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**The Scottish Bulletin
of
Evangelical Theology 1**

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Scottish Evangelical Theology Society

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The Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology

In the late 1950's a Scottish branch of the Tyndale Fellowship was formed, and continued to meet annually for over twenty years. By agreement with the Tyndale Fellowship its name was changed and its identity recognised as distinct from that of the parent body, particularly in that it admitted to membership ministers who were not involved in theological research, as such. The Scottish Tyndale Fellowship (which had for several years published a *Scottish Tyndale Bulletin*, carrying versions of addresses given at its annual conference) became the Scottish Evangelical Theology Society, and its membership promptly doubled and has continued to rise. It welcomes into membership all who support its aim of advancing evangelical theology, and who agree to its doctrinal basis. The SETS has, however, found difficulty in sustaining at an adequate standard of production the expense of an annual *Bulletin* with a limited circulation.

In consequence, at the annual meeting this year it was agreed to join forces with the Scottish Evangelical Research Trust and its study centre, Rutherford House, in the publication of a rejuvenated *Bulletin*, which it was hoped would circulate more widely than within the Society and also, in due course, attract material other than SETS conference addresses.

The Scottish Evangelical Research Trust was established recently to set up Rutherford House, a study and research centre on the lines of Tyndale and Latimer Houses in Cambridge and Oxford respectively. The Trust has a particular interest in dogmatic and historical theology, in contrast notably to the Biblical emphasis of Tyndale House, and a concern for matters of practical theology, though unlike Latimer it is not limited to working within a particular denomination. As it happens, most of the support which it has hitherto received has come from within the Church of Scotland. But use of the Rutherford House facilities (which include residential, self catering accommodation for short- or long-stay residents, and a growing library) is not thus limited. Pamphlets and booklets on various subjects are either published or in preparation under the aegis of the House, both popular and academic, and some with special reference to matters of moment within the Church of Scotland.

This new *Bulletin*, carrying the joint *imprimatur* of the SETS and the House, consists largely of material first presented at the 1982 SETS conference, in Larbert, though two reviews of important books with a Scottish reference are included. It is hoped that future issues will publish other papers as well, and the editor would be glad to have material offered for inclusion in his hands by the end of March, 1983.

N.M. de S. Cameron,

The Second Finlayson Lecture

Retribution and Punishment in the Old Testament, in the light of the New Testament

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In attempting to cover this subject I shall begin with a look at the words 'Retribution' and 'Punishment' in our common speech. Turning to Scripture, I shall be concerned with the relation between vengeance and retribution; with the ways in which certain punitive words are used in the Old Testament; and with the implications of the main punishments prescribed in the Mosaic law. Then from the New Testament I will try to show what place retribution has in the teaching of Jesus and the Apostles, and to what extent human action of this kind administers or foreshadows the judgment of heaven. Finally, since our interest is presumably not purely academic, I will make some comparison between views of punishment that prevail in our society and the doctrine of it to be found in Scripture.

The words 'retribution' and 'punishment'

We have all been warned against relying too much on etymology in arriving at the current meaning of a word. But this discouragement should not be overdone, as though our present language owed nothing to its ancestry, or as though all words had departed equally from their origins. Many terms in fact remain in almost mint condition; and this is perhaps especially true of words that have escaped the friction of everyday use.

So with this apology I would remind you of a dictionary definition of the Latin verb *tribuo*: namely, 'to distribute, to assign, impart, allot, bestow'; to which is added in Dr Smith's dictionary the comment '(usu. implying that that which is given is *due*)'. The italics are his. But if this element of what is 'due' is present in the simple verb, it would seem to be doubly implied in *retribuo*, which the new Oxford Latin Dictionary defines as 'To hand back duly [*sic*], giving as examples 'money, etc., owed; also transf. a reward or punishment'. I suggest that our own word 'retribution' has lost nothing of this force. Whether we should accept it as a proper ingredient of punishment; and, if so, what priority it should have, are further questions, dependent ultimately on what is revealed in Scripture. For the moment it is enough to note its preoccupation with guilt and desert, rather than with needs and policies. In a word, it is *retrospective* rather than prospective: asking what has been done, and what requital is thereby due, rather than what can be done to improve some person or situation.

In itself, retribution can be thought of as operating either automatically or by personal intervention, whether private or judicial. There is a built-in tendency for evil to recoil on its perpetrator, which has given rise to many parallels to the biblical saying, 'he who digs a pit will fall into it' (Pr. 26:27). We remember the conclusion drawn by pagan onlookers when Paul escaped the sea only to be attacked by a viper. 'No doubt this man is a murderer . . . Justice (*dikē*) has not allowed him to live' (Acts 28:4). In the hands of individuals or groups between whom there is no hierarchical relationship, retribution takes the ugly form of vengeance (on which we shall have more to say). Only when it is administered on the basis of an authority that one party holds or claims over the other – for example, as a parent, a master or an agent of the community and its law – can retribution be called punishment.

But what of the word 'punishment' itself? Is it wider than retribution? Should it indeed, as the majority would now argue, sever all its links with such a concept? Before turning to Scripture for the theology of the matter, which will be our main task, we should at least look at the normal use of the word 'punish', to make sure that we shall not be doing needless violence to it. Here I would submit that this word is, properly speaking, as retrospective, and as concerned with desert, as is the word 'retribution'. It can admittedly be used loosely and metaphorically, as when one speaks of a punishing blow, or even of an overworked machine receiving heavy punishment; but these are merely vivid expressions for rough treatment. One comes a little nearer to its proper sense when a man swears vengeance in the words 'I'll punish him for this!' – but he is borrowing the term; it does not belong to him as a private individual. Indeed we shall argue from Scripture that it *belongs* not even to a judge: only to God, who entrusts it to certain agents. But even at the level of ordinary usage, the word 'punishment' obstinately retains both its aura of authority and its backward look to misdemeanours which have put their perpetrator in the wrong, and earned him what he has now to undergo.

One may of course shape the *content* of a punishment to some useful end: to reform the offender, to deter the tempted, to protect the public, or to express the community's disdain for certain things; and in this sense 'punishment' is a wider term than 'retribution'. But without retribution, without an implied reference to authority and to an offence and its deserts, the action is no longer punitive. We can only speak of 'punishment', rather than of thought-reform, or discipline, or restraint, or treatment, if the person we subject to these forward-

looking measures is undergoing them not only for his future good but (in the other sense of 'for') for his past evil: that is, for the specific wrong that he has done.

Vengeance and Retribution in the Bible

Even in popular speech the line between vengeance and retribution can at times be very thin – and not without reason: for private vengeance, even at its worst, still has in it a trace-element of justice and even obligation: some notion that a moral debt has been incurred which cries out to be settled. And judicial retribution, for its part, can seldom be wholly dispassionate; nor in my view should it be. For while its calculation must be scrupulously fair, and its execution wholly without malice, a policy of pronouncing sentences with studied indifference would depersonalise, not to say trivialise, both the offender and his judge.¹

Certainly Scripture, despite the well-known concern of C.H. Dodd and others to disengage God from what is called His wrath,² couples the strict logic of judgement (as sin's final fruit and the sinner's chosen lot) with a divine indignation which is anything but impersonal, using fiery metaphors and piling up such synonyms as 'anger and fury and great wrath' (Dt. 29:28). Moreover, the harsh word 'avenge' is sometimes the only possible translation of the roots *nqm* and *ekdikeō*: for example, when the direct object of the verb is neither the offender nor even his victim (where the weaker word 'vindicate' would make sense, as in some translations of Lk. 18:1-8) but the victim's *injury*. Thus God avenges *the blood* of His servants, as both Testaments assure us in several places.³ This sense is equally clear in Romans 12:19, in at least the opening warning, 'Avenge not yourselves' (where the verb is *ekdikeō*). The reason is expressed in the same terms, namely that God has said 'Vengeance (*ekdikēsis*) is mine', and that He has appointed one's earthly governor as His avenger (*ekdikos*).⁴ In such hands, of course, vengeance becomes judicial retribution; but the use of the same root in all three places underlines the closeness of the two concepts, while making it clear that the distinction between them lies not in the realm of the propriety or impropriety of requital as such, but in that of a person's right or lack of right to effect it. Where we might have expected the New Testament's warning to be clinched with the words 'for vengeance is wrong', it is striking that it quotes instead, unaltered, God's deuteronomic dictum, 'vengeance is mine'.

That dictum, we may add, is upheld throughout the Old Testament, which uses the root *nqm* and its LXX equivalent, *ekdikeō*, with approval only where God or His appointed agent exercises it. This is especially clear in Ezekiel 25:12-17, where first the vengeance of Edom and the Philistines is roundly condemned; but where secondly it will itself attract vengeance – the divine retribution which is called 'my vengeance'; and where, thirdly, in Edom's case this will be effected 'by the hand of my people Israel'. So, just as in the New Testament, wherever vengeance has the character of vendetta, or springs from cherished animosity, whether in nations (as above) or parties (e.g. Jer. 20:10; Lam. 3:60) or individuals, it is a sin. This is put most warmly in the great commandment of Leviticus 19:18: 'You shall not take vengeance or bear any grudge against the sons of your own people' (or, as verse 34 will make clear, against 'the stranger in your midst'), 'but you shall love your neighbour as yourself'. At the same time, this very command occurs in the context of a legal system whose penalties, many of them extreme, were to be carried out by men on God's behalf; even (in the case of murder) by the victim's next of kin.

I have dwelt on this two-edged term because its sharpness cuts through any effort we might make to turn the edge of retribution, but it is reinforced in Scripture by various other expressions which are less emotive but no less plain.

The witness of Old Testament vocabulary

One way of speaking which simply *assumes* rather than argues that a crime and its deserts belong indissolubly together, is the Hebrew habit of using a single word for both an offence and its punishment. The earliest example meets us in Cain's protest to the LORD in Genesis 4:13, which at first sight appears to say, 'my iniquity (*'awōnī*) is greater than I can bear', but which in fact is using the word in its secondary sense of 'my punishment', as the context makes clear. The two senses are so intertwined that it is at times hard for the translator to decide which one is to prevail. Thus the familiar AV clause in the Law, 'he shall bear his iniquity', might be better rendered 'he shall bear his punishment' – for the vocabulary is the same as Cain's.⁵ This word is no isolated example of the virtual identity of an act and its deserts in Hebrew thought. Work and wages, for instance, can both alike be expressed by the word *p^cullā*; likewise tidings and the messenger's reward by *b^cšōrā*. And in the penal realm, the words for sin (*√ht'*) and guilt (*√šm*) can do double duty (like *'awōn*, above) to mean also 'punishment'⁶ – or indeed treble duty, to mean at times the sacrifices that atone for them: the sin-offering (*hattā't*) and guilt-offering (*'āšām*).

While these examples have the considerable force of simply taking it for granted that a deed and its due are but two sides of the same coin, there are also verbs and nouns which spell the matter out specifically, in many contexts of punishment. The two most prominent roots for this are *šillēm* and *šūh*, expressing payment and return. The former of these is used to reinforce the famous utterance, 'Vengeance is mine', with the addendum

which the LXX and the New Testament render as 'I will repay' (Dt. 32:35; Rom. 12:19; Heb. 10:30), and it is prominent not only in the laws which deal with making reparation, but also in many prophecies and prayers. It is a mark of God's covenant-loyalty that He will 'requite a man according to his work' (Ps. 62:12 [13, Heb.]), whether with reward or (for the covenant-breaker of Dt. 7:10) with a highly personal retribution ('he will requite him to his face'). It is dauntingly deliberate in Isaiah 65:6,7, where 'I will repay' is not only repeated but reinforced with 'I will *measure* into their bosoms payment⁷ for their former doings'.

The other verb of requital is *šbh*, to turn or return, which can speak of the natural recoil of a crime on its perpetrator (e.g. 'your deeds shall return on your own head', Obad. 15; cf. 1 Ki. 2:33). But far more often it is found in its causative form (hiph'il), with God as the doer, the one who 'returns' or 'renders' to a person what his deeds deserve. To take one instance, this is how Psalm 94, that psalm of divine retribution, calls upon the 'judge of the earth' to shine forth. 'Render to the proud their deserts' is its opening plea (and in the word 'deserts', *g'mil*, we have yet another double-duty word for both deed and recompense). Then in the final verse the singer sees his prayer accepted. 'He will bring back on them' (it is the same verb) 'their iniquity and wipe them out for their wickedness'. Among many other examples of this way of speaking, there is a particularly vivid instance in the closing comment on Abimelech and the men of Shechem in Judges 9:56,57: 'Thus God requited the crime of Abimelech . . .; and God also made all the wickedness of the men of Shechem fall back on their heads'. We can note, too, the use of the verb in parallel with 'punish' (*pdq*) in Hosea 12:2 (3, Heb.), and in construction with 'vengeance' or 'retribution' in Dt. 32:41,43, where it redoubles that word's retrospectiveness by promising, literally, to 'return retribution' on God's enemies.

Vocabulary, of course, is not everything; therefore for a control we must look to the biblical narratives and laws to find out how strictly or flexibly retribution was interpreted.

Examples of Old Testament practice

We are met at once by considerable flexibility in God's handling of the first murderer. First He decrees for Cain a punishment that falls short of the death penalty yet contains a strong element of retribution, by making the earth withhold its bounty and its hospitality, on account of its violation by the blood of Abel. But secondly, in reprimanding Cain from death God threatens not an equal but a sevenfold retribution on whoever might kill him. In both these sayings there is some degree of matching the sentence to the crime, yet the former sentence draws back from one-to-one equivalence, while the latter seems to disregard it utterly.⁸

While God's direct judgments are a special case (for He is not a servant of the law but the creative source of it and of all goodness and right), it was nevertheless possible to appeal to the precedent that He had set by this exercise of mercy, as David agreed over the 'Cain and Abel' case that was put to him – albeit fictitiously – by the woman of Tekoa. Perhaps, too, the very fact that in some cases any lifting or commuting of a penalty was forbidden ('your eye shall not pity . . .'; Dt. 13:8; 19:13,21; 25:12; cf. Num. 35:31ff.) may have implied that in other cases discretion might be exercised. Further, there is no wooden literalism of retribution in the penalties which the law did prescribe. This is true even of the *lex talionis*, 'an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth'. It has often been pointed out that the first statement of this principle is immediately followed by an example which treats it creatively: not extracting an actual eye or tooth from the master who has injured his slave, but requiring, instead, the slave's release (Ex. 21:24-27). It emerges that the *lex talionis* was designed to express to the judiciary, with maximum memorability, the principle of equity: neither minimising nor exaggerating the seriousness of an offence; still less ignoring it in the interest of some policy;⁹ yet not simply re-enacting it.

This principle of proportionate but not imitative retribution is evident everywhere in the Law. The husband who defames his wife is not defamed in return, but beaten and fined (Dt. 22:18,19); the thief or swindler does not make good his offence by simple restitution, as if he were a mere borrower, but by an added fine and, in some cases, a sacrifice (Ex. 22:1,4; Num. 5:7). The adulterer and other gross sexual offenders obviously cannot suffer a penalty similar to the offence, but one, nevertheless, that is of equal gravity. This penalty, revealingly enough, is death, which is also the sentence for sins of sacrilege, rebellion, kidnapping and murder, though never for wrongs against property. There is a significant comment in Dt. 22:26 on the death-penalty for rape, which reads: 'for this case is like that of a man attacking and murdering his neighbour' – a remark which makes explicit the principle of proportionate retribution by its assessment of the seriousness of the crime and therefore of the punishment. For lesser crimes the principle is actually stated in so many words in Dt. 25:2, where the beating of an offender must be not only supervised by the judge and limited by the 40-stroke maximum, but must depend in the first place on whether 'he *deserves*¹⁰ to be beaten', and then must be 'in proportion to his offence'. Our Lord gave heaven's endorsement to this principle in His words about 'a severe beating' and a 'light' one, in Lk. 12:47f.

I have suggested earlier, in looking at the terms we use, that while 'punishment' is a misnomer if it has no retrospective and retributive reference to justify and control it, yet (subject always to those controls) it may rightly have other ends to serve as well. This is borne out in Scripture by a number of comments.

There is the element of *deterrence*, prominent in Deuteronomy in the refrain which follows certain of its penalties: 'And all Israel shall hear, and fear, and never again do any such wickedness as this' (Dt. 13:11; cf. 17:13; 19:20; 21:21). A second motive is the *protection of society*, though I am not aware of any mention of physical protection as the end in view. The concern, rather, is for the nation's soul, as we might say, which is imperilled when crime remains unpunished. Here the refrain is: 'so shall you purge the evil from the midst of you' – whether that evil be something as openly disruptive as murder, perjury or anarchy, or as seemingly private as adultery or a bride's pre-marital unchastity. There are eleven such comments between Dt. 13 and 24,¹¹ giving this aspect of punishment apparent precedence over the deterrent aspect, since it concerns the relation of a whole people to God, and the danger of their sharing the guilt that they implicitly condone.

A third desirable element in punishment is the offender's *reformation*. While this receives no mention in the penalties laid down for individuals, it plays a large part in the national punishments foretold in Leviticus 26:14ff. for breach of the covenant. Retribution ('vengeance for the covenant', 26:25) remains the basis for these chastisements, as ever, or they would not be punishments; but the end in view is repentance, and the sufferings are described as discipline, using the root *ysr*¹² which is a favourite term in Proverbs for character-training. The fatherly relationship, indeed, whether divine or domestic, seems to be the biblical context for this reformatory aspect of punishment. In the lawcourt, the nearest approach to it is the reminder that the offender is still one's brother, whose punishment must not deny that fact by its excess (Dt. 25:3). This is an immense safeguard, but it is a far cry from making his rehabilitation a necessary criterion (let alone *the* criterion) in passing sentence on him.

Fourthly there is *restitution*. From one angle, the fivefold, fourfold or twofold repayment of a theft (ex. 22:1,4,9) was a punishment setting matters right between the offender and the law. But to the victim, thanks to the absence of any sharp distinction between criminal and civil cases, it brought the benefit of both repayment and compensation, since the money was payable not to the community but to him, if Ex. 22:9 (which specifies this) expresses what its companion passages evidently take for granted.¹³

All this may reaffirm to us that while retribution is the core of punishment in the Old Testament, it is not the whole of it. But it is time to see what attitude the New Testament takes to this word and concept.

Retribution and Punishment in the New Testament

To keep this study within bounds, I shall look chiefly at the teaching of Jesus. On our theme, that is, on what is to be done about evil and evildoers. His words are characteristically bold and colourful. There are no pastel shades, no mild or middle ways, but startling extremes of kindness and severity. Kindness, whether His or ours, runs here to unheard-of lengths of loving, giving, suffering, forgiving, and returning good for evil. But if a person opts, instead, for what he thinks is due to him, or fancies that God's grace is mere indulgence, he is warned of a severity that will exact the last farthing of his debt.

Retribution, in act, together with reward, meets us on nearly every page of the gospels; and while much of it is found in the parables, as the basis on which masters punish or promote their servants, or kings their subjects, we are not free to dismiss it as mere colouring material, for it is presented in most cases as the arrival point of a story which may well have begun with the words, 'The kingdom of heaven is like . . .', and be clinched with a warning that does nothing to reduce its impact. In one form or another it is put to us that 'So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, unless . . .'

Parables apart, Jesus was constantly reinforcing this line of teaching. For His endorsement of the Old Testament view of punishment as the due requital of deeds done, we need scarcely look further than His statement of His own intended action at the final Judgment: 'For the Son of man is to come with his angles in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay every man for what he has done' (Mt. 16:27). This is only overturned where grace has been free to operate. Where matters come to judgment, a multitude of sayings make it plain that there will be no compromise, no prospect of rehabilitation. The fire of ghenna is not the fire of a refiner.

Meanwhile, however, the Son of man had come to save, not to judge. His followers must live in the same spirit: of love, not litigation; of gloriously lopsided requital – giving back good for evil; not seeking an eye for an eye or a tooth for a tooth, but deeply aware that the lawcourt's guide could never be the lover's motto.

This is not to abolish lawcourts, nor to change their role. Jesus, no less than Paul or Peter, acknowledged civil power as a trust 'from above' (Jn. 19:11), and was ready to be tried on the basis of what could be proved about Him (Jn. 18:20-23). Paul had no quarrel with even a death sentence on him, if he could be shown to deserve it (Acts 25:11); and Peter expresses the responsibility of governors in terms of requital: 'to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right' (1 Pet. 2:14). His word for punishment here is *ekdikēsis*, whose root we have already noticed as the LXX equivalent of *nqm* (vengeance or retribution) and as a New Testament term carrying the same range of meaning. We saw that while personal vengeance was forbidden as decisively by Paul (Rom. 12:19a), as by Jesus, yet both alike – and indeed every New Testament writer – saw God as the one who

would exercise it in due course (Rom. 12:19b),¹⁴ and Paul went on to name the civil power as God's *ekdikos*, His agent of retribution, in the meantime (Rom. 13:4).

Since the New Testament, however, is addressing us not as civil rulers but as church members and as citizens, it is mostly content to establish the basic retributive element in punishment, rather than to enlarge on its secondary and wider aspects. As we have seen, these have already been aired in the Old Testament, and it is chiefly from there that we may fill out the picture to include considerations of deterrence, public wellbeing, reformation and restitution, where they are appropriate. I have said 'chiefly', however, rather than 'only', because some of these features do emerge also in the New Testament's treatment of punishment and discipline within the church. Our Lord authorised a last-resort procedure for settling disputes, by the church acting as a court: hearing proper evidence (Mt. 18:16; cf. 2 Cor. 13:1) and having the right to excommunicate (Mt. 18:17), which is a penalty reminiscent of the Mosaic sentence to be 'cut off from the midst of the assembly'.¹⁵

Where this is taken up in Corinthians 5, it appears to be as final, if need be, as a deportation or a death sentence (though one not humanly administered, any more than was that on Ananias and Sapphira). Yet Paul emphasizes its constructive aspects even so: for its aim was the offender's ultimate salvation 'in the day of Jesus Christ' (5:5); and in this particular case it seems also to have brought about his more immediate repentance and reinstatement (2 Cor. 2:5-11). A second positive effect was the impact it made on the congregation, whose heart-searching and setting of their house in order is described in 2 Corinthians 7:8-12 – giving us a New Testament equivalent of the point made so often (as we have seen) in the Mosaic law: 'so shall you purge the evil from the midst of you'. And in his references to his own judicial authority as an apostle, Paul is careful to stress the fact that while he is 'ready to punish every disobedience' (using the retributive verb, *ekdikeō*, 2 Cor. 10:6), his authority was given him 'for building up and not for tearing down' (2 Cor. 10:8; 13:10).

Finally we must glance at the general modern rejection of retribution, and at the two most common alternatives to it.

Current objections and alternatives to retribution

The objections are mainly three:

1. Retribution is barbarous, rationalising the primitive urge to hit back;
2. It is negative, adding a second evil to a first;
3. It is unChristian, being forbidden in the Sermon on the Mount.

To these I would make the following beginnings of a reply:

1. One can take an opposite view of the instinct to retaliate; seeing in it, despite all the distortions of pride and hatred, some reckoning of desert. Judicial retribution can then be seen as isolating this one element of desert from its less worthy companions, in order to assess impartially and administer responsibly what appears to be due. If so, it is not a rationalisation of spite, but a conversion of rough into approximately true justice.

2. To the objection that retribution merely adds a second evil to a first, the basic answer is that the two acts are not unrelated, like two successive crimes, which are obviously worse than one, but are reciprocal. When the whole is considered, not the parts in uncorrelated succession, it is clear that a crime matched by retribution is a totality of which the parts are in a state of some degree of balance; whereas a punishment without a crime is an abuse of power (and indeed of language), and a crime without a punishment is as one-sided a transaction as a purchase without a payment. The balance may indeed be restored by some act of grace; but this transcends justice; it does not deny it.

3. As for the third objection, that retribution is unChristian, we have already seen the truth and half-truth of it, in considering the respective roles of the individual, the Lord, and the civil power, in relation to evil, as taught in the New Testament as a whole. To ignore these scriptural distinctions is to aspire to be more Christian than Christ and His apostles and to join together what God has put asunder.

We turn now to the two most common alternatives to retribution, namely the utilitarian approach which asks only what will bring most benefit to society and to the offender, and secondly the approach summed up in the word 'reprobation'.

The fatal weakness of the former of these, namely that it discards the notion of desert, exposes it to the danger of two opposite poles of injustice: *i.e.*, to laxity and tyranny. In a permissive society scarcely a day will pass without some instance of a sentence that makes light of a horrific crime, accompanied by such a comment as 'It would be nonsense to make you serve this prison sentence'.¹⁶ But the opposite danger is envisaged in C.S. Lewis's classic article entitled 'The Humanitarian Theory of Punishment'.¹⁷ Here I will quote only one extract, at a point where he is considering the situation in which a reformatory or deterrent sentence might be, as he puts it, 'hideously disproportionate to the criminal's deserts'. He continues: 'The experts with perfect logic will reply, "but nobody was talking about deserts. No one was talking about *punishment* in your archaic vindictive sense of the word. Here are the statistics proving that this treatment deters. Here are the statistics proving that this other treatment cures. What is your trouble?"'

To this, all that needs to be added is a reminder of the decision of Caiaphas to engineer the death of Christ, 'that the whole nation perish not' (Jn. 11:50). With extraordinary candour, the ethicist Sir David Ross, in drawing back from the primacy of retribution in punishment, quotes Caiaphas with reluctant approval. His exact words are as follows: 'The interests of society may sometimes be so deeply involved as to make it right [*sic!*] to punish an innocent man "that the whole nation perish not"'.¹⁸

Against this slide into moral relativism, the sticking-point most favoured by those who disallow retribution is the second concept mentioned above: that is, reprobation. Punishment, on this view, expresses society's revulsion against unacceptable behaviour. The report of the 1949-53 Royal Commission on Capital Punishment saw this as a refinement of the concept of retribution, a version purged of primitive thoughts of vengeance and expiation.¹⁹

Reprobation does indeed retain the vital notation of desert and of due proportion in assigning penalties; and it rightly abjures the vindictive spirit implied in the word vengeance. But in seeking to be high-minded it loses something of the simplicity and objectivity of retribution. Where retribution concentrates on the debt rather than the debtor, revulsion has the opposite tendency, and thereby inflicts, I suggest, a deeper wound. Within retribution, too, there is room for the offender to have some sense of expiating his offence, whether by serving the sentence that corresponds to it or by making restitution (as in the Mosaic law for theft). Under reprobation, however, since the idea of expiation or 'atonement', in the terminology of the report) is specifically disowned, the cloud of official disapproval lifts only at society's pleasure, and there is no way in which the offender can claim to have paid off his debt. Society's reply must be: 'No: it is we who have now discharged *our* debt – our obligation to act out our rejection of your behaviour'. The distinction may be a subtle one; and if the logic of reprobation is seldom followed through to this extent, it may be because common sense rebels against the insufficiency of the concept to be anything more than a supplement to the plainer if apparently harsher logic of retribution.

In Conclusion

In the end, neither the consensus of penologists nor the intuitions of common sense can be anything but provisional and subject to divine correction. For if our authority to punish is from God, and if He has declared the principles on which He punishes, it is for us to follow and embody them as best we may. These principles we have already studied in our sampling of the Old and New Testaments which it would be wearisome to recapitulate in detail. Instead, I will sum up my understanding of this teaching, in words that I wrote some years ago, where I concluded 'that retribution is the *root* idea in punishment; not that it should be the only idea. If punishment can be constructive as well as fair, this is sheer gain; and if mercy can be exercised, this is a delight. But first the moral acts must be established: we must know what is owing, and be clear that it *is* owing. Only so can we be safe from overcharging on the one hand, when the fancy takes us, and from making a practical denial, on the other hand, through our laxity, that any values are absolute.'²⁰

To give Scripture itself the last word, we may listen to the appeal of Hosea to a society as sadly adrift as our own:

Hold fast to love and Justice,
and wait continually for your God.²¹

Notes

¹ One is reminded of the gentleman in *Erewhon* who was afflicted with a tendency to swindle. He 'has but lately recovered from embezzling a large sum of money under singularly distressing circumstances' [he had relieved a widow of all her property] 'but he has quite got over it, and the straighteners say that he has made a really wonderful recovery; you are sure to like him'. (Samuel Butler, *Erewhon*, ch. VIII, end.)

² C.H. Dodd, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (1932), Fontana Edition 1959, pp.48-50

³ Dt. 32:43; 2 Ki. 9:7; Ps. 79:10; Rev. 6:10; 19:2. Cf. Mt. 23:35.

⁴ Rom. 13:4; cf. *TDNT* II.444.

⁵ On the other hand, in the ritual of the scapegoat it is clearly not the penalties but the iniquities of the nation that are confessed, transferred and borne away (Lv. 16:21,22); and something of the sort seems implied, too, in the role of priests as sinbearers in Ex. 28:38; Lv. 10:17, whereby they complete the process of atonement rather than suffer punishment.

⁶ E.g., *hêt*: Lam. 3:39; cf. Lv. 20:20; 24:15; Nu.9:13; 18:32; Is. 53:12; Ezk. 23:49. Also *hattā't*: Zc. 14:19; also probably Lam. 4:6 in view of the contrast between a swift end and a lingering one, in the ensuing verses. For a clear example of *'āšām* in the sense of 'punish', see Joel 1:18, where man's fate involves his beasts.

⁷ Our expression 'payment for their doings', translates the single term 'their *p^c'ullā'* – another example of the identity between a deed and its due, discussed above.

⁸ I say 'seems to', because the killing of Cain, marked as he now was with God's safe-conduct, would no longer

be simply an act of vengeance but one of sacrilege. This extra dimension of calculated defiance, compounding the offence, may account not only for the heavy penalty here, but also for God's later warnings of 'sevenfold' punishment for sins which imply a spurning of the covenant. See Lv. 26:18,21, etc., with 25 which speaks of 'vengeance for the covenant'.

- ⁹ The practice of 'positive discrimination', as it is now called, in favour of a politically sensitive social group, is condemned both when it favours the rich and when it favours the poor. 'You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great': Lv. 19:15; cf. Ex. 23:3.
- ¹⁰ Lit. 'is a son of beating'. Admittedly this kind of expression can mean merely 'is sentenced to . . .' (cf. NEB, GNB), as in Pss. 79:11; 102:20 (21, Heb.). But Jonathon's protest to Saul in 1 Sam. 20:32, 'Why . . .? What has he done?', picks up the stronger sense of the phrase Saul had used, as does David's taunt in 1 Sam. 26:16, 'You deserve to die'. Cf. 2 Sam. 12:5 and, in a context not of sentencing but of reprieve, 1 Ki. 2:26 (lit. 'a man of death').
- ¹¹ Dt. 13:5 (6, Heb.); 17:7,12; 19:13,19; 21:9,21; 22:21,22,24; 24:7. The verb ('purge') is the pi'el of *b'r*, to burn out, exterminate; cf. the use of the pu'al of *kpr*, to make atonement, in Num. 35:33, where the murderer's death must clear the land of bloodguilt.
- ¹² In the pi'el, vs. 18,28, for God's action; and in the niph'al, v.23, for the response it should evoke.
- ¹³ This is borne out by the law of Lv. 6:1-7 and Num. 5:5-10 concerning conscience-money, making the original sum plus one-fifth all payable to the defrauded person or his next-of-kin. Only if no kinsman could be found was it to go 'to the LORD for the priest' (Num. 5:8).
- ¹⁴ Cf. .e.g. Lk. 18:7,8; Heb. 10:26-31; Rev. 20:11-15.
- ¹⁵ Num. 19:20; cf. Lv. 17:4,9,10; 20:3,5,6; Num. 15:30,31.
- ¹⁶ These words of the Recorder of London (19 February, 1982, at the Old Bailey) reported while this paper was in preparation, were addressed to a woman who had killed her common-law husband, in response to a taunt from him, by pouring paraffin over him and igniting it.
- ¹⁷ In P.E. Hughes, ed., *Churchmen Speak* (Marcham Manor Press, Abingdon, 1966), 39-44. The extract quoted here is from p.40.
- ¹⁸ W.D. Ross, *The Right and the Good* (Oxford, 1930), 61.
- ¹⁹ *Report* (HMSO, 1953), sections 52,53, pp. 17,18.
- ²⁰ D. Kidner, *The Death Penalty* (Falcon, 1963), 10.
- ²¹ Hosea 12:6 (7, Heb.).

The Word of God in Worship

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Introduction

If we would seek to understand the Word of God in worship, it is necessary for us first to say something about Jesus Christ in worship. Our understanding of Jesus Christ, who He is, what He came to do and what He does do for us today, in worship, will guide and control our understanding of worship and of the importance and activity of the Word of God in worship.

The Importance of Worship

Israel was called to be a worshipping community, a "royal priesthood". The worship of God is man's highest, noblest activity. It gives meaning, direction and joy to the whole of life. All God's purposes in Creation and Redemption are fulfilled in us when, together in our worship, we are renewed in and through Christ and in the name of Christ we glorify God. Through God's Grace we are called to voice for all people, for all creatures and for all creation, the praises of God and to realise our God-given destiny to be priests of Creation under Christ, our Great High Priest, (Cf. *Reports to the General Assembly*, 1970, page 201). God calls man to worship, to glorify and to enjoy the Lord and in so doing to be concerned that all men everywhere should glorify and enjoy the Lord. In so glorifying Him, they realise their creaturely glory. At the heart of this call to worship, then, is the call to mission. Worship and mission belong together. In God's call and purpose they are inseparable. Together they belong to the very life and being of the Church in the world. "In worship the Church faces God in the name of Christ on behalf of the world, in gratitude, confession and intercession. In mission, the Church faces the world in the name of Christ on behalf of God as the ambassador of the Gospel of Reconciliation", (*idem*, page 201). In the Church's participation in Jesus Christ, in the Spirit, they belong together.

Worship (in so far as it can be understood as man's activity) is our joyful response to God for all that he has done and is doing for us, in Jesus Christ. It is the joyous offering of ourselves in thanksgiving for the One True Offering to God made on our behalf by God's well-beloved Son, in and through whom alone we are able to draw near to God and are called to be sons. It is even more. It is our participation through the Spirit in the once-and-for-all offering of Christ to the Father. It is our sharing through the Spirit in His Perfect Life, Death, Resurrection and Ascension. It is such a sharing in Christ through the Holy Spirit that we (sinners that we are) are made by Grace to stand in Christ's place before the Father (as He stood in our sinful place before the Judgment Seat), and we are accepted by the Father as if we were actually His only well-beloved Son and are able to call Him Father. By Grace through the Holy Spirit we receive and enjoy Christ's Holy Obedient Life to the Father: by Grace in Christ, through the Spirit, we are made to glorify the Father and to serve the Father seeking that all men and all creation glorify the Father, both now and hereafter. In Christ we are made heirs of the Father and rejoice in all the glory and joy of the New Creation.

The Place of Jesus Christ (in worship)

As we read in Colossians 1:15f, "Christ is the visible likeness of the invisible God. He is the first-born Son, superior to all created things. For through Him, God created everything in heaven and on earth, the seen and the unseen things . . . God created the whole universe *through Him* and *for Him*". That is, God has created all people, all creatures, all things, seen and unseen, in this vast universe to manifest forth His glory and to praise Him. Apart from man, creation does not know God and His purposes for creation, and creation is dumb. Only to man, made in His likeness, has God given a mind to understand Him and a mouth to speak forth His praises. Man is given dominion over all creation, to express on behalf of all creatures the praises of God, so that through the lips of man the heavens might declare the glory of God and the firmament show forth His handywork (Psalm 19:1). In worship man is called to gather up, and to voice the worship of all creation. "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and creation realises its creaturely glory in glorifying through the lips of man. Man was made to be that creature among all creatures, who might know the Creator and on behalf of all creatures worship God" (*Reports* 1970, p.192).

Because of man and his sin, creation fails to glorify God as God intended. Instead the whole of creation groans in travail waiting for the Redemption of man. Creation waits until man is Redeemed and renewed, in order that, in and through man, all creation might glorify God.

The glorious news of the Gospel is that God does not abandon His purpose for man and for all creation. God has come Himself into this created world. In Jesus He has taken on Himself our creaturely existence. He, although remaining God, has become man for us and for all creation. (Col. 2:9,10; Eph. 1:10, 20-23). Christ

Jesus came to be the Lord and the Priest of all creation, and thereby came to do, for men and for all creation, what man in his sinfulness fails to do. He offered to God, on our behalf, as Man and thereby as one of us and for us, in our stead, a perfect Holy obedience, through His Life, Death, Resurrection and Ascension into the presence of the Father. And in and through that perfect offering of His entire Life, He offers to the Father on our behalf and on behalf of all creation, praise and glory. As Man, in our name, He worships and glorifies the Father (Hebrews 1:2. 3:2,16f). In the words of the General Assembly Report, (p.192), the Good News, "the Gospel of Grace is that He assumes our life, takes on our responsibilities, offers to the Father a life of unbroken communion and obedience, dies our death, rises in our humanity, returns to the Father as the One True Man before God, the One True Servant of the Lord, the One True Worshipper, Who now, by His Holy Spirit, leads us in our worship. As our High Priest, He is the Head of all creation, the Head of the Church, the Leader of the worshipping community, who lives in communion with the Father to intercede for all His creatures.'

The New Testament speaks of worship as that which we do together on the Lord's Day, when we come together to meet the Lord Jesus Christ and praise Him for all that He has done for us and when, in the Spirit, we thankfully are made to share anew in Christ, in His union with the Father and in His Lordship over all things and over all creation.

The New Testament also speaks of worship as the offering of ourselves in a life of obedience and service in Jesus Christ. Paul says: "Offer yourselves as a living sacrifice to God, dedicated to His service and pleasing to Him. This is the true worship that you should offer." (Romans 12:1)

The worship which we do together on the Lord's Day passes over and into the worship which is the offering of our whole life to the Father in Christ, and is thereby a continued sharing throughout the whole of our life, in the perfect offering of Christ to the Father.

In either use of the term 'worship', and in the end we must understand worship in wholeness as involving our entire life, Christ is 'the High Priest in the Most Holy Place', the *Leiturgos* (Hebrews 8:2), the Minister of the Sanctuary, the One True Worshipper, Who leads us in all our worship: the One in and through whom alone, and in union with him, we worship the Father, in the way that is acceptable to the Father. Christ is the High Priest and at the same time the One True Offering which God has provided and which alone is acceptable to Him.

Now Christ's worship of the Father on our behalf, His Ministry for us and for our salvation is two-fold. First, there is that one-and-for-all event in which leaving the life of glory and eternal communion with the Father, He became the Son of Man, that we sons of men might become sons of God by Grace and be drawn into the Son's communion with the Father, so that, by the Holy Spirit, we might call Him "Father, Dear Father". This event stretches from His birth to His death, to His resurrection and Ascension to the right hand of the Father, that is, to His return as our representative to the Presence of the Father.

Secondly, there is His continuing heavenly ministry, inaugurated by His resurrection and ascension and which continues on into eternity. Jesus as Son of Man reigns as Lord and, as Man, He continues to pray for us. At the same time, His very Person, bearing the wound-print and the scars of His once and for all sacrifice for us, is a living intercession for us pleading our cause. Through the outpouring of His Holy Spirit He relates us to, and implants us into, His expiatory sacrifice, and draws us into His life of communion with the Father.

There is a further two-fold ministry of Christ. He comes as God, to represent God to man, and, at the same time, he comes as Man, to represent man to God. God demands that we worship Him. For God created all men and all creation for His glory, that we might worship Him, praise Him, serve Him and be the sons of God that we are meant to be (Hebrews 2:10). At the same time, God gives Himself to us in the Incarnate Son, that we might worship Him as He requires. As the Incarnate Son, as Man, as our Elder Brother, Kinsman and Representative, He takes hold of us, atones for our sin, cleanses us, prays for us, gives to us His own Perfect Human Life, that united with him and in Him we are made to approach the Father, to be united with the Father and to glorify the Father, as He requires. That is, God demands our worship in Christ, and at the same time, in Christ, He gives to us what He Himself demands of us. In wonderful love, He gives Himself to us in Christ and thereby, draws us near to Himself and unites us with Himself, in Christ. We are accepted by God, not because we are worthy or have offered worthy worship. We are altogether unworthy. We are accepted "in spite of our unworthiness, because He has provided for us a Worship, a Way, a Sacrifice, a Forerunner in Christ our Leader and Representative, and our worship is our joyful Amen to that Worship" (*idem* p.194-195). Our worship is a thankful, joyful appropriation of Christ and of His Worship of the Father, through the Spirit, so that all that is of Christ is ours by Grace through the Spirit. Through the Holy Spirit, and by Grace, His Life of obedience to the Father, His Death to our sin, his Resurrection, His Ascension (His Faith in the Father) His very Sonship and Life of communion with the Father, His Reign in Glory, are all ours! God has come in Christ and (as Calvin says) has effected with us a wonderful exchange (*mirifica commutatio*) and this wonderful exchange, whereby we are reconciled to the Father, is enshrined at the heart of all worship, whether that worship be what we do together on the Lord's Day of the worship of the whole of life.

The Word of God in Worship

We have dealt at length with worship and with Christ in worship. Now we are able to turn to the Word of God in Worship. Our understanding of Christ in worship guides and controls our understanding of the Word and provides and controls the content of the Word that we preach.

Christ Jesus is central to all our worship. Likewise the Word is central to all our worship of God. Christ is the One True Worshipper (the *leiturgos*), whose worship alone is acceptable to the Father. Likewise the Word of God is that Word through which alone the Father can be known and worshipped and whose praise of the Father alone is acceptable. Christ as the One True Worshipper leads us in our worship, by giving Himself to us, so that by Grace His Worship of the Father is our worship and our worship of the Father is a response of thanksgiving for Christ. Likewise the Word of God leads us in our worship of the Father. It comes and lodges within us, revealing the Father and evoking, guiding and controlling our response of praise and adoration of the Father. We receive God's Grace through the Word and we return to God in thanksgiving the Grace that we have received through the Word. Grace (*eucharis*) is what we receive. Thanksgiving (*eucharistia*) is the Grace that we give back to the Father.

Without the Word and the Spirit (and the Spirit works through the Word) we could not worship the Father. Our worship would be an act of man, attempted in our strength and in our understanding, and, as such, it would be unacceptable to God. Consider the difference which we all have experienced between our attempting to pray to God in our own strength, when prayer becomes an effort of man, and the prayer that is evoked after we have encountered God in His Word and listened to Him speaking to us. This time prayer is altogether different. We pray along the lines of the Word that we have read and heard, using the message that we have received and incorporating it into our prayer. Now the Word evokes and controls our praying and we pray with an ease and a freedom and a power, not otherwise enjoyed for we are using God's word, not our word in prayer. And what is more, such prayer is in union with Jesus Christ, where our prayer is being joined with His Prayer and His praying by grace, becomes our praying as now He is praying in us and through us. Such praying is praying in the Word and in the Spirit. We listen to what God has said, we hear what God has promised and ask God to fulfil what He has promised within the context in which we are placed. We claim from God the answer to what He Himself has promised. Such prayer is in accord with the Father's will. Such praying is in His Name. It is prayer together, and in union, with Jesus Christ and is the kind of prayer of which Jesus said, "Whatever you ask in my Name that will I do" (John 14:13). But it is prayer evoked by the Word, guided and controlled by the Word and prayed in and through the understanding of the Word and in and through the power of the Word. Without the Word it would not be, and could not be, true prayer acceptable to God. And without the Word our whole worship of God, which is a response of praise and prayer *to*, and *through*, and *in*, the Word, would not be true worship, acceptable to God. Christ and the Word together are central to all worship.

Christ is the Word of God Who became flesh and lived on this earth as a Man, in order to bring us to God that we might become sons of God. The Word of God, when truly proclaimed in worship today, is that same Divine-human Word Who is Christ Jesus. He comes to us in the form of the Word and seeks to become flesh and blood in us (to be born in us), so that we might become sons of God. Only by the Word of God being welcomed by us and coming to live in us does Christ Jesus live within us. Only so are we filled by the Spirit, possessed by the Spirit, made sons of God and heirs of the Kingdom, able to serve and glorify God.

The Word of God, this Divine-human Word that is Christ Jesus, is the Divine-human Word that is witnessed to in Scripture. The Human word of Scripture is the bearer of, the witness to, the Divine-human Word that is Christ the Saviour, the One True Worshipper, the Lord of all. This is why in our Reformed worship, the Bible occupies the central place that it does. It inspires the words of our hymns, evokes and guides our prayers: and it is placed in the pulpit, or on the lectern, as a symbolic reminder that the minister's sole task is to read and to seek to make known the message of the Bible, the Good News of Christ, so that people might encounter Christ and share today in His New Life in union with the Father.

All this means that there is no room, nor place, in worship, for man's word, or man's opinions. Other books have their place in their own spheres, man's opinions are important and can be voiced and heard in meetings and discussion groups and in conversations and in print. But they have no place in worship. The only word which has a place in worship is the Word of God, the Word that is Jesus Christ and Who is witnessed to in the sacred Scriptures. This alone is the Word of authority and power, the Redeeming Word which can change lives, bringing man to repentance and to faith in God and to the joyous acceptance of His Salvation.

Preaching and Prayer

Prayer is the necessary accompaniment of preaching. In preaching, God comes and encounters His people in the context of prayer.

It is the duty of the Church, and our duty, yours and mine, to approach Scripture in a spirit of humility, of acceptance, of expectation, prepared to meet the Lord, to hear what He has to say to us, and to obey Him. That is not in itself easy. It is contrary to the spirit of the natural man. We need to pray for such acceptance

of Scripture, such humility and the readiness to hear the Word of God which will disturb us, challenge us, change us and call us to obey the Father. We cannot create such an attitude in ourselves. We cannot bring ourselves to that attitude and to that place where we will hear God speaking. Only God can do that for us, but it is something which God wants to do for us and will do for us, as we pray.

Again, the Word of God comes to us in Scripture in human words. To accept, to hear, to understand and appropriate that Word for preaching and teaching, we must interpret Scripture in a faithful and true way. Yet that may not be easy. Scripture, despite its humanity, is not always easy to understand. It can only be grasped and understood in terms of the Living Word (the *logos*) to which it points. In John 8:43 Jesus said: "Why do you not understand my speech (*lalia*)? Even because you cannot hear my Word (*logos*)." The human speech (the *lalia*) of Jesus cannot be understood in itself, but only in terms of the Word (the *logos*) that speaks it and stands above it and behind it. Our natural ears cannot hear the Word (the *logos*) of Jesus, nor can our natural minds understand it. There is a veil concealing it from us, just as there was a veil concealing the Presence of the Son of God in the man Jesus, to natural men. That veil can only be drawn aside by the Father. Our ears have to be opened by the Holy Spirit if we would hear the Word (the *logos*) which alone will allow us truly to understand and interpret the human speech of Jesus, and not only His human speech but that human word which is Scripture.

On the other hand, there is no revelation of the Word (the *logos*) apart from the human word (the *lalia*). For, "It is the work of the *logos* to explain the *lalia*, which it adopts, and the work of the *lalia* to reveal the *logos* which it serves" (T.F. Torrance. "Essays in Christology for Karl Barth", p.28). This was true for those who listened to Jesus when on earth, and it is equally true for all who would approach Scripture in the right way and hear God speaking to them today in the sphere of Scripture. "The Word of God which speaks to us through Holy Scripture in human words is to be understood and appropriated as we interpret the human words (*lalia*) faithfully in accordance with the objective Word (*logos*) which adopted and moulded it as its instrument of communication, and which still uses it to communicate to us the divine revelation." (idem p.28).

Again, the Word of God which we are called to receive and appropriate and which does not come to us in abstraction from the human word (the *lalia*), comes in concrete historic situations. It comes in the actual human situations in which the Word of God has addressed itself to men and women in the Old and New Testament, in and through the actual humanity which the Word has called into subservience as a worthy instrument for its revealing purpose. It can only be received, heard and appropriated in these actual situations. That is to say, if we and our people would hear the Word of God in the preaching of Scripture, then we and they must allow ourselves to be drawn by the Spirit into those concrete original spheres in the Old and New Testament, in which the Word of God came in creating, redeeming, sanctifying power. We must allow ourselves to stand where the men and women of the Bible stood under the impact of the Word of God, experiencing the same cleansing, purifying, renewing, sanctifying power of the Word and the Spirit. The Word of God comes in historical settings, and we must allow ourselves, through the Holy Spirit, to be placed in these concrete historic settings of Scripture. True preaching is not the preaching of abstract moral and spiritual generalisations and principles. It is the presentation of these concrete historic settings (and for that we need arduous exegetical study), in order that we and our people might live into these situations and might, like the men and women of the Old and New Testament, encounter the cleansing, renewing, life-giving Word of God. This is not within the ability of the preacher as a man. Yet this is what he is called to do and what God will do for him, for his people, in the context of prayer, as we ask Him.

Again, we are not called to be concerned with the human speech of the Bible as something in itself, as if it were, or could be, independent of the Word of God to which it points. We are not called to be concerned with the humanity and the historical, cultural context of the men and women of the Bible, in themselves. All without exception point away from themselves to the Word of God which has confronted them, laid hold on them and drawn them into its saving work. Yet, much biblical study and preaching seems to be of this order and preoccupied with the human speech of the Bible and then go on to understand the Word of God. We can only understand the *lalia* in terms of the *logos*, just as we can only hear the *logos* through the *lalia*. That is to say, true preaching, which is presenting the concrete situations in which the Word of God came to men and women in the Old and New Testament, is the preaching of the Living Word. It is the preaching of a Saving Gospel where we and our people today encounter the Living Word who is God, and where people are transformed, changed, reconciled to God, born again into the Kingdom of God. True preaching leads to the saving of men and women and therefore only takes place in the context of prayer, where we and our people are praying.

We cannot preach the Word of God simply as a result of diligent study, or human ability. Because then it would not be preaching of the Word of God. It would remain as man's word, unless, and until, God by His Grace works the miracle where preacher and hearer receive, hear, understand and appropriate the Living Word of God and are transformed and renewed by it.

The Content of Preaching

We are called to preach Christ Jesus. He is the one to whom all Scripture bears witness and therefore the content of all true preaching.

In preaching Christ we are presenting, in frail human words, a Living Lord, a Personal Saviour, who comes to us, through the word preached, in Mercy and Judgement, in Love and salvation. This is the wonder and the miracle that takes place in true preaching. Christ, having commanded us so to preach, comes as He promised and Himself confronts men and women in love and Saving Power and gives Himself to them for renewal and reconciliation with the Father. But it is always a Person who is proclaimed, as it is a Person who meets, confronts, gives Himself to us and saves us. It is not an idea, nor a creed nor a doctrine. Creeds, doctrines, have their place in the teaching of the Church, but worship is the place of personal encounter where the Living God comes to us men, in Christ Jesus and where we, in Jesus, are drawn into fellowship with the Father. The Gospel we proclaim in worship is the Saving Person of Jesus Christ.

Returning to what we said earlier, Christ exercises a two-fold ministry. First, there is the once-and-for-all event of His coming to earth at Bethlehem, His Life and Death and Resurrection and Ascension, when he returned to the Presence of the Father, on our behalf, bearing our humanity with him. And, secondly, there is His continuing heavenly ministry when He lives to make intercession, when He continues to pray and to work, coming to us today in the form of the Holy Spirit, seeking to implant us into His Death and Resurrection, so that we might joyfully, thankfully share in His Risen Life in fellowship with the Father.

If we proclaim only the first aspect of His Ministry and omit the second, then the event of Christ's Death on the Cross and His Resurrection become the instrumental cause of our faith and salvation today. The event of the Cross and the empty tomb gives rise to the event of our faith today. But what primarily matters is our faith, and how we acquire faith, and the "signs" and "evidence that we have acquired faith. This has been characteristic of much preaching in Scotland (as my brother James has emphasised). Here, there is a lack of emphasis on the Person of Christ alive today, indeed, there is a lack of present communion with the Risen Christ and with the Father. The emphasis is turned from the Person of Christ to our selves, to our need for repentance and for faith. This is why so many Godly people who have sat under this kind of preaching lack assurance of Salvation! The emphasis is not where it should be and where the New Testament puts it, on the Person of the Risen Christ, who comes to us today (as Calvin says) clothed with His Death and Resurrection in order to gather us, incorporate us into Himself in His Death and resurrection, that we might, by the gift of Grace and By the Holy Spirit, share in His Fellowship with the Father, and in worshipping, in Christ, worship the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Christ is alive. He reigns in union and communion with the Father and we are made through the Holy Spirit to live and reign in Him. If we omit in our preaching the continuing heavenly ministry of Christ, then we lose so much of the reality of the Person of Christ and all that that means.

Again, if we omit from our preaching the continuing heavenly ministry of Christ, and therefore present the event of the cross as that which causes, and gives rise to, the event of our faith, then the way is opened, and the temptation is there to preach what Calvin (*Institutes*, book 3) calls "legal repentance" and not "evangelical repentance". "Legal repentance" is the view that says "Repent, and *if* you repent, God will forgive you". In this view, God our Father has really to be conditioned into being gracious and forgiving toward us. If the event of the cross is the cause, or condition, of the event of our faith, then, in practice, in history, the church has tended to the view that God will only give us the benefits of the cross, that is, faith, salvation, etc., on condition that we repent. The emphasis falls on man and on his repenting: and whereas faith is still proclaimed to be a gift, it now comes to be regarded, like repentance, as a work of man. This view underlies a good deal of evangelical theology and pastoral counselling. Calvin, however, following, as I believe, the New Testament, rejected it. He held to what he calls "evangelical repentance". Here the forgiveness of God is prior to our repentance. The Gospel, the Good News, is that God in Christ Jesus has borne away our sins on the cross, God has forgiven us and redeemed us in Christ. In the light of this, we are commanded to repent and believe. Faith, in this context, is the thankful, joyful acceptance of what God has done for us in Christ Jesus. It is the thankful acceptance of Christ and his salvation. The refusal on our part to obey this command, the refusal to accept the gift of forgiveness and salvation, the gift of life, means that we are lost! We have no share in Christ and His salvation and will be told by Christ, at the last, "Depart, I never knew you". It is *not* good news to be told that *if* we repent, God will forgive. It is *not* good news to be told of the immense weight of responsibility that is ours in conditioning God to be merciful! The Good News is that God *is* Merciful. He *does* love us! He has forgiven us and redeemed us and offers us abundant life, eternal life, simply as a gift. The Good News is God's offered Grace.

Then again (as we said earlier) Jesus Christ has a two-fold ministry wrapped up in His own Person. He is at once God and Man in one Person. As Son of Man He gives us to what He Himself demands of us. He gives us Himself, His Perfect Life of faith and obedience to the Father, lives out for us on our behalf, that, through His wondrous exchange, we may in Him, standing in His place before the Father, inherit all the Promises of the Kingdom and know that we are accepted by the Father as if we were His only Beloved Son.

If we preach only the one aspect of His ministry, namely the first, where He comes to us as God summoning us to repentance, to faith and obedience and service, and if we omit the second aspect of His ministry where Christ comes as Son of Man to give to us all that he demands of us, then we lay on our people a terrible burden of constantly endeavouring to believe and obey! As such, we command and exhort our people to follow and obey the Lord, without showing them how to receive the Power of Jesus Christ and the Power of the Holy Spirit, without which they can never follow and obey Christ. We fail to preach Jesus the Son of Man. As such, the Christian life becomes a matter of duty, lacking both joy and power. As such, our constant theme is "repentance" and "the perseverance of the saints", without which heaven will be shut against us. As such, we omit the ministry of the Holy Spirit Who causes us to share in Christ's victory over sin and death and the world. This failure to preach the Ministry of the Son of Man, has a far-reaching effect on the (Christian) faith and attitude of our people, and it has a far-reaching effect on worship. It gives rise to the tendency, in worship, to lay the whole emphasis on preaching the Word and to leave too little room for the response to the Word on the part of the congregation, and, certainly, little room for a joyous response! This has characterised much worship in the Reformed churches. I remember just such a service which I attended in Basle, in my student days. The preacher was (to use the Swiss term) "positive" in his theological outlook. (We would use the term "conservative".) The service commenced with the signing of two verses of a hymn. This was followed by a brief prayer the length of a collect and a short reading from the Bible. Then followed a sermon of approximately 45 minutes. The service was concluded with the singing of the remaining verse (or verses) of our first hymn and the benediction. The service was one almost entirely of *listening*. There was no orchestra of sung praise or other opportunity for congregational response. This, surely, is far removed from the worship of the New Testament church and far removed from the worship of the Redeemed Church in the Book of Revelation. When we consider the great doxologies in the New Testament, exalting the Saviour, and consider that these were hymns used in worship by the Church in New Testament times, then the type of service which I have mentioned and which took place in Basle, belongs to a different world. The New Testament doxologies are largely hymns praising the Saviour, the Son of Man. Jesus as Man (as well as God) has Redeemed us, and, as Man, the Leader of our worship, He has made on our behalf, a perfect response to the Father, which we could not make. By grace His response, His worship, becomes ours. We share in His response, His worship, and therefore in His fellowship with the Father, through the Holy Spirit and through thanksgiving and faith. Worship, that is, the worship which is a real sharing in Jesus' worship of the Father, and His fellowship with the Father, must allow time and opportunity for joyous, thankful praise, on the part of the congregation. Without that response of praise, our worship does not follow the New Testament pattern and can scarcely be a real sharing in Jesus Christ. If we fail to reach the vicarious Humanity of Jesus Christ, then our worship will lack warmth, and Saving Power and joy!

Again, if we fail to reach the vicarious Humanity of Jesus, the Ministry of the Son of Man, then we probably never mention the fact that in Christ, in worship, man is called to voice praise to God, on behalf of all creation. As we said earlier, creation in itself is dumb and man is called on behalf of all creatures and all creation, to voice praise and thanksgiving to God. Consider how frequently this thought, or summons, occurs in the Psalms.

There are other issues which originally I had thought to take up in this paper, but time does not allow: what form should the response of praise of the congregation, to Jesus Christ, take?

How do we know that our preaching is the Gospel, and not just our opinions of what the Gospel is?

How far should we say that the Gospel is political?

I conclude, by re-affirming my basic theme, that the Word in worship, its importance and significance, must be understood in terms of our understanding of Jesus Christ, and not the other way round.

Commitment to Christ and the Doctrine of Scripture

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When your Secretary wrote to me kindly inviting me to participate in this conference he asked me to read a paper on the doctrine of Scripture from a 'theological and dogmatic' point of view, and he alluded to the fact (gleaned from one of your members who is an old friend of mine) that at one time in my life my thinking about the Bible had been deeply influenced by the writings of B.B. Warfield. What happened to me at that now far-off time was, I think, that I discovered a way of looking at the Bible's witness to itself which gave me the theological rationale for the conservative approach to the Bible which I had been brought up on and which in practice I had always adopted but had become worried about. The effect of my reading of Warfield was that I was set more firmly onto the foundation from which I had begun my Christian pilgrimage.

I mention 'this', partly because you, Mr Secretary, referred to it in your letter and partly because I hope I can assume that a conference of evangelical theologians such as this will not require me to rehearse those important arguments for the Bible's inspiration and authority of which Warfield has given so masterly an account. I want to concentrate on one major issue which I believe to be fundamental for evangelicals and others in the current debate on the doctrine of Scripture. I refer to the relationship between personal commitment to Christ and adherence to the Scriptures as the Word of God written. I hope that this will provide an approach to the doctrine of the sort that was requested of me.

Divine-human Encounter

I begin with a few words about personal piety. One of the dominant strands in this, discernible in all branches of the Church at all periods of its history, but coming to especially sharp expression in evangelicalism, is that which we may characterize as 'the divine-human encounter' (to use the title of Brunner's famous book). The emphasis here is that God is personal and that he has personal dealings with his personal creatures. He who created the world and sustains it in being, governing and controlling it at every point, also redeemed it through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, who is the personal incarnation of the personal God and the only Saviour of men. The whole movement of God towards the sinful race is a matter of grace, and the benefits of the accomplished work of redemption are applied in all ages by the Holy Spirit whose saving ministry is positively regarded to by faith. Thus the whole 'scheme' of encounter revolves around the two poles of grace and faith. It describes a way of life which, in its every facet, relies upon the truth that God sustains a personal relationship with men.

The activity of prayer brings this into focus. The evangelical sees prayer more in terms of dialogue than anything else ('God speaks to me and I speak to God'), and not infrequently it takes the form of a wrestling with God or a pouring out of the heart to God in earnest, even anxious, supplication. Other sorts of prayer are not indeed ruled out (e.g. meditation) but the evangelical lays heaviest emphasis on this 'conversation' aspect because this is the way in which his tradition (squarely based as it is on 'biblical personalism') has taught him to think about his relationship to God and has shaped his religious consciousness. And this being so, it is not at all surprising that he should have a strong and ever-present desire to know what God is saying to him, to know his mind, as we say. If his relationship with God is to grow and to take in more and more aspects of his experience, he must know what God is telling him to believe and to do. I want to argue that the evangelical doctrine of Scripture fits comfortably into this framework of piety, indeed belongs to it.

Gospel and Scripture

An evangelical doctrine of Scripture, as its name implies, is controlled in all its parts by the Gospel. By this I mean that, in the context of that grace-faith relationship of which I have just spoken, the believer enters into union with Christ and is thereby committed to a life of trust and obedience which covers the activity of his mind as well as his behaviour. He is an obligated person. He is not his own. He belongs to another and it is his duty to conform himself in every department of his life to the pattern which is given him in the Gospel. The Bible is presented to him within the context of that experience. He believes it and lives by it because it comes to him with the Christ of the Gospel's imprimatur upon it. He does not move spiritually or theologically or logically from credible Bible to credible Gospel. He travels in exactly the opposite direction.

If I were required to spell this out I would do so by drawing heavily upon the Bible's teaching concerning its own nature and purpose. As we examine and evaluate the teaching of Jesus (both his statements and his own personal practice) relative to the Old Testament, we find ourselves forced to adopt a high view of the authority of these documents. As we consider the way in which Jesus clothes with authority and spiritually equips chosen men to bear authoritative testimony to him before the world, we find ourselves taking up a view of the New

Testament Scriptures similar to that which we have adopted in regard to the Old. There is, of course, much else in the Scriptures themselves which would lead us to trust them, but the christological centre and starting point is crucial for the evangelical approach.

Now, of course, we are confronted here with a complex situation. In the first place, it is complex because it comprises a whole-of-life transformation as well as a process of reasoning. In the second place, it is complex because the Christ to whom one is joined by faith is known only from the Gospel and this Gospel is itself enshrined in the Bible, so that the Bible's immediate testimony to Christ and his salvation is accepted as a starting-point for discovering what the status of the Bible really is. There is a certain circularity about the process, a sort of CIRCULUS VERITATIS DEI, and this is inevitable because we are dealing here with the question of an absolute authority which by definition cannot be tested by any other norm. The essential point is that the evangelical doctrine of Scripture begins with the Evangel, appropriated by faith, and proceeds from there.

Maintaining a Christological approach

I feel sure that all of us would subscribe to this approach but it is obviously worth saying that it is all too easy (history proves it) to slide away from this position and to finish up in a very different place.

This is an approach which needs to be vigilantly maintained – I mean in one's own heart and mind as well as in the Church. Let me say something about the intellectual side of it. I am well aware, of course, that it is possible for a true believer in Christ to reach conclusions about Scripture very different from those which I have characterised as 'evangelical' (he may, for instance, read our Lord's teaching differently). It is always arrogant to suppose that unless a professing Christian reasons himself to the same positions as one's own he cannot be a converted man. What I would want to say is simply that the evangelical doctrine of Scripture is arrived at by a perfectly valid (and, to the evangelical, at least, convincing) chain of reasoning which is firmly attached to what the Bible says about Christ, his work and his teaching. For the evangelical, submission to Christ in its intellectual and noetic as well as in its personal and existential aspect leads to a high view of the inspiration and authority of Scripture and this view he is eager to maintain. The pressures in the Church at large tending to undermine the evangelical doctrine of Scripture are known to us all if we are at all conversant with modern critical study of the Bible and have any degree of self-awareness. There is always the temptation so to maximise the humanness of the Bible that its divine origin is seriously obscured. There is the temptation to adopt some external touchstone by which to decide what in the Bible is to be accepted and believed and what discarded. And among those who do accept a high doctrine of the Bible's authority there is the temptation to build confidence on arguments and 'evidences' (e.g. archaeological confirmations of biblical history) rather than upon the Bible testimony to itself (which centres on Christ's own teaching and example). Not indeed (to stay for a moment on this last point) that it is mistaken to try to clear up biblical problems in the field of history or to offer confirmatory evidence from extra-biblical sources. Such an exercise, it seems to me, is entirely consonant with belief in Scripture's God-given authority. The question here is what importance one gives to any positive conclusions reached when one is constructing one's doctrine of Scripture. Calvin has some decisive remarks on this: "Let this point therefore stand: that those whom the Holy Spirit has inwardly taught truly rest upon Scripture, and that Scripture indeed is self-authenticated; hence it is not right to subject it to proof and reasoning. And the certainty it deserves with us, it attains by the testimony of the Spirit".¹ Again, in a more balanced fashion: "Scripture will ultimately suffice for a saving knowledge of God only when its certainty is founded upon the inward persuasion of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, these human testimonies which exist to confirm it will not be in vain if, as secondary aids to our feebleness, they follow that chief and highest testimony".²

I cannot say any more here about the maintenance of this approach to Scripture on its intellectual side. But let me say a little about its spiritual aspect. I come back to what I said earlier about the grace-faith relationship. The christological approach which I have been commending, because it involves, when properly understood, an attitude of commitment to Christ himself, demands that the life of the Church should, in its every part, promote and undergird that personal relationship with God in which *every* doctrine of the faith, including the doctrine of Scripture, comes to its truest expression. In that setting, the Bible naturally occupies an important place, for how else can people be schooled in the way of discipleship than by using the 'disciple's handbook'? The use of the Bible by church members in their homes, the preaching and teaching from the Bible which happens in the congregation, the invariable reference to the Bible when matters of Church life or reform are under discussion, in short, the pride of place given to the Bible, and *obviously* given to it, in the whole life of the Church, makes clear that the Christian life depends upon God's Word, that the Christian life can only be weak, stunted and deformed without the nourishment which God gives. The christological way of building the doctrine of Scripture is part and parcel of the christological way of ordering the life of the Church. It is therefore not to be expected that an evangelical doctrine of Scripture will hold sway over the minds of Christians when the life of the Church is not ordered in a thoroughly Christ-centred fashion. I think that we have sometimes 'intellectualized' our doctrine of Scripture, quite unwittingly, by working on it in detachment from these wider considerations.

My own practice in all this, for what it is worth, in the context of a parochial preaching and teaching ministry, is to return again and again to the christological centre-point. I find it necessary. The habitual reference to the teaching of Christ and his apostles is the way to re-learn submission to the Word of God in the Bible. It seems to me that the christological approach is a matter of attitude, a matter of worship, certainly a matter which lies at the heart of christian living. One needs to be refreshed in it partly because questions arise and doubts assail, but also for the simple reason that study of the Bible, such as is demanded by a preaching and teaching ministry, involving as it does close attention to the text with its numerous problems and difficulties, calls for a sense of direction, an idea of the import or thrust of the whole, lest one lose one's way.

Spirit and Scripture

One of the pillars of the evangelical understanding of scripture is, of course, the doctrine of the testimony of the Holy Spirit. Christ gave the Spirit to his disciples to guide them into all truth and that same Spirit, working in people's hearts, brings them to a firm persuasion of the faith of the Gospel and sustains them in that conviction, causing them to have confidence in the Bible as a whole and thereby opening to them the possibility of a lifelong adventure of learning about God. Perhaps I may be permitted to quote some works of mine on the subject of the growth of the believer's knowledge of God: "He sees Christ as the One 'in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge' (Col. 2:3), as the One who meets his own personal need of forgiveness and new life, and makes sense of his previous experience, and his heart begins to move out, as it were, in trust towards him. From this centre-point of confidence his assurance starts to grow outwards as if concentrically, just as wavelets move outwards from the point in the water where the stone is dropped. It grows to cover more and more of the teaching which the Bible contains. This understanding of divine truth develops and its range increases. Bit by bit, under the direction of the Spirit, he begins to see something of the 'breadth and length and height and depth' (eph. 3:18) of the love of God in Christ. It does not happen all at once. It is a process which spans all the years of his life but it could never happen at all unless that simple beginning had been made when the Gospel 'dovetailed into his soul'." (That last expression is from the testimony of a convert from Islam to Christianity whom I mention earlier in the chapter). I am here stressing, of course, the cognitive side of the process but I also try to show in the context that the intellectual activity is in no way separate from the spiritual development of the Christian in faith and obedience. I quote the passage now to underline the point that the Christian's confidence in the contents of the Bible comes as a happy concomitant of his experience of the Gospel, occasioned in him by the work of the Holy Spirit. The Bible is given to him, as it were, by the God of the Gospel and his desire to know more and more of God's mind and God's ways leads him to read it and ponder it and to find, as he does so, that his knowledge of God is enhanced not just in terms of intellectual possession but more importantly in terms of a whole-of-life experience.

Christological Interpretation

A further point concerning the evangelical doctrine of Scripture is this: it leads to a christological kind of interpretation (I include mention of this for completeness). Christ is seen as the key to the Bible. The Old Testament points to him and the New Testament declares him. It is commonplace to say that God's self-revelation in deeds is illuminated by an accompanying God-given interpretation in words, but it is true and important. It is also important to say that the revelation is both informative and redemptive and finds its culmination and its consummation in Christ who is the very Word of God expressed in deeds and words. So when we say that the Bible should be interpreted christologically we are just bearing witness to the fact that Christ is the climax of the whole activity of God which the Bible records.

Much attention has been given during the last few years to the question of biblical interpretation and the discipline now known as hermeneutics has brought to the forefront the question of the situation or the condition of the interpreter, his culture, his rationality, his receptivity, and so on; in short, all that he brings personally to the text he is handling. I don't want to say any more about this. I just want to say that, however the matter is approached, it is essential to observe the direction in which all Scripture moves. H.D. McDonald, in some paragraphs on interpreting the Bible christologically quotes Norman Geister as follows: "Viewing the Old Testament christologically is not an interpretative (hermeneutical) option; for the Christian it is a divine imperative".³ This must not, of course, be done woodenly or literalistically, finding hidden references to Christ at every turn. It must be done with due regard to the drift of the recorded history and to the contemporary reference of, for instance, the prophetic message, and so on. But it must be *done*, if the Scriptures are to be seen as the expression of a single mind and a single purpose, that of the Lord God himself, despite all their obvious diversity.

Primary and Secondary Emphases in the Christological Approach

I come finally to a brief consideration of what I think to be an implication of this general approach to the doctrine of Scripture. Although it leads (as we have seen) to high views of inspiration and authority, the actual working out of these ideas reveals differences of opinion. I can indicate one of the major differences like this. Some evangelicals believe that this position includes a clearly defined doctrine of inspiration, derived from Scripture itself, which carries with it the corollary of inerrancy in all that Scripture touches. Jesus's own use of Scripture along with passages like 2 Tim. 3:16 and 2 Peter 1:21 are adduced in support. Others, while holding firmly to the plenary inspiration of Scripture as taught in the New Testament, demur at the term 'inerrancy' and prefer to speak of the trustworthiness or reliability of Scripture or of its infallibility in the sense that it will not deceive. The human side of the phenomenon of Scripture, say they, is entirely consonant with its divine origin (as the 'inerrantists' also argue) but, they go on, this human side makes its inspiration an "impenetrable miracle and mystery". Such evangelicals will not indeed speak readily of 'errors' but they do not think that Scripture requires "the extension of these divine attributes of infallibility and inerrancy to the whole human process involved in revelation or to the total phenomena of Scripture".⁴

Now there are those in the first group who see enormous dangers in the position of the second and vice versa. I wonder whether the debate has not sometimes got away from concern with the christological/religious rootage for which I have argued and which I regard as primary in this debate. Ultimately, one's confidence in Holy Scripture as the Word of God is a matter of faith. Certainly, one's reason, working on the Scriptural evidence, corroborates the testimony of the Holy Spirit, as one commits oneself in humble obedience to the teaching of the Lord and his apostles. But never must the primacy of faith be lost sight of. By grace through faith one is caught up into a truth which is not just a great fact (it has its factual side) but also an eternal salvation. One is given new eyes with which to discern spiritual realities and new ears with which to hear the divine voice. It is a matter of being in relationship to the revealing and redeeming God in Christ.

Hence I believe that the groups whose views I have all too briefly mentioned can stand side by side on *basically the same ground* in so far as they are genuinely evangelical in intent and method in the way I have described. The first group, if heeded, will save the second from undervaluing the divine character of Scripture. The second group will save the first from giving less than full value to the actual phenomena of Scripture, bearing as those phenomena do the marks of humanness upon them.

It is the christological orientation that matters ultimately, an orientation which has, at its spiritual heart, a desire to bow down before the Christ who is presented to us in the Scriptures.

Notes

¹ Institutes I, 7,5 (Library of Christian Classics edition).

² Institutes I, 8,13

³ N.L. Geister, *Christ, The Key to the Interpretation of the Bible* (Chicago, 1968), p.38 quoted by H.D. McDonald in: *I Want to Know What the Bible Says about the Bible* (Eastbourne, 1979), p.134.

⁴ Both quotations are from the *Acts and Proceedings of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America* 1963.

Congregationalism

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Introduction

The topic given me is 'Congregationalism'. I take this to relate not simply to one particular church polity, but also and, more fundamentally, to the whole concept of the 'gathered community' which underlies the notation of congregationalism. Church groupings which historically have adopted a congregationalist form of government include the Mennonites, Congregationalists, Baptists, Plymouth Brethren, and most forms of Pentecostalism. All these groups adhere also to the underlying theology of the church as "a gathered community of believers".

Perhaps what is most obvious about these churches is their insistence upon the autonomy of the local church – its "competence before God to make its own decisions". It seems clear that historical and theological factors are intertwined in leading to this stance.

We need to spend some time examining the concept of local church autonomy. Even so, we should say now that, though historical factors have played their part, these groupings have themselves argued for that polity as a correlate of a particular theology of the Church – namely, the 'gathered community' view. Thus, the early English Separatists in the late 16th century had perforce to operate on the congregationalist model, since they were so isolated and since they were opposed to the notation of a State Church, which in England was Episcopalian in Character. Yet they saw their position as derived from a certain biblical understanding of the church.

With this in mind, I want first of all to deal with the basic issue of the notion of the church embedded in Congregationalism. From that base we will later examine the relation between that theology of the church and the polity of congregationalism. Finally, we will look at the difficult question of the extent to which evangelicals of any Church or denomination may be logically committed to the 'gathered community' view of the church.

In our judgment the issues raised by our subject go to the very heart of the evangelical quest, namely, to assemble a people, purified by Christ, to worship and to serve Him in our world.

1. The 'Gathered Community' Concept

In interdenominational or undenominational circles it is often found convenient to sidestep questions about the nature of the church. Since it is clear that we may disagree, it seems pointless to bring up these questions. This is as true among evangelicals as it is among persons of more liberal theology.

Even so, this is a great pity. If the Lord has important things to say in the Scriptures about God, about Christ, about sin and salvation, and so on, does He have nothing to say about the Church or the churches? Modern scholarship frequently assumes that Primitive and Early Church practice may have varied from area to area, and be unconvinced that the New Testament offers one model only of church polity. That, however was not the position of the Churches at the Reformation, neither Romans, nor Episcopalians, nor Lutherans, nor Reformed, nor Anabaptists. It is, of course, possible that varying understandings of the Church and of church government are to be found within the New Testament, but we should not glibly assume that all the old debates were "full of sound and fury, signifying nothing".

It is sometimes assumed that the less highly structured churches simply have 'no theology of the church'. This comment is not intended to be insulting: it is simply, I suggest, a mistaken perspective. One particular theology of the church may differ so radically from that held by others that it may not be recognised for what it is. If the stress falls upon the Church rather than the churches, or if the Church be thought of as a sacramental entity or a sacred institution, then the Church is clearly given a place of some centrality. This approach is signified at its extreme in the statement of Cyprian: "Outside the Church there is no salvation". By contrast with this, the Reformers were much more careful. The Church might be "the sphere of God's saving action" (Calvin), but personal faith in Christ was more important than the external participation in sacraments that bound one to the Church. Even so, the Reformers laid quite a stress upon the corporeal and social character of the Church, seeing it as the New Israel.

The 'gathered community' view looks quite differently at this whole issue. It stresses the individual's relationship with God through Christ, and views the church as the assembly of those with such personal commitment. It is not primarily a sacramental community nor is it a sacred institution. Rather the church is the living fellowship (*keionia*), grounded in faith in Jesus Christ.

This is not to say that Baptism or the Lord's Supper are treated lightly by upholders of this view. Nor are all its advocates committed to Believers' Baptism, though a majority are. Thus, Congregationalists practice Infant Baptism. Even so, it was Congregationalists in America who advanced the concept of the 'Half-Way

Covenant', whereby they underlined their adherence at a fundamental level to the 'gathered community' notion.

Let us try to define the 'gathered community' view and to set forth what we see to be its biblical and theological basis. Essentially it is the view that the church is constituted by mutuality of faith in Jesus. Of course, all Christian Churches are concerned to bring people to faith in Christ, but the mainline Churches of Mediaeval Europe and of the Reformation have repudiated the 'gathered community' concept. Catholicism (Roman and High Episcopalian) has viewed the Church as constituted by God-given sacraments and by Apostolic succession of ministry. The Reformed Churches have viewed the Church as present when certain features are in evidence, viz. the preaching of the Word of God, the administration of the sacraments, and a properly ordained ministry. It is these features which *make* the Church the Church, not the faith of her members. In essence, the 'gathered community' view looks *back* to Jesus' assembling of the Twelve and others around Him (the 'little flock') and *forward* to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, when only those with faith in Christ will be received. That is, we believe that no-one should be deemed a Christian or a member of Christ's Church who will not be so acknowledged by Christ as His Coming in glory.

Where is the evidence for this view? We submit that it is found in the whole New Testament emphasis upon the declaration of the Gospel and the need for personal response to it. The perspective was admirably set out by Balthasar Hubmaier, a 16th century Anabaptist, who said the order was this: the preaching of the Word of God; hearing; repentance; faith; baptism; church membership, good works, and Christian witness. Among evangelicals there is little need to lay stress upon the need for personal response in repentance and faith. Yet clearly not all evangelicals see churchmanship as essentially subsequent to repentance and faith.

Such a passage as Matt. 16:18 seems to imply that the Church is founded upon the kind of faith that Simon had reached (unless one moves in a Romanist line of interpretation). The Acts of the Apostles tells of witnessing followed by response and living fellowship within Christ's Church. Acts 2:47 is a significant verse, which, we believe, gives Luke's perspective: "And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved." The Pauline Epistles are addressed to 'the saints' in Rome and elsewhere, and the way in which they are addressed suggests that they were persons who had responded in faith to Christ's Gospel, and required counsel in the Way.

We are aware, of course, that things can be said on the other side. If the Church be the New Israel, does this not imply that the Church is a more inclusive kind of entity than simply a gathering of believers? If the whole nation of Israel was in a covenant relationship with God, does this not indicate that children of Christians are somehow members of the church? It is also frequently urged that the 'gathered community' view is sociologically inept. It works with an excessive individualism, it is claimed, and loses sight of the organic character of the church. The Church is more than an aggregation of believers.

Clearly, this is a matter on which Christians, even evangelicals, are not going to be fully agreed, and my purpose in this paper is to present a case rather than to enter into detailed apologetic defence of it. Let me say simply, however, that the advocates of this 'congregation' view make much of the utter newness of what God has done in Christ. There is discontinuity, as well as continuity, between God's approaches under the Old Covenant and His approach under the New. A racial entity is a different kind of 'animal', we would urge, from a community called into being by a specific piece of News: that Christ died for our sins and was raised on the third day for our justification. As for the charge, which is sometimes made, that this view takes little cognisance of the social dimension of the Gospel, this, we would reply, is simply not true. Of course, the church is wider than the individual, but each must enter by the Door, Christ Jesus. In practice, churches based on this model and understanding have probably as rich a community life as those of the more institutionalized churches. Nor is it simply that the Church depends on human response: Christ has promised to be with those who are gathered together in His Name (Matt. 18:20).

2. Congregationalism as a Church Polity

In historical terms English Congregationalism (using that term in the widest sense) derived from two streams of dissidents which emerged within the Church of England in the late 16th and early 17th centuries, the Separatists and the Independents. Most Separatists reached that position via Puritanism, while Independency became a variant of Puritanism. Separatists repudiated the concept of a State-Church relationship, whereas Puritans (believing in presbyteral church government) and Independents (believing in congregational autonomy) approved the notation of a State establishment. We have not had a Congregationalist establishment either in Scotland or in England, but Massachusetts had a Congregationalist Establishment as late as 1930's. The important point is that, though having differing views of the appropriateness of an official link with the State, both Separatists and Independents believed that the local church should manage its own affairs.

In the England of the 17th century there was clearly no room for a Congregationalist Establishment. Accordingly, such groups were perhaps confirmed in their convictions, in so far as they were the butt of a persecuting agency.

Clearly, the scattered character of groups whose thinking was Puritan-Independent also contributed to the necessity of managing their affairs on a congregationalist line.

Even so, these groups worked with a definite theology of the church which led to congregationalism as a polity, the 'gathered community' concept. It was further developed, especially among Independents, along the lines of a covenant between the local church and God. This helped to set the local church over against other Churches. Moreover, it was claimed that a scrutiny of the New Testament documents revealed the priority of the local church.

It is impossible here to go into the historical factors in detail. We do wish, however, to show the lines of continuity between the 'gathered community' theology of the church and the notion of 'autonomy'. For some may imagine that the stress upon the autonomy of the local church owed much to post-Renaissance ideas about the dignity of the individual and about liberty. In reality, the basic point may be made very simply. If you have a church where two or three are gathered together in Christ's Name with Him in the midst, that fellowship must be competent to manage its own affairs. That does not mean that it despises fellowship with other congregations, but such links will not cut across its autonomy.

The whole theology of the 'gathered community' stresses the immediacy of Christ's Lordship within the local congregation. For example, it is often said that a Baptist principle is the Lordship of Christ. This may seem very arrogant. Don't all Christian Churches recognise the Lordship of Christ? And, of course, they do. But the point is that, on this particular theology of the church, Christ's Presence and Lordship are such that the authority of a whole group of possible 'powers' within the church are set aside: Pope, bishop, presbytery; State, Parliament, Royalty; even elders and deacons. On this understanding, Christ moves within the fellowship by the Spirit to reveal His will. Obviously, congregations make mistakes. But that may be attributed to human failure to discern the mind of the Spirit. Nor are gifts of wisdom or counsel despised, but all are subject to the 'church meeting'.

It may be asked whether this is not to substitute one kind of tyranny for another, and it has to be confessed that sometimes that is precisely what has happened. Moreover, there tends to be a heavy emphasis in current congregationalism upon the democratic character of this process of government. Some of us may prefer a democratic form of government to another, but that preference has probably more to do with social and political notions than with interpretation of the New Testament. It requires to be said, however, that the founding fathers did not rest their case upon general democratic social ideas, but upon a particular understanding of the nature of the church.

Another plank in this construction was the notion of the covenant. It requires to be said, though, that this by itself would not necessarily lead to congregationalism. After all, Puritans, with their belief in a State-Church relationship and their adherence to presbyteral government, also talked in terms of a covenant relationship: the covenant was, however, between a Christian nation and God.

Clearly, the New Testament does not say in so many words that Christ's Church is to follow an episcopalian, a presbyteral, or a congregational form of polity. It might have saved a lot of ink and time if it had! Congregationalists, however, would point to the view of the church as set over against society – islands in a sea of paganism. In the situation of the Primitive Church distance alone demanded a measure of congregational autonomy. Congregationalists usually favour the view that *presbuteroi* and *episcepi* are to be equated, and cite Acts 20:17,28 in support. Any leadership or authority the apostles may have had is interpreted as spiritual in character, not that of one 'power' set over against another.

It has to be confessed that among Christian groups which practice congregationalism some power has at times been given to particular offices within the local church. Thus, a Brethren fellowship may not approve the external authority of a bishop but it may accept that of an internal elder. This is because the language about elders has seemed to suggest that deep respect, if not actual obedience, is to be given to them. Even so, the most characteristic pattern within 'gathered community' churches is to abhor any kind of power structure, be it internal or external.

A number of brief general observations may now be made.

a) Congregationalism lays stress upon the *dynamic* elements of church life rather than upon the *structured* elements. To many of us this seems a gain. Functions replace fixed officos. If the church is the fellowship of kindred hearts in Christ, then offices do not constitute the church as such and they must surely be subject to the mind of Christ through it rather than delivering decrees to it.

b) Congregationalism carried within it opportunities to implement the participation of members within worship and service, something which is being rediscovered today. We talk about 'the rediscovery of the laity', but, of course, in the New Testament, the *laos* is the *whole* people of God. No one is claiming that congregationalists always take these opportunities. Nor are we denying that in episcopalian and presbyterian churches a real implementation of the use of the gifts of the people is taking place. But congregational polity is, in its theory, ideally suited to acceptance of this contribution. For congregationalists 'the priesthood of all believers' has meant not simply the priesthood of the whole church, in which each has a share, but the priesthood

of every believer.

c) Congregationalists, like other evangelicals, are perhaps today in danger of succumbing to movements that lay great stress upon the authority of the Spirit in certain gifted leaders: this, we believe, is a retreat from their essential stance. On the other hand, this outlook on the nature of the church is peculiarly open to an emphasis upon the rôle of the Spirit of God that moves from the grassroots upwards.

3. Evangelicalism and Congregationalism

I do not intend to say much more about the polity of congregational government, though I believe in it and see it as derived from the 'gathered community' concept. Rather I want to address myself, more briefly than in the preceding two sections to the way in which the 'gathered community' concept affects us all as evangelicals.

Very starkly I want to suggest that evangelicalism naturally and properly leads to a 'gathered community' view; that the cutting edge of our evangelism is removed when we do not follow this line; and that often evangelicals do give a lukewarm reception to the notion but are impeded from following it through because of their particular denominational affiliation. Such a statement is not intended to be offensive. It is an honest statement of how I see it. Only by saying so can the real issues emerging from the 'gathered community' concept be revealed.

a) Apart from the specific reasons given earlier for adherence to a 'gathered community' view (interpretation of Matt. 16; the Acts sequence: repentance, conversion, baptism, membership, etc.) there appears to be an interior logic connecting a stress upon conversion and this view of the church. Thus, God deals with the individual soul in conversion. 'God has no step-sons'. That leads very easily, if not inevitably, into the view that true churchmanship follows conversion. By its logic it calls in question the effectiveness of sacraments or any other predisposing factor (such as having Christian parents) to place us within the church.

At a very practical level, do not many evangelicals feel that there is a 'church within a church' in many of the situations to which they belong? If evangelicals do see real fellowship as bound up with common living faith in Christ and His Cross, then is not the experience of belonging to an entity that is more institutionalized different from belonging to the church in the New Testament sense?

Let me again make it clear. This is not merely the question of the appropriate subjects for baptism, it is the problem of whether a church that has unconverted people within it is a church at all, insofar as they are present. If there are 40 converted persons in a church of 400, is not the true church in God's eyes the 40 and not the 400?

One recognizes, of course, that in a sense all evangelicals would wish the church to be composed only of truly converted persons (plus the children of such, where Infant Baptism is approved). It is indiscriminate baptism, in part, that has produced the present situation, and no responsible Christian approves of that. I would wish to urge, however, that where the Church is seen primarily as a sacramental institution or (in Reformed fashion) as constituted by preaching, sacraments and ministry, rather than by conscious personal commitment to Christ, the proportion of converted persons within the 'churches' is almost bound to decrease. It is difficult therefore, for me to see why evangelicals can support such systems.

b) The practical results for evangelism are also very grave. If persons are taught by their churches that they are in some sense Christians through sacraments or through their belonging within a church that has the true objective marks of the same, is it surprising that much of our evangelical witness and preaching falls on deaf ears? If one is a Christian already, why does one need to be converted?

We would also claim that there are very serious results also for the development of Christian lives. People are converted, join a church that is not evangelical and does not insist upon personal spiritual experience, and their spiritual lives can wither away. Of course, it is perfectly possible for a church with the 'gathered community' pattern to become liberal in its theology and also to insist less upon conversion. Tragically, this has often happened, but it happens less, we submit, than in churches which repudiate the 'gathered community' notion. Why? Because an insistence upon personal faith and commitment is the basic platform of these churches.

Conclusion

Congregationalism as a church polity has much to commend it in general terms. It makes for the participation of the lowliest church member; it lays stress upon the interaction of persons in Christ; and it seems to accord with New Testament practice. Much more important, however, is the theology of the church embedded in it. Evangelicals long for the fellowship of truly born-again persons. The best human way of guaranteeing that is to accept and implement the 'gathered community' notion.

The biblical basis is, we believe present. Parallels with Israel do not appear to us to be germane: 'Grace does not run in the blood.' The stress upon heart-experience seems to demand, as its corollary, a 'gathered community' view. Two major practical benefits are that it helps to restore the 'cutting edge' of evangelism, and it provides a warm supportive atmosphere for growth into the Christian maturity. We rest our case!

The Membership of the Church of God

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Ecclesia. The Church. The Church of God.

We see her, do we not, in her 2000 years of history, rising to great heights in her testimony to her Lord and Saviour, sometimes remarkably blessed by the outpouring of God's Spirit – yet sometimes tossed and beaten by the waves of dissent, division, heresy, unfaithfulness. Nevertheless, always preserved by her Lord, even in the darkest generations. The subject I hope to treat today is the Membership of the Church of God. Perhaps that is too general a title. But I trust that my thesis will become more plain as we proceed.

Stated briefly, I am arguing for a fairly broad basis of membership of Christ's Church; not too broad, but then, on the other hand, not too narrow either. Simply, in accordance with Scripture. There is disturbing evidence that much church polity today, especially in evangelical circles, is adopting a Pietist position in respect to Church Membership. Now some of you, I know, will have been taught, and will still hold, and will continue to hold, long after you have heard this paper, that the Pietist position on Church membership is the correct one. It seems to me that the Reformers in arguing for a broad basis of membership were truer to Scripture than the Pietists who argued for a narrower basis of membership. Perhaps "broad" and "narrow" are inadequate terms. "Exclusive" and "inclusive" might serve us better. My paper, then, is to try and demonstrate that church membership ought to be "inclusive" rather than "exclusive".

I The Church of God

We had better begin by defining our terms. I would suggest that the word "ecclesia" meaning, of course, "an assembly", "a congregation", is used in at least *five senses* in the Scriptures.

(i) "*The whole body of the faithful, in heaven or earth, who have been or shall be spiritually united to Christ as their Saviour*". In Ephesians 1, Paul is at his most sublime and profound in his description of the Church of Christ. Although he doesn't use the word ecclesia, I don't think there would be any disagreement whatsoever that he is writing about Christ's Headship over His Church which, in the earlier part of the chapter is so wonderfully portrayed in its salvation by the Triune God. Cf Col. 1.18.

(ii) "The body of believers in any particular place, associated together in the worship of God". e.g. Romans 16.1 where Paul refers to the "Church at Cenchreae". There are many instances of this use of ecclesia in its local sense.

(iii) "A number of congregations associated together in the worship of God". The Church of Jerusalem comprised many groups of believers. It must have been so. Acts 2.41 tells us that 3000 believed, and goes on to say that daily the Lord added to that number. So that by 4.4 we are told that the men within the Jerusalem Church now numbered 5000, and in the next chapter, 5.14, we are told multitudes of men and women were added to the Lord. By Acts 21.20, James comments to Paul, "You see how many 1000s (literally, myriads) of Jews there are which believe". Now no one in their mind will suggest that a church of thousands all met in Jerusalem under one roof for the breaking of bread. Thus, clearly, in the NT, ecclesia is used of a number of congregations associated together in the worship of God".

(iv) "The body of professing believers in any place, as represented by their elders". Matthew 18 illustrates this. The Christian with the problem over a fellow believer is instructed by the Lord "to tell it to the church". I think there would be no disagreement that the office-bearers are given authority to act on behalf of the Church of God; and so ecclesia can have this meaning of "those representing the local body of believers".

(v) "The whole body throughout the world of those who outwardly profess the faith of Christ".

Now I have left this 5th use of the word ecclesia to the end quite deliberately. Because it is at this point that we find a very clear division of opinion. I hope those who do not hold the Reformed position on this matter will forgive me if I seem to be presumptuous in setting my own position in the centre, and the Roman view on the one side, with Independent's view on the other side. The point is that Reformed Theology, from Luther on, but more especially from Calvin on, has made a distinction between the Church Invisible and the Church Visible. And it is to that distinction that we must now turn our attention.

II The Church Visible

1. The Problem

Now our question is: Does Scripture really use the term ecclesia to refer to the whole body of believers who outwardly profess faith in Christ as Lord and Saviour. Certainly the Westminster Confession clearly teaches it does:

"The visible Church, which is also catholic or universal under the Gospel (not confined to one nation, as before

under the law), consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion, together with their children; and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation”.

Now Martin Luther it was who first made this distinction between the Church Invisible and the Church Visible. About the Church Invisible there is no disagreement among Protestants. The Church Invisible, as we have seen, is the whole company of the Elect – those who are truly regenerate by the Holy Spirit. But Luther taught that the Visible Church, the “institution of the ecclesia here on earth” consisted in those who profess faith in Christ and worship Him, with Word and Sacraments being taught and administered in a proper manner. To that Calvin added that there must also be the presence of a proper and Scriptural Discipline. This then is our understanding of the Visible Church:

- (i) Professing Christians worshipping Christ
- (ii) The Word being faithfully taught
- (iii) The sacraments being properly administered
- (iv) Discipline being properly exercised

Now on the one side of that is the Roman teaching. The Romans will not allow any such distinction as that made between the Church Visible and the Church Invisible. Rather, they identify the Church with the Kingdom of God, and state that the true Church is the “congregation of the faithful, professing the same faith, partaking of the same sacraments, governed by lawful pastors under one visible head, the vicar of Christ”. Cardinal Bellarmine (quoted in Latin, p.11 HT Vol.1 Wm Cunningham). I don’t propose to spend time examining the Roman teaching.

What then of the teaching of the “Independents” and Pietists, let me quote Strong’s Systematic Theology. VII.1.1.

“The Church of Christ, is the whole company of regenerate persons in all times and ages, in heaven and on earth. In this sense, the Church is identical with the spiritual kingdom of God; both signify that redeemed humanity in which God in Christ exercises actual spiritual dominion”.

Then Strong goes on to quote H.C. Vedder:

“The Church is a spiritual body, consisting only of those regenerated by the Spirit of God”. Strong comments: “Yet the Westminster Confession affirms that the Church “consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion, together with their children”. So Strong continues: “This definition includes in the Church a multitude who not only give no evidence of regeneration, but who plainly show themselves to be unregenerate. In many lands it practically identifies the church with the world”.

The key statement is clearly this: “The Church is a spiritual body, consisting only of those regenerated by the Spirit of God”. Now with that we entirely agree as a statement about what we have already defined as the “Invisible Church”. But Strong makes no allowance whatsoever for any use of the term “ecclesia” in a wider, more general sense, in this secondary sense of those who *outwardly* profess faith in Christ.

Who then are right? The Reformers and the Westminster Confession? Or the Independents and Pietists, insisting on a pure church, and seeking – as they do – to admit only those who give tangible evidence or fruits of regeneration?

2. *The Biblical Evidence for a Doctrine of the Visible Church*

(1) The Old Testament

I was brought up in theological pietism. I was certainly taught that the Doctrine of the Visible Church was utterly wrong. Together with this teaching there was added the theology that the Old Covenant was a covenant of works. That when Moses said: “Do this and live”, he actually meant (and therefore God intended us to understand), “Do this – keep all this Law – and you will earn a place in heaven”.

But, and so I was sincerely taught, God knew that man could never ever keep all the Law, and so that injunction was one which He gave to teach humanity a grim lesson: namely that by the works of the Law shall no one be justified in His Presence. It was a command, therefore, not unlike one of the labours of Hercules, needing a god to be able to accomplish it. No mortal man could ever manage to do this and so live,

Yet in my own daily study of God’s Word, without anyone teaching me otherwise, I rebelled against such an understanding of Moses injunction, “Do this and live”. I found that OT saints did not stand in terror under the Law of God. They loved it. They took sweetest delight in it. They found it better than honey, more precious than gold, a light for their pathway, a lamp for their feet. I read with fascination the great messages in Deuteronomy in which there are such rich promises to those living by the Law of God, promises which are all in a context of Love, both the Love of God for His elect people, and the love of His elect in response to Him. And I found it impossible to reconcile that whole ethos of Psalms and Deuteronomy with that view of the Law as a kind of spiritual cat & nine tails.

Not that we do not need the severe chastening of God. We do, and that will always be an integral element in the Law; just as it is an element in the very Presence of Christ (see how Peter kneels down in the boat among

all the fish, even while the boat is actually in process of sinking! and cries, "Depart from me for I am a sinful man"). But the Law was a way of life for the redeemed! That was it! A whole way of life for the redeemed, for those elect, and redeemed by the Passover Lamb and brought from slavery. "Do this and live", meant – not, "Do this and enjoy life".

I became convinced that the OT was not a *dismal record* of failure, a first try at a Covenant, so to speak, just to show mankind his inability (though that is all there – how could it not be); rather was the OT, and the Old Covenant a perfect blue print of the New Testament and the New Covenant.

One thing my earlier teaching HAD brought home to me was the way in which all the intricate ceremony and ritual of the Tabernacle worship was all a pattern of things that were to come. I love that little hint of this in Luke, when he tells how the Lord on the twilight walk to Emmaus beginning with Moses . . . expounded things concerning Himself. If there is a video library in heaven, that's one tape I would love to watch through again!

Now where is all this taking us? Simply to this point: that in the OT we have a *Church within a church*. And that is not, I urge, a bad mistake; but a pattern. Isaiah's remnant points to the regenerate group within a chosen nation, a holy people. Malachi knew the same situation, with the Lord Himself taking note that among all those people, all worshippers, after a fashion stingy givers, sitting lightly on their vows (it could be a description of some Xn denominations we all know) among them was a little group of believers who met for prayer and fellowship, and the Lord Himself took note of them literally in the book of remembrance 3¹⁶. The OT teaches me, therefore, there is a doctrine of a "Visible Church".

Now if that OT pattern is scorned by the theologians who deny any doctrine of the "visible" church, then turn with me now to the NT to see whether or not a different pattern emerges.

(2) The Gospels

At once we met an interesting question: the relationship of the Kingdom of God to the Church of God. However much we may find it hard to agree on what the precise relationship of these two to each other is, two things we will agree on, I'm sure; the first is that the term "Kingdom of God" is essentially eschatological in its reference to salvation-history. The Kingdom is, not just Christ's Rule and Kingship, but Christ Himself. And the parables of the Kingdom focus in an eschatological context on the manifestation of Christ and His Kingship.

The second point of agreement concerns the Church. Because where else is the Rule of Christ present in the world of men today, other than in the Church? I am not forgetting the Sovereignty of God, or denying His control in events of world history, moment by moment, year by year. But the Reign and Kingship of Jesus finds its locus on earth within His church.

Granted then these two premises, what are we to make of the parables of the Kingdom. eg The Sower, The Tares and the Wheat, the Dragnet, The King's Marriage Feast, The Ten Virgins, the Sheep and the Goats, the Talents etc? Do not all of these show that Awesome Judgment of God that begins with the Church of God? Christ separating the genuine from the counterfeit, the true from the false? This is what the Kingdom of God is like, says Jesus. And I can see no other satisfactory theology of the parables than that of the visible church being distinguished in God's Judgment from the Invisible Church.

(3) The Epistles

There is far more material than can be referred to in a paper of this nature. But I select a few sample references, almost at random, to illustrate my thesis that the NT assumes a "Visible" Church as we have defined it.

- (i) 1 Cor 11.19 "for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognised".

The astonishing, almost "throw away" line of Paul's takes us by surprise. I wonder if you have ever even paused over it. The context you will know well enough. The Love-feast in the Church is being abused. Divisions, perhaps of a social nature – the rich as distinct from the poor, or the free as distinct from the slaves – have intruded into the fellowship, and these divisions are being shamefully displayed in that contradictory manner that

too much and are even intoxicated!

Our text suggests that all along Paul has been aware that among the professing Christians are those whose profession was spurious. But he has taken no action, other than to declare fully and faithfully God's Word. Now he sees that cracks beginning to show. Time is working as God's servant; and some of the spurious Christians are being shown up for what they really are.

It would not be impossible to read Paul's words even more poignantly as meaning that the genuine are in the minority. But I shall not go as far as that, and will content myself with asserting that this troubled fellowship, with all its problems, like so many fellowships today – alas, was simply a local branch of the "Visible Church" of God.

We will return to the evident point that no church situation is ever static, but that there is a continuing process of purification going on, as evidenced by the factions in Corinth that are showing up the genuine believers, and

therefore the spurious also. The point is plain that the Corinthian fellowship was a mixed bag, to put it mildly. Yet Paul was willing to write "to the Church of God at Corinth", including in that company *all the fish* the Dragnet had brought in.

- (ii) Phil.3.16-19 "Only let us hold true to what we have attained. Brethren, join in imitating me, and mark those who so live as you have an example in us. For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, live as enemies of the Cross of Christ. Their end is destruction. . ."

Simply to note that Paul is conscious that *many*, as he puts it, once were within the fellowship which he Paul called the Church, but now have fallen by the wayside. Paul sorrows over them. And he warns the believers to whom he is writing. He warns because some of those to whom he is writing may yet backslide and join them. He sorrows, "with tears" because some of them may yet return. He sorrows because he came to love those who have fallen away, treating them as true believers, even though events proved his acceptance of them as Christians to have been mistaken. Mistaken, but not wrong. Of course he was right to accept them as Christians when they made outward profession. But Paul cannot be blamed for making such a mistake. Only God, in the final assessment will make no mistake. Every pastor within the Church of God will make mistakes. Simply because we are not asked to pass that final verdict. So as Paul accepted, we accept, those making their outward profession, and we believe the best of them until they by their lives demonstrate they are not believers.

- (iii) Colossians

Who were the mysterious teachers within that fellowship of Christ who were causing so many problems? They are there like a shadow and attempts have been made down the years to try and identify them. But their identity doesn't concern us at this point. Only their actual presence. To me the astounding thing is that Paul does not go as far as to tell the Colossian Church to exclude them. Their teaching was certainly disturbing the church. Paul refers to it as "philosophy, empty deceit, human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ" 2.8.

Yet the apostle contents himself with simply affirming the great truths of the Gospel, almost tolerating the presence of the troublesome teachers. Dick Lucas, in his recent commentary, tries to grapple with the problem of their identity and suggests they were a primitive "fulness of life" or "second blessing" group within the church. But whoever they were they were wrong, quite wrong. And Paul is emphatic in asserting that.

I do not find his attitude towards these visitors to the Colossian Church at all surprising. Because I find his letters pulsate with the knowledge that there will never be here on earth a pure church. Paul warns that after his departure, fierce wolves would enter the church, not sparing the flock. Worse, from *within* the church, "from among your own selves will arise men speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them" (Acts 20.30). But Paul knew, however afflicted and harassed the Church God might be as the visible Church, the true Church, the Invisible Church, would be presented faultless before God on the final day.

- (iv) Revelation

I pass over the Letter to the Hebrews, the Epistles of Peter and John and Jude, all of which corroborate the comments I have been making thus far and I remind you of the Seven letters of Christ to the Seven Churches of Asia in Revelation 2 and 3. The Churches there, all except one, were impure churches, certainly not composed of the elect alone. The Judgments uttered against some within some of those churches are chilling and uncompromising. And they complete what for me is a picture true to the entire Bible of a doctrine of the Church Visible, that great body of Professing Believers.

Now, lest some of you are wondering why I should spend so long on what you may regard as a matter of mere semantics, we must now press on to work out the practical implications of this doctrine. Doctrine is always important. Often it stands like the foundations of the house, not seen because it dictates the whole design and structure of the building. And in fact that is how it has worked in the church's life today. If we deny any Doctrine of a "Visible Church", then we will attempt to build a pure church, expecting that 99% (allowing for the presence of a single Judas) of our members will be truly born again. Our attitude towards membership will be shaped by that expectation. On the other hand, if we hold the Doctrine of the "Visible Church", we will expect our congregation to be in God's Hands, with Himself as the final arbiter, and we will adopt a more inclusive attitude towards membership. It is now, therefore, to the question of membership of the church that we must turn.

III. Membership of the Church of God

Our first question here is clear: what are the qualifications that Scripture would guide us to use in admitting anyone to membership of a Christian fellowship. Return with me to the four elements in the church which we earlier saw the Reformers emphasised.

- (i) Professing Christians worshipping Christ

There must be a Confession of faith. The whole doctrine of the Confession of faith is an interesting one. It can be traced from the affirmation Israel made in Exodus 24.7, through to the words of Peter at Caesarea Philippi, on to the climax of Christ's "good confession" (as Paul calls it) before Pontius Pilate. On from there

to that “confessing with the lips” faith in Christ to which Paul refers in Romans 10 and so on, culminating in the adoration of Christ in Revelation. R.P. Martin has shown that in Phil 2 we have perhaps the earliest Christian Confession that “Jesus is Lord”.

There is surely a close and necessary bond between the public confession of faith in Christ and the united worship of Him by Christians coming together. This then is the first element we find in church membership – Confessing the Lordship of Christ, and praising Him as such.

(ii) Now such a confession can never be made lightly, and so we have the second element of a *Proper discipline exercised*. The relationship this bears to Church membership is that it looks for fruits of repentance. “If any one is in Christ, he is a new creation . . . all things become new”. “Repent and be baptised”. And to confess Christ is never merely the uttering of some creed, it is a real *identification of the person with the Body of Christ*. Confession of Christ involves *crossing over* to Jesus’ side, and that cannot be done without repentance; and repentance implies a new way of life; and that imposes on the church the responsibility of exercising discipline, that shame may not be brought on the name of Christ by some who may not be giving evidence of repentance.

(iii) The third element is the Word being taught faithfully; clearly, implying a regular pattern of life together in a learning listening context. We would expect, therefore, those asking for membership of Christ’s Church to be ready to sit regularly under the teaching of the Word of God.

(iv) Our fourth element is the administration of the sacraments. Baptism must be administered, and the Lord’s supper is the focus of our devotion and worship and fellowship.

Here then we have four great pillars of Church membership as the Reformers saw God’s word defining them for us.

Now you might have thought that evangelicals, with a sound structure such as that, would surely be united. But we are not, because the interpretation of the first two of these tenets of membership varies widely.

Basically, the difference may be stated as follows:

“With Independents, a *saving belief* in Christ is the only title to admission to the Christian society; and the candidate for admission is bound to bring with him at least credible *evidence to prove* that such a title belongs to him, and that he has been effectually called unto salvation through faith that is in Christ Jesus.

“With Presbyterians, on the other hand, an *intelligent profession of belief in the Gospel* is the title to admission to church membership; and the candidate for admission is only required to show that his conduct and life are in accordance with and accredit his profession”

Jas Bannerman, *Church of Christ*, 1896 p.74

Bannerman then proceeds to four reasons why he regards the Presbyterian position to be the right one. The first three, I pass over, as I think I have already covered the substance of them in what I have already said. His fourth argument is worth noticing. It is that in seeking evidence of regeneration before admitting a person to membership of the Church, those examining the candidate are passing judgments which no man is competent to do. The Presbyterian twofold insistence on (a) a *full knowledge and public confession of faith of the Gospel* and (b) that discipline which seeks to ascertain that there is *nothing in the candidate’s life which is contrary to a profession of faith* remains, Bannerman argues, within Scriptural guide lines and does not lead pastors and elders out into forbidden areas of judgment and assessment which are reserved for God alone.

Now I want to add one or two comments before we leave this subject of membership. First, Bannerman is not mistaken in his understanding of the position of Presbyterians. Listen to Knox in his Book of Discipline:

“Every master of household must be commanded to instruct or else to cause to be instructed, his children, servants and family, in the principles of the Christian religion; without the knowledge thereof aught none to be admitted to the Table of the Lord Jesus. . . . And therefore of necessity we judge it, that every year at least, public examination be had by Minister and Elders of the knowledge of every person within the Church . . . such as be ignorant of the articles of their faith; understand not, nor can rehearse the commandments of God; know how to pray; neither whereunto their righteousness consists, ought not to be admitted to the Lord’s Table . . . For seeing that the just liveth by faith, and that Jesus Christ justifieth by knowledge of Himself, insufferable we judge it that men shall be permitted to live in ignorance as members of the Church of God”

Book of Discipline, 9th Head, Concerning the Policy of the Church (p.241)

Notice also Calvin’s comments on this same subject.

Commenting on the Independents’ insistence that “saving faith” is the qualification, and denying any man can pass such a judgment: “As to the efficacy of the ministry . . . others erroneously maintain that what is peculiar to the Spirit of God is transferred to mortal men, when we suppose that ministers or teachers penetrate to the heart and mind, so as to correct the blindness of the one, and the hardness of the other”. IV 1.6.

But just say, asks some pious son rather petulantly, that we admit an unbeliever to membership of the church? Hear Calvin again (if all we have said about scripture is insufficient): “For it may happen in practice that those whom we deem not altogether worthy of the fellowship of believers, we yet ought to treat as brethren, and regard as believers, on account of the common consent of the Church in tolerating them, and bearing with them in

the body of Christ. Such persons we do not approve by our suffrage as members of the Church, but we leave them the place which they hold among the people of God until they are legitimately deprived of it. With regard to the general body we must feel differently; if they are undoubtedly entitled to be ranked with the Church, because it is certain that these things are not without a beneficial result". IV.1.9

IV. Discipline in the Church of God

Remember that Proper Discipline is essential to the being of the Church of Christ as we have so far tried to define that Church in NT terms. We now outline the levels of discipline which are clear within the Scriptures. I find only three levels of discipline.

1. Excommunication

(1) Excommunication of those guilty of scandalous living.

There are two clear examples of that; the first is 1 Cor 5 where Paul deals with the man who is living incestuously. Such a person is guilty of several sins.

- (i) The sin of immorality.
- (ii) The sin of denying his earlier Christian profession which was in a context of repentance, and a turning from the old life, and a godly resolve to walk in newness of life.
- (iii) The sin of bringing public shame on the church of Christ. The testimony of the Church is marred and dimmed by sin.
- (iv) The sin of defiling the Temple of the Holy Spirit; the Church is the Temple in which God dwells; and those who defile that temple, God will defile them!

Therefore, such a person must be excluded from the Church of God and from the Table of the Lord's Supper.

The second example of what may well be an act of excommunication is found in 1 Timothy 1.20, where Paul states that Hymenaeus and Alexander have been delivered to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme. This is the same expression that Paul used in 1 Cor 5.5 though there he spoke about the flesh being destroyed so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

But note: discipline, even in extreme cases such as these two, is not to get rid of people, but the opposite: it is for the ultimate purpose of winning back to Christ the one who has strayed. Paul will not pass judgment. The man may be a scoundrel whose profession of faith was meaningless; or he may be a genuine believer who has been waylaid by Satan, and needs drastic treatment to bring him back. Both possibilities are held in perfect balance in the awesome discipline that is imposed.

(2) Excommunication for personal and private wrong-doing

Matthew 18.15-17. The difference here between the case the Lord deals with and those in 1 Cor 5 and 1 Tim 1 seems only to be that the one are public scandals, and the other a private offence.

So the Lord in Matthew 18 lays down the procedure. It is to be dealt with first on a private basis; then, failing reconciliation, two or three others are to be brought in; and finally, failing that, it is to be taken to the church. Early church did adopt this practice laid down by the Lord e.g. Titus 3.10 follows the procedure laid down by the Lord in Matthew 18. A "factious person" – creating divisions in the Church – is to be warned once or twice, and then excluded from the fellowship if there is no change of heart.

2. Discipline of Self Examination

The famous passage, 1 Cor.11.28. Robert M'Cheyne made much of this "self-examination". He set a number of questions which he gave to his First Communicants to ponder prayerfully in private before God on their knees.

1. Is it to please your father or mother, or anyone on earth, that you think of coming to the Lord's Table?
2. Is it because it is the custom and your friends and companions ARE COMING?
3. Is it because you have come to a certain time of life?
4. What are your real motives for wishing to come to the Lord's Table? Is it to thank God for saving your soul? Ps 114.12,13. Is it to remember Jesus? Luke 22.19 Is it to get near Christ? John 13.23 Or is it for wordly character, to gain a name, to gain money? Matthew 26.15.
5. Who do you think should come to the Lord's Table?
6. Do you think any should come but those who are truly converted, and what is it to be truly converted?
7. Would you come if you knew yourself to be converted?
8. Should those come who have had deep concern about their soul but are not yet come to Christ? etc. etc.

The questions go on to ask about the meaning of the bread and wine, about the meaning of fellowship and so on. But the point is that McCheyne was seeking to provoke and stimulate self-examination. He did not go on to ask for individual answers to his questions.

3. Discipline by the Word of God

This is the only other form of discipline I can uncover in the Scriptures. I have no doubt in my own mind that by far the most important is this final one. Sometimes, it is a very pointed and pertinent Word. "Those who sin rebuke that others may fear". What an awesome task is the ministry of the Word of God with this heavy

responsibility of rebuke. Of course we do not take it on ourselves – we are commissioned to it by God. But it is easy to shun the real and relevant rebuke, and to neglect this responsibility that is ours.

But the Word of God, faithfully and fearlessly preached, yet lovingly and tenderly preached as well, to men and women whom we love and pastor as those committed to our care, that Word will provide *almost all* the discipline that is needed in the Church.

Not just fearlessly and faithfully preached; that alone will empty a church. But lovingly and tenderly, with pastoral insight and pastoral follow-up that is humble and gentle and overflowing with concern and compassion. Always the two sides. They are both needed. The faithfulness and the fearlessness can be utterly loveless, and see what Paul says about that in 1 Cor 13.

Basically, then, there are three levels of Discipline:

- * Excommunication – the exclusion from the church of those who in one way or another are trouble-makers.
- * Self-examination, which will only be truly done if the third is right.
- * The faithful, loving, pastoral ministry of God's Word.

Conclusion

Now does all this add up to an inclusive kind of church membership? I think it does. Our aim is to bring in as many as we can, not to keep out as many as we can. To include as many as we can within the faithful adherence to Scripture's pattern. Yet, I think we have run the danger of becoming exclusive in our attitude towards those coming to us. I discussed with a group of ministers and Divinity Students quite recently how best they could keep people away from church – that was how we ended up, anyway, though at the time no one quite saw the direction we were taking. The fear was that an unconverted soul might come to the Lord's Table. I heard only weeks ago of a couple from a well-known evangelical church who had moved away and joined another fellowship that had only had a Biblical ministry for a short time. They were hesitating about having their child baptised lest – they said – other babies be baptised on the same occasion where parents are unbelievers. That is the Pietist's fear, not the Bible's fear.

“Our indulgence ought to extend much farther in tolerating imperfection of conduct. Here there is a great danger of falling, and Satan employs all his machinations to ensnare us. For there always have been persons who, imbued with a false persuasion of absolute holiness as if they had already become a kind of aerial spirits, spurn the society of all in whom they see that something still remains . . . egs . . . Others again sin in that respect, not so much from that insane pride as from inconsiderate zeal. Seeing that among those to whom the Gospel is preached, the fruit produced is not in accordance with the doctrine, they forthwith conclude that there no church exists. The offence is indeed well founded, and it is one which in this unhappy age we give far too much occasion. . . . Thinking there is no church where there is not complete purity and integrity of conduct, they, through hatred of wickedness, withdraw from a genuine church, while they think they are shunning the company of the ungodly. They allege the Church of God is holy. But that they may at the same time understand that it contains a mixture of good and bad, let them hear from the lips of our Saviour that parable in which He compares that church to a net in which all kinds of fishes are taken, but not separated until they are brought ashore. Let them hear it compared to a field which, planted with good seed, is by the fraud of an enemy mingled with tares and is not freed of them until the harvest is brought into the barn. Let them hear, in fine, that it is a thrashing-floor, in which the collected wheat lies concealed under the chaff, until, cleansed by the fanners and the seive, it is at length laid up in the granary. If the Lord declares that the Church will labour under the defect of being burdened with a multitude of wicked until the day of judgment, it is vain to look for a church that is altogether free from blemish”. IV.1.13.

We warn, we rebuke, we invite, we instruct, we charge, we teach . . . and we trust the Holy Spirit of God to use His word.

“It is indeed the special prerogative of God to know those who are His, as Paul declares in 2 Tim.2.19. And doubtless it has been so provided as a check on human rashness, the experience of every day reminding us how far His secret judgments surpass our apprehension. For even those who seemed most abandoned, and who had been completely despaired of, are by his goodness recalled to life, while those who seemed most stable often fall. Hence, as Augustine says, ‘In regard to the secret predestination of God, there are very many sheep without and very many wolves within’. For He knows and His mark is on those who neither know Him nor themselves. Of those again who openly bear His badge, His eyes alone see who of them are unfeignedly holy, and will persevere even to the end, which alone is the completion of salvation.” IV.1.8

The Pastor

William Still

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Under the general title of "The Doctrine of the Church" I was asked to discuss the booklet of mine which has been extant for almost twenty years, *The Work of the Pastor*. The booklet consists of two sets of addresses delivered at the New Years of 1964/65 at Swanwick, and 1965/66 at Larne, N. Ireland. The Irish men had asked me simply to repeat the first set at their Conference the following year, but since the last word had not been spoken on the subject – *my* last word, then or now – I made a fresh start. You will not want me to "cough up" these addresses now, nor large tracts of them, but rather discuss their implications – the background being the ministry of systematic Bible teaching, which is now proliferating in Scotland and beyond, in face – it must be confessed – of much prejudice.

The thesis of the addresses, prepared after twenty years' experience, is that the work of the pastor is to feed the sheep with the Word, the finest of the wheat – by which is meant not a distilled essence of biblical theology (I don't know what kind of liquor wheat produces), but expounding the whole of the Scriptures with their variegated but unfolding truth with a view to building up the Church in rounded Christian character. When this is done the Spirit who gave the Word in the first place sets the members of the Church to work for the Lord, and in time the same effect is reproduced in other places, applying its character-building principles to the congregational or local situation in a variety of ways, kerygmatic, didactic, or social, even political!

The man who pooh-poohed these principles in a broadcast some years ago as leading merely to holy huddles, did not know what a survey of his members' outreach to the community, and a survey of ours, showed that we had an overwhelming advantage in the number of evangelical people serving the community in some form of social or community service. And his was *the* church of the city!

After twenty years in the ministry, then, with a good deal of Christian experience before it, it was plain to me that the teaching of the Word produced a character which sought unself-consciously to reproduce itself by the same means. After nearly twice twenty years in the ministry now, there is sufficient evidence that this is true – at home and abroad – to convince all but the cynics.

Speculating on how this particular practice started in Scotland, and why it has proliferated, it was necessary first to look into the history of Bible exposition, and its fruits through the ages, and I am indebted to James Philip for some research which he began recently into the history of systematic Bible ministry. If one thing is clear about the Old Testament it is that Israel was most herself when, at different stages in her career, she was expounding and seeking to live by the Torah of God – if not always systematically, yet applying it to her current situation, often with great thoroughness. You have the same application in the shorter history of the New Testament, as Luke remarked to Theophilus when he said that since many had sought to set down an account of the things most surely believed among the Christians, he also sought to write down an orderly account of them.

Indeed, looking back to the Old Testament as it is interpreted in the Acts of the Apostles, amid the primitive kerygma we have from Peter, Stephen and Paul remarkably systematic expositions of Old Testament doctrine leading up to the event of Christ. These are not "Gospel" sermons in the evangelistic sense, but teaching sermons. However, as James Philip points out, "The high dignity of the systematic pattern of ministry was often but indifferently maintained in the Christian church subsequently, and for long periods was obscured and even lost altogether, especially in the 100 years or so following the close of the New Testament era." May I interject here a recollection of my astonishment as a younger minister reading a sentence in Tom Torrance's Preface to his doctoral thesis, that it was his "firm conviction that the misunderstanding of the Gospel took place . . . as easily as in the second century."

Concerning the 100 years following the close of the New Testament era, James Philip goes on: "Homily took the place of exposition, as it has done since so often. Then came Clement of Alexandria, and Origen, the latter in particular, and much later, Chrysostom and Augustine. Following them there was an ebb tide, and even during the succeeding dark centuries where the Latin church revived, the preaching was far removed from expository." James Philip blames this partly on Christianity becoming the official Church of Rome with Constantine. I wonder myself how the Celtic church would compare with that general stricture. But, he goes on, "the Reformation with antecedents such as Wycliffe soon changed that situation with what has been called a 'wave of mighty Reformation preaching'. That expository preaching for which Calvin is famous, as also Swingli and Bullinger, and Luther perhaps less so, did not last long, for by the 17th century, and through the 18th, and certainly among the evangelicals of the 19th century, systematic expository preaching was hardly known. It was preaching by texts."

I would simply comment on that, that although Andrew Bonar's commentary on Leviticus suggests that a more

systematic pattern was at least present in his mind, yet he does not seem to have adopted it in the pulpit. Nor did McCheyne. Of course, many men through these centuries would occasionally resort to systematic Bible exposition of a book or two – it would be more than amazing if this were not so; but there seems to me little discernible trend towards sustained systematic teaching of the Bible within our ken until a man called Campbell Morgan of Westminster Chapel sought to engage in it to some extent, and much more his successor the good Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones. I myself had the privilege, seemingly by chance, of attending the service in the Chapel at which the old man, Campbell Morgan, in a flowing white beard handed over responsibility for that teaching ministry to Dr Lloyd-Jones. I felt then that history was in the making.

However, I need to interject that although the Puritans were largely preachers from texts rather than systematic Bible expositors, they certainly cover the ground of Biblical teaching in depth, and, as some of us believe, amplified and clarified Reformation insights. Surely few would deny that, whether they agree with all their insights or not. Some might even think that their contribution was too abysmally deep for them!

As to Dr Lloyd-Jones' ministry, although you could say of him that he covered with more than adequacy the teaching of the whole Bible, it was not by going through the Bible book by book, for I wonder how many or how few books of the Bible he taught systematically in 30 years: the Sermon on the Mount, Romans, Ephesians, and others. Of course, it was true of him – as we can see from his volumes – that he was able to walk through whole tracts of the Scriptures from the point of a text of even one word; yet it was not the same as covering the Bible book by book. And although his method was undoubtedly a *tour de force* to ransack almost every biblical implication and nuance of a text or word, yet it seems to me that it would have been better to have expounded the Scriptures in their own contexts, traversing the whole territory of Scripture itself, rather than scaling a few of its great heights and viewing the whole field from these. I wonder what you think.

That is not meant to be a crude criticism of a great man's work, from which many of us have greatly benefited, but an observation from experience. Surely it takes the whole of Scripture, rightly divided of course, to produce a whole man in Christ, a rounded Christian character; as I discovered many years ago after shying from the teaching of the book of Proverbs because I was not sure how to tackle it in the pulpit, or even in Bible Study. I found that to my amazement we never had such full attendances at mid-week Bible Study as when we read and studied Proverbs. People were fascinated by its practicalities and benefited from them enormously. Later on it was possible to sermonise one's way through the book on Sundays with great help from Derek Kinder's commentary. Since then one has gone through the book of Job similarly, on three occasions.

It is astonishing to discover that the whole Bible is so eminently preachable and teachable, despite one's many floundering mistakes. It is this which enhances one's estimate of the Holy volume as the very Word of God, to be treated with the profoundest reverence, not in a bibliolatrous sense, but as a living book working its beneficent will within us when the Spirit who inspired it is permitted to illuminate its pages and reveal its saving and edifying truth to crucify hearts and minds. In fact the difficulties one encounters in such a ministry are so few and so comparatively trivial that one can devote practically the whole of one's time to turning the Word into bread for men's souls. This is to be a pastor, a feeder of the sheep.

Of course we may get on our high horse and seek to know everything, not least to get the better of our critics, but when we have resisted the temptation to do aught but feed men's souls, even the beginnings of the fruit of it in individual lives, and in domestic situations, and in the general life of the congregation, are very marked.

But I have to tell you how I came to adopt a systematic expository ministry. It is perhaps almost shocking to have to admit that so far from having traced the fitful history of such preaching and having seen it as a good and excellent thing, I am afraid the truth is that I stumbled on it in innocence and ignorance. As I see it now, it was an inevitable stumble, which can only redound to the glory of God and His kindness in showing it to me, who am the least of the brethren, something which has been taken up and used in our land and beyond in an increasingly fruitful way.

I have only the vaguest recollection of how it started. I used to think it began in 1947 when daily Bible Reading Notes were first issued, prayer begun in earnest in our congregation, and the message turned from one of largely evangelistic emphasis to one of teaching the Word to young Christians, of whom there were many. I found, however, that it was as natural for people to be converted in a teaching meeting as in one specifically designed to the conviction and conversion of souls. It was the livingness of the Word when it was let through to men's consciences without quibbles and dilution that gripped them, and I discovered that the Holy Spirit was more than willing to bless every portion of the Word, provided one did one's home-work, and found out what the Word was saying exegetically, and what one was called upon by the Spirit to say to it expositively.

At that time (1947) I began tentatively a series of messages on the Letter of James, Galatians, Romans chapters 1 to 8, and Hebrews. As one preached week by week, the succeeding passage of each Letter followed in natural sequence; it seemed the right and inevitable thing to do, especially as the doctrine of salvation unfolded in Romans chapters 1 to 8. It was only later that I found to my astonishment that this way of preaching was regarded as unusual enough to be commented upon and severely criticised as an intolerably heavy way of

ministering the Word – a practice that ought to be reserved only for Bible commentators.

But on looking back through my history, I see that at Cowdenbeath in June 1946, only a year after the beginning of the ministry in Gilcomston – in the thick of a fiercely evangelistic assault on what was then a benighted town – when thirty of us (now scattered by the Lord to the four corners of the globe) descended on the community, I swept through Romans chapters 3 to 5 one night “on being justified”, and chapters 7 and 8 (I don’t know where the vital chapter 6 got to!) the next evening. These could hardly have been systematic expositions of these chapters in two nights, but seemed a necessary part of a Gospel mission. Yet at home, we were already going through books of the Bible systematically in mid-week study, and I should think that that was common then, where there was such a thing in a congregation, the former mid-week service (as the prayer meeting of the United Free Church of Scotland came to be known) having died out in the early 1920’s. Our mid-week Bible Study commenced three weeks after I was inducted in the month of July, and included our holiday week, and it has never stopped.

However, the matter of greatest significance to me between 1946 when Billy Graham started our Youth for Christ in Aberdeen, and 1947 when we really got down to feeding the many converts who were around, is that from the time the systematic ministry began numbers which until then were overflowing (since I began on the upsurge of interest following the end of the Second World War on two fronts, May and August 1945) suddenly grew smaller, and the light-hearted evangelistics fled! Incidentally (and paradoxically) our offerings greatly increased, and young converts began to seek the Lord’s will for their lives until at one point during the first ten years of the ministry we had about ten of our members on the mission field of Nigeria alone. Actions speak louder than words!

This is why I politely refused to listen to the criticisms of people who, for all they may have to show in other directions, have little or nothing to show in the lives of men. It is “by their fruits”, not their roots, that true servants of the Lord are known. This would be my criterion for retiring. When I feel that the Word of God as spoken by me has lost its grip on men’s minds, hearts, consciences and wills, and therefore on their practical lives, then I ought to stop, and leave the task to those far better equipped spiritually, as well as otherwise, to undertake it.

What I would like to say a word about now is not methods of covering the biblical ground, fascinated as I would be to discuss that, but rather what it is in essence in the Word which truly feeds souls – as distinct from merely informing their minds of scriptural facts. I suppose that the more one ranges through and through the Word, seeking to extract its practical essence to feed souls, the more one becomes aware of what is the essence of the essence, if I may put it like that. It is this (and I use a man who has recently meant quite a lot to me, Geerhardus Vos, formerly of Princeton, to say it for me). He says: “the death and resurrection of Christ constitutes the focal point of all biblical revelation”. I suppose that may seem axiomatic, and obvious, to you, but to have seen the truth of it in preaching through the Bible several times one appreciates the statement as a wonderful crystallization of the truth discovered. And I would go further and say that the essence of the truth which has made all the difference to the calibre of the Christians one has seen grow up and go out into service is that which centres in Romans chapter 6, and indeed in that one crucial and critical verse 11, “Reckon therefore yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, and alive unto God in Jesus Christ”.

I believe that even where there has been a whole system of Bible exposition, but not the faithful use of the surgeon’s knife (the sword of the Spirit) in the teaching of sanctification, we have merely theoretic Christians, who prove to be of little or no earthly or indeed heavenly use at all. But I would nevertheless maintain that you cannot know the essence of the truth until you have extracted it from the totality of its body in the whole Word. Vos says also: “The pervasive meaning of Scripture should be brought to bear on any single portion”. These two statements by Vos are complementary and comprehensive. Hence the double emphasis on both the sweep of biblical truth, and yet concentration on the core of it.

One other summation of the truth which I find helpful in feeding, for example, my 3 to 7 year old infants, is the truth about the Trinity. You can give the profoundest theology to these infants and get an intelligent response from them too, if you go about it the right way and scale down the concepts to the simple domesticity of the Trinity which they can understand.

I must confess that I am never far away from the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ in my preaching, nor from the dimension of evil, personal and imperial, and never far away from some aspect of the doctrine of the Trinity.

How Bible teaching can be boring, with all the fascination of these impenetrable yet magnetic and satisfying truths, I do not know. And yet I do know. At the heart of the problem, whatever else can be said about it, must be the spiritual state of the preacher or teacher, namely that self and sin have not been consistently and progressively slain, and his heart made to burn with the livingness of the truth, especially that of the death and resurrection of Christ, the dimension of evil, and the Trinity. Which subjects, of course, encompass the whole range of Christian doctrine, and take the whole Bible to be fully understood.

Then there is the hard work necessary before one comes before one's people with balanced meals, not necessarily manigificently garnished, as by a professional chef, but soundly, solidly, fully prepared, although that is a task far from easy. But it is paramount for the true pastor, for he, like the inexperienced mother of her first child, who must lay all aside, even the clamant needs of her perhaps thoughtless young husband, in order to attend to her baby, the pastor must feed his flock. No trouble is too great for the young mother to go to to feed and otherwise attend to her child, in order to see it grow. The nurse or doctor at the clinic will expect to see that the child is growing, and will want to know the reason why, if it does not. The same here. We must see people grow. Some may grow away, alas, but some will grow up and into the fellowship. If none do so there is surely something wrong, and it is ours to find out what it is, if no one is growing, including ourselves.

I don't mean by this that we must necessarily expect speedy results, but some results, straws in the wind at least, else we must ask ourselves serious questions when we have such dynamic material in our hands. We must of course trust the Book, and the Book's living laws, and devote ourselves to the same with all our might, being distracted neither to the right hand nor to the left.

I sometimes think that many pastors have too many irons in the fire. I know it is not easy to concentrate sufficiently to specialise on the preaching of the Word when there are so many demands upon us, but when our priorities are right we simply must put our pastoral work first, and that is primarily preaching, from which what we often call 'pastoral work' ought largely to emerge. Otherwise, we will diffuse our energies so widely and superficially that much of our effort will come to nothing, except one kind of exhaustion or another. It is imperative for the building of Christ's church that the people be fed with food convenient and nourishing, and it is ours to find out that food in the Word and distinguish it from more technical considerations. For it is so easy to be preoccupied with defending the Word of God (and someone must do it for us pastors) that we neglect to let it loose among the people to make its own mighty impact. There is one thing sure: what you say about the Word of God will neither save souls nor edify them, but the Word itself, even read without expounding it, if the preacher is right, and it is watered by prayer, will undoubtedly do its own work. Nonetheless, we must see that in expounding the Word we do not depart so far from its own terms and usages and ethos to rob it of its inherent power and anaesthetise its saving energy. Of course the Word may take its time, like the growth of the oak tree which took many years to split the old Cathedral wall, but the action is inevitable once the seed is planted.

Of the many things I would discuss concerning the practicalities of gathering and upbuilding Christ's church, one I must mention assumes ever greater significance to me the longer I live. It is that the Church has failed to take hold of the covenant of Grace and teach it and apply it to ensure a future for Christ's church among its own children. How few today bring up their children within the Covenant!

I heard one of Iain MacKenzie's late Sunday evening programmes on T.V. in which he exposed what was supposed to be the life of an inturned Calvinistic community somewhere in the Highlands. The whole emphasis was upon adult conversion to Christ after profound repentance and self-loathing, thereafter apparently to live the narrowest kind of life conceivable. I had never believed that these remote areas were so devoid of understanding of the Covenant in respect of their children until an elder from the Highlands said that he and his wife had never heard the Covenant of Grace in respect of children expounded as a practical possibility, until they came to the Lowlands. He confessed that formerly they would have waited to see how their children would develop and whether they would "decide" for Christ on reaching years of understanding and discretion. Fortunately his young children were then told that their infant baptism by the deliberate act of their parents' faith meant that they were being "claimed" for Christ, and would be brought up in the Lord. Since then these children and many others have grown up straight and tall in Christ, not without difficulties, but none that believing and loving parents could not handle. Indeed, the faith of these youngsters develops so early that by the age of five and six they are not only conscious of their love for Christ but are amazingly responsive to the Word and are eager to partake of the Lord's Supper.

In view of the church's unwillingness to implement the obligation of the Covenant in respect of her children, I was shocked to come across this in Andrew Bonar's diary: "Lord, my children are long in seeking Thee" Considering our experience during the last twenty years I found this difficult to understand, and would cite David Searle's article in the April issue of *Life & Work* on "The Kirk's 'vanishing' children", to whose insights on this matter I have before paid tribute.

As far as our congregation is concerned, the practice is that all our children except the very youngest are twice in church on Sundays with their parents. The little ones are present on Sunday mornings for half an hour when their diet is generally some simplified form of the message to be given to the adults. This leads to a continuity which promises to provide church members and office-bearers in the future, and that promise has already been sufficiently fulfilled to afford confidence that this will be so. All this stems from the frequent promise in the Pentateuch that God's Israel will perpetrate from generation to generation, with the most striking reference that in Deut. 7.9, that those who remain faithful to the faithful God and love Him and keep His commandments

will go on "to a thousand generations".

This is a radically different concept from that of ministers frantically flying all over the place to evangelise other people's youngsters while the children of their own flock are in the wilderness and lost to the cause. Even travelling evangelists and Bible teachers may have sad and sorry situations in their own homes. It is a truly biblical principle that charity begins at home, for if the church builds truly Christian homes then the church will not only survive, but grow and reach out to the uttermost ends of the earth, and this is what we all earnestly desire to see developing in Scotland. There is great need for it.

I add this: the growth in the Lord of families in Christian fellowship soon turns the church into one large family, and if those families avoid the temptations to become cliquish and inturbed because they are grounded in the whole Word of God and know their responsibility for friend and neighbour, then that family of families is able to provide a warm and friendly environment in which to bring susceptible and perhaps even unsusceptible people, and introduce them into what a Christian church really is.

I recall my friend George Patterson (who with Geoffrey Bull and George Bell went to China as a missionary had to flee to India via Tibet with the Communist take-over) telling me that he was sure the groups of the Little Flock in China would survive because they had no organisation that the Communists could find and object to. Recent statistics from China have proved his point. I think it was during the Kennedy/Cuban crisis in the early 1960's when Khrushchev banged ever over-run by the Communists, the only kind of Christian community that could possibly survive would be one so simple, domestic, unorganised, and so little regimented or structured that it would not be found other than in simple gatherings for worship, study and prayer, and then individual Christians living the life wisely amongst their fellows.

If we could achieve something like that in Scotland without the fearsome stimulus of Russian or other invasion, in time – but I stress, in time – not only our church but our nation would be transformed. I have no illusions as to how long it takes to teach this to a congregation. We at home are only learning it after 37 years. I know that if we had been better Christians it would have taken a shorter time, but not much shorter.

In some places, a whole generation, maybe more than a generation, may need to be replaced before such a creative and constructive simplicity can be achieved. Many older people simply refuse to learn, and would die, and do die – if not in their sins certainly in blissful ignorance of what it takes to form a real Christian church. I know that God can do it suddenly by overwhelming revival. We are surely hardly against that, if that is His will; but short of it, and I pray for it with all my heart, the task is to roll up our sleeves and get down to it with the co-operation of the Lord's slower dynamical power.

The Logic of Infallibility: an evangelical doctrine at issue

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It is now nearly ninety years since Benjamin Warfield commented wryly that in the matter of the inspiration of Scripture

The old formula, *quot homines tot sententiæ*, seems no longer adequate. Wherever five 'advanced thinkers' assemble, at least six theories as to inspiration are likely to be ventilated.¹

The passage of those years has hardly simplified the position. Contrary to some of the expectations of Warfield's Conservative contemporaries, the theories of the 'advanced thinkers' still hold the field. On the other hand, despite the fond hopes of his adversaries, the orthodoxy which he represented has yet to be driven from it. Indeed, it has made gains and advances in the face of a confused enemy. But of recent years the confusion has been less confined to the line-of-battle drawn up against evangelical Christianity. Its defenders, too, have shown signs of division, and it is a good deal less easy to see who stands where in the battle for the Bible today than it was in the days of Old Princeton.

A key element in Warfield's exposition and defence of his doctrine of Scripture has been highlighted by David Kelsey in his important work, *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology*. He writes that, according to Warfield, 'the doctrine of inspiration is a vast hypothesis functioning methodologically like the Copernican theory or the theory of evolution'. As a result

Anyone who relies on the hypothesis has the confidence that any conflicts that appear between facts and the hypothesis can be explained within the framework of the hypothesis. It would take an enormous number of conflicts to raise serious doubt about the adequacy of the hypothesis.²

In fact, Kelsey is less than fair to Warfield in his exposition of the Princeton scholar's stance. He expounds him in these terms:

the doctrine of inspiration provides us with a rule: Always suppose that scripture is inspired and therefore inerrant. The rule instructs us *a priori* to treat apparent errors or inconsistencies in the Bible as being merely apparent and not real. As Warfield puts it, 'all objections brought against the doctrine of inerrancy pass out of the category of objections to its truth into the category of difficulties to be adjusted to it.'³

Thus quoted, Warfield sounds more than a little arbitrary. In the essay which Kelsey cites it is otherwise. He has argued that the Church assumes the truthfulness of the teaching of Scripture in doctrinal matters generally. Therefore, in the matter of the doctrine of Scripture, if Scripture itself speaks it must be heeded. As it happens, the Biblical writers teach a doctrine of plenary inspiration.

If they are trustworthy teachers of doctrine and if they held and taught this doctrine, then this doctrine is true, and is to be accepted and acted upon as true by us all. In that case, any objections brought against the doctrine from other spheres of inquiry are inoperative; it being a settled logical principle that so long as the proper evidence by which a proposition is established remains unrefuted, *all so-called objections brought against it pass out of the category of objections to its truth into the category of difficulties to be adjusted to it* . . . If a fair criticism evinces that this is not the doctrine of the Biblical writers, then of course it has 'destroyed' the doctrine which is confessedly based on that supposition. Failing in this, however, it can 'destroy' the doctrine, strictly speaking, only by undermining its foundation in our confidence in the trustworthiness of Scripture as a witness to doctrine. The possibility of this latter alternative must, no doubt, be firmly faced in our investigation of the phenomena of the Bible; but the weight of evidence, be it small or great, for the general trustworthiness of the Bible as a source of doctrine, throws itself, in the form of a presumption, against the reality of any phenomena alleged to be discovered which make against its testimony.⁴

That is to say, the methodological *a priori* which can dismiss alleged errors and inconsistencies is itself the fruit of two arguments, asserting the general trustworthiness of Scripture in matters of doctrine, and its teaching of the doctrine of plenary inspiration. The burden, however, of Warfield's argument – and this is aptly seen by Kelsey as it has not been by many of Warfield's critics, and, one might add, not a few of his disciples – is that the believer in plenary inspiration (by which phrase we may refer to Warfield's doctrine) is under no *obligation* to dispute a case brought against the doctrine *on its merits*, where they comprise the fruit of historical and literary

criticism. That is to say, he may come to face any given objection to the doctrine of plenary inspiration and its implication of inerrancy with a well-grounded presumption that, irrespective of apparent difficulties, the doctrine may be held with confidence.

When Warfield suggested that wherever five 'advanced thinkers' are gathered six theories of inspiration will be ventilated, he went on to qualify himself. However deep the disagreements which divide them, modern writers on the subject are united in one matter:

They differ in every conceivable point, or in every conceivable point save one. They agree that inspiration is less pervasive and less determinative than has hitherto been thought, or than is still thought in less enlightened circles. They agree that there is less of the truth of God and more of the error of man in the Bible than Christians have been wont to believe. They agree accordingly that the teaching of the Bible may be, in this, that or the other, – here, there or elsewhere, – safely neglected or openly repudiated . . . They agree only in their common destructive attitude towards some higher view of the inspiration of the Bible, of the presence of which each one seems supremely conscious.⁵

That too, of course, holds good today. We face a consensus rejection of the evangelical tradition, but alongside it a deep consciousness of that doctrine and its implications. It could be argued that the fundamental problem of modern theology lies in its inability to find a ground in Biblical authority. The emasculated Rule of Faith with which those who reject the essentials of Warfield's position are left is an insufficient rule. As a result, as Van A. Harvey has commented aptly, 'much of recent Protestant theology may be regarded as a series of salvage operations, that is, attempts to reconcile the ethic of critical historical inquiry with the apparent demands of Christian faith'⁶. As it happens, the context of his remark is one of the more perceptive salvage operations. But it may be doubted whether any of them can succeed. The intention of this paper is to explore some of the issues which underlie the endeavour.

1. The Nineteenth-Century crisis

Since conservative evangelicals today find themselves in a small minority, perhaps especially in their doctrine of Scripture, it is common to find it assumed that this had always been the case. A sectarian mentality, and an accompanying failure of confidence, are the result. In fact – and this can scarcely be disputed – the doctrine of plenary inspiration which Warfield defined and defended is nothing less than what he termed 'the church-doctrine of inspiration': the common heritage of the Church Catholic. To say that is, of course, to raise several difficulties. In what sense can the doctrine of one age be said to be identical with that of the next, when the context in which it was once defined has been superseded by another? What are the characteristics of 'authentic' doctrinal development, and 'inauthentic'? How would particular defenders of plenary inspiration before the rise of Higher Criticism have responded had they written after its widespread acceptance? It is often argued that to call in testimony writers who did not themselves live against the back-cloth of critical historical study as witnesses against its method and conclusions is simply anachronistic.

There is some substance in this argument, but it is not as convincing as it may appear; for it begs the real question at issue. That is to say, *if* the doctrine of inspiration held by the older generations in fact essentially involved inerrancy in matters of history and so on, it is by no means illegitimate to cite their testimony against lesser views. On the other hand, *if* historical and literary inferences drawn from the essentials of the doctrine were to a degree arbitrary accretions of the general assumptions of the day, they may reasonably be disregarded. But that, of course, is the issue which today requires resolution.

What we may say with some definiteness is that, prior to the rise of what is commonly called historical criticism, what is today the minority preserve of James Barr's 'Fundamentalism' was the common doctrine of the Christian Church. Perhaps the most striking admission of this was made at the height of the Fundamentalist Controversy in the United States, by Kirsopp Lake, the New Testament scholar, who was a vigorous and indeed, extreme opponent of orthodoxy. He candidly writes in these terms:

It is a mistake, often made by educated men who happen to have but little knowledge of historical theology, to suppose that Fundamentalism is a new and strange form of thought. It is nothing of the kind: it is the partial and uneducated survival of a theology which was once universally held by all Christians. How many were there, for instance, in the Christian Churches, in the eighteenth century, who doubted the infallible inspiration of all Scripture? A few, perhaps, but very few. No, the Fundamentalist may be wrong; I think that he is. But it is we who have departed from the tradition, not he, and I am sorry for the fate of anyone who tries to argue with a Fundamentalist on the basis of authority. The Bible and the *corpus theologicum* of the church is [*sic*] on the Fundamentalist side.⁷

That assessment could be illustrated at indefinite length. It could also be disputed, but not in its essentials. For even where isolated Christians have doubted this or that text, or have admitted difficulties in particular passages, the general assumption of Scripture's normative authority – an authority extending to the historical claims which it makes, which are indeed the warp of its theological woof – has been universal in the Church. And that for

a simple reason: the canonicity of the books of the Old and New Testaments is the major premise of all theology and preaching. To call it into question is to abandon a tradition dating historically and stemming logically directly from the New Testament church's use of its own Scriptures, and from our Lord's use of His. If the Bible is the Church's canon, its infallibility is no added extra, it is *necessary*, entailed in its adoption by the Church.

But to revert to the historical question. The beginning of the nineteenth century found Britain still largely shielded from the questioning of Christian doctrine which was becoming widespread on the Continent. The traditional position was maintained by all alike within the churches – whether evangelical or moderate, high or low, established or dissenting. There were fundamental differences between churchmen of these different tendencies, but about Scripture there was a marked homogeneity. One authoritative survey of the position during the eighteenth century remarked that 'the doctrine of unerring literal inspiration was almost everywhere held in its strictest form' (Abbey and Overton)⁸. The opening of the nineteenth saw G.S. Faber's Bampton lectures for 1801 on *A View of the Mosaical Records* speak of the attitude to Scripture as one of 'prescriptive veneration'. His work, writes one commentator, 'proceeded on the alternative that if the Pentateuch is not infallible there is no revelation'⁹. In 1814 the Bampton was concerned specifically with the interpretation of Scripture, and the Lecturer was William Van Mildert, later Bishop of Durham and widely recognised as the most learned of the bench of bishops of his day. He was no evangelical – he denounced the Methodists as fiercely as the Romans – but he was representative of the received orthodoxy of the period. As one writer put it, 'the Bishop was essentially a prudent Churchman, his progress never exceeding that of the whole ecclesiastical body'.¹⁰ V.F. Storr writes of the acceptance of

the traditional view of the Bible as a volume inspired from cover to cover, whose statement, whether they related to science, or history, or religion, were to be accepted without questioning. The Bible was treated as something apart from other writings. Its various books were regarded as being all on the same level of inspiration, and as having proceeded under a divine superintendence which protected them from any material error. Even a man of such large mind as Van Mildert could write that in the Bible 'it is impossible even to imagine a failure either in judgment or in integrity'.¹¹

For Van Mildert, 'the authenticity, authority and truth' of Scripture 'are assumed as axioms or postulates'.¹² In consequence, 'the critical reason is entirely subordinate' to 'the subject-matter of the revelation'.¹³

In these words, Van Mildert touches upon the heart of Warfield's defence of the orthodox position: the scholarly study of Scripture must ever defer to Scripture's statements, including those about itself, its nature, and its composition. While there must indeed be such scholarly study – and Van Mildert is insistent on that point – 'the Scriptures themselves have a peculiar and extraordinary character impressed upon them, which takes them out of the class of ordinary writings'.¹⁴

It is at this precise point that the nascent historical criticism of the nineteenth century challenged the orthodox view. Because it asserted – it presupposed – that the Bible must henceforth be studied, in Jowett's famous phrase, 'like any other book'. No longer would Scripture be permitted a hermeneutic all of its own. Whatever special qualities it had must emerge from an examination of it on the same terms on which all human documents were examined.

2. The claims of history

Harvey is one of only a few modern writers to draw attention to the significance of the nineteenth-century controversy for the church. Christians were called upon to abandon their traditional presumption of infallibility in favour of historical study whose results, whether or not they favoured the Biblical testimony, could never be more than approximations and probabilities. As it happened the conflict with the new methods was largely conducted on the pragmatic level: did Moses write the Pentateuch? did John write the Fourth Gospel? rather than the level of principle: is our access to the knowledge of God in Scripture by means of historical criticism, or by means of our submission to the evidence of Scripture *as such* ?

Harvey writes

The entire history of conservative Biblical scholarship in the nineteenth century represented a retreat from one announced last-ditch stand to another. If Tholuck claimed that the last bastion of Christian faith was the apostolic authorship of the Fourth Gospel, a succeeding generation believed this to be obviously indefensible and fell back on what they regarded as a more adequate barricade, only to evacuate that for still another which would also be overrun.

The only really viable alternative was to enter the lists of the debate and to attempt to vindicate the truth of the sacred narratives. To do this, however, it was necessary to pay a costly price: it was necessary to accept the general canons and criteria of just those one desired to refute. One had, so to speak, to step onto the ground that the critics occupied. This was fatal to the traditionalist's cause, because he could no longer appeal to the eye of faith or to any special warrants. The arguments had to stand or fall on their own merits. (pp.105.6)

That is to say, the conservatives – evangelical and otherwise – who did not swim with the new currents of scholarship from across the North Sea faced a dilemma. Either they could denounce the basis on which the historical-critical study of Scripture rested, as dogmatically and Biblically improper, or they could face the critical arguments on their merits. During the first half of the century, and indeed into the 1860's, the former seemed adequate. Bampton lecturers and others included German rationalism, or 'neology' as it was sometimes called, along with other infidelities under a common ban. But once *Essays and Reviews* and the writings of Bishop Colenso had disseminated the essentials of the critical approach widely amongst clerical and educated lay opinion, something more was called for, and something more was given. Commentaries and monographs appeared disputing *ad hominem* the latest German critical positions. The work of an earlier generation of German conservatives was republished in Britain, a factor which itself educated British opinion in the new theories while appearing to reassure that they could be answered. The Higher Criticism had seized the initiative, and for practical purposes conservatives felt obliged to play the critics at their own game. As Harvey suggests, they had perhaps no alternative. But the course which they adopted was fatal to the position they sought to defend.

Various factors urged them on, not least the remarkable success of the Cambridge School of New Testament scholarship – the famous Trio of Lightfoot, Westcott and Hort) who, without recourse to dogma, had undermined the extremely radical views of the Tübingen scholars and set New Testament scholarship in this country on a firm and very conservative base. Westcott, for instance, though declining to pronounce on the matter, treats Scripture precisely as would a declared infallibilist. Conservatives were reassured that their coveted doctrine would be capable of vindication on 'critical' grounds. Increasingly, Old Testament writers gave practical recognition to the validity within the church of the critical tools and methods, as men such as Alfred Cave sought to defend the orthodox doctrine of Scripture in its conclusions on the grounds adopted by its detractors. The result, of course, we know: he and his fellows – including the far more prodigious American scholar William Henry Green – failed to make any significant impact on the course of scholarly debate. The analogy with what had been achieved in the field of New Testament by the Cambridge men was false; the essentials of Graf-Wellhausen remained intact, and the volumes of the conservatives were ignored. They were seen for what they were: attempts to *use* historical criticism to support a dogmatic position. That held no interest for those who rejected the dogma itself. For once the propriety of the new historical methods had been acknowledged, there was no room for the special warrants and the special hermeneutic which were the *raison d'être* of the conservative position. Willis B. Glover, in his work on the non-conformist reaction to Higher Criticism in England, instances Cave's small volume *The Battle of the Standpoints*:

Cave rightly insisted that the central problem was the nature of revelation, but he did noting to define the difference between his own standpoint and that of the dominant scholarship of historical criticism.

Since he claimed to meet them on their own ground, it is difficult to see what he meant by a battle over standpoints . . . This Pamphlet . . . exemplified in the contradiction between the title and the content the confusion of Cave's thought. His really was a different standpoint, but he hid this fact from himself and others by his claim that his approach was critical and inductive.¹⁵

In other words, the grounding of my belief that *p* happened may be historical (on general historical grounds it is more likely than not that *p*) or on some other, special grounds (the Bible says *p*, and since I hold for special reasons that what the Bible says happened, happened, I believe *p*). It is one thing to move on, having given this latter ground for belief in *p*, to show apologetically that even if the major premise of Biblical trustworthiness is not accepted, there are grounds on which we may believe *p* to be likely. It is another to give these general, historical warrants for *believing p*.

3. The logic of the revolution

The underlying debate of the nineteenth century about Scripture was not actually one about whether what the Bible said was to be believed, in the sense that *p* happened rather than *q*. It was about whether what the Bible said was to be believed *because the Bible said it*, or whether it should be believed, or disbelieved, on the grounds of critical historical investigation. This distinction is vital, and the fact that it was largely obscured in many of the discussions by means of which the position identified with Warfield and his successors changed from being that of the consensus into that of a small minority was itself a major contribution to that change. The spectacle of the Cambridge Trio's success in demonstrating New Testament reliability on historical grounds largely confused those who were contending for the doctrine of Scripture and the reliability of the Old Testament. Under the guise of disagreements over questions of authorship and relatively minor historical details, a fundamental revolution was accomplished in the method and self-understanding of Christian theology.

We suggested as we began that Kelsey's analogy between the doctrine of Scripture maintained by the orthodox camp and the great organising theories of the natural sciences was apt and illuminating. By way of reflection on the hermeneutical revolution which underlies the modern debates about Scripture we may draw attention

to the parallels which it has with revolutionary changes in the natural sciences themselves. The classic example remains that of the Copernican revolution in sixteenth-century astronomy, and it well illustrates the revolution in method which convulsed nineteenth-century Biblical scholarship. The replacement of critical history for the doctrine of plenary inspiration as the fundamental principle governing the interpretation of Scripture was no less catastrophic in its implications for Christian thought than that of helio- for geo-centricity for the study of the heavens. Not merely did certain data require re-evaluation; the whole theoretical framework by which they were understood was overturned. The Ptolemaic astronomers had come to terms with deviant observations by positing epicycles in the planetary orbits; yet now such observations were hailed as the key to the new astronomy. Orthodox Biblical scholars were well used to apparent discrepancies in the Biblical history, and well able to posit harmonistic devices which had hitherto been agreed to make sense of them; yet now the anomalous phenomena were made the basis of a new science of Biblical interpretation. The old and trusted methods of harmonising observation and theory came to be seen as mere special pleading, such that the epicycles of the old Biblical interpreters carried no more weight with Critical scholars than those of the old astronomy did with the disciples of Copernicus. A fundamentally different perspective had been attained, new *gestalt*, and there could therefore be no logical, step-by-step movement from the one position to the other – in either direction – since the decision required of the theologian, as of the astronomer, was in essence a single one; and yet by it he travelled to a wholly fresh understanding of his task, in its method and in its results. The believer in ‘plenary inspiration’ could never, logically, come to doubt infallibilism, since his theory left no standing-ground for errors which might challenge it. Van Mildert and Warfield were unable to ‘discover’ errors in Scripture for the same reason as the pre-Copernicans were unable to ‘discover’ helio-centricity: their fundamental method prevented any conceivable data from receiving such an interpretation. Only a revolution in their thinking, involving a step outside one logical pattern and into another, could bring this about. Part of the value of this parallel is that it points up the profound significance of the change which took place, as infallibilism was abandoned. It suggests that in a difference of *gestalt* we have a way of understanding the extraordinary disparity between conservative and other views of *se*. It is not that the conservatives are dishonest and ignorant, nor is it that others find errors where no sensible man could see them. Rather, the religious presuppositions which determine the differing methods of the two schools cause B to see error where A can see only truth.

It is not uncommon for pious men inside or outside the doctrinal bounds of the Scottish Evangelical Theology Society to play down the significance of the debate about Scripture. We may indeed wish to distance ourselves from some of the more strident executors of B.B. Warfield. But the fundamental epistemological question which is raised in the children’s hymn,

Jesus loves me, this I know
For the Bible tells me so

will not go away. Does our knowledge of God come from His Word, or must that Word forever await the attestation of critical history? Do we consider that we have a full community of discourse with any and all Biblical scholarship, or is our hermeneutics a *special* science that we admit to be inter-dependent with our religious presuppositions? These are pressing questions, and while their answers need to be cautious and reverent and duly qualified, the recognition that there is a logic to infallibility which can admit of no challenge poses a major question-mark against the strategy of a generation of evangelical scholarship.

Notes

1. *Works*, I, p.51.
2. Kelsey, p.22.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Works*, I, pp.174f; emphasis ours.
5. *Ibid.*, p.51.
6. *Historian and the Believer*, p.246.
7. *Religion of Yesterday and Tomorrow*, pp.61f.
8. *English Church in the Eighteenth Century*, I, p.560.
9. Hunt, *Religious Thought in the Nineteenth Century*, p.41.
10. *Ibid.*, p.39.
11. *English Theology in the Nineteenth Century*, p.177.
12. *Scripture-Interpretation*, p.11.
13. *Ibid.*, p.22.
14. *Ibid.*, p.21.
15. *Evangelical Non-conformists and Higher Criticism in the Nineteenth Century*, p.192.

Reviews

Alastair Heron, ed., *The Westminster Confession in the Church Today* (St Andrew Press, Edinburgh, 1982) 154pp. £4.00.

This recent volume, compiled by the Church of Scotland's Panel on Doctrine, is a brief, and generally interesting, series of articles and personal views on the Westminster Confession of Faith. Within a brief compass it endeavours to outline the historical origins of the Confession, the evolution in the life of the Church of Scotland, the theological structure and emphases, and to stimulate discussion over such questions as, "How sound is the general teaching and tone of the Confession?", "How far is it time-conditioned, and how far might it still be seen as a Confession for today?" The book will be of interest especially to those who are familiar with the continuing debate within the Church of Scotland concerning its relation to the Westminster Confession as its Subordinate Standard of Faith. It will also interest, however, a more general public as it is, in the main, a popular rather than academic study of the Confession and its teachings.

Leaving aside the personal views of the Confession, and the two brief but helpful articles on its historical origins and changing place in the life of the Church of Scotland over the centuries, the 'meat' of the book is found in the two chapters which discuss the teaching of the Confession. The first of these is a basically *descriptive* treatment of the teaching of the Confession by the Revd Dr S.B. Ferguson. The other chapter, and the one which will inevitably provoke the greatest discussion, is by the Revd Prof J.B. Torrance, entitled "strengths and weaknesses of the Westminster Theology". The title itself, however, is a little misleading. While the Confession's weaknesses are pliantly and fully discussed, its strengths are conspicuous by their absence!

This highlights a serious defect in the book, that it is less than it claims to be. If we place the 'personal views' of the Confession to one side (as most will do), Prof Torrance's article stands alone in giving a theological appraisal of Westminster Theology. This is not the fault of Prof Torrance. But the book would seem less an *apologia* for the removal of the Confession as the Church of Scotland's Subordinate Standard if it contained an essay as *pro* the Confession's theology as Prof Torrance's article is against it.

It is not possible within the confines of a review to discuss Prof Torrance's contentions that the Westminster Confession seriously departs from the theology of Calvin, and develops a theological structure out of step with Reformation theology. However, it is interesting to note that Prof J.H. Leith, possibly the greatest living authority on the Westminster Confession, makes the comment (in another section of the book) that those who argue that Westminster theology distorts the theology of Calvin

generally fail to note adequately the roots of seventeenth-century theology in Calvin's *Institute of the Christian Religion*, or to value properly the necessary rôle that Westminster illustrates in the development of doctrine or the remarkable achievement of the Westminster Confession in the kind of theological excellence to which both Borth and Tillich have paid tribute (p.99).

If we are to believe Prof Torrance, the theology of the Westminster Confession is very far from any kind of excellence, and certainly bears little if any resemblance to the theology of John Calvin.

Whom are we to believe? If the present review encourages those who read it to dig into the issue for themselves, and above all provokes them to examine first-hand the teaching of the Confession itself, then the reviewer at least is confident that Prof Leith's comments will bear the test of scrutiny. The same cannot be said for Prof Torrance's claim that Westminster distorts Calvin, seriously weakens our understanding of God, grace and the Holy Spirit (p.45), makes God's grace conditional (p.48), places law before grace (p.49), tends towards Sabellianism (p.50), sees the Old Testament merely as a set of legal precedents (p.51) and separates grace from Christ (p.52)! Such generalisations do not bear the scrutiny of theological enquiry. One brief example must suffice. To say that the 'Federal scheme' which the Westminster Confession adopts is built on the priority of law over grace (p.49) is seriously to misunderstand the Puritan conception of law. Simply to state, as Prof Torrance has done, that the federal scheme teaches that God made a covenant of works with Adam, and is him with all men, 'making eternal life conditional on keeping its terms', and not add that nearly all the Puritans concurred in the view that whatever good Adam would have received by his obedience was of *grace* is to misunderstand and misrepresent the roots of Westminster theology (cf. E. Kevan's *The Grace of Law*, especially pp.110ff.).

The book in general serves the purpose for which it was written. It is to be hoped that those who examine its contents will do so with both an open Bible and an open Confession before them!

Ian Hamilton, Newmilns

Ian B. Cowan, *The Scottish Reformation: Church and Society in Sixteenth-Century Scotland* (Weidenfield and Nicolson, London, 1982), 244pp., £11.95.

This straightforward account seeks not only to advance the author's contribution to the debate about 'the causation and emergence of the Reformation in Scotland', but also to redress the concentration of recent studies on ecclesiastical organization by directing attention to the Reformation's impact on society. The first three chapters assess the 'vitality' of the late medieval Church, concluding that the secular clergy and the parish system were more obviously in need of reform than the monasteries. 'All in all monasticism in Scotland was in a better shape than has sometimes been allowed.' Yet the monks were of little relevance to the Reformation, for or against, compared with the Dominican and Franciscan friars, whom the Reformers could not ignore, even though the friars' services to the community benefited largely their own relatively prosperous middle-class circles to the disregard of the poor. Cathedrals and collegiate Churches in practice drained resources of finance and personnel away from the parishes. 'Parochial service and the manner in which it was carried out lay at the root of many of the problems facing the church in sixteenth-century Scotland.' Serious deficiencies of personal morality and education can justifiably be laid at the parochial clergy's door. In the circumstances the infrequency of popular hostility towards incumbents is surprising. In reviewing the contributions of the Church in society Cowan is particularly interested in activities which involved joint participation of clergy and laity. He claims that 'in its encouragement of music and the visual arts the church was fulfilling both the spiritual and temporal aspirations of contemporary society'. Nevertheless, in the century or so before the Reformation, the church's dominant role in education, administration of justice and patronage of the arts was under challenge from the secular authorities' growing provision, and the sacramental and vernacular preaching ministry which it alone could provide for the community, was increasingly neglected.

This is a commendably balanced picture of pre-Reformation Catholicism in Scotland. If anything the author portrays it in less gloomy colours than has often been the case, but in some respects such as monastic life and the quest for fraudulent relics Scotland was markedly less corrupt than England. Above all, the central focus on the inadequacies of parochial ministry exposes the clamant need for reform at the point where religion most closely touched popular life. This is borne out by David Lindsay's *Three Estates* which directs most of its satirical fire against the secular clergy. Cowan considers this work in a chapter on Catholic reform initiatives, whose ultimate failure, he believes, is attributable more to 'secular attitudes which had been bred within the church, coupled with even stronger manifestations of secularism outside its ranks' than to incipient Protestantism.

A particular strength of the heart of the book is the mapping of regional variations, both of the appearance of Protestant heresy in the 1540's and 1550's and of the consolidation of a Protestant ministry and the prevalence of Catholic recusancy after 1560. Here Cowan incorporates the substance of his valuable Historical Association pamphlet, *Regional Aspects of the Scottish Reformation* (1978). Never again will glib geographical generalizations about the Reformation in Scotland be pardonable, but, especially for the post-1560 period, the reader may well feel the lack of broad regional summaries to gather up the significance of what was happening so variously in numerous localities.

Cowan holds that as late as the 1540's an essentially Catholic ecclesiastical unity might have been preserved. A highly determinative role is ascribed to the Protestant lairds who at that time constituted only 'a tiny minority'. The change in 1558 was politically motivated. The fear of France and the influence of England enabled the militant Protestant minority, largely restricted to Kyle in Ayrshire and 'a closely demarcated area on the east coast', to secure the ascendancy. A question mark is placed against the frequent assertion of historians that the success of the Reformation depended on popular urban support. 'In most burghs support for protestantism stemmed initially from a small minority of the populace who were only permitted to seize the initiative and win over their fellow citizens through the intervention of the local lairds.' Cowan here leans towards a political explanation for the Reformation itself rather than for the timing of it. (The two possibilities are posed in Jenny Wormald's *Court, Kirk and Community: Scotland 1470-1625*, 1981, which appeared too late to be noted by Cowan.

On the Reformation settlement itself, so contested a battleground since Gordon Donaldson's *The Scottish Reformation*, Cowan takes issue with attempts like Donaldson's to drive a massive wedge between Knox and Melville, reformation and Presbyterianism, First and Second Books of Discipline. 'The redefinition of the Principles that governed the polity of the Scottish church [in the Second Book] may have led to some departures from the organizational plans of 1560, but such "innovations" were generally speaking merely a statement of existing practice.' Apart from claims for financial redistribution, 'the two books diverged very little on basic issues. The one constant, which governed all else, lay in their unanimous belief that church and state were separate and distinct entities.' So the author rejects Donaldson's view that the 1560 settlement envisaged nothing inconsistent with the supremacy of the godly prince in an episcopal Church. The General Assembly is obviously referred to in the First Book and was in essence an ecclesiastical, not a civil, body. 'The attempt to correlate

superintendence with episcopacy, in any meaningful sense of the word, breaks down entirely in terms of spiritual authority . . . Spiritually the minister and superintendent were one . . . Here too the second Book of Discipline only restated accepted theory in more positive terms.' This interpretation is balanced by the recognition that the presbytery constituted one example of the Kirk, even after the Second Book, 'adopting new stratagems to meet changing circumstances', it being compounded out of 'the exercise' and 'the common eldership' already propounded. Pursuing the book's special interest, Cowan concludes that 'the exercise of discipline [by the Kirk Session] brought an involvement between church and society that has never been surpassed. The indifference of the pre-Reformation church had been replaced by an intense interest in the lives of each individual member of society.'

A chapter on worship encompasses observances such as marriage. For today one might note that the Reformers saw no need for two wholly similar Sunday services. In this area also Cowan's interest lies in the way in which the changes of the Reformation overcame the earlier distancing of the Church from the people. Demonstrations of popular enthusiasm such as greeted John Durie's return to Edinburgh in 1582 were 'a far cry from the apathy and lassitude of the pre-Reformation church'.

The final chapter surveys the relation to Church and society in the post-Reformation years. It stresses the importance of bonding or banding for religious purposes, the increase of lay participation and the co-operation of laity and ministers as illustration of the practicality of the ideal of a covenanted people. Poor relief and educational aims and provision are also examined, but not the territory covered by Gordon Marshall's *Presbyteries and Profit: Calvinism and the Development of Capitalism in Scotland 1560-1707* (1980).

This is a most welcome book and must surely become the standard introduction to the Scottish Reformation. It is accurately produced. (A surplus negative has crept in towards the foot of p.53, some verbatim repetition occurs between pp.114 and 120 and 'inimicable' (p.177) should be 'inimical'.) The Bibliography could helpfully have been a little fuller. One or two omissions can be made good from the notes, but there is no mention of A.C. Cheyne's weighty review of Donaldson in *Scott. Journ. of Theol.* 16 (1963), pp.78-88. Michael Lynch's *Edinburgh and the Reformation* (1981) obviously appeared too late, but his earlier studies on the capital are also not listed, nor is Marshall's book mentioned earlier.

The Book's greatest lack is of course in theology, on which Cowan manages to be remarkably reticent. The simple labels 'Lutheran' and 'Calvinist' will no longer suffice to depict the developing theology of the Scottish Reformers. Continental links and influences are only briefly touched upon, and Zwingli makes no appearance (cf. G. Locher's 'Zwingli's Influence in England and Scotland', in his *Zwingli's Thought: New Perspectives* (1981), pp.340-383). While the author cannot be blamed for omitting what he never intended to include, 'Reformation without tarrying for theology' is bound to have its limitations. The historiography of the Scottish Reformation still remains somewhat undeveloped compared with the continental or English Reformation, and the cause must lie partly in the fact that its contributors have too often lacked that combination of historical and theological skills demanded by the subject. Dr Cowan is a Scottish historian. For all the merits of his scholarly and thorough volume, which fills so obvious a gap in the available literature, one is left wondering if justice can be done to the Scottish Reformation within a restrictedly Scottish historical perspective.

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