]

Within twelve months of his return to Scotland he baptised more than 600 children and was also responsible for the ordination of many elders. The manner in which he carried out this duty is outlined in an interesting document, entitled, 'The Form and Order of the Admission of Elders as done by Mr James Renwick.'.[27] This document reveals the care which Renwick took to give a proper account of the Divine origin and solemn responsibilities of the office.

Having had a number of close escapes from his enemies, Renwick was eventually captured at the beginning of February 1688 in Edinburgh. A passerby overheard him as he raised his voice in prayer in the house in which he was lodging and reported him to the authorities. The three charges that were brought against him were that he had disowned the authority of James II, had opposed the paying of cess and had instructed his followers to carry arms at conventicles. Despite efforts to persuade him to plead for mercy by compromising his principles, Renwick remained constant to the end and was

duly executed on 17th February 1688. As he approached the scaffold he sang from Psalm 103 and read from Revelation 19.

James Renwick, the young martyr, died at the age of 26 because of his unswerving love and loyalty to King Jesus. But he who said, 'What is the matter though we all fall, the Cause shall not fall', was proved right. The crimes with which he was charged and for which he died were legalised as Rights within one year of his execution. 'He learned the truth and counted the cost, and so sealed it with his blood.'[28] He paid a high price for our freedom. On this 350th anniversary of his birth may the example of his life and ministry spur us on to 'expect great things from God and attempt great things for God', knowing that 'in due season we shall reap if we do not give up.' (Gal. 6:9)

Reformed Presbyterians today are the spiritual descendants of the Society people. We owe much to the dedicated, diligent and faithful ministry of James Renwick. At great personal cost Renwick remained faithful to Christ. He was a man of principle, refusing to yield to the pressures of the State. In this 21st century there are increasing pressures on Christians to conform to what is perceived to be politically correct and spiritually progressive. May this generation of Reformed Presbyterians, and in fact every true believer, stand firm in the Lord, refuse to compromise with evil and continue to live a life pleasing to King Jesus. 'Be faithful unto death; and I will give you the crown of life.' (Rev. 2:10)

Notes

1. A. Smellie, *Men of the Covenant*, p.493.
2. Smellie, op. cit., p.481.
3. Thomas Houston, *Letters of Renwick*, 1865.
4. J. Meldrum Dryerre, *Heroes and Heroines of the Scottish Covenanters.*
5. J. Howie, *The Scots Worthies*, p.633.
6. W. H. Carslaw, *The Letters of James Renwick*, p.41.
7. Carslaw, op. cit., p.59.
8. Carslaw, op. cit., p.70.
9. Dryerre, *Heroes and Heroines of the Scottish Covenanters*, p.109.
10. Smellie, *Men of the Covenant*, p.484.
11. Jock Purves, *Fair Sunshine*, pp.111, 112.
12. J. H. Thompson, *A Cloud of Witnesses*, p.477.
13. Smellie, op. cit., p.488.
14. Dryerre, op. cit., p.115.
15. A. Shields, *The Life and Death of James Renwick*, p.469.
16. Carslaw, op. cit., p.89.
17. Shields, *The Life and Death of James Renwick*, p.527.
18. Unpublished Manuscript of Ebenezer Nesbit, quoted in Houston, op. cit., p.14.
19. Houston, *The Life of James Renwick*, pp.17, 18.
20. Shields, op. cit., p.117.
21. Shields, op. cit., p.594.
22. Hetherton, *History of Church of Scotland*, Vol.2, p.64.
23. Shields, op. cit., p.596.
24. Carslaw, op. cit., p.170.
25. Carslaw, op. cit., p.80.
26. Carslaw, op. cit., p.161.
27. Shields, op. cit., pp.599-643.
28. Smellie, op. cit., p.493.

THE LAMB CHRISTOLOGY OF REVELATION

Warren Peel

Warren Peel is Lecturer in Greek at the Reformed Theological College, Belfast, and Minister of Trinity Reformed Presbyterian Church, Newtownabbey.

One of the greatest theological contributions of Revelation is to our understanding of Christology. It is 'the revelation of Jesus Christ' after all, and he is the Alpha and the Omega of the book, its beginning and end and theme throughout.[1]

The first verse tells us that the book is the revelation of Jesus Christ, and the last two verses bring the book to a conclusion with the promise of and prayer for Jesus' coming, as well as the pronouncement of the grace of Jesus upon the people of God. Luther was less than sure, dismissing the Apocalypse as a 'dumb prophecy' that spoke too little of Christ and the gospel, but as Donald Guthrie puts it,

> Once the strangeness of the genre is accepted, the presentation of Christ may be claimed to be of the highest order. This does not mean to say that it presents a complete account of the nature and work of Christ, but its contribution to NT christology is nevertheless considerable.[2]

In summarizing his survey of the christological material in Revelation, Guthrie writes, '...the christological presentation in this book is of a high order. Christ is portrayed in his full resurrection glory.'[3]

But *how* is Christ presented in the Apocalypse? In a rich tapestry of names, titles, symbols, and motifs. The dominant image by far, however, and the most distinctive contribution Revelation makes to New Testament christology, is that of the Lamb. 'The word *arnion* ('lamb') occurs 30 times in the New Testament: once in John 21:15 and 29 times in the Apocalypse. Not limited to one or two scenes, the term appears in fully half of the chapters of the Apocalypse...[it is] by far the most frequent designation for Christ in the Apocalypse. It appears more than twice as often as any other name or image for Christ - even more than the simple name Jesus, the title Christos, or variations thereof. The Apocalypse is the only book in the New Testament that applies the word as a title for Christ.[4] What is the significance, however, of this

image in Revelation's christology?

What the Lamb Means

Several lines of approach to understanding the Lamb imagery of Revelation should be noted.

1. Semantic Issues

John uniquely uses the Greek word *arnion* of Jesus in Revelation. This was an unusual word for lamb in both the LXX and the NT,[5] and John's use of it has prompted many to ask what lay behind his choice. What nuance did he have in mind or wish to evoke by describing Christ by this unusual word? The suggestion originally popularised by Spitta[6] was that *arnion* should be translated 'ram'. Johns has shown that linguistic evidence for this is lacking however.[7] The impulse to translate *arnion* as 'ram' is understandable given the context in which it is used in the Apocalypse. As Johns puts it,

> The lamb of the Apocalypse is a vigorous and majestic image; no sense of weakness or powerlessness on the part of the Lamb is implied... Thus, while most commentators have agreed that no linguistic evidence exists for such a translation, they have nevertheless appealed to the contextual evidence noted above.[8]

This is surely the point of John's choice of the image of a lamb however. It is deliberately paradoxical. The picture is of a weak lamb - a *slaughtered* lamb no less - but a lamb that having *been* slaughtered (*esphagmenon*, a perfect tense) now stands, raised and glorified, at the right hand of God in heaven. This paradox may also explain the use of *arnion* as opposed to *amnos* as the term used for the lamb. Hillyer, who sees John's choice of vocabulary as significant, puts it thus:

> The Septuagint uses *amnos* about a hundred times in connection with lambs for sacrifice. In this sense alone *amnos* is insufficient for the Apocalypse, where the Lamb is more than a sacrifice. He is also the triumphant warrior, trampling his enemies under his feet. The Lamb is not only the lamb that was slain; He is also the horned lamb (Rev. 5:6)... A different Greek word is chosen to include the idea of authority and triumph.[9]

Clearly philological considerations are of limited value - they cannot conclusively account for the nature of the Lamb.

2. Contextualized Christology

Assuming that Revelation was written to encourage Christians in physical and spiritual danger, we should expect that John's portrayal of Christ will relate to the *Sitz im Leben* of the readers.[10] Since the image of the Lamb is the

predominant one in Revelation, its meaning must surely relate to the main purposes of the book. Why, then, was Revelation written?

The social setting of Revelation has become a focus of discussion since the 1980s. The traditional assumption had been that the Apocalypse was written in response to a major outbreak of official Roman persecution, most likely under Domitian in the mid-90s. L.L. Thompson's 1990 study[11] questioned this traditional view, though he was not the first to do so.[12] Thompson's re-evaluation of the numismatic and epigraphic evidence, and the writings of Domitian's contemporaries led to a rehabilitated Domitian. According to Thompson, Domitian was misrepresented by later writers who for political reasons sought to flatter Trajan by denigrating his predecessor. He goes on to argue that Christians participated fully in urban Roman life and that all opposition was local rather than imperial in origin.

With regard to the imperial cult, Thompson argues that Domitian did not want to be deified,[13] and that it was his later detractors who presented him as arrogating divine titles to himself. Although Thompson's view has been challenged from several perspectives,[14] it is now largely accepted that there was no official Roman persecution of Christians under his rule. However, although there was no empire-wide, state-sponsored persecution of Christians, the local opposition experienced by the Asian churches would have been every bit as distressing. DeSilva points out that the relation between the state and Roman religious life placed tremendous pressure on all citizens to participate in the official religion, both in terms of temple worship and the idolatrous guild banquets that were at the centre of daily life.[15]

This was particularly the case in Asia Minor, the epicentre of the imperial cult. Asia was the first province to initiate an emperor cult. In his study of the cult of the Sebastoi at Ephesus in 89-90 A.D., S.J. Friesen shows how the thirteen dedicatory inscriptions from various Asian cities reveal the importance of the cult not just for Ephesus but for the entire province.[16] No other province had two emperor cults at this time - the establishment of the Sebastoi cult gave Asia three.[17] Such expressions of devotion to the empire would have made the Christians' non-participation in the cult very unpopular at best. It is possible, however, that this was an unusually bad moment in Asia to express reservations about the imperial cult. In 88 A.D. the proconsul of Asia, Civica Cerealis, was executed by Domitian for plotting against the emperor.[18] This may lie behind the wide support in the province for the Ephesian temple honouring the Flavians in general and Domitian in particular, and would certainly account for a heightened hostility towards Christians whose non-participation might call into question their city's loyalty to Rome at an acutely sensitive moment.

Against this background John presents his revelation of Jesus Christ. How does his portrait of Jesus as the Lamb relate to the social setting of the book? Just as the Lamb suffered in order to faithfully witness, so Christians must do the same. But just as the Lamb was exalted and vindicated and rewarded for his faithfulness in suffering, so too will those who faithfully suffer for his sake. Witherington puts it thus,

> It is no surprise that the slain-lamb image arises repeatedly in a document written to Christians who are being persecuted. They too are lambs for the slaughter, but, like Jesus, they in the end will have victory over death and their human tormentors.[19]

Slater agrees,

> It should come as no surprise, given the social setting, that the major, most pervasive image of Christ in the Apocalypse of John is the slain lamb. Closely associated with the slain lamb is a victory-through-suffering motif that is equally as pervasive in Revelation as the slain lamb.[20]

It has been noted by various scholars that apart from his death and resurrection, the human aspect of Christ's person and work is absent in Revelation.[21] This is surely to be both explained and expected in light of the purpose of the book. If the churches John is writing to are suffering for their faith in Jesus, then the particular truths about Christ they need to be reminded of are the pattern of his suffering and consequent exaltation, and his powerful present reign over all human affairs, past, present, and future.

3. The Source of the Lamb Imagery

Various proposals have been suggested as to the origin of the symbol of the Lamb in Revelation. Loren Johns has thoroughly researched the possible sources of Revelation's Lamb christology, examining first the Graeco-Roman environment, then early Judaism, followed by the Old Testament.[22] Most scholars have tended not to give much weight to the Greco-Roman background, and neither does Johns set too much store by the influence of Roman-Roman culture.

On the other hand, early Judaism and the Old Testament are widely regarded as feeding into the imagery of the Lamb in Revelation. Lioy writes,

> There are three sources worth mentioning that form the backdrop for the lamb terminology in Revelation: apocalyptic lambs, the lamb of Isaiah 53:7, and Passover and sacrificial lambs.[23]

Other writers may separate out these categories more precisely,[24] but

these are the basic *loci*. Which, if any, should be seen as the primary influence on the Lamb of Revelation?

Many scholars and commentators have found a warrior lamb figure in Early Judaism which they believe explains the origins and function of John's Lamb christology.[25] Johns comments,

> According to these scholars, the presence of a traditional Lamb-Redeemer figure in Early Judaism clarifies how and why John chose to portray Christ as a Lamb (*arnion*).[26]

The idea can be traced back to Spitta who

> claimed that we have in the Apocalypse a unique convergence of two separate lamb traditions, both of which derive from Jewish traditions. One is the lamb as sacrificial victim and the other is the powerful ram.[27]

This is an appealing idea, but the evidence does not appear to bear it out. Of the four apocalyptic passages worth noting,[28] none is indisputably free of Christian interpolation.[29] We may take one of these passages as an example:[30] *Test. Jos.* 19.8-11. C.H. Dodd sees this passage as conclusive:

> There can be little doubt that in this tradition of apocalyptic symbolism we must find the origin of the "Lamb" of the Apocalypse of John. The "Lamb" is the Messiah, and primarily the militant and conquering Messiah.[31]

Johns has examined the arguments for and against Dodd's position at great length, and concludes,

> The convergence here of early christological traditions developing within Christianity is simply too extensive to be fortuitous, especially when one notes the linguistic connection with the New Testament... The additional comment, "The Lamb of God who will take away the sin of the world" seems to clinch the conclusion that we have here either a Christian document based on Jewish sources or extensive Christian interpolations supplied by someone familiar with the traditions reflected in the Fourth Gospel and the Apocalypse of John, and with traditions reflected in other portions of the New Testament.[32]

His conclusion is that, 'Nothing in the original Jewish version of the Testament of Joseph 19 could have served as a model or forerunner to the lamb figure of the Apocalypse of John.'[33]

Much more promising is the suggestion that the lamb imagery of Revelation is drawn from the Old Testament, especially given the large number of allusions to the Old Testament in the Apocalypse.[34] Johns examines seven

potential antecedents in the Old Testament for the Lamb of Revelation: (1) the lambs used for atonement of sins in the sacrificial system; (2) the paschal lamb of Exodus; (3) Daniel's vision of a ram and a goat; (4) the Suffering Servant Song of Isaiah 53.7; (5) the lamb of the Aqedah (Gen. 22); (6) the eschatological victorious lambs of Micah; (7) the lamb as a symbol of vulnerability in visions of eschatological peace and elsewhere.[35]

Johns proceeds to argue, however, that only (7) is relevant to John's use of the symbol of the Lamb in Revelation. This seems a needlessly reductionist position,[36] and one not shared by many other readers of the Apocalypse.[37] Johns's arguments are directed against taking any *one* of the above possible antecedents (1-6) as the key to the lamb imagery of Revelation. But there is no reason to think that John had in mind only one single Old Testament *locus*.[38] One or more may have been more prominent than others, but elements of each can be discerned in the Lamb of the Apocalypse.

For example, the lambs of the sacrificial system must surely contribute to the imagery of the Lamb in Revelation. The lamb is the slain lamb in Rev. 5.6; his death has expiatory force (Rev. 5.9, 1.5); Revelation is full of cultic imagery that recalls the whole setting of the sacrificial system. Johns argues that Revelation's terminology doesn't quite fit with this background, since *thuō* rather than *sphazō* is the natural verb for sacrifice. But *sphazō* is also a perfectly normal term in the LXX for sacrifice.[39] Johns also argues that the usual word for the sacrificial lamb in the Old Testament is *amnos*, and never *arnion*. There is no reason, however, why the use of *arnion* cannot include the idea of *amnos* within it. The lamb of Revelation may be more than an *amnos*, but it is not less.[40]

It seems more balanced to see these various antecedents as contributing to John's picture of the Lamb,[41] with different backgrounds coming to greater prominence at different points in Revelation as the unfolding story demands, rather than trying to reduce the source to any one *locus* in particular.[42]

This leads us to consider the use to which John puts the image of the Lamb in Revelation, which must surely be our prime concern.[43]

What the Lamb Does

Everything about the Lamb of the Apocalypse is surprising. We have already seen that the very word used for him, *arnion*, is unexpected. His first appearance in 5.6 is especially startling, and sets the tone for the rest of the book.[44] John is told to behold the lion of Judah, but when he turns to look he

sees a lamb looking as though it had been slain. The lamb to John's readers, as we have seen above, would have evoked associations of sacrifice, weakness, and vulnerability, but what John's vision reveals is that this lamb is *leonine* (or, indeed, that the lion is lamb-like). Lest the point should be missed by the simple juxtaposition of the two images, the Lamb's powerful nature is emphasized in what follows:

- He is found standing in the centre of the throne. The setting of the scene in chapter 4 conditions us to be astonished by this comment, since it stresses the transcendence and inapproachability of the one who sits upon the throne, surrounded by concentric circles of heavenly beings. Yet here is a figure - a lamb of all things! - who doesn't come from outside these circles but is already there at the throne and who is able to stand before God without being consumed.

- The fact of his standing at all, given that he had been slain, draws attention to the resurrection in power of Jesus from the dead.

- He has seven horns and seven eyes, further defined as the seven spirits of God - a symbolic reference to perfect, divine strength and knowledge.
- He takes the scroll containing the purposes of God for the universe from the right hand of the Almighty, and will shortly open its seals - i.e., execute its decrees - something that no other being in all of creation is qualified to do (Rev. 5.2-4, 9).

- Most astoundingly, the Lamb is *worshipped*, in three separate songs of praise, by the whole company of heaven and then by the whole of creation. A seven-fold paean of praise attributes awesome qualities to him: power, wealth, wisdom, strength, honour, glory, and praise. The remarkable climax comes in the third song when God Almighty and the Lamb are praised together, and a divine trio of virtues are ascribed to both of them eternally.

These introductory assertions of the Lamb's power are reinforced by everything else the Lamb does in the Apocalypse, which can be gathered together in two broad categories:

1. He judges the inhabitants of the earth - 'the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty' (6.15), who cry out in terror to be hidden from the wrath of the Lamb (6.16). This wrath of the Lamb is connected with the wrath of the one who sits on the throne - both God and Jesus judge the world together. The Lamb's judicial capacity has already

been introduced by his opening of each one of the seals of the scroll, thus unleashing judgment upon the earth. The Lamb is the keeper of the book of life (13.8, 21.27) and as such he decides who is saved and who is lost. The eternal punishment of the wicked takes place in the immediate presence of the Lamb (14.10).

2. He redeems his own people. This is pictured in the paradoxical image of the Lamb as shepherd in 7.17. The Lamb sustains, watches over, provides for and leads his flock. This image could be regarded as epitomizing the work of Christ for the church in Revelation.[45] This work begins with the redemption accomplished by the sacrificial slaughter of the Lamb for the sins of his people[46] (5.6,9, 1.5, 7.14), his death, like that of the paschal lamb, enabled God's people to be redeemed from slavery, to cross the sea to the Promised Land, and to sing the song of the final Exodus, 'the song of Moses...and the song of the Lamb' (15.3). The wedding of the Lamb to his bride, the church, is the climax of this redemptive journey. It is announced in 19.7 and then described in chapters 21-22, where the Lamb is mentioned seven times. At the centre of the New Jerusalem, its temple and its lamp, the Lamb rules forever over his people whom he has bought and brought to be with him.

Thus the image of the Lamb reinterprets the image of the Lion. Jesus Christ is the Lion of Judah and Root of David[47] - he is the powerful, conquering Messiah predicted in the Old Testament, but the *manner* in which he carries out his mission and achieves victory is through apparent weakness, humility, and self-sacrifice. It is not hard to see the relevance of this in the original social setting: John's readers look at themselves and they *see* lambs - apparently weak, vulnerable, called to self-sacrifice in order to be faithful witnesses to the world - but they *hear* 'lions.'[48] They may think they are being defeated, but in fact they are conquering.

Conclusion

The dominant christological image of the Apocalypse is the Lamb. Why is Jesus revealed to the readers of this book above all as an *arnion*? The popular and enduring idea that the Lamb of Revelation is to be at least partially explained by the apocalyptic ram of early Judaism - a mighty warrior figure - was found to be without support in the relevant Jewish texts. Conceptually, the word clearly recalls the *amnos* of the Old Testament, but the choice of *arnion* suggests the Lamb of Revelation is not to be identified with any one Old Testament lamb in particular - it includes them, but is also bigger than them.

So John confronts us with a christological image that is full of paradoxes. A lion and a lamb at the same time - apparently weak and humble, looking as though it had been slain in fact, but full of power to save his people to the uttermost and destroy his enemies, and worthy of the worship of all men and angels. The reason for the paradox, however, is to be found in the thread that runs through the whole of New Testament Christology - not just victory *after* suffering, but victory *because* of suffering and *through* suffering.

But Jesus is not just presented thus to state accurately an abstract point of christology. He is the *arnion* because the Christians of Asia Minor needed to hear this truth and think of themselves as *arnia* too. Faced with the same opposition that Jesus faced from the dragon and his two beasts, Asian Christians were encouraged to overcome in the same way that the Lamb overcame: by suffering, sacrifice, and, if needs be, by slaughter.[49] Jesus the Lamb's example spurs on the lambs he shepherds however (7.17): they too will conquer if they follow the Lamb and not the beast.

Notes

1. A point illustrated, e.g., by the 32 books, dissertations, and journal articles listed by Dan Lioy relating to the Christological emphasis of Revelation, ranging in date from 1907 to 2002; q.v. D. Lioy, *The Book of Revelation in Christological Focus*, Studies in Biblical Literature 58 (New York: Peter Lang, 2003), pp.176f, n.1.
2. D. Guthrie, 'The Christology of Revelation,' in *Jesus of Nazareth: Lord and Christ, Essays on the Historical Jesus and New Testament Christology*, ed. Joel B. Green and Max Turner (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1994), p.397.
3. Ibid., p.403.
4. L.L. Johns, *The Lamb Christology of the Apocalypse of John* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003). Johns (2003), p.22. Cf. Lioy (2003), p.118: 'Harlé considers this motif [of the Lamb] the title par excellence that designates the totality of the person and the salutary nature of the work of Christ. Laws similarly proposes that the Lamb is the central Christological motif of Revelation, especially in terms of this image controlling and interpreting "other major themes." Hohnjec likewise sees the Lamb playing an integral part in the visions and prophecies that were revealed to John. In particular Hohnjec regards this motif as a starting point for understanding the Christology of Revelation. He also sees the Lamb motif being present throughout the Apocalypse, whether explicitly or implicitly. Moreover he regards the name "Lamb" as being used in a comprehensive way to describe Christ in the fullness of his person and work.'
5. *Arnion* occurs 4 times in the LXX, compared to the more usual word *amnos* which is found 98 times. In the NT, *arnion* is found only once outside Revelation (Jn. 21.15, referring to believers), where it occurs 29 times, compared to the 4 places where *amnos* is used.
6. Friedrich Spitta, in his essay "Christus das Lamm," in *Streitfragen der Geschichte Jesu* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1907), pp.172-223. Spitta was, in turn, building on ideas found in Bousset's commentaries (1896 and 1906) which claimed that the figure of the lamb was a messianic symbol.
7. Johns (2003), pp.24f.
8. Johns (2003), pp.24-5. He cites the telling example of J. Massyngberde-Ford as one commentator who follows Spitta's lead, '...who says that the character of the animal in the Apocalypse best matches that of the ram, [but] ends up translating *arnion* as "little lamb," since linguistic evidence for *arnion* as ram is lacking: "Linguistically the only possible translations are 'little lamb' or 'lamb'"'. Ibid., p.24, n.14.
9. N. Hillyer, '"The Lamb" in the Apocalypse,' *EQ* 39.4 (1967), p.229. Cf. Lioy (2003), p.118, '*Amnos* only occurs four times in the New Testament...and it is always applied to Jesus, who is compared with a lamb as the One who suffers and dies innocently and representatively. *Arnion*, in contrast, enjoys more extensive usage.'
10. Cf., e.g., B. Witherington III, *Revelation*. New Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p.27, 'It is natural for the author to stress the sovereignty of God, the power of Christ, and Christ's judgment of the wicked for the saints and the like. In short, it is natural for the author to stress forensic images of Christ both as judge and as redeemer of the faithful from judgment (as the Lamb of God).'
11. L.L. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).
12. See, e.g., P. Prigent, 'Au temps de l'Apocalypse, I: Domitien,' *RHPR* 54 (1974), pp.455-83; T.B. Slater, 'On the Social Setting of the Revelation to John,' NTS 44 (1998), pp.232-56.
13. Thompson (1990), pp.104-7.
14. Summarized, e.g., in Scot McKnight and Grant R. Osborne (eds.) *The Face of New Testament Studies: A Survey of Recent Research*, (Leicester: IVP, 2004), p.481: 'Beale believes that Thompson overstated his case and that the truth lies in between the two extremes. Both Domitian's supporters and his later antagonists gave biased accounts, and though Domitian never demanded to be worshiped as a god, he did accept the title, and the

negative evaluations of his reign have some basis in fact...Janzen maintains that the coins point to a certain amount of megalomania on the part of Domitian; they show that even his wife is referred to as the mother of the divine Caesar...Slater sums up the evidence well: Domitian was loved by the people in the provinces because he curbed the economic exploitation caused by the Roman governors, and thus the elite in Rome disliked him intensely.'

15. D.A. deSilva, 'The Social Setting of the Revelation to John: Conflicts Within, Fears Without,' *WTJ* 54 (1992), pp.274-77.
16. S.J. Friesen, *Twice Neokoros: Ephesus, Asia and the Cult of the Flavian Imperial Family* (Leiden: Brill, 1993).
17. In addition to the cult of Roma and Augustus at Pergamum, established in 29 B.C., and the cult of Tiberius, established in 26 A.D.
18. Suetonius, *Domitian* 10.2.
19. Witherington (2003), p.30
20. T.B. Slater, 'Context, Christology and Civil Disobedience in John's Apocalypse,' *Review and Expositor* 106 (Winter 2009), p.54. Cf. Johns (2003), p.127, 'It is in this context [of the social crisis precipitated by Christians faithfully resisting the imperial cult] that John develops an ethic of *faithful, nonviolent resistance* - an ethic characterized and impelled by his own unique development of Lamb symbolism.'
21. E.g. Witherington (2003), p.28: 'There is little attention to the ministry of Jesus or the merely human side of Jesus except to emphasize his death and its benefits...Revelation has a high Christology stressing Christ's heavenly exaltation and roles since and because of his death and resurrection.' Guthrie (1994), p.399: '[Revelation] sets out a glorious picture of Christ which seems at first sight far removed from the portrait of Christ in the Gospels. There he was approachable, but here overawing...The human life of Jesus may find few echoes in the book, but the reality of the death and resurrection cannot be denied.' Cf. ibid. p.407: 'The comparative absence of allusions to the historical Jesus in Revelation provides the main difficulty. The human figure of flesh and blood has largely been replaced by the Lamb...Since the concentration of ideas is so clearly eschatological it is by no means clear where more allusions to the historical Jesus could have been introduced.'
22. Johns (2003), pp.40-149.
23. Lioy (2003), p.119.
24. E.g. David Aune, *Revelation* 1-5, (Dallas, Texas: Word, 1997), pp.372-3, subdivides the O.T. references into 8 different categories.
25. Johns (2003), pp.76-7 lists some of the key figures: Beasley-Murray ('...there seems to be no doubt that this figure [of the lamb] is derived from Jewish apocalyptic imagery, which represented the people of God as the flock of God out of which arises a deliverer who rescues them from their foes.'), Pieter Willem van der Horst ('It is very likely that... Jewish apocalyptic imagery forms the prototype of many lamb passages in Revelation.'), Raymond Brown, George Wesley Buchanan, R.H. Charles, C.H. Dodd, Ernst Lohmeyer, Josephine Massyngberde-Ford, Leon Morris, Robert H. Mounce, Charles H. Talbert, and Etienne Trocmé.
26. Johns (2003), p.78.
27. Johns (2003), p.78.
28. *Test. Jos.* 19.8-11 refers to a leader who is depicted as a lamb; *Test. Benj.* 3.8 uses the actual phrase 'lamb of God'; *1 Enoch* 89.45 refers to David as a lamb, speaks of lambs borne by snow-white sheep which grow horns (90.9). One of these lambs sprouts a great horn and in 90.10-19 this animal wins a great battle. *1 Enoch* 90.37-8 describes the birth of a snow-white bull with huge horns, followed by the transformation of beasts of the field into snow-white bulls. In one textual reading, the first of them becomes a noteworthy lamb over whom the Lord of the sheep rejoiced.
29. Cf. Aune (1997), p.369.

30. Cf. Johns (2003), pp.87-97 for a full discussion of the remaining three, reaching the conclusion that 'there is no evidence at this point to establish the existence of anything like a recognizable redeemer-lamb figure in the apocalyptic traditions of Early Judaism.' (p.106).
31. C.H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1953), p.232.
32. Johns (2003), p.82
33. Johns (2003), p.87. Cf. Jeremias, 'Testament of Joseph 19.8 is Christian and thus offers no evidence that ancient Judaism had a conception of the redeemer as a lamb. For this understanding there is so far no ancient Jewish evidence.' J. Jeremias, 'Das Lamm, das aus der Jungfrau hervorging (Test. Jos. 19,8).' *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 57 (1966), pp.216-19. Bauckham concurs: 'There is no substantial evidence that the Lamb was already established as a symbol of the messianic conqueror in pre-Christian Judaism. The verse commonly cited from Testament of Joseph 19:8 has so evidently been rewritten - if not entirely composed - by a Christian editor, that it is no longer possible to tell whether the victorious lamb was already present in a Jewish version.' R. Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark (1993), p.184.
34. Estimates range, depending on the criteria one uses for assessing what constitutes an allusion, from 195 (W.D. Dittmar, *Vetus Testamentum in Novo* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1903) to 1000 (approx.) (van der Waal, *Openbaring*, pp.174-241). Jon Paulien has done an in-depth study of the tally of allusions in various commentators and the criteria for their inclusion, and in surveying G.K. Beale's commentary estimates 'about 1,200 allusions to the Old Testament, considerably higher than the typical projection of 500-600.' J. Paulien, 'Criteria and Assessment of Allusions to the Old Testament in the Book of Revelation,' in *Studies in the Book of Revelation*, ed. Steve Moyise (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001), p.126.
35. Johns (2003), pp.127-49.
36. In the end Johns only regards the four occurrences of *arnion* in the LXX as decisive in shaping the Lamb imagery of Revelation.
37. Cf. the review of current scholarly thinking by R. Skaggs and T. Doyle: 'Many scholars associate the Lamb, particularly as slain, with Isa. 53.7 (the slaughtered lamb) and 53.8 the Passover lamb (cf. Beale 1999: 351; Comblin 1965: 26, 31; Swete 1907: cxxxix; Fiorenza 1991: 60-61; Bauckham 1998: 184). Aune notes that certainly the Lamb should be seen at least partially within the context of the sacrificial ritual, but it is not entirely clear as to which particular sacrifice (1997: 372).' R. Skaggs and T. Doyle 'Lion/Lamb in Revelation', *CBR* 7.3 (2009), p.364.
38. This tendency is not unique to Johns. Each potential antecedent has its champions. E.g. I.T. Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John* (New York: Macmillan, 1919), p.315, '...the figure [of the Lamb] is clearly that of the Lamb as an atoning sacrifice.' Bauckham (1993), p.184, 'Doubtless the Lamb is intended to suggest primarily the passover lamb, for throughout the Apocalypse, and in a passage as close as 5:10, John represents the victory of the Lamb as a new Exodus, the victory which delivers the new Israel.' Hillyer (1967), p.228, '...the figure is almost certainly taken from the Passover Lamb and from Isaiah 53...'
39. *Sphazō* is used, e.g., of Abraham's slaughter of Isaac in Gen. 22.10. It is also used of the slaughter of the passover lambs in Ex. 12.6, the sin offering in Ex. 29.11, the burnt offering in Lev. 1.5, the fellowship offering in Lev. 3.2, and the sin offering in Lev. 4.4.
40. Cf. Hillyer (1967), p.229, 'The Septuagint uses *amnos* about a hundred times in connection with lambs for sacrifice. In this sense alone *amnos* is insufficient for the Apocalypse, where the Lamb is more than a sacrifice. He is also the triumphant warrior, trampling His enemies under His feet... The same title is required to express the sacrificial basis of Christ's work, but a different Greek word is chosen to include the idea of authority and triumph.' Guthrie agrees, 'Since the Lamb is presented as one who has been slain, there can be no question that the sacrificial lamb must be in mind.' D. Guthrie 'The Lamb in the Structure of the

Book of Revelation,' *VE* 12 (1981), p.69.

41. An approach taken to some extent by, e.g. Aune (1997), p.373, 'The metaphor of Jesus as sacrificial lamb whose blood (i.e., death) has atoning significance is based on the confluence of two traditions: Jesus as the (Passover) lamb (1 Cor 5.7; John 1.29, 36) and the conception of the death of Jesus as atoning in a way similar to the purification offering (Lev 17:11; Heb 9:13-14).'
42. E.g. the sacrificial lamb seems to be at the forefront of John's mind in Rev. 5.6, whereas the passover lamb is surely the focus of Rev. 15.3.
43. Cf. Guthrie's comments which are pertinent here, although referring to source-critical arguments for a reductionist view of Revelation's christology: '...we are concerned with the christology of the finished product, not of its parts.' Guthrie (1994), p.398. Cf. Resseguie's comment on a narrative critical reading of Scripture: 'Narrative cricitism is a shift away from traditional historical-critical methods to the way a text communicates meaning as a self-contained unit, a literary artifact, an undivided whole...the primary focus of a literary approach is on the formal features of a text in its finished form.' J.L. Resseguie *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), p.19.
44. E.g. in 7.14 the saints have made their robes white in the blood of the Lamb; in 7.17 the Lamb shepherds his people, an odd role reversal to say the least; the saints overcome the rage of the dragon in 12.11 not by means of armed resistance and supernatural wonders but by the blood of the Lamb; the Lamb marries in 19.9 - an unusual thing for a lamb to do!
45. Hillyer (1967), p.235, 'This verse [7.17] epitomizes the "Lamb of God Christology"'. Cf. T.B. Slater *Christ and Community: A Socio-Historical Study of the Christology of Revelation*, JSNTS 178 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), p.200, 'The Lamb performs several important functions in Revelation, but the Lamb's most important christological function involves leading an eschatological Christian community whose destination is the New Jerusalem.'
46. Although from the divine perspective this work has its origin in eternity (Rev. 13.8).
47. Cf. Skaggs and Doyle (2009), whose summary of the interpretation of the Lion/Lamb of Rev. 5.6 suggests two main approaches: either the Lamb obliterates the Lion (thus Caird, famously: 'The title "Lamb," which is used almost exclusively of Christ, is meant to control and interpret all the rest of the symbolism. It is almost as if John is saying to us at one point or another: "wherever the OT says 'lion,' read 'lamb.'" Wherever the Old Testament speaks of the victory of the Messiah or the overthrow of the enemies of God, we are to remember that the gospel recognizes no other way of achieving these ends that the way of the cross.' Caird (1966), pp.74-5), or the Lamb reinterprets the Lion. The latter is the majority position, although how precisely the Lamb reinterprets the Lion is answered in numerous different ways. Although they are differently nuanced, many of these suggestions are making the same essential point about Revelation's christology: Jesus is the Lion of Judah, but just not in the way that the Jews had been expecting - his victory is accomplished not by a display of military might or raw divine power, but by apparent defeat in humble self-sacrifice. Resseguie's comment seems to reflect what the majority of scholars are saying, though having reached it by slightly different routes: 'John's juxtaposition of the lion and lamb forges a new definition of victory: the way to conquest is by sacrificial death.' J.L. Resseguie, *Revelation Unsealed: A Narrative Critical Approach to John's Apocalypse*, Biblical Interpretation Series 32 (Leiden: Brill, 1998), p.134.
48. Cf. Resseguie (1998), pp.32-3, where he points out that John *hears* some things and *sees* others. The seeing describes the outward appearance, but the hearing uncovers the inner reality, the spirit or essence of what is seen.
49. Guthrie (1981), p.65, 'If we, therefore, see the rationale of the Lamb imagery as being a reminder to the readers that God is going to achieve victory by totally unexpected and apparently inappropriate means, we shall appreciate why the Lamb title occurs so many times.'

WHAT IS A HEALTHY CHURCH?

Jerry F. O'Neill

Jerry O'Neill is President of the Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA, and Professor of Pastoral Theology.

What is the best church in your community, and how would you know if you found it? When I posed a similar question to a group of seminary students from a wide range of denominational backgrounds recently, I mostly got smiling faces for an answer. I did not know for sure how to interpret those smiles, but I think they were saying, "Well, of course, I think that the church I go to is the best in my community – that is why I go there, but I am not sure that you would agree." My guess is that most of you readers will also think that you are members of the best church in your community and perhaps, from God's perspective, you really are.

But in this article I want to suggest that the way we in the Reformed church assess the health and strength of a local church, or of a denomination, may not be the same way that Jesus, the Head of the church, judges our health. In making this tentative assertion, I am not suggesting that you would use what seem to be the criteria of the broader church today - attendance figures, number of programs, and size of budget - because I am confident that this is not the case. You cannot be a happy member of a Reformed church today if you think the health of a church is judged by numbers or programs!

In thinking about these questions, some of you may reflect on books or articles you have read on this subject. For example, Donald MacNair wrote a book entitled *The Living Church* that was published about the time when I entered the ministry. It was a helpful book for me personally, discussing topics such as evangelism, prayer, pastoral leadership, the role of the ruling elders, discipleship, and spiritual gifts.

More recently, Mark Dever has written a book entitled *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church* that is well-reputed in Reformed circles. (Dever is a Baptist, but Reformed in his soteriology.) In this popular book he discusses the following topics: expositional preaching, theology, the gospel, conversion, evangelism, church membership, discipline, discipleship and growth, and church leadership. Who could argue that these topics are important issues to consider in any church context?

If you are like most people whom I know in the Reformed world, even if you have these books or others like them, your mind will likely go to principles formulated during the Protestant Reformation, and you will think in terms of assessing churches based on whether or not they preach pure doctrine, rightly administer the sacraments, and practise church discipline. Of course, when we think of the church, it is right to think of these aspects of the church. Without question, the church is called upon to preach the truth of Scripture, to administer the sacraments properly, and to discipline the unrepentant sinner.

A summary of what I hear in my own experience, mostly consistent with the historical principles just mentioned, is for individuals or families to assess a church based on one or more of the following:

- Sound doctrine. What Reformed Christian do you know who does not begin here? It is the proper place to begin. But I have heard it said in strong terms that the best church in a community, and the church that you should always attend if you live in that community, is the church that has the best doctrine. Period. Although I don't always hear it said so bluntly, it does seem that there is an unspoken assumption that purity of doctrine equals a healthy, "good" church. We shy away from thinking about even the possibility of dead orthodoxy. In fact, I have heard a man in a leadership position in a Reformed denomination question whether or not there is such a thing. But if you are honest with yourself, I think most of you have likely experienced dead orthodoxy "up close and personal" at some point in your lives.

- Strong expository preaching. This is not in contradistinction to sound doctrine; rather, it is a corollary. If there are two churches in a community that hold to the same doctrinal standards, then a second factor often considered in determining the best church in a community is the quality of the preaching. Is it doctrinally sound? Is it expository? Is it in-depth? Is it on point? Is it clear? Is it gripping? Everybody appreciates strong preaching, and it is natural for Christians to assess the health of a church based on the quality of its preaching. But we all know intuitively that the preaching of great sermons is not the same thing as a healthy church. Hopefully, one will lead to the other, as the Spirit of God uses the preached Word as a means of grace in the transformation of those who hear it. Sadly, however, that which is considered great preaching does not always produce that which the Scriptures call us to be and to do.

- Commitment of members to attend the called worship services and the midweek Bible studies and prayer meetings provided by the church. It is

commonly understood that a healthy church has a strong percentage of its people attending worship services (morning and evening, if called by Session), and a growing church often has more people in attendance at these services than they have members on the roll. A long-standing gauge for determining the health of a congregation in certain Reformed churches is to compare the number of those who attend Lord's Day evening worship services with those who attend the morning worship services; the higher the percentage is, the healthier the church is perceived to be. A healthy church also has a solid percentage of its members engaged in midweek Bible studies or prayer meetings. Some sessions work hard to try to have half, or three-fourths, or even more of its members involved in some sort of Bible study or prayer meeting, and that is a noble goal, indeed.

But the question under consideration in this article is this: is the real health and strength of a congregation satisfactorily evaluated merely by looking at its doctrine, its preaching, and the commitment of its members to attend worship services and mid-week Bible studies and/or prayer meetings? Asked another way, is the church with the soundest doctrine, the best preaching, and with the highest percentage of members committed to attending worship services and midweek Bible studies necessarily the best church? At the risk of being a bit controversial, let me answer that question with a guarded "No!" In this paper I propose that sound doctrine, strong preaching, and faithful attendance at called meetings of the church may be God-ordained means to move us toward a healthy church, but they are not necessarily to be equated with healthy, vibrant, God-honouring churches.

Ever since I did an exegesis paper more than thirty years ago as a seminary student under the tutelage of Dr. Renwick Wright, I have been struck by the way in which the apostle Paul prays for the church of Philippi, as recorded in Philippians 1:9:11. Writing under divine inspiration, Paul summarizes his prayer for them in these words:

> And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight so that you may be able to discern what is best [or approve those things that are excellent] so that you may be pure and blameless in the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ - to the glory and praise of God.

If this is Paul's prayer for the church in Philippi, do you not think that this prayer provides for us today at least a partial understanding of what a healthy, God-honouring, vibrant church should look like in our generation? I think we would all agree that this is the case.

Paul prayed for the church in Philippi in the way that he did because he understood what God's design for the church has always been. Of course, Paul does not always pray in exactly the same way for all the churches, and an in-depth study of Paul's other prayers could provide much more food for thought and encouragement than what we will look at in this article. But for purposes of this study, I want us to focus on Paul's prayer for the church in Philippi; and in so doing, I trust that all of us will gain a better understanding of what our churches are to be like if we are going to serve the Lord faithfully in our generation.

Paul's first part of his prayer is that the church would have an abounding love that is informed by knowledge and depth of insight. Notice, as we begin our study of this prayer, that knowledge and depth of understanding are critically important for the church at Philippi, and for every other church. Sound doctrine is a starting point for a good church. The church is called by God to be the pillar and ground of the truth. In this postmodern world where the emerging church is minimizing, if not denying, the role of doctrine in the life and ministry of the church, we need to continue to emphasize this point. Most Reformed churches already emphasize this fact, but lest you are tempted to do otherwise, think again. Knowledge is of fundamental importance. Systematic theology and what we today call 'distinctive principles' are essential.

Paul wants us to go beyond mere knowledge, but you cannot have a healthy church without sound doctrine. Churches that minimize doctrine in order to 'relate' to a fallen world are wrong at this point. Truth is important; and God has made that truth known to us in his Word. Although we must humbly acknowledge that because of the noetic effects of the fall, we will never have perfect understanding of doctrine; nevertheless, by God's grace, he does reveal truth to us, and we can have confidence in the fact that Reformed theology as developed over the centuries by the historic Reformed church is a wonderfully reliable summary of the Christian faith.

By way of personal testimony, let me say how much I love being in a confessional church. More and more I see the beauty of our subordinate standards. No, they are not perfect, but can you imagine functioning without them? I love teaching at a Seminary where students memorize the Shorter Catechism (if they have not already memorized it by the time they start at the Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary). There is no better summary of biblical truth in such a concise form, and it is appropriate for students to memorize it.

But the Scriptures make clear that knowledge itself can be deadly. Paul says to the church in Corinth that knowledge, without the graces that are to flow from it, puffs up (I Corinthians 8:1). He also says that you can understand all mysteries, and have all knowledge, yet without love you are only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal (I Corinthians 13:2).

Think of the church in Ephesus as Jesus describes it in Revelation 2. Less than fifty years after this church was established by the apostle Paul (perhaps much less, depending on the dating of the Book of Revelation), Jesus says that he is ready to remove the candlestick from their midst - not because of false doctrine, not for lack of perseverance, not because of evil deeds, but because they had lost their first love. In fact, the church is commended for maintaining orthodoxy, even to the point of practising church discipline on ones who had not kept the faith, and they had persevered and not grown weary, yet in the midst of it all, they had lost their first love. If any church should serve as a case study for us today, and a warning for us today, it is the church in Ephesus.

- The church in Ephesus was started under the ministry of the apostle Paul himself, and we see his great love for Christ and the church demonstrated at every point in his ministry to them, including his farewell address to the elders of the church in Acts 20 when he freely shed tears as they kissed him good-bye.

- Other godly leaders followed Paul in leadership in Ephesus, including Apollos and Timothy. This was not a church plant that experienced a lack of pastoral leadership after the church planter departed. Instead, there were godly, gifted men who followed Paul in providing pastoral leadership after he left. Some scholars believe even the apostle John spent time in Ephesus.

- Paul wrote to young Timothy, his son in the faith, as Timothy pastored the church in Ephesus, and reminded him that the goal of his instruction was love (I Timothy 1:5), not good doctrine or orthodox preaching.

- Paul wrote directly to the church in Ephesus and encouraged them to walk in love (Ephesians 5:2).

- Paul prayed for the church in Ephesus, that they would know the height and depth and width and breadth of the love of Christ (Ephesians 3:14-19).

We would think that no other church has ever experienced such blessings. Paul himself started the church; he stayed in touch with both the pastor and people after his departure, writing separate letters to both the pastor and the congregation, encouraging them to walk in love; and he prayed fervently for them that they would know experientially and in every way the love of Christ. (Parenthetically, let me say that if I could have one mere man praying for me, it would be the apostle Paul!) Yet, in less than half a century, Jesus warns the church that he was not going to let the church continue to exist unless there was repentance and a renewal of their first love.

Doctrine is not the goal of our instruction; love is. Notice again how Paul begins his prayer for the church in Philippi. He prays that their *love* would abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight.

It is true that you cannot know what love is, or how it is to be demonstrated, without knowledge. For example, you would not know how to show your love for Jesus in a way that pleases him in worship unless you had an understanding of the regulative principle of worship. But the goal of our instruction, per Paul's charge to Timothy, is love, not mere knowledge or theology.

Most of us in the Reformed camp have been taught well some of the key aspects of biblical love. We know that love involves sacrifice and service. Jesus demonstrates this love supremely in coming into this world not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many (Matthew 20:28). We know what love is by this: Jesus laid down his life for us - and we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers (I John 3:16). He demonstrated to his disciples his love for them by washing their feet, and then he tells them to do likewise (John 13).

How closely does the Bible associate love with giving! Our heavenly Father loved us, and he gave his only begotten Son (John 3:16). Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her (Ephesians 5:25).

I Corinthians 13 is the classic passage on love, and is often read at weddings - appropriately so. I Corinthians 13 sets forth Biblical love for all of our relationships, however, not just our marriages: love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not easily angered; it keeps no record of wrongs suffered; it does not delight in evil, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.

We also understand how closely love is linked with obedience. Jesus says in John 14:21 that those who love him will keep his commands. We know from I Samuel 15 that to obey is even better than to sacrifice. We cannot say that we love God if we are not committed to doing what he tells us to do. Love is not emotionalism. It is serving, giving, forbearing, forgiving, obeying, trusting, hoping, and enduring.

Although biblical love is not emotionalism, it is very important to state clearly that it does include our emotions; it includes our affections; it includes the deepest feelings of our soul. It is not a healthy sign when we in the Reformed camp do not preach on this aspect of love. Love is not ultimately emotionalism, but it is emotional - and it is to our peril if we think otherwise. One well-known Reformed scholar of the twentieth century, Gordon Clark, seeming to contradict the importance of our affections, asserts in his commentary on the First Letter of John that biblical love in not emotional love. He says, "Love is obedience to the law. An emotion called love can never be relied upon....Emotional love is usually wrong....Love is obedience to the Ten Commandments....[Christian love] is not an emotion." (pp.64,131). If Clark means to say that biblical love does not involve the emotions, I could not disagree more strongly. Biblical love does not allow emotions to trump reason or obedience, but biblical love most certainly is emotional. If you are married, try to imagine how strong your marriage would be if your affections were not included in your love for your spouse!

Our forefathers in the faith were deeply emotional and affectionate, and so are we to be. To the extent to which the Reformed church today is correctly labelled the "frozen chosen", to that extent it is a strong rebuke. We who understand the doctrines of grace should of all people be an emotional people. If you really understand grace, can your emotions not be engaged? As we have noted above, Paul wept with the elders of Ephesus when he bade them farewell, and in Philippians 1:8, the verse that precedes Paul's prayer that we are considering in this study, he could not have said more strongly in Greek how much his inner being longed to see the church for which he prayed. He expresses deep, deep affection for the church immediately before he tells them that his prayer for them is that they might have an abounding love.

J.C. Ryle, writing on the theme of holiness in his commentary on Luke 7, pens these words that give us cause for pause and reflection:

> More "doing" for Christ is the universal demand of all the Churches. It is the one point on which all are agreed. All desire to see among Christians more good works, more self-denial, more practical obedience to Christ's commands. But what will produce these things? Nothing, nothing but love. There never will be

> more done for Christ till there is more hearty love to Christ Himself. The fear of punishment, the desire of reward, the sense of duty, are all useful arguments, in their way, to persuade men to holiness. But they are all weak and powerless until a man loves Christ...The heart must be engaged for Christ, or the hands will soon hang down. The affections must be enlisted into His service, or our obedience will soon stand still.

Paul prays for the Philippian church to have an abounding love that is informed and bounded by knowledge and depth of insight, but Paul's prayer for the church did not end there. He prayed that the church might abound more and more in love so that they would be able to discern what is best, or alternately, so that (*hina* in the Greek) they might be able to approve what is excellent. Biblical knowledge must lead to wisdom. We need to be able to discern and approve those things that are excellent. As one famous evangelist of the past has said, the good is often the enemy of the best. A church that is a healthy church is a church that is able to discern the difference between the good and the best. Life is short. There are many things that can sidetrack us from the goal, and we need discernment to stay on track. We need excellent doctrine, excellent worship, excellent ethics, excellent love, excellent service, excellent relationships, excellent evangelism, excellent discipleship, excellent parenting, and excellence in every other area of life.

Have you ever known someone who had a good intellectual understanding of theology who just seemed to have no sense - someone who wasn't excellent in his relationships or his parenting or his work? Have you ever known someone who understands intellectually the theology of the church but someone you would not want to serve on any committee of the church? Something is wrong with this picture! Paul prays for an abounding love informed by biblical knowledge so that the church would be able to discern and approve that which was best.

Of course, the concern of the apostle Paul was not just that the Philippians would be able in an academic or theoretical way to approve those things that are excellent. Paul's prayer was that they might be able to approve those things that are excellent so that they might be pure and blameless in the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ. Some English translations do not make this point as clearly as they should. The Greek word used here is *hina*, the same word used to introduce the previous clause. Paul prays that the Philippians may have an abounding love *so that* they may be able to approve what is excellent *so that* they might be pure and blameless for the day of Christ.

If you know anything about Management by Objectives principles, you know the theory is that if you are going to achieve the overarching purpose for an organization, you need to set attainable goals that, if met, will enable you to accomplish the purpose; and in order to reach those goals, you need to set certain specific, measurable objectives that will, if met, enable you to reach the goals. That is, you should set certain objectives to help you meet certain goals so that you can ultimately accomplish your overall purpose. The terminology for these management principles has changed over the years, but whatever the terminology is, the principle is the same: you seek to accomplish measurable objectives that will enable you to meet certain goals so that you can ultimately achieve your overall purpose. Although Paul is not concerned about management principles, it is this concept that enables us to understand Paul's prayer. He prays for the church to grow in certain ways so that they might reach a certain goal so that they might, in turn, be in a position to fulfil an even larger objective.

Paul's concern for the Philippian church, and his concern for you and me, is not just that we would be knowledgeable, or even loving or discerning. Paul prays for an abounding love rooted in knowledge and depth of insight so that we might be able to discern those things that are excellent so that we might be pure and blameless in the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

Paul is praying that the church in Philippi will be perfectly sanctified in the day of Christ. Of course, you and I know that we will never be perfectly sanctified this side of glory, and our perfection then will be Christ's righteousness imputed to us through faith, not our own righteousness. Nevertheless, Paul's prayer for the church, if you will, is that we become what we already are in Christ.

When we think of sanctification, when we think of being pure and blameless in the day of Christ, most of us probably think, first of all, of putting off those sins that so easily beset us. We think of putting off lust, greed, selfish ambition, deceit, and a host of other sins. And well we should! As we live in union and communion with the resurrected and living Lord of Glory, we must, by God's grace, repent of our sins of commission so that we may reflect the image of God in our lives.

But notice in our text the words that further develop what Paul had in mind as he prayed. Paul prays that we would be pure and blameless in the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ. If we are to be pure and blameless on the day of Christ, then we are to repent

of our sins of omission as well as our sins of commission and fill our lives with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ.

Notice that this fruit is, indeed, through Jesus Christ. Paul is not praying for works righteousness. Rather, he is praying that the Philippian church will become more and more what they already were in Christ. He is praying that they will live according to what they already are. In Christ, we are declared to be righteous. This is our status. Through faith, Christ's righteousness has become our righteousness, and Paul prays that the Philippians would reflect that righteousness, that they would fill their lives with the good works that God ordained in advance for them to do. Paul's desire is that the church in Philippi, and that we today, be salt and light in a dark and depraved world so that men may see our good works and glorify our Father who is in heaven.

From my perspective, this is a great time to be a Reformed Presbyterian. The church in Scotland has had more encouragements in the last two years than they have had for generations. The Irish church has seen an increase in young men pursuing pastoral ministry at a time of critical need, and this has been a huge encouragement. The North American church has withstood the retirement of a respected and fruitful generation of pastors and has grown slowly, but surely, over the last quarter of a century. News from South Sudan is tremendously encouraging, and recent developments in a country in Asia seem beyond what we could even have prayed for a few years ago. Work continues in Japan, Cyprus, Australia, and France even though these places have been particularly resistant to the good news of Jesus Christ.

However, even with all the encouragements of recent years, I do wonder if the Reformed Presbyterian Church today is as effective as we once were in our efforts to be salt and light in cultures that seem to be growing ever darker. At best, our light appears dim, and our salt seems to have lost much of its saltiness. I remember reading that our American President, Abraham Lincoln (1861-1865), knew the Reformed Presbyterian (Covenanter) Church for two reasons: (1) our stand against slavery, and (2) our call for the nation to acknowledge Jesus Christ. Today, it seems, neither national leaders nor common citizens have been generally impacted by the witness of our small denomination; and I wonder if any one of us has seriously considered and prayed about what it would take to reverse this direction.

I understand that times have changed, but my question remains: is the Reformed Presbyterian Church today actively seeking to do those good works that God ordained from all eternity for us to do? If we are going to be filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, we must

demonstrate to a watching world the fruit of repentance. We must let the Spirit of Christ so fill our lives that love, joy, peace, and patience mark our lives. We must seek to preserve justice in our lands for all people, including the unborn and the oppressed. Only twenty-five years ago many Reformed Presbyterians were leaders in our communities in efforts to save the lives of unborn children, but even that stand for righteousness seems to be waning.

In the last two or three years I talked to a woman who was at Geneva College with me in the 1960s. Her father taught in the Bible Department there during those years. She is no longer in our denomination, and she expressed to me the concern her father had during his retirement years that, as the Reformed Presbyterian Church recommitted itself to historic confessional theology in the last century, it simultaneously lost its commitment to a full-orbed gospel ministry to the needy. Perhaps that observation is incorrect, and I hope that it is, but I do wonder in the day of Christ if the Lord will commend the twenty-first century church for extending the cup of cold water to the thirsty and loosening the chains of the oppressed.

Many years ago I preached a sermon, perhaps on Isaiah 58 or Matthew 25, encouraging the congregation to invest in the lives of the oppressed and disadvantaged. I remember a wonderful Christian woman approaching me and discussing the sermon. She said, in essence, that the liberal church from which she and her husband had come was deeply involved in helping the downtrodden; but that she did not realize that conservative, Bible-believing churches were to do those kinds of things as well.

But here is my question: if Jesus organized the church in such a way as to have not only ordained elders, but also ordained deacons; and if the primary responsibility of the deacons is to oversee mercy ministry; does the health of your congregation - from God's perspective - depend at least to some extent on how active you as a church are in ministries of mercy? Why do we need ordained officers to oversee ministries of mercy if we do not consider ministry of mercy to be a key aspect of a healthy church?

I have had the distinct privilege in my lifetime of participating in ordination exams for many young men pursuing pastoral ministry. These exams include church history, exegesis, systematic theology, distinctive principles, personal godliness, pastoral and evangelistic gifts, and preaching. To the best of my memory, never have I seen a man asked about his commitment to ministering to the poor. That may mean that I have a poor memory; perhaps such a question has been asked once or twice in the dozens (probably hundreds) of individual exams given during these years, but I am

also sure that it means very, very little emphasis has been placed on this important matter.

In contrast, the Scriptures do not record that the apostle Paul's presbytery gave him a single theology or church history exam when they commissioned him and sent him out to do missionary work, but Paul does record, under divine inspiration, "They desired only that we remember the poor, the very thing which I also was eager to do" (Galatians 2:10). Mercy ministry is not just a concern of the deacons; it was a concern of the apostle Paul and the presbytery that oversaw his work; and it should be a concern of all of us.

How about hospitality? Might not hospitality be included in the fruit of righteousness for which Paul prays? Is it not true that our Lord expects his Bride to be hospitable? Certainly, elders are required to be hospitable (Titus 1:8 and I Timothy 3:2); Gaius is commended for his hospitality (3 John 5); the author of Hebrews warns all of us not to neglect hospitality to strangers (Hebrews 13:2); and Peter instructs the church to be hospitable to one another without grumbling (1 Peter 4:9). In spite of this, I have known at least one Reformed church which has a reputation for never showing hospitality, even to visiting preachers. It is not surprising that few see that congregation as a healthy, vibrant place of worship. Recently my wife said to me that she thought all college students and all lonely people consider hospitality to be one of the marks of a good church! I think she is right. College students and those who are especially lonely are not the only ones to think so, either.

Even more basic than what I have said so far: does not the fruit of righteousness also include worship that is in spirit and in truth? I increasingly fear that because Reformed Presbyterians sing Psalms a cappella in worship, and do so exclusively, that we think that this is a point on which we pass muster. Sometimes I fear that we think our worship is acceptable to God, and no one else's worship is. But again, if we think such thoughts, we do so to our own peril. Our worship is weak and imperfect at best, to use the language of chapter 16 of the Westminster Confession of Faith. At best, our worship is stained. It is acceptable to God only through the mediating work of our Saviour, and it is through his mediating work that God also receives the worship of all of his elect.

Yes, we need to improve our worship! How we need to sing in the Spirit, not distracted by the concerns of the week, and not indifferent to the reality that we are worshiping the King of kings, the Lord of lords, the Creator of the heavens and the earth! I have been tremendously helped in my understanding of Biblical worship by G.I. Williamson. How clearly and how simply he shows

the necessity of singing Psalms exclusively in our worship if we are to bring worship that most pleases our Lord! But I have never forgotten another statement I heard him make one time. He said, in essence, in the context of a beautiful defence of exclusive Psalmody, "But I would rather worship in a congregation and hear the singing of grateful, Spirit-filled singers of man-made hymns than to worship with a lifeless, joyless group of exclusive Psalm singers." On the one hand, we know that only God knows the heart; but on the other hand, we have all been in settings that make us appreciate the sentiments of Pastor Williamson. Thankfully, by God's grace, it is possible to sing both in spirit and in truth - though not perfectly so! But that must be our goal. If we are filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, then our worship will, indeed, be Spirit-filled.

Paul prays for the church in Philippi to be pure and blameless in the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ. What a grand objective! What a great goal for those who name the Christ! Would to God that we could be pure and blameless, even as God has already declared us to be in Christ!

However, Paul is not yet through with his prayer. He has prayed for an abounding love rooted in knowledge and depth of insight. He has prayed for discernment as we test and approve those things that are excellent. He has prayed that the church be pure and blameless in the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, but even that is not enough. Even that is not the great and grand purpose for which we have been created. Notice the great goal for which Paul prays as he ends his prayer: the glory and praise of God. Hallelujah! The end of it all is not about us, but him. That is the purpose of our existence - the glory and praise of God!

As I grow ever older, one thing strikes me more and more clearly. It isn't new. It's as old as creation. It is summarized nicely in words familiar to all of us. Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever. At the end of the day, that is all that matters. At the end of life, that is all that matters. At the end of this present evil age, that is all that matters. In the new heavens and new earth, that is all that matters. Life is not ultimately about the creation, it is about the Creator.

Yes, Paul wanted the church in Philippi to be knowledgeable and theologically sound. He wanted that knowledge to inform a growing love for Christ and those around them. He wanted such a love to lead to discerning those things that are best so that they could be pure and blameless on the day of Christ. But all of that was for the glory and praise of God. Only the glory

and praise of God can be our overarching purpose in life.

As I hope is clear by now, my concern in writing this article is that many of us who are in Reformed churches today may really be convinced that if we have our theology right, we are okay. We may squabble; we may slander the pastor; we may never invite a neighbour to church; we may never visit a prisoner; we may never invite a visitor to lunch; we may have virtually no impact on our community; but we are okay. Conversely, we may have brothers and sisters who love the Lord Jesus Christ passionately, who show that love in every imaginable way, who would give their lives for Jesus without flinching in their loyalty to him; but they don't have their systematic theology as consistent or precise as ours, and they don't yet have their worship as carefully regulated as ours; and we are not so sure that they are okay.

I don't have all this figured out. Perhaps no one does this side of eternity. But I am confident that Herman Bavinck, the great Reformed theologian of another century, must be heard when he (provocatively) states in his book *The Certainty of Faith* that even the Roman Catholic doctrine of righteousness by good works is vastly preferable to a Protestant righteousness by good doctrine. He says that at least the Catholic doctrine produces works which profit humanity while a doctrine of justification by good doctrine produces only lovelessness and pride. May it never be that we in Reformed and Presbyterian circles fall into the trap of believing in righteousness by good doctrine!

I don't know what church is the best church in your community, but I do know that it is not enough to have the best doctrine. That is only the starting point and if we find ourselves still in the starting blocks, then perhaps we have unwittingly slipped into the mindset that good doctrine is all that really matters in the life of a church. Wherever you are in your desire to have a strong, vibrant, healthy church, my prayer for you is Paul's prayer for the church in Philippi: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight so that you may be able to discern what is best [or approve those things that are excellent] so that you may be pure and blameless in the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ - to the glory and praise of God. Amen!

EXPOSITORY PREACHING: THE NEED OF THE HOUR

James Davison

Jim Davison is a member of Great Victoria Street Baptist Church (Belfast), a member of the Irish Baptist Historical Society, and a visiting lecturer in Church History at Belfast Bible College and the Irish Baptist College.

The Necessity of Preaching

It has been well said that the authenticity of 'Biblical preaching' is significantly tarnished by contemporary communicators who are more concerned with personal relevance than with God's revelation. Such men have failed to understand that 'Scripture unmistakably requires a proclamation focused on God's will and mankind's obligation to obey.' For men 'wholly committed to God's Word the expository pattern commends itself as preaching that is true to the Bible.' This type of preaching, 'presupposes an exegetical process to extract the God-intended meaning of Scripture and an explanation of that meaning in a contemporary way.' For this reason 'The biblical essence and apostolic spirit of expository preaching needs to be recaptured'[1] just as it was in a former day.

As the reformation of the English church progressed during the sixteenth century two things became fundamental. The first was the emphasis on Scripture alone as the foundation for establishing sound doctrine, the principles by which the church is to be governed, worship is to be conducted, and on the basis of which piety or godliness is required. The implication of this was that 'every area of life came under the influence of God and the guidance of the Word.'[2] How this was to be worked out led to the second emphasis, which maintained that preaching was the one indispensable vehicle by which the truth of Scripture was to be proclaimed.

This exalted view of preaching stemmed from the belief that it was *the* method that God ordained in Scripture to fulfil his purpose. John Downame well expressed this understanding of preaching when he declared that preaching is 'God's own ordinance which he has instituted and ordained for the gathering of the saints, and building the body of his Church....for the true conversion of his children, and for the working of the sanctifying graces of his Spirit in them.'[3] Thomas White echoed this understanding of preaching when

he wrote, 'The most ordinary means of our effectual calling is the preaching of the Word.'[4]

The Elizabethan Puritan Thomas Cartwright put it in a very picturesque way when he said, 'As the fire stirred gives more heat, so the Word, as it were, blown by preaching, flames more in the hearers, than when it is read.'[5] Likewise, the 'heavenly' Richard Sibbes, 'Preaching is the chariot that carries Christ up and down the world.'[6] The Long Parliament was told by Stephen Marshall that 'preaching of the Word was the chariot on which salvation came riding into the hearts of men.'[7]

This picturesque way of emphasising the primacy of preaching could be illustrated many times over from Puritan writings. However, in our endeavour to present the Puritan understanding of preaching, we will content ourselves with two final comments from Edward Reynolds, who after the Restoration became Bishop of Norwich. In his sermon on *Preaching Christ* (2 Corinthians 4:5) we note this comment by Reynolds:

> [H]e who is the 'Lord of men and angels,' was solemnly anointed unto this function, to preach the gospel to the poor, to proclaim deliverance to the captives, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord; (Luke 4:18-19, 43-44) and though he were the Lord of life and glory, unto whom every knee must bow (Phil. 2:10) whom all the angels are commanded to worship; (Heb. 1:6) yet he did not distain...to go about preaching the gospel of the kingdom (Matt. 4:23).[8]

Reynolds continues by insisting on the principle of '*Necessitate praecepti*' where preaching is concerned. He argues that it was:

> In a special manner appointed by Christ, who is 'King and Lawgiver' in his church; as his 'Father sent him,' and gave him a commission, and a command to discharge the service which was entrusted in his hand; which he, with all willingness and obedience, set about, though it were not only to preaching but to dying, that so the 'pleasure of the Lord might prosper in his hand.' Even so did he send forth his disciples, (John 21:21) with a strict commission and command (as having all power in heaven and earth given unto him) to preach the gospel (Matt. 28: 18-20). And in order to perpetual discharge of that service, he appointed not only apostles, prophets, and evangelists, which were temporary officers, but pastors and teachers to attend the same to the world's end, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ (Eph. 4:13-18). And accordingly, the apostles took special care to commit the same service unto faithful men, who might be able to teach others, and appointed elders to be ordained in every city for carrying on this necessary work (Acts 14:23, 2 Tim. 2:2, Titus 1:5).[9]

For the Puritans the importance of preaching the Word 'consisted in the fact that it was the declaration by the preacher of the revelation of God.

confirmed in the hearts of believers by the interior testimony of the Holy Spirit.'[10] But in being God's spokesperson the Puritan minister recognised his awesome responsibility, and none expressed this more clearly than Richard Baxter when he wrote:

> It is no small matter to stand up in the face of a congregation, and deliver a message of salvation or damnation, as from the living God, in the name of our Redeemer. It is no easy matter to speak so plain, that the ignorant may understand us; and so seriously that the deadest hearts may feel us; and so convincingly that contradicting cavillers may be silenced.[11]

In recognising this awesome responsibility, however, the Puritan preacher also recognised the importance of his own walk with God. 'He must,' wrote Perkins, 'first be godly affected himself who would stir up godly affections in other men.'[12] Many years later John Flavel in addressing a 'great and solemn assembly' of fellow ministers expressed the same principle when he declared, 'Believe it, sirs, all our reading, studying, and preaching, is but a trifling hypocrisy, till the thing read, studied, and preached, be felt in some degree in our own hearts.' Flavel was very aware of how human nature could manifest itself, and therefore warned the assembly, 'Believe it, brethren, it is easier to disclaim, like an orator, a thousand sins of others, than it is to mortify one sin, like Christians, in ourselves; to be more industrious in our pulpits than in our closets; to preach twenty sermons to our people, than one to our own hearts.'[13]

Likewise, Richard Baxter, in his renowned *The Reformed Pastor*, exhorts his fellow 'pastors and overseers of the churches of Christ'[14] to constant vigilance, respecting their own piety and godliness. Among the reasons given why pastors should take heed to their own standing before God are the following:

> Take heed to yourselves, lest you should be void of that saving grace of God which you offer to others, and be strangers to the effectual workings of that gospel which you preach;...lest you perish, while you call upon others to take heed of perishing;...that you be that which you persuade your hearers to be, and believe that which you persuade them daily to believe;...lest you live in those actual sins which you preach against in others; and lest you be guilty of that which you daily condemn;...lest your example contradict your doctrine. [Finally] If the work of the Lord be not soundly done upon your own hearts, how can you expect that he bless your labours for the effecting of it in others?'[15]

Puritan Preaching

While the godly example displayed by the Puritan preacher is important it is very clear that, as all Puritan preachers insisted, 'the first and principal duty of a pastor is to feed the flock by diligent preaching of the word.'[16] This means

that preaching, as a means of feeding, must be presented in a way that the hearers could partake of it. This desire to feed helped produce the structure of the Puritan sermon, and also necessitated it to be plain, memorable, and practical. Indeed, there was 'little interest in speculative thought or even speculative divinity. Of paramount concern was that godliness which desires to know the will of God in order to follow it.'[17] However, while the function of the sermon was practical rather than picturesque, the preacher would at times open the window of the imagination of the hearers by the use of similes and metaphors and other such means as a way of illustrating the various points that were being made.[18]

Preaching, however, although it has a long history in the English church, has not always held such a prominent position. It was not until the Puritan era that preaching became so widespread and was elevated above all else in worship by the Puritans. In considering why sermons became common, even popular, by the early 1600s, at least two reasons are postulated. One is that in the first generation of Protestantism an individual had to be convinced of the truth of the Protestant position to become a Protestant. This came about by knowledge of Scripture, which was expounded in sermons by godly ministers rather than relying on 'entrenched traditional Catholicism.'[19] The second main reason is that 'Protestants were convinced that everyman must make up his mind about religion for himself under the eyes of his Maker.'[20] In these two reasons alone we see the urgency or necessity for preaching; so that men could be instructed in the truth, and the way of duty to God.

With the Reformation there came, also, a shift away from the medieval emphasis on the fourfold method of interpreting Scripture, to an emphasis on the literal interpretation of Scripture as the only proper method of interpretation. William Perkins, in his *The Art of Prophesying*, concurred with this method of interpreting Scripture when he referred to the interpretation of Scripture as 'the opening of the words and sentences of the scripture that one entire and natural sense may appear.'[21] It must not, however, be construed that the English Reformers and their successors rejected totally these other forms. William Whitaker states the position well:

> We concede such things as allegory, anagoge, and tropology in Scripture; but meanwhile we deny that there are many and various senses. We affirm there is but one true, proper, and genuine sense of Scripture, arising from the words rightly understood, which we call the literal: and we contend that allegories, tropologies, and anagoges are not various senses, but various collections from one sense, or various applications and accommodations of that one meaning.[22]

Now while the method employed by Reformers like Latimer and Hooper can with certainty be described as the plain style of preaching, it was William Perkins, Fellow of Christ's College, Cambridge, who would forge the shape of mainstream Puritanism. Indeed, the evidence shows that so influential was Perkins' sermon structure that Puritan ministers throughout the seventeenth century would apply it in their own ministries and earn for him the title, 'Father of Puritanism'.

Men like Richard Greenham, Arthur Hildersham, and Richard Rogers in their parish ministries would have an influence on the Puritan Movement, but the major influence would be that of William Perkins. It was Perkins, more than anyone else, who simplified and made theology popular by his plain presentation of the gospel. It was Perkins who presented biblical truth in a manner that made it possible to be understood and assimilated by the simplest of minds.

It is important, also, to recognise that although Perkins was himself a fine theologian, he 'realized that the Church's greatest need was preachers, not abstract theologians.'[23] With this in mind Perkins always endeavoured to present theology in a practical and relevant manner to his hearers with a particular aim in mind, which was, 'to cultivate a godliness and devotion in the hearts of his hearers....to instruct the simple ploughman as much as the Cambridge academic in how to live for God.'[24] It was this 'unique capacity to popularise vital theological concepts that made Perkins a voice whose words fell on eager ears.'[25]

To assist in a proper presentation or proclamation of God's Word, Perkins produced his textbook on homiletics *The Art of Prophesying*. In this book, which may have been the first of its kind, Perkins, after expounding in great detail what is, and is not, involved in preaching, concludes with this summary: Preaching involves: 1) reading the text distinctly out of the canonical Scriptures; 2) giving the sense and understanding of it being read, by the light of the Scripture itself; 3) collecting a few profitable points of doctrine out of the natural sense of the passage; and 4) applying the doctrines rightly collected to the life and manners of men in a simple speech.[26]

This analysis of what is involved in biblical preaching focuses on two very essential things: 1) the necessity of making a thorough examination and explanation of the Scripture text, with the aim of allowing Scripture to speak for itself, and 2) an appeal to the consciences of the hearers, which may only be made after the first part was completed. On this basis the preacher must not only start with Scripture, his whole sermon must also be about explaining,

enforcing and applying the Scripture to the hearts and minds of his hearers.

For the Puritans who followed in the footsteps of Perkins, the centre of the sermon was the opening of one or more particular propositions ('doctrines') drawn from a specific text of Scripture and then proved by 'reasons,' which were the explication and justification of the 'doctrines.' This was then followed by moral applications or 'uses' to drive home the doctrine expounded to the hearers, and to demonstrate the contemporary relevance of the doctrine to the lives of the hearers.

Examples of Puritan Preaching

To help us to understand how Puritan preachers handled this style or form of sermon in practice we will examine two separate sermons by two Puritan divines. The first sermon was preached well before the Civil War and the second long after it, which may demonstrate the long life this style of preaching had.

The first sermon

This example of the Puritan style of preaching is a sermon by Robert Bolton[27] on the text *In that day shall this song be sung in the land of Judah* (Isaiah 26:1), published in 1633, two years after Bolton's death, under the title of *The Four Last Things*. The subject is *Preparation Before Death*. Starting with a brief **exegesis** of the first seven verses of the chapter Bolton notes: 1) in times of captivity there is the consolation for the people of God in knowing that he will 'most mercifully rescue and relieve his own' who afterward 'will acknowledge and magnify his miraculous hand in their preservation and support,' and also stir up others to have the same trust in God, who 'never did, nor ever will fail or forsake any who put their trust in him' (vv. 1-7); and 2) an instruction how 'the godly should carry themselves in the time of crosses and chastisements (vv. 7-21).'[28]

Under the first point Bolton notes the provision of a song (vv.1-3), which will bring comfort to the people of God in extreme times. The time when the song will be sung is *In that day* (v.1), which may be understood either: 1) historically and literally of the Israelites' deliverance from Babylon; 2) anti-typically, of the blessed deliverance of God's people out of the snares and bondage of the devil; or 3) comprehensively, of the gathering of 'the saints out of this vale of tears . . . and the powers of darkness, into Jerusalem which is above, where they shall joyfully sing triumphant hallelujahs.' Bolton also notes the exhortation to trust in God (v.5) and gives these reasons for it: 1) God's

eternal power; 'upon which we may forever sweetly and safely rest and repose ourselves;' 2) God's ability to 'trample in the mire, the insolence and pride of the most raging persecutors' and to set his people 'upon a rock of safety and salvation for ever;' and 3) God's watchfulness 'over the ways of the just.'[29]

From his exegesis of the passage Bolton **extracts this doctrine**: 'It is a holy wisdom, and happy thing, to treasure up comfortable provision against the day of calamity. It is good counsel, and a blessed course, to store up comfort against the evil day.'[30] In support of the doctrine Bolton cites Proverbs 10:5, *He who gathers in summer, is a wise son; he who sleeps in harvest is a son who causes shame* (NKJV). Bolton paraphrases the verse this way: 'He who, while it is called "today", turns not on God's side, and, by forwardness and fruitfulness in his blessed ways, treasures up comfort and grace against his ending hour, shall most certainly, upon his bed of death and illumination of conscience, find nothing but horrible confusion and fear, extreme horror, and insupportable heaviness of heart.'[31]

In **opening up the doctrine** Bolton gives a very vivid description of what befalls those who fail to store up any comforts of grace against the day when they will face death; the vale of tears. Those who fail in this great matter are 'lulled asleep with the syren songs of these sensual times;...[and] swim down the temporising torrent of these last and lewdest days, with full sail of prosperity and ease.' Indeed, by 'grasping gold, gathering wealth,...aggrandizing his posterity,...satisfying the appetite, and serving himself,' rather than gathering 'spiritual manna,' they must, says Bolton, go down to the 'bottom of the burning lake, there to lie everlastingly in tempestuous and fiery torments,...which, like infinite rivers of brimstone, will feed upon his soul and flesh, without remedy, ease, or end.'[32]

Unlike these miserable individuals the happy man is one 'who in the short summer's day of his miserable and mortal life, gathers grace with a holy greediness, plies the noble trade of Christianity with resolution and undauntedness of spirit.' Such a man, when his time comes to depart this vale of tears, will be met by 'a glorious troop of blessed angels; ready and rejoicing to guard and conduct his departing soul into his Master's joy.' Bolton also notes that on entering into their Master's joy the godly with him shall 'shine throughout all eternity with such glory and bliss, which in sweetness and excellency does infinitely exceed the possibility of all human or angelical conception.'[33]

Having compared the state of those who fail to gather spiritual manna and those who do, Bolton then explains what he means by spiritual manna. First in

negative terms: 'I mean not lands, livings, or large passions; I mean not wealth or riches:...I mean not top honour, or height of place: I mean not the arm of flesh or princely favour.' Then positively: 'I mean treasures of a more high, lasting, and noble nature: the blessings of a better life, comforts of godliness, graces of salvation, favour and acceptance with the highest Majesty.' These move Bolton to exclaim: 'There is no darkness so desolate, no cross so cutting, but the splendour of these is able to enlighten, their sweetness to mollify.' In support of his arguments Bolton speaks of the counsel of Christ found in Matthew 6:19-20, and concludes, 'why then should any poor Christian be distressed and cast down;...since the dearest Son of the eternal God...the Mediator of the great covenant...is his Advocate.'[34]

Having explained the difference between the one who sleeps and the one who gathers during the harvest time of God's holy providence Bolton gives some reasons why it is good to store up heavenly things: 1) It will help 'to assuage the smart, mollify the bitterness, and enlighten the darkness of the evil day'; 2) It may 'happily prevent a great deal of restless impatience, [and] reprobate fears'; 3) Reliance upon heavenly things will enable them to bear all crosses and with the 'wings of faith' soar above all miseries; and 4) The evidence of spiritual strength in time of trouble may move the ungodly 'to industriously desire to know what that is which makes such a man so happy in all estates.'[35]

With his thorough exposition of the doctrine completed Bolton turns his attention to the **application or use of the doctrine**. First, it may be used to 'awaken and remove all those secure and careless companions who...provide no food against a stormy day, [and] treasure up no comfort against the Lord's coming.' It is Bolton's lament that many sit regularly under gospel ministry 'senseless of those things which most deeply and dearly concern the eternal ruin or welfare of their souls.' Furthermore, there will be others who will go to hell, with the 'chief cause of damnation' being 'their false persuasion, and groundless presumption of salvation.' For the good of such people, therefore, Christians should apply the doctrine to their own lives.[36]

Second, it may be used to encourage Christians to store up 'the rich and lasting treasures of divine wealth and immortal graces,' which will 'shine comfortably upon our souls' in 'the darkness and most desperate dangers, of this present time.' Indeed in the valley of tears 'their splendour and spiritual glory will carry us triumphantly...upon the wings of joy, and in the arms of angels, to unapproachable light, unknown pleasures and endless bliss.'[37]

In the course of expanding on this second 'use' Bolton addresses those who as yet have not experienced the withdrawing of God's grace from them, 'leaving them for a time to the darkness of their own spirit, and Satan's temptations.' Yet, although crosses, calamities, and troubles 'may overtake you before you take leave of this vale of tears,' be assured, says Bolton, 'never before there is need'; 'always in wisdom'; 'in measure'; 'in love and kindness'; 'to try you'; 'to purge out sin'; 'to refine you'; 'to save you'; and remember, urges Bolton, God 'will ever be with you in trouble,' and he 'will deliver you.' By these encouragements, supported by multiple Scripture texts, Bolton reminds his hearers of the necessity of ensuring that the whole course of life should 'be a conscionable preparative to die comfortably.'[38]

To assist his hearers in the way exhorted Bolton sets down ten rules to fortify their 'spirits against all future evils, and terrible things.' For 'by these few precedents you may easily perceive what singular and sovereign power patience has to pull the sting, and extract the poison, out of the most grievous calamities and greatest troubles.' The ability to overcome the world by relying upon the promises of God is shown by the example of three men: Athanasius, Chrysostom, and Luther. Yet while these men have been 'furnished beforehand with singular gifts, and sufficiency of spiritual ability' for 'special services and extraordinary sufferings' it is also true, as Bolton notes, '[God] will never break a bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax, Isaiah 42:3.' The tenth rule exhorts us to 'a serious and fruitful mediation upon death, judgement, hell and heaven, in order 'to make us, by God's blessing, more humble, unworldly, provident, and prepared for the evil day.' Then following some comment on each of these subjects Bolton brings his discourse to a close.[39]

The second sermon

A sermon by Matthew Mead, one of the lesser known of Puritan preachers, is the second example of the Puritan form or style of preaching to be considered.[40] In his introduction to a sermon on Psalm131:2 *Like a weaned child is my soul within me* (NKJV), Mead asks what it was that 'humbled David's heart, and took him off from doting upon the world's grandeur, and from delighting himself in present enjoyments'? The answer given by Mead is that it was the power of God's grace, which had taken David's 'heart off from all things here below, by showing him the vanity and emptiness of them.' From this Mead **states the doctrine** drawn from the text, which is: 'where the grace of God takes hold of the soul, it makes it as a weaned child, to all worldly things.'[41]

The **doctrine is then opened** under three main headings showing: 1) what it is to be 'as a weaned child'; 2) the great resemblance between a weaned child and a gracious soul; and 3) how grace weans the heart from all worldly things. Under the first main head Mead makes two negative, but important, points: 1) to be weaned from the world does not mean that one must be 'without the comforts and contentments of this world.' In support of his argument Mead points out that King David 'had riches in abundance, honour in abundance, for he was...the greatest man in the kingdom, and yet his soul was as a weaned child'; and 2) neither does it mean that our enjoyments are to be slight and undervalued, 'for they are a real mercy; they are gifts from above, the noble effects of the bounty of providence.'[42]

Turning to the positive Mead identifies three ways by which a believer may be identified as being weaned from the world: 1) when he has 'a contented spirit in every condition, [and] under every providence'; 2) when he displays that pattern of humility propounded by Christ to his disciples: 'Whosoever shall humble himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven' (Matthew 18:4); and 3) when he is teachable. Mead makes the point that naturally man is the most unteachable creature for he is 'one that can neither see, nor hear, nor understand [2 Corinthians 4:4; Psalms 58:3-4; Romans 3:11].' How then can a person be weaned from worldly things? When by the special mercy of God, a soul is given 'a teachable frame of spirit; a seeing eye, a hearing ear, and an understanding heart.'[43]

Under the second main head a weaned child is considered in three ways: 1) in regard to its infirmities ('It cannot feed itself, it cannot defend itself, it cannot govern itself'); 2) in regard to its manner of weaning; and 3) in regard to its disposition. In developing these points Mead stresses the necessity for every child of God to be weaned from worldly pursuits in order that he may be fed upon the Word of God, which is the safest and most profitable counsel, for 'we can never err or miscarry in following the counsels of the Scripture.' Indeed, 'the happiness and salvation of the soul is the sure issue of following the counsels of the word.'[44] Mead after showing that God guides his people by the counsels of the Spirit, declares:

> How happy is the condition of God's people that have the word and Spirit to guide them! The word without the Spirit cannot, the Spirit without the word will not, guide us. The word is a light without us; the Spirit is a light within us. The word propounds the way to walk in; the Spirit enables the soul to walk in that way. Blessed are they whom God thus guides.[45]

In developing his argument Mead shows why a soul should be weaned from worldly pursuits. As the child who is weaned has 'the nature and kind of

its food' changed, so 'the soul of a believer...has another kind of substance, and lives upon another kind of comforts than he did before.' Such comforts are 'the comforts of the promises.... [and] he that lives upon the promises lives by faith, and the life of faith is the only life in the world.' Indeed, this life of faith 'is the only safe and secure life'; 'It is the only quiet life'; 'It is the only sweet and comfortable life'; 'It is the honourable life'; 'It is the only lasting life.' Such a life, writes Mead, 'proceeds from a living principle; the grounds of it are in God and Christ, and the promises, and no change reaches to these.' With such a foundation, 'what can he [who lives by faith] lack who has him who is all? What can he lose who has him who knows no change at all?' As 'the mariner, when he puts forth to sea, quickly loses the sight of land: but though he sails never so far, yet he never loses the sight of heaven.'[46]

Turning to his third main head – How grace does wean the heart from all worldly things – Mead presents a final analysis of the doctrine he has propounded from the text. Here Mead demonstrates that the natural man is without grace in his being and is therefore in a state of darkness in which the 'vanity, emptiness, insufficiency, and unsatisfactoriness [sic] of worldly things to the soul of man, cannot be discovered.' Grace too is a light in the soul and in the understanding, whereby the soul is able to discern the true nature of things and therefore able to make a right judgement. Also, grace acting upon the heart 'extinguishes and removes that out of the soul which makes the things of this world to be our chief good', and 'elevates the soul above sensual objects, to live upon more real, more suitable comforts; to live upon God, to lay up treasure in heaven, to fetch its refreshments from the divine fountain.'[47] To have this grace enables the soul to be easily weaned from all earthly enjoyments.

Up to this point in his sermon Mead has quoted at least sixty different texts from Scripture in support of his doctrine (where the grace of God takes hold of the soul, it makes it as a weaned child, to all worldly things), which gives us a clear indication of his confidence in the *sola scriptura* principle, and allowing Scripture to interpret itself. In developing his proposition Mead has carefully laid out his arguments, showing the necessity of being weaned from worldly and selfish pursuits, that cause distraction from our creation purpose of glorifying God, and the comforts and benefits that accrue to all who can say, like David in Psalm 131:2, '*Surely I have calmed and quieted my soul,... Like a weaned child is my soul within me*' (NKJV).

Turning to the **application of the doctrine** expounded, Mead exhorts his hearers to pursue a life of godliness by self-examination, so as to consider the power of God at work in their lives. Mead makes the point that there is no

greater duty placed upon a Christian, than frequent examination of himself and his state by the measure of present truths: 'When the word of the Lord is spoken, and truth discovered, then to bring it home to the heart, and try our spirits and condition by it, is a great duty [2 Corinthians 13:5].'[48] Following a few more reasons for self-examination Mead sets out some rules by which the believer is to examine himself, to determine if he is weaned or is being weaned from the world: 1) if you have heavenly affections amidst earthly possessions; 2) if you reckon your happiness and riches as the gifts of God; 3) if you bear worldly evils, worldly desires, and worldly losses, with a holy quietness and satisfaction of spirit; 4) if you choose holiness with affliction and loss, rather than sin with pleasure and preferment, then you are being weaned from worldly things.[49]

The second great use of this doctrine is our duty to 'bless the Lord, magnify the riches of his mercy, in calling and taking your hearts of from the world.' In support of this point Mead refers to Genesis 21:8 and shows that it was when the child was weaned that a great feast was held. Likewise, believers 'should rejoice in the Lord when the soul is become spiritual and weaned from carnal desires.' Mead makes the point very well when he says:

> To have the world, and yet to be weaned from the world; to possess it, and yet not to be possessed by it; this is a great mercy....But to live above all, amidst the enjoyment of all, this is the greatest mercy in the world....To see no greatness in any thing but in the great God, no beauty in any thing but holiness, no glory in any thing but Christ, no goodness in any thing but religion; O what a mercy is this![50]

Mead also exhorts those among his hearers who are Christians to evangelise: 'labour to wean others from the world,' especially friends and family, 'that they that are near to us may not be far from God; and chiefly our children, whose souls God will more immediately require at our hands.' Finally, Mead urges his hearers to 'beg God for this mercy of a weaned soul; that you may no longer fetch your satisfaction and comforts from the creature, but from God in Christ.' For 'the longer the soul lives upon the comforts of the world, and fetches its contentment from the creature, the harder it will be to draw off the affection and wean the soul from them.'[51]

The Necessity of Applying a Doctrine

Reading through these two sermons it soon becomes evident that the clear intent of both preachers is to change the minds of their hearers with a view to their being well grounded Christians. For this reason they endeavoured to ensure that 'the way of godliness, which desires to know the will of God in order to follow it'[52] was clearly articulated. There is no divergence into any

supposition or fanciful thought, simply a straightforward exhortation to practical godliness, which would bring glory to God and contentment to the hearers. In both of the sermons there is too the fundamental assumption that Scripture sets forth clear precedents by which man is to live. Indeed, the whole premise of their preaching was that the doctrine or doctrines drawn from the text were universally true. They were God-provided models for the whole world. This conviction 'was reinforced by the practice of largely or exclusively limiting the details of the sermon to biblical material.'[53] In Bolton's sermon over one hundred Scripture texts are cited, and in Mead's sermon more than seventy-five texts are cited.

These two sermons are also classic Puritan presentations of Scripture truth, as the preacher, after the exegesis of the text, proceeds to explain the doctrine he has drawn from it by reasons, which are separated into multiple divisions and subdivisions. Nevertheless, while the doctrine was the centre of the sermon, it was the third main division, the application of the doctrine to the whole of life, which kept the sermon from dying as soon as it was delivered. William Ames stressed the importance of the application when he wrote: 'To apply a doctrine to its use is to sharpen and make specially relevant some general truth with such effect that it may pierce the minds of those present with the stirring up of godly affections.'[54] Failure to apply the doctrine to its use is a sin committed by those 'who stick to the naked finding and explanation of the truth, neglecting the use and practice in which religion and blessedness consist. Such preachers edify the conscience little or not at all'[55]

Clearly it was not the intention of the Puritan preacher simply to tickle the ears of his hearers; it was, through an appeal to the conscience, to persuade his hearers to adopt the correct spiritual and moral behaviour for their lives.[56] As it was the responsibility of the preacher to exhort his hearers to godly living, so it was the responsibility of the hearers to reform their ungodly lives. The importance of applying the applications exhorted by the preacher is well noted by Thomas Manton in his comments on James 1:22 *be doers of the word, and not hearers only* (NKJV), where he points out that many, by going from sermon to sermon, hear much, but failing to digest what is heard they do not reap the benefit from the fruit of the word.[57] Such people who 'stay in the means are like a foolish workman that contents himself with having the tools.'[58]

Manton also warns that our 'judgement will be increased if there be not a lively impression upon our hearts.'[59] George Swinnock in *The Christian Man's Calling*, echoes this warning when he comments, 'If you would not have the word to witness against you, when you shall be judged by it, for your everlasting life or death, do hear and amend.'[60] Christopher Love in *The Right*

Hearing of Sermons makes the same important point in reference to how the preaching of the Word should be heard: 'You must take heed how you hear because, if you do not, the Word will not only be ineffectual to you, but will do you a great deal of hurt.'[61] Indeed, like the man who puts a light or a candle under his bed and lies in it is in danger of burning, 'so that man who lives under the means of grace and the dispensations of the Word, and takes no care how he hears it,...[is in] danger of hellfire.'[62]

In considering Love's work a little further we find that after giving reasons for the right hearing of the Word he gives seven directions how the preaching of the Word should be heard: 1) preparedly; 2) attentively; 3) retentively; 4) understandingly; 5) applicatively; 6) reverentially; and 7) obediently.[63] To illustrate the fifth direction Love gives the following scenario: 'If a patient has never such excellent counsel given him, never so powerful a medicine prescribed, if he does not apply it, it will do him no more good than if he had never known it.'[64] Then for the seventh direction Love says, 'Come with an obedient heart ready, prepared, and disposed to stoop and submit to all the instructions, corrections, and reproofs of the Word of God;....Be willing to submit to it, and, if you had a thousand necks, to lay them under the obedience of the Word.'[65]

The concept of '*doing*' is well explained by Manton when he describes who the *doers of the word* are; they are those who 'receive the work of the word into their hearts, and express the effects of it in their lives.'[66] Swinnock expresses the same point in these vivid terms: 'It is not the bread in the cupboard of the Bible, or on the table of the sermon, which will nourish your soul, unless it be by application of it to yourself, eaten and taken down into the stomach.'[67] Swinnock goes on to explain that it is not just the hearing of the precious promises in the ear that will rejoice the soul, they must be 'received and digested by faith [before they] will refresh and comfort the conscience.'[68] Therefore, urges Swinnock, 'when the glad tidings of peace are preached, let your heart leap with hope. Oh, let the nearer approach of the sun, call forth and ripen the fruits of righteousness.'[69]

William Lyford in the introduction to *The Instructed Christian*, which is entitled *The Plain Man's Senses Exercised*, points out that the scope of the ministry is, 'first to beget children to God, and then to build them up in the faith.'[70] Then from his brief exegesis of Hebrews 5:13-14 Lyford shows that the best way to build the saints up is by feeding them on the Word of God. 'The blessed Word of God is the food of souls, both for the weak and for the strong; there is milk for babes, and strong meat for them of full age, and both of them are nourished by it in their spiritual life, and to life eternal.'[71] From this

doctrine Lyford notes two uses. The first is that ministers when preparing sermons must ensure they will nourish as food: 'To refresh the weary, to strengthen the weak, [and] to make the healthy grow and increase.'[72]

It is, however, Lyford's second use of the doctrine, which speaks directly to the issue of application, and shows the importance of applying it. The Word must not only be prepared and presented as food it must of necessity be received as food. However, in order that this may be done correctly there must be a proper approach to the hearing of the Word. Then having received the Word as food it should be 'digested and turned into substance. Not as the vintner that tastes of many vessels, but swallows none.'[73] The third point made by Lyford is that the Word is 'for retention and practice, chew the cud, and walk in the strength of it.'[74] The whole emphasis in this work by Lyford is to exhort the Christian to grow in the doctrines of the faith:

> For by reason of use and exercise, we attain that ability and dexterity to discern things that differ. Thus you see that to diligence in hearing, Christians must add prudence in discerning. The end of Scripture is to make us wise to salvation, wise to discern the voice of the tempter from God's voice, to know a false prophet, though he comes in sheep's clothing. It is a shame for a carpenter, or goldsmith, or mathematician, not to know the use of the instruments of his profession.... Now religion is every man's profession and trade, and it concerns all its professors to be acquainted with the doctrine and intents thereof.[75]

The book is a defence of various doctrines, which had been under attack in the first half of the seventeenth century, including the divine authority of the written Word of God. Lyford begins by showing how Satan seeks to undermine this authority and then sets out a number of doctrines drawn from the testimony of the Word itself. One of these doctrines states that Scripture 'is of divine authority; the last and supreme judge in matters of faith and duty.'[76] This is then proved by an appeal to the judgement and practice of Christ, the testimony of John the Baptist, and the testimony of Moses. Building upon this Lyford shows the properties of a supreme judge, including the 'infallibility and fullness of knowledge, by which we are assured that his verdict is true.'[77] If, however, the judge is not infallible an appeal to another may be proper.

Importantly, argues Lyford, this does not apply to Scripture for 'Scripture delivers the infallible truths of God;...it delivers all truths that are sufficient and needful for salvation; 2 Timothy 3:15.'[78] From this text Lyford shows that Scripture teaches three things: 1) what doctrines are to be believed and what doctrines are not to be believed; 2) what we must do, by instructing in all points of duty; and 3) Scripture is profitable for correction if we should go astray.[79] Expanding on these p.. ' , ford states, like the Reformers before him, that

Scripture is 'the voice of God', which God has made 'common to all, that by it all controversies might be decided;...every conscience guided, and every man's life framed.'[80] Turning to the use of the doctrine Lyford makes the point that if the Scriptures are the last and supreme judge in matters of faith and duty, as he has argued they are, then:

> Let every sincere Christian thus resolve: if the word be of the highest authority, then I must give it the highest place in my heart; I must live by the word, and act by the word, and die by the word.... [Indeed] if you can give the word the highest place in your heart, then in very condition you can with comfort appeal to God to judge you, and say, 'Lord, I am willing to be ordered by it'....[Yes,] if you can say this in truth of heart, then you may with comfort appeal to God in any estate.[81]

We must also note Lyford's word of warning regarding the failure to submit to the authority of Scripture. 'Remember,' says Lyford, 'that if we will not yield to the judgement of Scripture now, to our conversion and amendment, we shall ere long be forced to yield to its authority and judgement to our confusion.'[82] By highlighting this warning against the neglecting of Scripture along with his exhorting to godliness Lyford was using the same methods to bring about the same end as his fellow Puritan preachers, namely, to establish the individual in a right relationship with God. This way of preaching, and writing, caused real concern to both hearers, and readers alike, in a society that held the Bible to be central to all aspects of life. For it urged them to seriously consider what the Bible said and to examine their own lives and their relationship with God in the light thereof.

In a society which has moved far away from this understanding of God's Word that which is urged in Puritan preaching is surely something we are greatly in need of recovering at this present time. For a return to, and acceptance of, God's word as central to all of life would bring with it a return to giving God the honour that he alone is worthy of, and with the psalmist we will say:

> *The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.*
> *The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes.*
> *The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.*
> *More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.*
> *Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward* (Psalm 19:7-11).

Notes

1. Richard L. Mayhue, 'Rediscovering Expository Preaching' in *Expository Preaching: Balancing the Science and Art of Biblical Exposition* (Word Publishing: Dallas, 1992), p.3.
2. P. Lewis, *The Genius of Puritanism*, (Haywards Heath, Sussex: Carey Publications, 1977), p.12.
3. J. Downame, *The Christian Warfare* (London, 1604, Rpt. Amsterdam: W.P. Johnston, Norwood, NJ, and Theatrum Orbis Terrarum Ltd,. Amsterdam, 1974), p.158.
4. T. White, *A Sermon on Effectual Calling in Puritan Sermons: 1659-1689*, vol. 5 (Rpt. Wheaton, IL: Richard Owen Roberts, 1981), p.278.
5. Thomas Cartwright cited in H. Davies, *The Worship of the English Puritans* (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1997), p.186.
6. *The Works of Richard Sibbes*, vol. 5 (Rpt. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1977), p.508.
7. S. Marshall, 'A Sermon Preached before Parliament' in R. Jeffs et al, (eds) *Fast Sermons to Parliament 1640-1641*, vol.1, (Rpt. London: Commarket Press Ltd, 1971), p.135. (Hereafter cited as *Fast Sermons to Parliament*. The pagination is that of the 1971 reprints and not the original pagination relating to the separate sermons. This will be consistent to all references to the *Fast Sermons to Parliament* taken from the Commarket Press reprints).
8. *The Works of Edward Reynolds*, vol. 5 (Rpt. Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2000), p.343.
9. *The Works of Edward Reynolds*, p.344.
10. H. Davies, *The Worship of the English Puritans, Worship and Theology in England From Cranmer to Baxter and Foxe, 1534-1690*, vol.1 (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1996), p.182.
11. 'The Reformed Pastor' in *The Practical Works of Richard Baxter*, vol. 4 (Rpt. Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2000), p.383.
12. Cited by W.S. Hudson, 'The Ministry in the Puritan Age,' in H.R. Niebuhr and D.D. Williams (eds) *The Ministry in Historical Perspectives* (New York: Harper Brothers, 1956), p.205.
13. *The Works of John Flavel*, vol. 6 (Rpt. London: The Banner of Truth, 1968), pp.564, 568.
14. 'The Reformed Pastor' in *The Practical Works of Richard Baxter*, vol. 4. p.369.
15. Ibid, pp.369-371.
16. *The Works of John Owen*, vol.16, (W.H. Goold edition, Rpt, London: Banner of Truth, 1968), p.74.
17. H. Davies, *Worship and Theology in England*, vol. 1, p.305.
18. H. Davies, *Worship and Theology in England*, p.305.
19. H. Davies, *Worship and Theology in England*, p.228.
20. H. Davies, *Worship and Theology in England*, p.228.
21. W. Perkins, 'The Art of Prophesying' in *The Works of William Perkins* (Abingdon: Courtenay Sutton Press, 1970), pp.337-338.
22. W. Whitaker, *Disputations on Holy Scripture* (Rpt. Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2001), p.404.
23. W. Whitaker, *Disputations on Holy Scripture*, p.58.
24. J. Long, 'William Perkins: "Apostle of Practical Divinity"' in *Churchman*, vol. 103:1 (London, 1989), pp.56-57.
25. Ibid, p.55.
26. W. Perkins, 'The Art of Prophesying' in *The Works of William Perkins*, p.349.
27. Robert Bolton was born in Blackburn, Lancashire in 1572. He went up to Lincoln College, Oxford University at age twenty. Bolton came to faith after hearing William Perkins, and was ordained to the ministry when he was thirty years old.
28. R. Bolton, *The Four Last Things: Death, Judgement, Hell, and Heaven* (Rpt. Pittsburgh, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1994), p.5.
29. R. Bolton, *The Four Last Th* pp.6, 7.

30. R. Bolton, *The Four Last Things*, p.7.
31. R. Bolton, *The Four Last Things*, p.8.
32. R. Bolton, *The Four Last Things*, pp.7, 8, 9.
33. R. Bolton, *The Four Last Things*, p.9.
34. R. Bolton, *The Four Last Things*, pp.10, 12, 18.
35. R. Bolton, *The Four Last Things*, pp.19, 20, 22.
36. R. Bolton, *The Four Last Things*, pp.22, 25, 27.
37. R. Bolton, *The Four Last Things*, pp.28, 29.
38. R. Bolton, *The Four Last Things*, pp.32, 33.
39. R. Bolton, *The Four Last Things*, pp.33, 35, 53, 66.
40. Matthew Mead was born in 1629, but the place of his birth is unknown, as is any record of his education.
41. M. Mead, 'The Power of Grace in Weaning the Heart from the World' in *A Name in Heaven the Truest Ground of Joy* (Rpt. Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1996), p.78.
42. M. Mead, 'The Power of Grace', pp.79-80.
43. M. Mead, 'The Power of Grace', pp.80, 81, 82, 85.
44. M. Mead, 'The Power of Grace', pp.85, 94, 95.
45. M. Mead, 'The Power of Grace', p.96.
46. M. Mead, 'The Power of Grace', pp.104, 105, 106, 107, 108, 109, 110, 111.
47. M. Mead, 'The Power of Grace', pp.115, 116.
48. M. Mead, 'The Power of Grace', p.117.
49. M. Mead, 'The Power of Grace', pp.120-122.
50. M. Mead, 'The Power of Grace', pp.125-126.
51. M. Mead, 'The Power of Grace', pp.127, 128, 131-132.
52. H. Davies, *Worship and Theology in England*, vol. 1. p.305.
53. L. Ryken, *Worldly Saints: The Puritans As They Really Were* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), p.99.
54. W. Ames, *The Marrow of Theology* (ET by J.D. Eusden, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997), p.193.
55. W. Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, p.192.
56. L. Ryken, *Worldly Saints: The Puritans As They Really Were*, p.101.
57. T. Manton, *A Practical Commentary of the Epistle of James* in *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton*, vol.4 (Rpt. Worthington, PA: Maranatha Publications), p.152.
58. T. Manton, *A Practical Commentary*, p.153.
59. T. Manton, *A Practical Commentary*, p.153.
60. G. Swinnock, *The Works of George Swinnock*, vol. 1 (Rpt. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1992), p.169).
61. C. Love, 'The Right Hearing of Sermons' in *The Mortified Christian* (Rpt. Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1998), p.141.
62. C. Love, 'The Right Hearing of Sermons', p.142.
63. C. Love, 'The Right Hearing of Sermons', p.143-146.
64. C. Love, 'The Right Hearing of Sermons', p.145.
65. C. Love, 'The Right Hearing of Sermons', p.146.
66. T. Manton, *A Practical Commentary of the Epistle of James* in *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton*, vol.4, p.152.
67. G. Swinnock, *The Works of George Swinnock*, vol. 1, p.158.
68. G. Swinnock, *The Works*, p.158.
69. G. Swinnock, *The Works*, p.161.
70. W. Lyford, *The Instructed Christian: The Plain Man's Senses Exercised to Discern both God and Evil* (Rpt. Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, nd), p.26.
71. W. Lyford, *The Instructed Christian*, p.27.
72. W. Lyford, *The Instructed Christian*, p.28.

73. W. Lyford, *The Instructed Christian*, p.28.
74. W. Lyford, *The Instructed Christian*, p.28.
75. W. Lyford, *The Instructed Christian*, pp.28-29.
76. W. Lyford, *The Instructed Christian*, p.33.
77. W. Lyford, *The Instructed Christian*, p.34.
78. W. Lyford, *The Instructed Christian*, p.34.
79. W. Lyford, *The Instructed Christian*, p.34.
80. W. Lyford, *The Instructed Christian*, p.36.
81. W. Lyford, *The Instructed Christian*, p.38.
82. W. Lyford, *The Instructed Christian*, p.39.

JUSTIFICATION: THE CENTRAL ARTICLE OF FAITH

A Biblical and Theological Analysis

Pieter de Vries

Pieter de Vries is Assistant Professor of Biblical Theology and Hermeneutics at the Reformed Seminary connnected with the Free University of Amsterdam.

Introduction

The doctrine of justification is the article of faith that determines whether the church stands or falls. The church stands when she proclaims this God-honouring, soul-saving and liberating message and the church falls when she neglects to do so. The answer we give to the question, "how can we be just in the sight of our Maker?" manifests the character of our religion. Do we trust in our own righteousness or in the righteousness of God revealed in the cross of Christ? We are only righteous in the sight of God when the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us. We are justified by faith and not by works.

The doctrine of justification by faith is a biblical doctrine. In God's purpose it was the task of the apostle Paul to give a full exposition of this doctrine. The letters he wrote to the Galatians and the Romans are especially important in this connection. However, the kernel of the message of justification by faith we already find in the Old Testament. Paul argues from the Old Testament. The faith of Abraham teaches us that a man is justified by faith alone and not by works. The prophet Habakkuk testified: "but the just shall live by his faith" (Hab. 2:4).

Our Lord Jesus Christ made this clear not only in his teachings, but also through his actions, that he came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance. He received sinners and ate with them. The message of our Lord Jesus Christ was a message of unconditional forgiveness; forgiveness not based on man's merits but only on God's free grace and sovereign mercy. He gave a most striking example of this message in the parable of the Pharisee and the publican. The publican pleaded in Luke 18:13, "God be merciful to me a sinner" and this man went down to his house justified.

Augustine

When we study the Bible we can greatly profit from the insights of former generations. We are not the first generation that has read the Bible. Neglecting the rich sources of insight from former ages and generations stands in contradiction to the article of faith: "I believe one holy, catholic church, the communion of saints." Spurgeon once made the following remark: "People who pay very great attention to what God revealed to them usually pay very little attention to what God revealed to others." We must try to understand the Scriptures in communion with other saints. At the same time we must caution that the insights from other generations into the Scriptures must be tested by the Scriptures themselves. Not the church, not the Lord's people, but only the Word of God is infallible.

Looking at church history with regard to the doctrine of justification, the first person we need to pay attention to is Augustine: the greatest father of the Western Church. Augustine knew by experience that he was saved by God's grace alone. However, the first year after his conversion his doctrinal views regarding the place of the grace of God in man's salvation were somewhat confused. Augustine gained deeper insight into the nature of God's grace in his conflict with the British monk Pelagius. Augustine stressed more and more that man is by nature depraved and that he can be healed only by the grace of God. The most important work Augustine wrote in this connection is *De spiritu en littera (The Spirit and the Letter)*; a work based on 2 Corinthians 3:6: "for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life." In this work Augustine stresses that the law cannot be fulfilled by natural man. The law commands but since Adam's fall it cannot give the power to fulfill. Augustine denies that when Paul stated that a man cannot be justified by the works of the law, he had only the ceremonial side of the law in view. Referring to Romans 7:7, "What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet." Augustine shows how Paul taught that this is also true with regard to the moral commandments.

The law is given to us so that we may seek grace and grace is given that we may fulfill the law. When saved by grace a man loves not only God but also his commandments. It is his desire to glorify God. It is not a matter of compulsion. The love of Christ constrains him.

Augustine stressed that man is saved and justified by grace alone, but for him, justification, as such, is not the declaration that we are right in the sight of God because Christ's righteousness is imputed to us. For Augustine

justification meant that we are made righteous. He pointed to the Latin word *facere* in this connection. He did not make the distinction between justification and sanctification. Where Augustine used the word "justification" we as Reformed Christians use the words "regeneration" and "sanctification". Nevertheless, Augustine makes clear that man's sins are forgiven not because of any merits found in him but purely of grace alone. For his best works man needs forgiveness. So although there is a formal difference between the theology of Augustine and that of the Reformers, in actual content they are very closely related to each other.

In the formal treatment of justification as making men righteous, Roman Catholic theology could align itself with Augustine. But when Augustine teaches that regeneration is purely grace and that the forgiveness of our sins is wholly apart from a consideration of our works, Roman Catholic theology, with the exception of the Jansenists (an Augustinian stream in the post-Tridentine Roman Catholic Church), did not see eye to eye with Augustine. In the line of Augustine, the Jansenist denied every synergistic view of grace. They taught the total depravity of man and the gracious election of God. The teaching of the Jansenists was condemned in several papal bulls, the most famous being *Unigenitus* (1714).

The stance of the Reformation

The Reformation can be seen as an Augustinian revival. Among others, because he was an Augustinian friar, Luther had a special interest in the works of this church father. The Reformers argued that Augustine with regard to the doctrine of grace was completely on their side and not on the side of Roman Catholicism. Warfield taught that the Reformation was the final triumph of Augustine's doctrine of grace over his doctrine of the church. For the first time a clear distinction was made in theology between justification and sanctification. In this respect the doctrine of the Reformers surpasses the doctrine of Augustine. The Reformation emphasized the forensic nature of justification. The *Westminster Larger Catechism* gives the following definition of justification: "Justification is an act of God's free grace unto sinners, in which he pardoneth all their sins, accepteth and accounteth their persons righteous in his sight; not for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but only for the perfect obedience and full satisfaction of Christ, by God imputed to them, and received by faith alone."

Luther greatly benefited from the writings of Augustine, but declared at the same time that by the grace of God he himself was given a deeper insight into what it meant that the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel. This

righteousness is not that we are renewed in the image of Christ, but it is the alien righteousness of Christ, outside us. At the same time a justified man is really a new man because his sins are imputed to Christ and Christ's righteousness is granted to him. He is made one with Christ as a wife is united to her husband. For Luther justification is not only the declaration that we are righteous in the sight of God, but it is also the creation of a new relationship with God. We find the same in Calvin when he closely connects justification by faith with mystical union with Christ. Christ dwells in the believer and the believer dwells in him. John Murray said in this connection that justification is not only a declarative act, but also a constitutive act. Justification by faith alone is not fiction. The alien righteousness of Christ is the real possession of the believer who is united to Christ by the Holy Spirit. This close relationship between the forensic declaration of forgiveness of sin and being right with God and mystical union with Christ was not always retained in later Reformed theology.

The New Perspective

The insight of the Reformation into Paul's doctrine of justification has been greatly questioned in recent years. Three names must be mentioned especially: E.P. Sanders, James D.G. Dunn and N.T. Wright. Sanders, in his work *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, questions the portrait of first century Judaism given in many scholarly works. He disagrees that first century Judaism could be characterized as legalistic. This is, according to his opinion, a Christian and especially a Protestant prejudice. Sanders characterizes first century Judaism as "covenantal nomism". Sanders states that first century Judaism professed that Israel was elected out of God's sovereign good pleasure. It was a matter of grace. Works were not necessary to enter into the covenant but necessary to stay in the covenant. The character of Paul's religion was not fundamentally different from other forms of first century Judaism. Where other forms of Judaism placed Israel's election as God's gift, Paul placed faith in Jesus Christ as his gift of God. Paul's real difficulty with other forms of first century Judaism was that they were not Christian.

James Dunn agreed with Sanders to a great extent. He also thought that first century Judaism cannot be characterized as legalistic, but he questioned that Paul's only point was that the other forms of first century Judaism were not Christianity. Dunn was the first to use the expression "new perspective". The new perspective on Paul is different from that of the Reformers but also from the Christian view in general. It asserts that in the 16th century both the Reformers and the Roman Catholics missed the real point of Paul's message regarding justification.

According to Dunn, Paul's message on justification is not soteriological but ecclesiological. The message on justification was just a corollary of Paul's mission to the Gentiles. Paul did not want to retain circumcision, the Jewish festival calendar and the dietary laws as boundary marks for the Christian church. The only boundary marks were the confession of Christ as Lord and the possession of the Holy Spirit. Paul's teaching on justification was not anti-legalistic but anti-nationalistic.

Wright, in his work *The Climax of the Covenant*, reasons that the real emphasis of Paul's message regarding justification is the new stage in salvation history that has arrived with the coming of Christ. First century Judaism considered itself, spiritually speaking, still in exile. Paul proclaimed that with the work of Christ the exile has ended. The difference between him and his opponents lies in the fact that his opponents did not realise that a new stage in salvation history had dawned. The position of the Dutch New Testament scholar Jacob van Bruggen is quite close to that of Wright.

In connection with the new perspective, Paul's call is usually not seen as a conversion but just a realization that he was not in step with the ongoing development of salvation history

A short appraisal of the New Perspective

We must say that Paul's doctrine of justification has implications for the doctrine of the church, but we would be wrong to assume that his message on justification has only to do with the boundaries of the church of the New Testament. Paul's mission to the Gentiles was a consequence of his teaching on justification by faith and not the reverse. Since he had been called he knew that only through Jesus Christ there was access to God and not through the law. That was the reason why he preached justification by faith to Jews and Gentiles alike. He excluded from justification not only the so-called boundary markers but all the works of the law; also the works that are of a moral nature.

Justification has to do with forgiveness of sin. See what Paul says in Romans 4:6-8: "Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, saying, blessed *are they* whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered." Justification has to do with redemption from the wrath to come. Antithetical to the righteousness of God revealed in the gospel is the wrath of God revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness. (Romans 1:18). A final quotation in this connection: "Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him." (Romans 5:9).

Paul's call was not just a call to a mission and a realization of the true state of development of salvation history, it also constituted his conversion. Not a conversion from Judaism to Christianity but to a true understanding of what Judaism ought to be in the light of its own Scriptures. According to Paul the church consisting of Jews and Gentiles was the real embodiment of the promises of God. Jews who rejected Jesus as the Christ did not understand the real meaning of their own Scriptures. When called by God, Paul received a new view of God, of himself, of Christ, of the Scriptures and the history of Israel.

It is certain that in first century Judaism there was an awareness of God's grace, but that does not mean that it cannot be characterized as legalistic when we include more refined forms of legalism. According to the rabbis, Israel was the only nation that accepted the Torah which was offered to all the nations of the world. God called Abraham from Ur because of the merit he found in him. Obedience to the Torah was a constitutive element for remaining in the covenant. The rabbis showed us evidence of concern that the law demands perfect obedience. The rabbis denied the total depravity of man. The way they approach God is fundamentally different from the way the Christian approaches God through the Mediator Jesus Christ in holy self-condemnation and holy confidence. Perhaps first century Judaism can be characterized as covenantal nomism, but real Christianity cannot. Covenantal nomism as Sanders presents it, is clearly a refined form of legalism. There is not a personal entrance into the covenant or a personal appropriation of the covenant that is purely a matter of grace. The message of effectual calling and regeneration so essential in Christianity is lacking. Lacking is also the awareness that we need forgiveness even for our best efforts.

The so-called New Perspective is not far removed from the medieval scholastic position that Paul only rejects the keeping of the ceremonial law in justification. Many biblical scholars today have little knowledge of church history and the history of exegesis. They do not realize that insights presented as new are not so new at all, and were defended earlier in church history and rejected on solid grounds.

The position of Reformed theologians embracing the New Perspective can be characterized as covenantal nomism. It is a form of Reformed theology that does not give credence to regeneration and effectual calling. Having grace is merely a matter of belonging to the church and being a living member of it is just a matter of showing it in your works. When people reason this way, justification by faith alone as a living and experiential reality does not function. Their theology must be characterized as being tainted by the legalism Paul so ardently condemns.

The nature of justification

What is justification? It is not a making of oneself righteous. It is not sanctification. It is not only a matter of belonging to the Christian church because you profess Christ as Lord. Justification has to do with God as Judge. Justification is the declaration that you are free from guilt and condemnation in the sight of God. It is an anticipation of future judgment. To your utter astonishment and wonder you are declared not guilty, although you know you are. That justification is of a forensic nature is very clearly shown in Romans 8:33-34: "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us."

In essence justification is the same under the Old and New Testament dispensations. Abraham was already justified by faith. David gloried in the free forgiveness of his sins. The only real difference between the Old and New Testament believers in this respect is that the New Testament believers know that the ground of justification is actually laid. That ground is the work and blood of Christ.

The ground of justification

Justification is not according to our works, it is all a matter of grace. In Titus 3:7 we read, "That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life." The relation between the justification of the ungodly and God's grace is clear, but how can we relate the justification of the ungodly with the righteousness of God, with the wrath of God that is revealed against all unrighteousness and wickedness? Does God not contradict himself when he justifies the ungodly? For in Proverbs it is stated: "He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are abomination to the LORD." (Proverbs 17:15)

The answer to this mystery we find in Romans 3:24-26: "Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus."

Christ was set forth as propitiation of our sins. He bore the wrath of God in our place. The justice of God against all our sins is revealed in the cross of

Christ. He bore the penalty in order that everyone who believes in him may have forgiveness of sins and eternal life. So God is just and the justifier of him who believes in Jesus, at the same time. His righteousness imputed to us is the only ground of our justification. By the obedience of Christ many are made righteous. (Romans 5:19).

The instrument and time of justification

The ground of justification is the obedience of Christ; that he died in our place and that he always prays for us. The instrument of justification is faith. True faith is a self-despairing trust in Christ. A living faith is a saving and justifying faith. How aptly Toplady said:

> Rock of Ages, cleft for me;
> Let me hide myself in thee;
> Let the water and the blood,
> From thy riven side which flowed,
> Be of sin the double cure,
> Cleanse me from its guilt and power.
>
> Nothing in my hand I bring;
> Simply to thy cross I cling;
> Naked, come to thee for dress;
> Helpless, look to thee for grace;
> Foul, I to the fountain fly;
> Wash me, Saviour, or I die.

We are not justified some time before or after faith is first exercised. There are no justified unbelievers or believers that are not justified. The very moment a sinner, regenerated by the Holy Spirit, flees to Christ he is justified. Calling, regeneration, justification and sanctification are different blessings, but they cannot be separated from each other in time. The order of calling, justification, and sanctification is a logical order but not a chronological order. The very moment you are called according to God's purpose the gospel becomes to you the power of God unto salvation in which the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, the just shall live by faith. The sinner who believes in Christ is also the man who is made a new creation. Justification is never without sanctification and sanctification never without justification. (See 1 Corinthians 6:11: "but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.").

In his little booklet with questions and answer for catechism classes Abraham Hellenbroek, one of the most famous representatives of the Dutch

Second Reformation, emphasized that there are no stages in justification. This is one of the essential differences between justification and sanctification. Every believer is equally just in the sight of God. Every believer has received complete forgiveness of sins. Let me give a quotation of that good Protestant bishop J.C. Ryle:

> I hold firmly that the justification of a believer is a finished, perfect and complete work; and the weakest saint though he may not know and feel it, is as completely justified as the strongest...I would go to the stake, God helping me, for the glorious truth, that in the matter of justification before God every believer is complete in Christ. Nothing can be added to his justification from the moment he believes and nothing taken away.

Justification in the court of God and in the court of conscience

What is the relationship between justification and assurance of faith? In the Canons of Dort there are several statements about assurance of faith in the context of the perseverance of the saints and declension in grace. In the fifth chapter of the Canons of Dort we read,

> But God, who is rich in mercy, according to his unchangeable purpose of election, does not wholly withdraw the Holy Spirit from his own people even in their grievous falls; nor suffers them to proceed so far as to lose the grace of adoption and forfeit the state of justification, or to commit the sin unto death or against the Holy Spirit; nor does he permit them to be totally deserted, and to plunge themselves into everlasting destruction.

Every believer is in the state of justification and adoption. His state can never change, but Ryle was certainly right when he said in the quotation I gave that a believer may not know and feel that he is justified.

In various ways God assures his children that they are in the state of grace and justification. In the Canons of Dort three ways are mentioned:

> This assurance, however, is not produced by any peculiar revelation contrary to or independent of the Word of God, but springs from faith in God's promises, which he has most abundantly revealed in his Word for our comfort; from the testimony of the Holy Spirit, witnessing with our spirit that we are children and heirs of God (Rom. 8:16); and lastly, from a serious and holy desire to preserve a good conscience and to perform good works. And if the elect of God were deprived of this solid comfort that they shall finally obtain the victory, and of this infallible pledge of eternal glory, they would be of all men the most miserable.

So the promises of God, a good conscience and the testimony of the Holy Spirit are the means the Lord uses to give assurance of justification, grace and salvation.

When I mention the testimony of the Holy Spirit we come to the rich area of Christian experience. The Holy Spirit testifies with our spirit that we are children of God and that nothing will separate us from the love of Christ when he points us to the promises of the gospel, when he enlightens our minds in the knowledge of Christ and when he fills us with joy and peace in believing. We must never separate the three ways in which the Lord gives us assurance of faith. The Holy Spirit directs us to the promises of God as the vehicles in which Christ comes to us. Directing us to Christ, he conforms us into his image.

Assurance of faith is not static. It is stronger at one time than at other times. I quote again the Canons of Dort:

> Of this preservation of the elect to salvation and of their perseverance in the faith, true believers themselves may and do obtain assurance according to the measure of their faith, whereby they surely believe that they are and ever will continue true and living members of the Church, and that they have the forgiveness of sins and life eternal.

The strength of assurance usually corresponds to the strength of our faith.

Paul states in Romans 8:16, "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God." It is not without reason that Paul uses the present tense. Again and again we have to ask the Holy Spirit to give us new assurance and fresh manifestations of the glory of Christ. Let me quote a hymn of John Newton:

> The manna, favoured Israel's meat,
> Was gathered day by day;
> When all the host was served, the heat
> Melted the rest away.
>
> In vain to hoard it up they tried,
> Against tomorrow came;
> It then bred worms and putrefied;
> And proved their sin and shame.
>
> So truths by which the soul is fed
> Must e'er be had afresh;
> For notions resting in the head
> Will only feed the flesh.
>
> Nor can the best experience past
> The life of faith maintain;
> The brightest hope will faint at last,
> Unless supplied again.

Dear Lord, while in thy house we're found,
Do thou the manna give;
O let it fall on us around,
That we may eat and live.

In classical Reformed theology a distinction was made between justification in the court of God and in the court of conscience. Every believer is declared just in the court of God, but not every believer has a clear insight of it in the court of his conscience. Here we come to the area of assurance of grace. Knowing in the court of conscience that you are justified is the same as having assurance of faith. Classical Reformed theology connected justification in the court of conscience with the three ways of coming to assurance I mentioned and especially with the testimony of the Holy Spirit.

In the 19th century in The Netherlands this aspect of Reformed theology was given an interpretation it originally did not have. Justification in the court of conscience was equated with a very special and well defined crisis-experience. This idea came into existence, as far as I can see, in the conventicle: gatherings of God-fearing people where religious experiences were related and discussed. The people who defended this view of justification in the court of conscience, thought that without such a crisis-experience you could not or ought not to have assurance of faith. It was very confusing when sometimes this assurance of justification seemed to be equated with justification itself. So people began to speak not only about believers who lacked the assurance that they were justified, but about believers who are not justified at all!

I do not wish to question the godliness of quite a number of people who hold these views. I am sure of the genuineness of their religious experiences, but in the light of Scripture we must seriously question the way they frame their experiences in a theological scheme. Justification is not the same as having assurance and to come to assurance you do not need a crisis-experience. When you defend this view you are, with regard to assurance of faith, not far from Rome. Rome thinks that assurance of faith is only possible when you are given an extra-ordinary revelation. The Canons of Dort distanced themselves from this view. We already heard before how in the Canons of Dort it was stated:

> This assurance, however, is not produced by any peculiar revelation contrary to or independent of the Word of God, but springs from faith in God's promises, which he has most abundantly revealed in his Word for our comfort; from the testimony of the Holy Spirit, witnessing with our spirit that we are children and heirs of God (Rom. 8:16); and lastly, from a serious and holy desire to preserve a good conscience and to perform good works. And if the elect of God were deprived of this solid comfort that they shall finally obtain the victory, and of this infallible pledge of eternal glory, they would be of all men the most miserable.

The assurance of justification and the importance of the preaching of the gospel

The Lord uses the preaching of the Word for a twofold purpose. I quote question and answer 84 out of the Heidelberg Catechism on the keys of the kingdom:

> Q. How is the kingdom of heaven opened and shut by the preaching of the holy gospel?
> A. Thus: when according to the command of Christ, it is declared and publicly testified to all and every believer, that, whenever they receive the promise of the gospel by a true faith, all their sins are really forgiven them of God for the sake of Christ's merits; and on the contrary, when it is declared and testified to all unbelievers, and such as do not sincerely repent, that they stand exposed to the wrath of God and eternal condemnation, so long as they are unconverted; according to which testimony of the gospel, God will judge them both in this life and in the life to come.

Let me start with the second purpose. Unbelievers are warned in order that they would realise that they are lost sinners, that they do not have peace with God. They are warned in order that they would come to themselves just as the prodigal son and flee with a broken heart to the only Saviour. The task of a preacher is to preach the law to condemn all flesh and to proclaim the Saviour in order that sinners would flee to him for justification, life and salvation. The sinner is saved, when faith is given to him. That faith is a saving and justifying faith.

The first purpose of the preaching of the gospel is according to the Heidelberg Catechism to console believers. Believers have peace with God, but more often than once they are afflicted. When we use the distinction between justification in the court of God and in the court of conscience, we can say that the purpose of the preaching for believers is that the judgment of the court of conscience concurs with the judgment of the court of God. A believer has peace with God, is righteous in the sight of God, but often he cannot see it, he cannot fathom it. It is important that the preaching is clear on this point. "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." An unbeliever can never realize too clearly that he is a child of wrath. A believer can never realize too clearly that he has peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ.

The preaching of the gospel is the instrument used by the Holy Spirit to comfort believers.

Believers may lack joy and assurance because sermons fail to give a clear and distinct witness of the power of justification by grace alone. Christian in *Pilgrim's Progress* went thought the wicket gate and came into the House of Interpreter. That is a symbol for the church wherever the gospel is faithfully preached. It is remarkable that the distance from the House of Interpreter to the Cross where Christian was relieved from his burden was very short.

Believers often lack peace and assurance because they do not clearly see the distinction between justification and sanctification. They think there is only ground to believe that they have peace with God when they are more conformed to Christ than they are now. But that is wrong. Although believers have only a small beginning of the new obedience they may believe that they have complete peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ. We have to learn again and again:

> My hope is built on nothing less
> Than Jesus' blood and righteousness;
> I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
> But wholly lean on Jesus' name.

The task of the preacher is to assure everyone who flees to Christ that he has peace with God. A believer in darkness must first of all use the promises of God. Using the promises of God, trusting in Christ we experience the power of the gospel of justification by faith alone.

Justification as a state and a reality with ongoing significance

Justification is first of all a state. We are either in the state of condemnation or in the state of justification. When we are in the state of justification it is impossible that we will ever fall out of it. Through our own fault we may lack joy, peace and assurance in believing, but a believer has peace with God even when he does not feel it.

Justification is a state but we can also say it is a reality with ongoing significance. In his commentary on Romans 8:31 Calvin says: "Justification may fitly be extended to the unremitted continuance of God's favour, from the time of our calling to the hour of death." I can also say it with the last stanza from M'Cheyne's hymn - *The Watchword of the Reformers*:

> Even treading the valley, the shadow of death,
> This 'watchword' shall rally my faltering breath;
> For while from life's fever my God sets me free,
> Jehovah Tsidkenu my death song will be.

We must not restrict the significance of justification to the beginning of spiritual life. Again and again a believer must confess, and now I quote answer 60 of the Heidelberg Catechism, "Only by a true faith in Jesus Christ; so that, though my conscience accuse me, that I have grossly transgressed all the commandments of God, and kept none of them, and am still inclined to all evil." In this life a believer has to testify with the Psalmist, "If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" (Psalm 130:3), and "enter not into judgment with thy servant: for in thy sight shall no man living be justified." (Psalm 143:2).

In that way every time anew the power and joy of justification by faith alone is experienced. Again I quote the Heidelberg Catechism:

> notwithstanding, God, without any merit of mine, but only of mere grace, grants and imputes to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness and holiness of Christ, even so, as if I had never had had, nor committed any sin; yea, as if I had fully accomplished all that obedience which Christ has accomplished for me, inasmuch as I embrace such benefit with a believing heart.

It is very significant that question 60 of the Heidelberg Catechism says, "How are you righteous before God?" and not "How did you become righteous before God?" In the hour of death a believer has no other ground of justification than in the hour he first believed.

The doctrine of justification by faith alone is a doctrine of consolation for poor sinners. So we may and must preach it. Luther spoke in this connection about anguish; in German *Anfechtung*. Only in the way of anguish of soul we learn the value of the righteousness of God revealed in Christ. Leaning on Christ a sinner can live and die. O that we may say with Paul, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." (Galatians 2:20).

BOOK REVIEWS

Charles Simeon, an ordinary pastor of extraordinary influence, Derek Prime, DayOne Publications, pbk., 275 pages, £10.00

One of the things which prompted Derek Prime to write this biography of the eighteenth century Anglican minister Charles Simeon was the conviction that "in spite of the passage of two hundred and fifty years Simeon's life and experience provide enduring principles to the church at all times." This is undoubtedly the case and preachers in the twenty first century will be both stimulated and humbled by this record of a godly servant of Christ.

In a book of eighteen chapters relatively few are devoted to the details of Simeon's life, conversion and ministry. The author has chosen rather to concentrate on aspects of Simeon's character, his vision for preaching and mission and the influence of his life on a wide range of people. This approach makes the book both practical and contemporary.

Simeon's background was one of privilege and at the age of eight he was sent by his father, a widower, to Eton where his two brothers were already students. During his student days Simeon displayed an extravagance in the way he spent money and in the way he dressed. However a great change came over this young man during his time at King's College, Cambridge. It was a requirement of all students that they attend the celebration of the Lord's Supper. This requirement seems rather incongruous when set alongside the very lax approach in the College to teaching and examinations.

The realization that he would be required to partake of the sacrament filled Simeon with alarm. He recorded his disquiet graphically. "The thought rushed into my mind that Satan was as fit to attend as I and that if I must attend I must prepare for my attendance there." Simeon's home life had, it seems, been devoid of any real spiritual influence and he was not familiar with the truths of the gospel. However as he sought to prepare for attendance at the Lord's Supper he read several books, one of which was used by God to show him the meaning of Christ's death on the Cross. When Simeon read that the Jews in the Old Testament had transferred their guilt onto the head of the sacrifice he exclaimed, "What? May I transfer all my guilt to another? Has God provided an offering for me that I may lay my sins on his head?" Simeon was now able to partake of the sacrament with a joyful assurance of salvation and acceptance with God.

The change in Simeon's life was not just sudden but also obvious. Gone was the extravagant misuse of money and in its place he displayed a careful stewardship and cheerful generosity. During the next few years at College he did not know anyone who shared his spiritual experience. This lack of fellowship did not hinder his growth in grace and very soon a burden grew in the young man for the spiritual well being of those around him. Not surprisingly Simeon was drawn to the ministry of the gospel and was ordained as a minister in the Christ of England in May 1782.

Derek Prime addresses the early encouraging experiences which Simeon had as a preacher and the subsequent opposition he faced when he first became minister of Trinity Church in Cambridge. This initial storm passed and Simeon remained in that same congregation throughout his life and had a remarkably fruitful ministry there.

One of the strengths of this biography is that the author highlights what he regards as the key features in Simeon's work and the characteristics, both favourable and unfavourable, which he displayed. Frequent quotes from Simeon himself help the reader gain a greater insight into the ministry of this devoted servant of Christ.

There are many pertinent applications for the church at large, but in particular for preachers. Simeon was committed to help young men who were entering the ministry and then to see congregations receive the benefit of the ministry of these men. He was a zealous supporter and pioneer of mission in India and among the Jews. His influence was extensive, not only among his contemporaries, but it still continues through the work of the Simeon Trust.

One useful chapter deals with "Simeon and the principle of balance". This will challenge the reader to consider how best to hold firmly to his theological and ethical convictions while at the same time acting graciously towards those with whom he differs. This challenge is always up to date and it loses none of its cutting edge even as it travels over more than two centuries.

The title of this book describes Charles Simeon as "an ordinary pastor of extraordinary influence". Many pastors, reading this biography will wonder if they could dare to consider themselves as being ordinary. That in itself makes the book a good buy.

Knox Hyndman

Far As The Curse Is Found: The Covenant Story of Redemption, Michael D. Williams, P & R Publishing, 2005, pbk., 319 pages, £9.50

The author of this book is Michael D. Williams, Professor of Systematic Theology at Covenant Theological Seminary and his theme is the significance of covenant in all Scripture. God's Covenant of Redemption unfolds in redemptive biblical history through various epochs which build on and develop their predecessors. Thus we move in redemptive history through the covenants with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses and David to the New Covenant in Christ. Excellent treatises have been written on this crucial and glorious theme – the one most recommended by the reviewer being The Christ of the Covenants by O. Palmer Robertson. Now another major treatise on the theme has arrived to develop the meaning and scope of the covenant, highlighting the Scriptures' covenantal structure and character, glorying in God's covenant faithfulness, and wonderfully setting forth the fullness of the covenant's benefits for now and for the eternity in Christ.

The strengths of this excellent book are:

Firstly it is firmly rooted in careful exegesis of Scripture.
Secondly it exhibits and interacts with a wide range of crucial Reformed scholarship on the subject.
Thirdly it teases out and develops the implications of the subject with wisdom and passion that will appeal to readers.
Fourthly it emphasises in a special way the intimate connection there is between creation and redemption, an emphasis that has been neglected in Reformed scholarship.

The book launches right in to the climax of the biblical story – the resurrection of the Covenant Head, whose saving work extends to the restoration of creation. Williams then moves to the Exodus as the great redemptive type in the Old Testament, before, as Moses himself does, rooting God's covenantal dealings back into Creation, the Fall, Abraham and Moses. He then moves on to see how God's covenant people fared in the land and examines the role of the prophets in anticipating the New Covenant and how the Church is to be the Messianic Community of the New Covenant.

The final chapter on the Eschaton this reviewer found to be one of the most stimulating. What happens to the world when Christ returns? He examines what he calls the "escapist" view (i.e. the world will be destroyed and believers go to heaven), the annihilationist view (the present world will be done away with and a new universe created), and the restorationist view (the present

world will be transformed by restoration to something of its Pre-Adamic state). He argues strongly for the restorationist view.

We may not "dot every i" or "stroke every t" with this author, but we will be stimulated, helped and blessed by this book. It is highly recommended even for people in their personal devotions, say a chapter at a time. It will reward mediation on its pages, moving the reader to pause.

This excellent book could well become required reading alongside Robertson's *The Christ of the Covenants*, so students take note!

Norris Wilson

Serving God's Words: Windows on preaching and ministry, Paul A. Barker, Richard J Condie and Andrew S Malone (eds.), Inter-Varsity Press, 2011, pbk., 225 pages, £11.99

This book is a Festschrift - a series of articles from friends and colleagues of Peter Adam. They were commissioned and compiled by the editors to honour Peter on the occasion of his 65th birthday. The subjects of these articles were chosen to reflect Peter's priorities and interests in over 40 years of faithful Christian ministry.

For 20 years Peter was the Rector of St Jude's Parish Church in Melbourne, where his ministry was greatly used by God in the building up of the congregation and in the planting of new congregations. In 2002 Peter was appointed Principal of Ridley College in Melbourne, retiring from this post at the beginning of 2012.

The 12 chapters that make up this book are written by men whose lives and ministries have made a significant contribution to the extension of Christ's kingdom in various parts of the world. From their biblical studies and vast experience they each have something very worthwhile to say to those who are serving Christ in ministry in the 21st century.

Richard Condie, presently Vicar of St Jude's, Melbourne, writes a helpful chapter on "Words of life or tablets of Stone? Preaching the Ten Commandments today." Condie emphasizes the need for faithfully preaching the Commandments provided that attention is drawn to the redemptive context in which they were originally given.

Paul Barker, former Vicar of Holy Trinity, Doncaster, draws our attention to "Moses the preacher" in a chapter where he makes the point that the Book of Deuteronomy (cpts. 1-30) is Moses' final sermon. In a very convincing manner he demonstrates how Moses uses material from earlier revelation (Genesis - Numbers) to remind Israel of God's will and purpose for them as they prepare to cross the Jordan and occupy the land of promise.

David Peterson, Moore Theological College, Sydney, considers "Prophetic Preaching in the Book of Acts". By carefully examining the sermons included by Luke he concludes that prophesying in Acts involves evangelism, teaching and persuasion in a whole range of situations both structured and unstructured.

David Jackman, past President of Proclamation Trust and the founding Director of the Cornhill Training Course, contributes a very perceptive chapter on "Paul's Pastoral method: Reflections on 1 Corinthians". Jackman makes the observation about much contemporary preaching, *"Too often the congregation hears expository truths and appreciates doctrinal propositions, but the point of connection with the hard realities of life never seem to be made"*. This study of Paul's ministry to the church in Corinth demonstrates how he clearly advocated the primacy of the Cross and in application applied the message to *"moral deviance and relational divisions"* in the Corinthian church.

Allan Chappel, founding Principal of Trinity Theological College, Perth, contributes a chapter entitled, "Paul's ministry of the Word according to 1 Thessalonians." He is persuaded that the fundamental elements of authentic ministry are to be learned from the apostolic letters. From 1 Thessalonians Chappel challenges the modern preacher by demonstrating Paul's emphasis on: team ministry, prayer, character and the place for authority and affection in ministry.

William Taylor, Rector of St Helen's Church, Bishopsgate, London, writes what I consider to be the best chapter in this Festschrift. It is entitled "Preaching and the church that is fit for purpose: Lessons from 1 Timothy". Taylor reflects on that phrase in 1 Timothy 3:15 where the church is described as the "pillar and buttress of the truth". From this he concludes that *"the local assembly of the living God is the 'plausibility structure' for the gospel"*. Paul's challenge to Timothy was that there should not only be godly leadership in the church but also godliness in every area of the members' lives. It was only by holding on to such priorities that the preached word would be considered authentic in pagan Ephesus.

Don Carson, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, contributes a chapter on "The Minister's 'devotional' reading of the Bible". Writing with ministers in mind he presents the challenge: *"Resolutely set aside time for Bible reading beyond reading undertaken for the next sermon or Bible Study"*.

Graham Cole, Beeson Divinity School, Alabama, makes an important contribution with his chapter entitled, "Preaching God's Word and walking in God's Ways: Scripture, preaching and the ethical life". Cole shows the vital importance of living out Scripture in every day life. For this to happen, the author advocates the absolute necessity of applying the exposition of God's Word to the conscience. He makes the striking statement: *"Exposition without application is an abortion"*.

Peter Jensen, Anglican Archbishop of Sydney, has contributed an article on "Revelation and the judgements of God". In a useful discussion Jensen supports the theological position that God is sovereign in all aspects of life including what are usually referred to as "natural disasters". While recognizing that we cannot attribute these disasters to any particular national sins we must nevertheless recognize them as judgements from God against sin and therefore warnings to repent.

The final chapters are from: **Michael Raiter** (Principal of Melbourne School of Theology) on "The 'holy hush': biblical and theological reflections on preaching with unction"; **Gerald Bray** (Beeson Divinity School, Alabama) on "The *Homilies* and their use today" and **Vaughan Roberts** (Rector of St Ebbe's, Oxford) on "A ministry of Word and Prayer: what can we learn from Charles Simeon today?" This chapter brings the book to a fitting climax as no reader can fail to be challenged by Simeon's commitment to Christ and dedication to ministry in the midst of much hardship.

All the authors in this Festschrift have clearly adhered to their remit of reflecting Peter Adam's priorities in ministry. They have truly honoured him and provided 21st century preachers with valuable insights and challenges regarding Christian ministry.

Robert McCollum

The Acts of the Risen Lord Jesus. Luke's account of God's unfolding plan, Alan Thompson, IVP, New Studies in Biblical Theology, 2011, pbk., 232 pages, £12.99

Although the church is well served with many excellent commentaries on Acts, there are not many books dealing with its theology in an integrated way - surely a glaring need given that Luke wrote more of the New Testament than any other author! Alan Thompson's contribution to the *New Studies in Biblical Theology* series admirably addresses this lack. This book fulfils excellently at least two of the three stated aims of this series: "the articulation and exposition of the structure of thought of a particular biblical writer...and the delineation of a biblical theme across all or part of the biblical corpora." (p.11). Thompson refuses to treat Acts as a hunting ground for answers to questions that were simply not being asked by either Luke or his readers (e.g. baptism of the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues, church government, etc.), but instead reads the book on its own terms. His goal is "to offer a framework for interpreting the book of Acts so that the major themes highlighted by Luke may be identified and related to the book of Acts as a whole." The "organizing framework" which Thompson sees as integrating Luke's key emphases is the inaugurated kingdom of God. This makes sense, he argues, of Luke's purpose in writing: to reassure Theophilus and others like him that the events of the cross and resurrection really are the work of God, in spite of persecution and rejection by the Jews in particular. Jesus Christ has risen and reigns - the kingdom of God has come, but it is not yet fulfilled, and this accounts for the difficulties that the church is experiencing in the present.

Thompson shows in his first chapter that the kingdom of God is the major concern of Luke in Acts, and then in the remaining chapters shows how this explains the main emphases in the rest of the book: the continuing reign of the Lord Jesus (the kingdom has not ceased to advance on earth simply because Jesus is in heaven); the significance of the resurrection (the blessings of the age to come are present realities because the kingdom has come and is now here); the restoration of God's people (God's saving promises for Israel and the Gentiles are being fulfilled now that the kingdom has come); the role of the Holy Spirit (who was to be poured out in the last days, and those days have now come with the inauguration of the kingdom). The introduction of the new era, however, has implications for the old era, and so the place of the temple system and the role of the law as an authority for God's people necessarily changes with the coming of the kingdom, and Thompson deals with these two issues in chapters five and six. His treatment of the law in chapter six is a helpful balance to some current claims that the Old Testament law no longer has any place in guiding Christian conduct.

Thompson has a clear, coherent thesis that he logically unpacks. His argument is thoroughly grounded in the text of Luke/Acts - for he constantly bears in mind that Acts is just one half of a two-volume work, and does not miss the significance of this for interpretation. He interacts with a wide range of secondary sources on Acts, engaging with various views and reaching carefully argued evangelical conclusions. He is sensitive to the literary aspects of Acts, giving due weight in exegesis to repetition, framing devices, and other such rhetorical markers. One of the great strengths of this book is the way the author interprets Acts in the light of the Old Testament, making many biblical-theological connections across the canon that will help readers to see how the Bible fits together as a whole. Thompson shows very clearly how the experiences described in Acts did not appear in a vacuum, but are the fulfilment of promises made long ago.

There is much in this book to excite and inform the preacher - above all, understanding Acts on its own terms, being given a key to understanding the parts of the whole, and seeing how Acts fits into the trajectory of biblical theology ought to enthuse any preacher of the Word. Two particular helps for preachers are the expositional outline of Acts offered as an excursus at the end of chapter one, and the very helpful and suggestive study of the evangelistic speeches in Acts (pp.90-99) that will stimulate preachers who want to learn from apostolic example how to preach evangelistic messages.

One (very) minor, technical, complaint is that the font style and size of the subheadings makes it hard to distinguish the varying levels and sublevels of the flow of the argument, but this is a small price to pay for such an excellent guide to the book of Acts.

Warren Peel

Revisioning Christology. Theology in the Reformed Tradition, Oliver D. Crisp, Ashgate, 2011, pbk., 148 pages, £17.99

To many "the Reformed tradition" is a single uniform body of theology – a few disagreements on obscure issues such as infra- and supralapsarianism, but basically a choir all singing the same tune. The reality is rather different. Among those committed to the Reformed Tradition there is considerable diversity on numerous issues. One of these is, perhaps surprisingly, that of Christology. In the six compact chapters that make up *Revisioning Christology* Oliver Crisp, who now teaches at Fuller Seminary in California, examines

distinctive views held by theologians within the (broadly defined) Reformed Tradition which in various ways impact upon their Christology. Crisp aims to provide both explanation and critical interaction with his chosen six.

Crisp begins with Donald Baillie (1887-1954), a Scottish Presbyterian who became a well-known figure in the mid-twentieth century through his book *God Was in Christ* and who represents what Crisp terms "orthodox liberalism". In particular it is Baillie's work on the apparently paradoxical nature of the atonement that Crisp investigates. For Baillie the fact that Jesus is both God the Son incarnate and also the supremely inspired human being is profoundly paradoxical. Crisp subjects this claim to rigorous analysis, especially considering the exact nature of paradox and exposing the lack of clarity in Baillie's use of the term, concluding that there are unresolved tensions in his view of the atonement.

Crisp moves on to several figures who will be more familiar to many of the Journal's readers: John Calvin (1509-64), Jonathan Edwards (1703-58), William Shedd (1820-94) and John Owen (1616-83). Each has a significant contribution to make to Christological thinking, even if their conclusions are not always convincing.

With reference to Calvin, Crisp considers the issue of the motivation for the incarnation: would there have been an incarnation without the fall? Some scholars, picking up on scattered comments in various works of Calvin, have argued that he believed that God the Son from all eternity was ordained to be the Cosmic Mediator between the Trinity and the created order and that, on account of God's timelessness, there was no time at which the Son was not incarnate. A further independent Redemptive Mediatorship in relation to elect sinners is said to be another aspect of the incarnation in Calvin's thinking. Crisp examines these views closely and critically, setting against them other statements that Calvin makes in, for example the *Institutes*, concluding that there may be some unresolved tensions in Calvin's position.

Jonathan Edwards, in addition to being a great preacher, was a major theologian and philosopher in eighteenth century New England. He was always an independent thinker, perhaps most clearly in his holding an idealist metaphysic the view that what appear to us to be material objects are in reality ideas in the mind of God. A number of consequences follow from this commitment which would surprise many who know only Edwards' sermons. He was committed, for example to *occasionalism* the view that God is the direct cause of every event and that he continually recreates the cosmos from moment to moment. Such views clearly have profound implications for

Edwards' view of the incarnation, the taking of a (material?) body by the Son of God. Crisp expounds Edwards' position with commendable clarity and shows how in at least some respects it is compatible with confessional Reformed thought. He also highlights some of the major problems in Edwards' views.

Chapter 4 is devoted to nineteenth century American theologian W. G. T. Shedd, in particular the implications for our understanding of the union of Christ's two natures, divine and human, of Shedd's commitment to a *realist* understanding of the transmission of Adam's sin to his descendants. On this view, the souls of all Adam's descendants were *really* present in union with Adam's soul in Eden and so they actually sinned his sin and fell from perfection. Shedd combines this with a belief that our souls are derived from our parents just as our bodies are. These views have many strange implications for an understanding of the incarnation. Christ's soul, for example, must have existed before the incarnation as part of the soul of his mother, and of her mother and so back to Eden. Crisp nevertheless makes a strong case for Shedd's orthodoxy despite these theological and philosophical commitments.

In the chapter on John Owen Crisp focuses attention on Owen's "Spirit Christology", which deals with the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the incarnate Son of God. According to Owen, once the Second Person of the Trinity has united himself to a particular human nature in the incarnation, it is the Holy Spirit who sustains and empowers that nature from this point on and the active role of God the Son is at an end. As Owen puts it, "The only singular immediate *act* of the person of the Son on the human nature was the *assumption* of it into subsistence with himself." Thus the role of the Holy Spirit is much greater than usually thought. To many this position will seem perplexing and may appear to undermine the role of Christ's divine nature in the incarnation. Crisp examines some of the advantages of Owen's view, but also indicates some of the major problems which it also poses. In particular there seems to be in Owen's view of the incarnation a distancing of the Son from the ongoing life of Christ, such that the union itself may appear to be threatened. Crisp ends the chapter with a possible way of resolving the problems while maintaining a significant role for the Spirit in the incarnation.

In the final chapter Crisp considers the work of Kathryn Tanner (b. 1954) which may or may not turn out to be of enduring significance. Tanner, in ways which recall the position of Tom Torrance, regards the incarnation as itself atoning, an approach which of course impacts deeply on our view of the death of Christ. Tanner's approach leads to a removal of ideas of ransom, satisfaction and penal substitution from the doctrine of the atonement, an approach which

is gaining momentum in some scholarly, as well as popular, circles. Whilst acknowledging value in some of the questions Tanner raises, Crisp is unconvinced by her view of the atoning value of the incarnation.

Crisp writes with great clarity on some deep and complex issues, and the diversity he uncovers within the Reformed Tradition will surprise many. Figures such as Edwards and Owen emerge as much more complex and subtle theologians than they are often portrayed, and the unusual positions for which they argue cannot fail to stimulate considerable thought. Crisp is a reliable and helpful critical guide to a fascinating area of Reformed theology.

David McKay

BOOK NOTICES

The Power to Save. A history of the Gospel in China, Bob Davey, EP Books, 2011, pbk., 354 pages, £9.99

Though the most populous nation on earth, China remains an enigma to those living beyond its boundaries. The first historically documented dynasty which ruled in this vast nation dates from more than two thousand years before Christ. This dynasty was followed by at least ten others and it wasn't until 1912 that imperial China came to an end and the Republic of China was born. Bob Davey weaves the history of the church in China into the history of the nation itself. The story of the gospel in China is a relatively recent one. The author emphasises the part played by Robert Morrison whom he describes as the pioneer of the gospel in China. Morrison arrived in 1807, sent by the London Missionary Society, and remained in the work until his death in 1834. He laid a solid foundation through his preaching and by his work as a translator. Before his death he had completed a commentary on the whole Bible in Chinese. Many more missionaries were to follow in the footsteps of Robert Morrison, including Hudson Taylor, founder of the China Inland Mission. The story is one of ebb and flow, of faithful men and women serving Christ in difficult and often dangerous situations. Christians in China have faced persecution from various sources, ranging form the extreme nationalism of the Boxers to the more recent hostility during the time of Mao Zedong's "cultural revolution" and the actions of the Red Guards. In spite of all this the church has survived and prospered and has become increasingly self-supporting and self-governing. It has also developed a remarkable missionary vision. The church in China has been forced to grapple with the searching issue of relationship of church and state. The state claims the right to oversee and govern within the church and this has been accepted by many. The majority of Christians, however, belong to the numerous "House Churches" which resist state interference. In 1998 the leaders of these house churches drafted and published an appeal for tolerance and a Confession of Faith which is distinctly evangelical, though it permits different interpretations in areas such as speaking in tongues. Bob Davey knows his subject well. He has distilled the history of the church in China in an balanced and readable way. There is a great deal here to strengthen our faith as we read of the mighty sovereign power of God at work and see how Christ has continued to build his church in this vast and diverse nation.

Knox Hyndman

The Biblical Counseling Movement after Adams, Heath Lambert, Crossway, 2012, pbk., 220 pages, $17.99

Beginning with his 1970 book *Competent to Counsel*, Jay Adams began a revolution which has shaped Christian counselling ever since. In numerous subsequent books Adams developed his idea of 'nouthetic' counselling which put the focus on a counselee's need to face up to the teaching of Scripture regarding his or her problems and, with the counsellor's help, put it into practice. Reactions for and against Adams' approach have been strong, and as the years have passed, those committed to his basic insights have recognised weaknesses in what Adams was advocating. In this helpful volume Heath Lambert traces the development of the movement inspired by Adams and seeks to show how a new generation of counsellors has refined and revised the work of Adams to produce what they believe is a more biblical approach. Lambert examines advances in how counsellors think about counselling, how they do it and how they talk about it. He asks too if there have been advances in how counsellors think about the Bible and ends with a consideration of areas still in need of advancement, especially the issue of understanding the idolatry of the sinful heart. Lambert argues that the developments in biblical counselling theory and practice which he describes have resulted in an approach that better reflects godly compassion, without compromising the truth, and which softens what has often been perceived as the harshness of Adams' approach. This is a very worthwhile volume for anyone engaged in or interested in biblical counselling.

Unseen Realities. Heaven, Hell, Angels and Demons, R.C. Sproul, Christian Focus and Ligonier Ministries, 2011, pbk., 157 pages, £8.99

In view of the recent upsurge of interest in angels and demons, in part due to sensationalist fiction writing by both Christian and non-Christian authors, it is essential that the people of God have a sound biblical understanding of the subject of the spiritual world. Denials of the reality of heaven and hell also make these vital subjects for biblical examination. In his usual popular, readable style R.C. Sproul covers the basics, devoting four chapters each to heaven and hell, six to the angels and two to Satan. This is a solid biblical study, avoiding the empty speculations so common in this area, well suited to accomplishing Sproul's aim of bolstering readers' faith in Scripture's teachings regarding the supernatural.

Mind Your Faith. A Student's Guide to Thinking and Living Well, David A. Horner, IVP Academic, 2011, pbk., 272 pages, $20.00

When Christian young people go off to university or college, they are often ill prepared, and as a result think as Christians on the Lord's Day and in Christian circles, but adopt the thinking of the world in their studies. Such a contradiction is profoundly harmful spiritually. This book by David Horner of Biola University is one resource that addresses these problems, seeking not merely to enable Christians to "survive" their time at university but instead to "flourish" and come out better equipped to serve the Lord. In Part One Horner deals with the necessity for Christians to use their minds and to develop a Christian mind that is equipped to face the intellectual challenges of university study. Thus chapters consider, among other issues, truth, logic and worldview, all in pursuit of loving God with our minds. Part Two addresses the nature and necessity of faith and offers help in dealing with doubts and objections and in engaging in apologetics. Part Three focuses on character, offering a moral vision for college life and the good life (biblically defined). Horner makes it clear that for the Christian engagement with the world of the university is a moral as well as an intellectual matter. There are issues on which we would disagree with the author – his approach to apologetics is not Reformed presuppositionalism, for example – but this is a very valuable resource for parents and pastors preparing young people for third level education, and for young people looking forward to college or already immersed in it.

The Theology of Jonathan Edwards, Michael J. McClymond and Gerald R. McDermott, Oxford University Press (USA), 2012, hbk., 757 pages, $65.00

The flood of books and articles on Jonathan Edwards shows no sign of abating, and the appearance of a volume on Edwards of over 700 pages might at first sight cause the heart to sink. That, however, would be a mistake. McClymond and McDermott, two eminent Edwards scholars, have produced in one comprehensive volume an overview of Edwards' theology and the main lines of interpretation of it over the centuries. Their approach is to provide a concise article on each chosen subject rather than a single connected book-length exposition. Part One is introductory, dealing with historical, cultural and social contexts necessary for understanding Edwards. Part Two, by far the largest part, consists of thirty-one chapters on various aspects of Edwards' theology, divided into four sections: Methods and Strategies; The triune God, the Angels and Heaven; Theological Anthropology and Divine Grace; Church, Ethics, Eschatology and Society. Taken together these offer a rich evaluation

of Edwards' sometimes complex thought which can be read consecutively or dipped into as desired. Part Three is entitled "Legacies and Affinities: Edwards's Disciples and Interpreters" and surveys the history of interpretation of Edwards' theology. Whilst there are disadvantages in the format of the book, whereby some connections between theological topics could receive less than their due, but the authors skilfully trace five basic themes throughout their study: Trinitarian communication, creaturely participation, necessitarian dispositionalism, divine priority and harmonious constitutionalism. In sum, this is an excellent overview of a great theological mind and an indispensable tool for students of Edwards.

The Holy Trinity. Understanding God's Life, Stephen R. Holmes, Paternoster, 2012, pbk., 231 pages, £19.99

In the first volume of a new series from Paternoster entitled 'Christian Doctrines in Historical Perspective' Stephen Holmes of the University of St. Andrews provides a survey of the history of the doctrine of the Trinity from its biblical roots up to the contemporary scene. Many histories of this doctrine have been written and so the question naturally arises as to what is distinctive about this one. Holmes' intention in writing his book is overtly polemical: he believes that a modern-day revival of interest in the doctrine of the Trinity, associated with names such as Barth, Rahner and Zizioulas, has been, methodically and materially, a thorough-going departure from the doctrine as it was formulated and believed by the Church from its earliest days up until the Reformation. Holmes' goal is not dogmatic (proving the truth of the older tradition) but historical (establishing that modern Trinitarian theology is indeed a departure from what was universally accepted in the past), and this he achieves with compelling scholarship and clear argumentation. Given the case he is making, Holmes gives extensive attention to the first four Christian centuries, but deals also with the Middle Ages, the Reformation and the development of Anti-Trinitarian thought from the seventeenth century onwards. The final chapter brings the story up to date by examining the period from 1800 on. Holmes' polemical case is very well made, and the book as a whole is a valuable addition to historical studies of the Trinity.

Introduction to Reformed Scholasticism, Willem J. van Asselt, with T. Theo J. Pleizier, Pieter L. Rouwendal and Maarten Wisse, Reformation Heritage Books, 2011, pbk., 263 pages, $25.00

This translation and updating of a 1998 Dutch publication addresses an issue which has been much debated among theologians and church historians, namely what is "Scholasticism" and what influence did it exert in the formulation of Reformed theology in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It was once commonplace to find Scholasticism being blamed for everything that particular writers disliked in the theology of that period, and the consensus was that the Reformed Scholasticism developed by men such as Theodore Beza was a betrayal and corruption of the biblical theology of the first Reformers. In more recent times several scholars have provided carefully reasoned rebuttals of this consensus and have shown that Scholasticism was actually an academic methodology which could be used by theologians of various persuasions. The material assembled in this book, primarily by historical theologian Willem van Asselt, assisted by two other Dutch scholars, makes a significant contribution to a defence of the new understanding of Reformed Scholasticism. The various chapters consider the definition of Scholasticism, the relationship of Aristotle, Augustine, medieval philosophers, Renaissance humanists to Scholasticism and the way in which a scholastic argument was formulated, proceeding to a survey of the development of what is termed Reformed Orthodoxy (1560 – 1790) and ending with a chapter on "Scholasticism and Today". Two appendices offer a reading guide and a short piece by Gisbertus Voetius (from 1636) on "The Use of Reason in Matters of Faith". This is a very important volume for theologians and church historians: others readers may find it rather demanding fare. Its publication in English is most welcome.

The Trinitarian Theology of Jonathan Edwards. Text, Context and Application, Steven M. Studebaker and Robert W. Caldwell III, Ashgate, 2012, hbk., 246 pages, £55.00

As scholars are increasingly recognising, the doctrine of the Trinity is central to the theology of Jonathan Edwards. The understanding of the Trinity which Edwards developed and the applications of the doctrine which he made are clearly and helpfully introduced in this volume by two significant Edwards scholars. After a concise introductory chapter providing a summary of Trinitarian terminology and a survey of scholarly work on Edwards' trinitarianism, the authors provide two significant texts from Edwards writings which offer an overview of his position. One is the collection of pieces from

his *Miscellanies* entitled *Discourse on the Trinity* (not published until the early twentieth century) and the third chapter of Edwards' *Treatise on Grace* (first published in 1865). Studebaker and Caldwell then provide a summary of Edwards' doctrine, first of the immanent Trinity and then of the economic Trinity. The second part of the book then provides historical context for Edwards' doctrine. Chapter 5 examines the formulations of the doctrine of the Trinity in, for example, Augustine, and Aquinas, whilst chapter 6 focuses attention on Edwards' immediate context in the eighteenth century. The third part of the book turns to what the authors term 'pastoral application' – ways in which this key doctrine shaped other aspects of Edwards' thought and ministry. Four chapters consider his preaching, his view of the Christian life, his doctrine of creation and his vision of heaven. Edwards' contribution to an understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity is profound and in this volume Studebaker and Caldwell have provided a stimulating study which is a valuable addition to the literature on one of the greatest Reformed theologians.

David McKay