Editorial

This year marks at least two bicentenaries significant for Christianity in Scotland: one has been widely noted and celebrated, the other has passed with hardly a second glance.

David Livingstone, born on Friday 19 March 1813 in Blantyre by the Clyde, was again in the headlines this Spring. There were a number of points during the celebratory events where Livingstone's faith and Christian aspirations were muted—but no surprise there, really. Although longer articles on his life and legacy in the popular press could not wholly neglect his missionary endeavours, this aspect of his life certainly was not given prominence. The set of ten commemorative stamps released by the Royal Mail managed it, at any rate, with scenes of his life that celebrated exclusively his pioneering achievements. One would have no idea that Livingstone's African adventures arose not only out of the insatiable curiosity of the explorer, but from the convictions of a committed Christian.

Perhaps I am particularly sensitized to this dynamic. The reason I bear the name 'David' is because my father had a deep, even passionate connection with Livingstone. I well remember, back in my student days, standing at my father's side in Westminster Abbey. As he read the words, 'Brought by faithful hands over land and sea here rests David Livingstone, missionary...', the tears rolled down his cheeks, his spontaneous outpouring of emotion completely unselfconscious. Whatever might account for this sense of bonding my father—a Mennonite immigrant child of the Canadian prairies—had with the Victorian missionary, a large part must have been his perception (blissfully uninformed by 'critical' biography) of Livingstone as an exemplar of unreserved devotion to the cause of Christ.

Such sentiment is naturally difficult to find in serious studies of Livingstone's life. It is not that his Christianity is absent, so much as the scientific, geographical, and commercial interests which shaped much of his illustrious career dwarf attention to his faith. More than this, according to less sympathetic assessments, Livingstone's capitalist ideals—which held, as he thought, the key to the betterment not only of the Africa he knew so intimately, but of human society more broadly—proved caustic to his missionary activity. Infamously, Livingstone's evangelistic efforts resulted in a single convert, Sachele, 'a chief, who promptly got an ex-wife pregnant'[1] Livingstone himself doubted that he had made any converts at all.

---

[1] Tim Jeal, 'Dr. Livingstone, I Presume? The Victorian Explorer at 200', *The Daily Beast* (= Newsweek Online), 19 March 2013 <http://j.mp/Explorer200>.

An older assessment offers greater insight into Livingstone's faith. Mistakenly or otherwise, Livingstone was convinced that commerce would prove a vehicle for the advance of the gospel, and so he wrote from Africa to his family in July of 1850:

> If He in whose hand are the silver and gold only turns the tide that way, the enlightenment of the world will not be the work of missionaries: nor is it so very distant as a poor fellow like myself, enveloped in the thick darkness of heathenism and seeing so little progress made, is sometimes correspondingly disposed to think. Then let us pray that come it may, and come it will for a' that, when man and man the world o'er shall brithers be for a' that.[2]

While commemoration of Livingstone's birth drew national attention and a visit from a head of state, the 'other' bicentenary summoned no such grand occasions.

Nine weeks after Livingtone's birth, on Friday 21 May 1813 in Edinburgh, Robert Murray M'Cheyne was born. At least one superficial parallel exists between the two, beyond the proximity of their birthdays: a 'missionary spirit'. Livingstone remains one of the most famous missionaries of all. But M'Cheyne, the parish minister, felt this tug on his life, influenced in particular by David Brainerd's biography and Alexander Duff's words. As late as 1836, already at Larbert, he was willing to offer himself as a missionary to India. It was the same spirit, now under the conviction that God's chosen people continued to hold their place of significance before God, that impelled him to participate in the Mission of Inquiry to Palestine in 1839, despite ill-health and the responsibilities of his Dundee parish.

It is the contrasts, however, between the famous missionary-explorer and M'Cheyne that are more numerous and obvious. So, for example, they came from different social classes; belonged to different churches (Congregational; Church of Scotland) with all that entailed; had different domestic situations (married with children; bachelor); and contributed to strikingly different spheres of service and influence. At death, Livingstone's span of days doubled M'Cheyne's who died in 1843, less than eight weeks before the Disruption. He did not even manage to read once through the annual diary of Bible readings that continues in such widespread use today. He composed it for New Year, 1843, so that his 'flock'

Jeal's characteristic and critical hyperbole can be observed even in these few words.

[2] Cited by George Shepperson, 'David Livingstone 1813-1873: A Centenary Assessment', *The Geographical Journal*, 139/2 (1973), 205-19 (quotation from p. 210).

might all 'be feeding in the same portion of the green pasture at the same time'.[3]

Finally, while Livingstone acquired the reputation for participating in fractious relationships, M'Cheyne's friendships seem to have been warm and deep. Bonar describes how M'Cheyne 'used to warn his friends of whatever he apprehended they were in danger from'. Among the examples given is this one, in which M'Cheyne writes to a brother 'who had written to him despondingly about his people and the times'.[4] His reply has an almost poetic—perhaps prophetic—quality:

> I am sure there never was a time when the Spirit of God was more present in Scotland, and it does not become you to murmur in your tents, but rather to give thanks. Remember, we may grieve the Spirit as truly by not joyfully acknowledging His wonders as by not praying for Him. There is the clearest evidence that God is saving souls in Kilsyth, Dundee, Perth, Collace, Blairgowrie, Strathbogie, Ross-shire, Breadalbane, Kelso, Jedburgh, Ancrum; and surely it becomes us to say, 'I thank my God upon every remembrance of you.' Forgive my presumption; but I fear lest you hurt your own peace and usefulness in not praising God enough for the operation of His hands.

At a moment when some grumbling among churches in Scotland—evangelical ones, at any rate—might be viewed with some sympathy, M'Cheyne's more kingdom-orientated perspective is worth bearing in mind.

Meanwhile, between them Livingstone and M'Cheyne encourage us in different ways to ensure that both near and distant horizons stay in view, and to bear in mind that God is always doing more than we might think he is.

* * *

Sharp-eyed readers will note that the cover livery and design has changed from the 'new-millennium blue' format that adorned *SBET* from 2000-2012. (Those with especially long memories will note a number of resonances between this new design, and the one that was in use up to 1999.) This marks our new publishing relationship with Highland Theological College (UHI) which begins from this number. We remain grateful to friends at Rutherford House for many years of fruitful collaboration, as

[3] A. A. Bonar, *Memoir and Remains of the Rev. Robert Murray M'Cheyne* (rev. edn; Edinburgh and London: Oliphant Anderson & Ferrier, 1892), p. 619.

[4] Ibid., p. 131.

we look forward now to this new partnership with HTC with eager anticipation. A dedicated email address is available at HTC for those who wish to get in touch regarding subscriptions and related matters: sbet.htc@uhi.ac.uk.

David Reimer

CONTRIBUTORS IN THIS NUMBER

The first four articles originated as SETS 2012 Conference papers. The theme of the conference was 'A Godly Commonwealth? The Gospel and Scottish Identity'.

Dr Dewi Hughes is Theological Advisor for Tearfund

Revd Professor David Fergusson is Professor of Divinity in the University of Edinburgh, and Principal of New College, Edinburgh

Revd Dr Doug Gay is Lecturer in the School of Critical Studies, University of Glasgow, and Principal of Trinity College, Glasgow

Revd Dr Angus Morrison is Minister of Orwell and Portmoak Parish Church of Scotland

Russell Meek is Adjunct Instructor and PhD student at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

Dr K. Scott Oliphint is Professor of Apologetics and Systematic Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary

Making Theological Sense of Being Welsh: Celebrating Ethnicity and Culture as God's Global Family
Finlayson Memorial Lecture, 2012

Dewi Hughes

72 Ffordd Merthyr, Pontypridd, CF37 4DD
dewi.arwel@gmail.com

In the Oxford reader on ethnicity edited by John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith an *ethnie*[1] is defined as a type of human community that possesses the following elements:

1. A common proper name
2. A myth of common ancestry
3. Shared historical memories
4. Elements of a common culture—normally religion, customs or language
5. A link with a homeland
6. A sense of solidarity[2]

I have no doubt that I belong to an *ethnie*. It's name is Cymru [Wales]; it's ancestral roots are the Celtic peoples that occupied the islands now called Britain between 2500-3000 years ago; its story is populated by saints, princes and revivalists; its culture has been overwhelmingly Christian and its language Cymraeg [Welsh] until supplanted by English—or Wenglish—in the last 100 years; and its sense of solidarity is sometimes strong—especially when Cymru [Wales] play Lloegr [England] at rugby!

---

1 I think it unfortunate that in English thare is no noun, like the French *ethnie*, to describe an 'ethnic identity'. In Welsh we happily adopt English terms that have been derived from the classical languages. Since *ethnie* is derived from the Greek 'ethnos' I am happy to adopt it into Wenglish while suggesting that it might be a good idea to adopt it into English as well!

2 J. Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith, eds, *Ethnicity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 7.

Biblically *ethnies* are 'nations'. The table of nations (*goyim*) in Genesis 10 is clearly a table of ethnes and not modern nation states. And this Old Testament understanding is carried over into the New Testament where the nations (*ethnoi*/Gentiles) are generally the many different peoples ruled by the Roman state. Biblically and historically, therefore, there have always been more nations than states. The standard historical pattern has been for some nations to become more powerful and dominate and even destroy less powerful nations. This is the context for any theological reflection on ethnicity in general or Welsh ethnicity in particular.

For us in Cymru we have no option but to think of the significance of our nationhood in the context of the impact on us of our dominant neighbour, England. But through my work with Tearfund I came to see, firstly, that belonging to a minority nation in states that tended to be dominated by more powerful and numerous nations was very common. Secondly, I became convinced that there is a link between being a national minority and poverty. Then, thirdly, I saw that the neglect of a biblical understanding of nationhood has a detrimental impact on the mission of the church.

The worst example of a link between poverty and identity and the ethnic blindness of churches struck me during a visit to Ghana in 2004. I was teaching an intensive course in Christian development as part of an MTh in Applied Theology at the Ghana Baptist Seminary, Kumasi. A couple of days into the course a Southern Baptist couple that had worked for many years in the North of Ghana came to see me because they had heard that I was interested in ethnic identity. By that time I had done some work on ethnic identity for Tearfund and published a book entitled *Castrating Culture: A Christian Perspective on Ethnic Identity from the Margins*.[3] The missionaries told me about their work in the North and their continuing work with the same people that were migrating in significant numbers to Kumasi. Among those that were migrating were a large number of very young women. These women were very vulnerable and were being exploited dreadfully. The Americans were working hard to minister to these women but ministers and members of the evangelical Baptist churches in Kumasi were very reluctant to support them. I asked them whether they would be willing to arrange a walk for the ministers I was teaching through the slum (zongo) where they worked and they were delighted. On the visit I discovered that the slum was very close to the largest Baptist church in Kumasi. This church had many social programmes but was doing nothing to reach out to one of the worst slums that I have ever encountered. I walked through that horrible slum with

[3] Now re-published as *Ethnic Identity from the Margins: A Christian Perspective* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2012).

one of the leading Baptist pastors in Kumasi and was amazed when he said to me that he had no idea that people lived like this in his city! I wondered why it was that this particular slum was neglected? Why was it that the people who lived there were invisible to the good evangelical Baptists on the hill above them? The only reason I could think of—that was confirmed by the American missionaries—was that the slum dwellers belonged to a Northern *ethnie* that were considered inferior by the proud Asante people of Kumasi. They also happen to be Muslim.

This experience—and many others—confirmed my conviction that the evangelical missions and development community is in dire need of a theology of ethnic identity or nationhood. My interest in this issue eventually led to a request to facilitate discussion of it as one of the key issues facing the church at the Lausanne Congress in Cape Town in October 2010. A significant number of delegates did engage but my overall impression was, and is, that there is still a reluctance to be serious about this issue. One possible reason for this is the fact that most evangelical leaders belong to big and powerful *ethnies* or to intellectual and political elites heavily influenced by them. The reaction of English evangelical leaders to my insistence on making it very clear that I'm Welsh illustrates this point. The reaction ranges from amusement—leading to mockery—through puzzlement to frustration and even hostility. I can understand why an elephant finds it very difficult to hear a mouse in its path shouting as loudly as it can that he is about to be trampled to death! But I have found that even elephants can hear the voice of a mouse, and when they do they understand that the victims of ethnic oppression have a point. They can see that ethnicity raises many issues of righteousness/justice that evangelical Christians need to take on board if they are to express the reconciling love of God in our broken world.

MAKING THEOLOGICAL SENSE OF BEING WELSH

Living as we do in Cymru [Wales] under the dominant and often dominating shadow of our more powerful neighbour, Lloegr [England] and also under the dominant influence of the Christian faith it is not surprising that some of our church leaders have thought theologically about ethnic identity and nationhood. We will consider the way in which three church leaders have justified biblically and theologically their efforts to preserve the distinctive identity of the Cymry [the Welsh].[4] These three

[4] And to confirm the stereotypical view of the Welsh each theologian is a 'Jones'!

theologians, whose work spans three centuries, will be placed in their historical context because like all theology, theirs is contextual.

In Cymru the issue of language has driven thinking about nationhood. It is the historical strength and survival of the language that has preserved for us, more than any other factor, a strong sense of separate identity from our more powerful and numerous English neighbours.

1. GRIFFITH JONES, LLANDDOWROR (1683-1761)[5]

Griffith Jones, who was an Anglican cleric, made an enormous contribution to making Wales a literate people—in Welsh. When he became responsible for the local SPCK[6] school on becoming vicar of Lacharn in 1709, he soon realized that the English medium education on offer in the school was not very effective for his monoglot Welsh pupils. Putting the gospel imperative first, he realized that a lot more Welsh people could be taught to read the Bible much more quickly if teaching was done through the medium of Welsh. So, he decided to train teachers at Llanddowror, where he had become rector in 1719, and send them out to open short term 'schools'. These schools were held for three months between September and May, which was a quieter time in the farming year, and both adults and children were able to attend. The aims of these 'circulating' schools were limited: to teach the pupils to read the Bible and to say the Creed. Jones kept meticulous records of his schools, so we know from his last report of the work published just before he died in 1761 that his Circulating Welsh Schools movement had been responsible for running 3,495 schools in which around 158,000 pupils had had the opportunity to learn to read the Welsh Bible.

It is not surprising that his mother-tongue educational policy was questioned by some of his supporters. After all since the 1530s the English parliament had made English the official language of Wales, so it seemed to make no sense to these supporters to educate people in it. In October 1739, Griffith Jones published a letter defending his policy in which he made clear that his motivation was biblical and theological. The two biblical passages to which he turned to make his theological case were the Tower of Babel story in Genesis 11 and the account of the Gift of Tongues in Acts 2. He argued that the first passage proved that it is God's will that there should be many languages in the world. He also argued that God's purpose in bringing about a multi-lingual world was to thwart the tyr-

[5] For a brief biography see the *Dictionary of Welsh Biography* online article: <http://j.mp/DWB1683Jones> [last accessed 18 May 2013].

[6] Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge.

anny of a one-world government that is far more conceivable in a world in which only one language is spoken. Turning to Acts 2, he argued that the gift of tongues is not a reversal of God's action in Babel because the gift was given to the apostles and not to the people that heard their teaching. Thus, the diversity of languages was affirmed alongside the universality of the gospel message. There is no mention of 'nation' in Griffith Jones' letter but a strong affirmation that the difference between peoples that is highlighted by difference in language in different parts of the earth is God's will. To question his policy of teaching Welsh-speaking people in Welsh was, therefore, to question God's wisdom![7]

Griffith Jones was certainly not a 'nationalist' in the modern sense. He was quite content that Wales was being governed from London and that a king or queen of England was head of state. But in his mind that was not incompatible with the Welsh preserving and enhancing their own cultural identity within the territory that they had traditionally occupied.

By 1739 the Spirit of God was blowing strongly in Wales and continued to do so for the next 150 years. This was one of the main reasons for the success of Griffith Jones' movement, because the Methodist Revival created an ever-increasing number of converts that wanted to read the Bible. By the end of the 18th century, Griffith Jones' mantle had fallen on Thomas Charles (1755-1814) of Bala best known outside Wales for his key contribution to founding the British and Foreign Bible Society in 1804. One of the first acts of the Bible Society was to publish 20,000 Welsh Bibles and by 1855 it had published 933,222 Bibles and New Testaments in Welsh. It was a fair claim that in 1850 there was no nation on earth as well supplied with the Holy Scriptures as Wales and the Welsh-speaking identity of the Welsh seemed rock solid.

But dark clouds were gathering. The close proximity of coal and iron ore meant that the South Wales valleys became one of the centres of the industrial revolution. This meant immigration from England and beyond and the increasing need for people educated in something more than the Bible. At the same time the English Empire continued to expand. More and more educated people were needed to sustain it. When these developments were coupled with the growth of ideological English nationalism forces were set in train that almost proved fatal for the Welsh language.

---

[7] Jones also used the moral argument, that it was advantageous for Welsh people to remain monoglot Welsh because of the many immoral books that would be available to them if they learnt to read English, and the intellectual argument, that it was the common opinion of the great scholars of his age that Welsh was worth preserving.

One manifestation of the emerging English nationalism was the onslaught on Welsh medium education. I will focus on two key events.

1. The Treason of the Blue Books. This is what I wrote about this in *Castrating Culture*:[8]

> In 1846 the Education Committee of the British government… commissioned a report on the state of education in Wales. Three young English barristers were appointed to do the work and after three month or so in Wales staying with local gentry, who were thoroughly Anglicized, and with Anglican clergy, many of whom were very antagonistic towards Nonconformists, they presented their massive report of over 1200 pages in three folio volumes bound in blue boards. The commissioners were undoubtedly very able men and their work does present a very thorough review of the state of education in Wales in 1846, albeit from the perspective of English imperialists who delighted in expressing their contempt of Welsh. The following extract from the report by commissioner J. C. Symons is a good example of its general approach:
>
> 'The Welsh language is a vast drawback to Wales, and a manifold barrier to the moral progress and commercial prosperity of the people. It is not easy to over-estimate its evil effects.... It dissevers the people from intercourse which would greatly advance their civilization, and bars the access of improving knowledge to their minds. As a proof of this, there is no Welsh literature worthy of the name.'[9]

Here is the authentic voice of ideological nationalism in all its glory! We English are far superior to you Welsh in every way and the sooner you realize it and become English the better it will be for you—after all you have nothing in your language that is worth preserving. Of course that we have nothing worth preserving is an ignorant assumption because neither Symons nor his fellow commissioners could read a word of Welsh!

2. Foster's Education Act 1970. The report of 1846 was the first significant move on the part of the English government to make education in Wales serve the purpose of ideological nationalism. In Foster's Education Act of 1870 the English state took a firm grip of primary education and by 1880 primary education in English only became compulsory in schools in Wales. This was the era of the infamous 'Welsh Not' when pupils heard speaking Welsh had a piece of wood engraved with WN hung around

---

8 Dewi Hughes, *Castrating Culture: A Christian Perspective on Ethnic Identity from the Margins* (Carlisle: Paternoster), pp. 99-100.

9 *Reports of the Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of Education in Wales*, (London:HMSO, 1848), pp. 309-10.

their necks. They then had to look out for any other pupil caught speaking Welsh so that they could pass the 'Welsh Not' on to them because the pupil wearing it at the end of the day was severely beaten.

Added to this children were subjected to intense nationalistic propaganda in the textbooks that were used. Tudur Jones summarizes the propaganda of a book entitled *The Citizen Reader* that was used in the schools of Blaenau Ffestiniog in the 1890s. Children were encouraged to look at a world map and note the extent of the British Empire. In every part of the world they were encouraged to realize 'there are countrymen…who read the same English Bible that we read…'. The children were told to rejoice at their good fortune because 'England was an island' easily defended against foreign invaders—no mention of Scotland and Wales here or anywhere else in the book! A lot is said about parliament, the Crown, the importance of keeping the law and the imperial heroes of places like Lucknow and Khartoum and ends with Nelson's signal that 'England expects every man will do his duty'. The preface to what Tudur Jones calls 'an arrogant and virulent piece of English nationalistic propaganda' was provided by W.E Foster after whom the Education Act of 1870 was named.[10]

2. R. AMBROSE JONES/EMRYS AP IWAN (1851-1906)

This is the context in which a number of Welsh church leaders tried to describe a more biblical and theological view of nationhood in the second half of the 19th century. The Calvinistic Methodist minister R. Ambrose Jones (known as Emrys ap Iwan)[11] is now seen as a significant figure in the development of a view of nationhood that laid the intellectual foundations for the formation of a Welsh 'nationalist' movement in Wales that led to the formation of Plaid Genedlaethol Cymru in 1925. His ministerial career was somewhat unusual. Like many others he left school early, and in his case worked as a messenger for a clothes shop in Liverpool and as a gardener in his home area of Abergele before going on to the theological seminary in Bala. He spent a short time after seminary as a teacher but in 1874 he went to Lausanne for 18 months to teach English and to learn French and German. Then in 1877 he spent some months in Heidelberg, Bonn, and Giessen to perfect his German. He became a Francophile who admired the work of Pascal and Paul-Louis Courier in particular. As an

[10] R. Tudur Jones, *The Desire of Nations*, (Llandybie: Christopher Davies, 1974), pp. 154-155

[11] As a protest against anglicization some were adopting a Welsh form of their names by the end of the 19th century. Emrys is the Welsh form of Ambrose and the 'ap Iwan' meaning 'the son of Iwan' reflects a traditional Welsh practice of naming.

author he deliberately modelled himself on Courier so that his literary output is entirely made up of short pieces. He was ordained a Calvinistic Methodist minister in 1883 and was faithful to the evangelical tradition of his denomination that was enriched by his knowledge of European Protestantism and Catholicism.[12] So, Emrys ap Iwan did not write a systematic theological treatises on nationhood but he did deal with the issue at some length in his published sermons and in particular in a sermon on Paul's address to the Areopagus.[13]

The section on nationhood comes in his observations on Acts 17:26-27. He begins his discussion with an obvious point: 'Remember that the God who made men also ordained nations.' He does not expound precisely what he means by 'ordain', which is a pity because the concept of divine ordination or destiny was so crucial to the English nationalism that he was seeking to challenge. In coming to apply what he has drawn from the text later in the sermon he uses the word 'make' rather than 'ordain'. But here again there is no indication as to how God 'makes' or 'ordains' nations. The conclusion that ap Iwan draws from Paul's statement is that 'to annihilate a nation is next to the tragedy of annihilating humankind. And that annihilating a nation's language is next to the tragedy of annihilating the nation, because a nation ceases to be a nation…when it loses its language.' He compares a nation that does not foster its language to an individual committing suicide. Both suffer from 'weakness of mind' because self-preservation, he argues, is of the essence of a healthy mind.

He then focuses on the unity of the human race from which a diversity of nations has emerged. 'It is fitting,' he writes, 'that God has revealed to us that every nation of men has been made of one blood, in order to show that it is rational for men to sympathize with each other, and to love each other as close relatives, without making any distinction in this matter between Jew and Greek, black and white or those that are far or near.' Then he adds: 'But it is fitting that God has revealed to us at the same time that he made men nations as well.'

Why then, he asks, did God divide men into nations? Like many contemporary thinkers on nationhood he argues, firstly, that national diversity is good because it adds to the cumulative wisdom of the human race. Secondly, he focuses on Paul's more religious reason—'so that they would seek [the Lord]…' (Acts 17:27). This leads ap Iwan to discuss the most advantageous conditions under which nations can seek God. 'It is easier,'

---

[12] See the *Dictionary of Welsh Biography* online article: <http://j.mp/DWB-1848Jones> [last accessed 18 May 2013].

[13] Emrys ap Iwan, 'Y ddysc newydd a hen', from *Homiliau*, 3rd edn (Dinbych: Gee a'i Fab), pp. 41-56.

he claims, 'for a free and independent nation dwelling peacefully in its own land to find God than either a subject or conquering nation.' The barrier to a subject nation seeking God is that it 'tends to become servile, imitative [and] indifferent intellectually, too cowardly to think for itself, and too cowardly to speak the truth; and when such a nation seeks God it seeks him in order to be indulged and fussed by him and not in order to exalt his name through good works.' Since Wales/Cymru was a subject nation this is clearly ap Iwan's assessment of the Welsh nation at the end of the 19th century!

He then turns to the conquering nation: 'The dangers of a conquering nation are different. When a kingdom becomes a conquering empire it becomes proud, its morals deteriorate, it forgets God its Maker, it stirs up the anger of other nations, and it does something or other to ensure its own fall.' The conquering nation at the forefront of his mind he calls 'Britain' and not 'England' because as a subject nation Wales he believed was meekly serving the interests of the British Empire. What he says about the British Empire in 1900 was brave and prophetic even if it was a voice crying in the wilderness.

> [I]t is not with money spent on missionaries and Bibles that it can atone for the injury done to other nations. If [Britain] wants to see the nation's seeking the Christian's God it will need to restore every country that it stole to its rightful owners, and repent in dust and ashes for the rivers of innocent blood spilt to feed it's lust. Is it not the injustice of this country, more than any other country, that is the reason that Christianity has hardly made any progress in the last 100 years in India and China? And is this not the reason why the name of Christianity has become a swearword and a curse in many other countries? Before the word of the Lord can spread rapidly and be honored (1 Thes. 3:1) killing and stealing in the name of Jesus must stop; the enslaving of nations must end, and become as objectionable in our eyes as enslaving individuals. It is true that God allows a strong nation to lord it over a weak nation; but God does not approve of everything that he allows; and neither should we approve of it. God's purpose and will is for every nation to be sovereign in its own land; and for its laws to be administered and the gospel preached in its own language.[14]

The idea that a nation should be sovereign in its own land does seem to imply at least a measure of political independence but Emrys ap Iwan does not spell this out. There were many in the Liberal and emerging Labour

[14] Emrys ap Iwan, *Homiliau*, op. cit. pp. 50-53. He returns to many of the themes of this sermon in a number of other sermons. See Emrys ap Iwan, *Homiliau*, ail gyfres [second series], (Dinbych: Gee a'i Fab, 1909), pp. 11-14, 52, 59-63, 156-157.

Party in Wales at the beginning of the 20th century that did. There was a strong nationalist group of Welsh Liberals at this time that included David Lloyd George but the lure of position and wealth that they were offered as servants of English ideological nationalism overcame them. Lloyd George may have been the only Welsh speaker to occupy Number 10 Downing Street but he did so not as an advocate of the nation that nurtured him but as a faithful servant of the British Empire. The Labour Party likewise soon betrayed its 'nationalist' Welsh members and became an English nationalist movement. It was left to a small group of Nonconformist ministers and academics to form Plaid Genedlaethol Cymru [The Nationalist Party of Wales] in 1925.

3. R TUDUR JONES (1921-1998)[15]

Given the number of ministers that have supported it from the beginning it is not surprising that the Nationalist Party of Wales[16] has had some able theological advocates. The ablest without a doubt was R Tudur Jones (1921-1998). From 1950 to 1988 he was based as tutor and then, from 1965, as Principal at the Congregational College linked to the Faculty of Theology at the University College of North Wales, Bangor.

Tudur Jones was a political activist as well as an academic theologian. He served as president of Plaid Cymru and stood as a parliamentary candidate for Anglesey on two occasions. He was also a prolific journalist editing the Welsh and then the English weekly papers of Plaid Cymru for 21 years and contributing articles for the weekly Welsh newspaper *Y Cymro* for many years. This social activity was not strange fire for a theologian in the Reformed tradition. As a theologian who was familiar with Kuyper from early in his career, and became familiar with the Dutch school inspired by Dooyweerd in the 60s, his social activism—and his nationalism—was inspired by his Reformed view of culture and the victory of Christ.

The ethnie/nation in his Reformed view of culture. It is a part of the dignity of human beings created in the image of God that they 'subdue the earth'. We were created to tame the ground, animals, sounds—and social relationships. It is in the context of man's creation of social relationships

[15] For this section on R Tudur Jones I have made extensive use of a recent study of his nationalism by Sion Rhys Llwyd, 'Cenedlaetholdeb R Tudur Jones yn ei gyd-destun hanesyddol a diwinyddol' ['The Nationalism of R Tudur Jones in its historical and theological context'] (unpublished doctoral thesis, Bangor University, 2011).

[16] Now known as Plaid Cymru/The Party of Wales.

that Tudur Jones clarifies what is meant by nations being ordained or made by God. Thinking about nationhood after ideological nationalism had been seen in all its hateful glory in Nazi Germany he was eager to block any route to claiming that any nation was divinely ordained or created. 'God did not create nations,' he states unequivocally, 'God created man and man formed nations.'[17] Nations are human constructs.

Tudur Jones was also convinced that within the overarching purpose of God, even in a world deeply impacted by sin, nations are good human constructs. The problem of the nations is not their existence but the fact that some nations succumb to the sin first manifested in Babel. Babel is the archetypal attempt to create a centre of quasi-divine power on earth that demands the subjugation of its citizens and other nations to its lust for self-aggrandizement. Tudur Jones calls this sinful tendency ideological or monocentric nationalism.

I believe that he makes an unanswerable case that England has been deeply stricken by the Babel syndrome and that he was right to focus so much of his thinking on nationalism on English ideological nationalism and its destructive impact on the Welsh and other nations in the UK and beyond. The key issue for nations/ethnes is how to be just in their relationships.

The nations and the victory of Christ? Firstly, it justifies Christian action with regard to the nations. The exaltation of our risen Lord to the position of the highest authority over all of creation means that we must claim every square inch of the created order, including the destiny of nations, for him.[18] Since nations figure prominently as the focus of blessing in the history of redemption from the call of Abraham to the vision of the new creation, acting to ensure the blessing of nations in the kingdom of the exalted Christ is hardly optional.

Secondly, the victory of Christ determines the nature of our Christian action with regard to the nations. Fundamental in this context is the need to make disciples of Jesus from all nations. Throughout his career Tudur Jones saw gospel proclamation as his prime calling that was fulfilled by a very active preaching ministry throughout Wales. In the political context his Christian action was focused above all else on exposing the destructive effects of English ideological nationalism on the Welsh nation. He never tires of showing how English nationalism has set up all sorts of

[17] Sion Rhys Llwyd, 'Cenedlaetholdeb R Tudur Jones, p. 104 quoting R. Tudur Jones, 'Christian Nationalism', in *This Land and People*, ed. by P.H. Ballard and D.H. Jones (Caerdydd: Collegiate Centre of Theology, 1979), p. 76.

[18] See R. Tudur Jones: 'Christian Nationalism', in *This Land and People*, p. 95.

mechanisms to annihilate the Welsh nation and assimilate the Welsh into the English nation. Now if God in Christ is in the business of blessing nations there is no way in which annihilation can be seen as a blessing! The forces of destruction must be resisted and the development of democratic government gives Christians an opportunity to do this in the political sphere, so that the bottom line of Christian resistance now comes long before the choice between Christ or Caesar. However, Christians resist injustice in the spirit and strength of their exalted Lord:

> [Jesus] does not console His followers with the thought that they will be able to love one another in some distant world where there will be no thieves, wars, slanderers or hypocrites. On the contrary, He speaks of this present world with all its evils and sin, and asks His followers to love their enemies, to forgive their persecutors, to abstain even from just retribution, and to abstain from resisting evil. Nor are the children of light to lord it over one another, but rather are they by their eagerness to serve to invert the world's normal method of deciding precedence.[19]

For Tudur Jones 'resisting evil' meant answering the unjust violence of the state with violence. He believed that pacifist resistance was the only option for those who wanted to resist an unjust state in the way of Christ. This explains the strong support he gave to the pacifist direct action of the Welsh Language Society from 1962 on. It also explains why the Society opted for pacifist resistance because many of its leaders from the beginning until the present have been influenced by Tudur Jones.

The significance of the nations in God's purpose also led Tudur Jones to reject the modern concept that the state has precedence over the nation. It is not the state that should define the nation but the nation the state. So, from what he would consider his biblical perspective there is a British state but there is no such thing as a British nation. Britain is made up of at least four nations and the British state should exist to serve the well being of all four nations, and not as a means to absorb three of the nations into an English state as has been the case in the history of the British Isles. His study of modern history also led him to the conclusion that a modern state was incapable of serving the interests of more than one nation. This is why he became a strong advocate of political independence for Wales and as such a very active member of Plaid Genedlaethol Cymru.

---

[19] R. Tudur Jones, 'The Christian Doctrine of the State', *Congregational Quarterly*, 31/4 (1953), 316.

CONCLUSION

As Scotland considers independence and the church continues to think about its global mission the following points from our attempts to make theological sense of being Welsh may be worthy of further consideration:

1. It is a part of God's plan for human beings that they should form themselves into *ethnies*/nations—this special type of human community bigger than family, clan or tribe that is characterized by a common name, ancestors, history, culture, territory and a sense of solidarity. Nations may be human constructs but they are so within God's overall plan for the good of humanity.

2. The appearance, place and destiny of these nations are ultimately in God's hands but his desire is to bless them. Therefore, we should not do anything that will lead to the destruction of nations but to their blessing.

3. The concept of the nation-state that developed in the 19th century and that in its ideological nationalist manifestation led to the oppression of many nations is contrary to the biblical view of nationhood.

4. The story of the way in which the English state deliberately tried to annihilate the Welsh nation in the 19th century is a powerful illustration of the injustice perpetrated by ideological nationalism in control of a modern nation-state.

5. A strong biblical case can be made that the state should exist to serve the nation rather than vice versa. If state policy is having a destructive effect on any nation then the action of that state can justifiably be claimed to be unjust and, as such, contrary to God's will.

6. Work needs to be done urgently on whether it is possible for a modern nation-state to serve more than one nation. The record in the UK has not been good, to say the least, while the attempt to establish modern nation-states in multi-national post-colonial countries has been disastrous. In Africa in particular the legacy of ideological nationalism remains in states that are torn apart continually by national/ethnic rivalry.

7. In the context of missions we must value language as a crucial element of a people's ethnic identity. Evangelical Protestant missions have been good at doing this but have been slow to appreciate that by valuing a people's mother tongue, especially through Bible translation, we strengthen a people's sense of identity. Without a different philosophy of the state to the one that still prevails in post-colonial nations this is likely to exasperate the conflicts in such states.

In the mid 90s Tearfund supported the Association of Quechua Evangelical Churches of the Jungle of Peru, led by Pastor Artidoro Tuanama, to train leaders in encouraging native liturgy and helping the community

to rediscover its culture. In the weighing scales of the nations this little nation would struggle to move the dial, but to the God who has committed himself to bless the nations they are precious. Artidoro's words in a Tearfund report are a powerful plea that they, and many nations like them, should be precious to us as well:

> We simply want to take our place as indigenous and native Quechua people, understanding and living out the gospel. We assume our identity without shame, retaliation or indignation against those who have caused harm to our past and castrated our culture.[20]

[20] *Update File Peru*, No. 24, (London: Tearfund, June 1996), p. 1.

Theology and Scottish National Identity

David Fergusson

School of Divinity, New College, Mound Place, Edinburgh EH1 2LX
David.Fergusson@ed.ac.uk

1. CELEBRATING THE SCOTTISH REFORMATION BACKWARDS TO 1960

The 450th anniversary of the Reformation in this country was marked by a number of events at the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, several conferences and a moving celebration at St Giles that included representatives of other churches and faiths. A former Moderator, Dr John Miller, preached at that service and offered a perceptive and measured assessment of the Scottish Reformation from the perspective of the Kirk. The singing of the metrical Psalms, especially in some of their earliest forms, was one of the most inspiring features of the celebration.

The dominant political theme of the anniversary celebrations, however, was that the Reformation had contributed positively to Scottish society through the educational system that it spawned. In particular, through the attainment of high adult literacy rates, the educational programme of the Kirk facilitated the great achievements of the Scottish Enlightenment in the 18th century. This was generously acclaimed by Tom Devine writing in *Life and Work* and in other publications.[1] Devine of course is the leading Scottish historian of our day and he is someone who describes himself as a 'cultural Catholic'. In much of what was subsequently said by the Moderator in 2010 and at the special Sunday evening service of commemoration at the Assembly, this refrain was heard many times again. The Reformation had given Scotland an educational system of which it could be proud. Building on earlier medieval ideals, it had promoted the work of our schools and universities around the country, advocating a system of comprehensive education. Here at least was something everyone could celebrate and of which we need not be embarrassed.

This reception of the Scottish Reformation in 2010 raises several questions. Was the Reformation not primarily a theological movement intent on recovering the gospel in the life of the church, partly through a recovery of the Pauline doctrine of justification and a commitment to place the authority of the Bible over and if necessary against that of church tradition? The Reformers sought the renewal of church and society accord-

[1] E.g. Tom Devine, in *Life and Work* (2010), 11–13.

ing to the Word of God. They aimed at a godly commonwealth in which church and state were bound together in a close partnership, each fulfilling a divine mandate in its province and both together working to the glory and obedience of God. Education was a feature of this movement but this was largely directed to the reading of Scripture in the vernacular. It did not aim at secular progress although it was not antipathetic to this. The Reformers indeed would have been deeply troubled by the more deistic inclinations of the leading moderates such as Hutcheson, Robertson, Blair and Reid, all Presbyterian clergy who ranked amongst the leading Enlightenment scholars of the 18th century. So why make so much of this dotted line connecting the Reformation to the Enlightenment? The answer must be that this narrative enables one to appropriate the gains of the Reformation for a more inclusive vision of Scottish society. Education is an ideal of other churches and faiths, as well as of humanism. Insofar as the Reformation can be enlisted for this cause, it can be celebrated for its civic contribution even while recognising its religious dimension.

Contrast this with the 400th anniversary celebration of the Reformation in 1960. This took place at the beginning of a decade which witnessed that sudden and rapid process of secularization which in many ways is still with us, at least as far as the decline of the national church is concerned. In 1960, nobody spoke about the Scottish Enlightenment. Why was that? The reason is that the term was not invented until the 1970s, a sign that the signification of Scottishishness itself is a fluid activity and that recent constructions of our cultural identity have tended to eschew religion.

The 1960 celebrations were impressive in many ways—there was a flurry of popular books based on serious scholarship. These were devoted to studying John Knox, the Reformed churches, and the wider history of the Kirk. The Queen spoke at the General Assembly, the first monarch to do so since her ancestor James VI, son of Mary Queen of Scots. She described the Kirk as the national church of Scotland and celebrated its inclusiveness and public contribution. The Moderator was Principal Burleigh, Professor of Ecclesiastical History at New College. He gave a closing address to the Assembly which still repays study. The Reformers, he insists, did not create a new church. They belonged to the one catholic church which they sought to reform within the realm of Scotland. 'The Reformers aimed at National Reformation which they were persuaded would ensue from a Reformation of the Church of Scotland, the Kirk of God within the realm.'[2]At the same time, Burleigh insisted that the Reformation drew attention to the importance of the local congregation, for

[2] *Life and Work* (1960), p. 174.

this was where the marks of the church—preaching, sacramental administration and godly discipline—were most apparent. We can return to this point later because it affords a relevant reflection for the presence and mission of a church today. In a society in which the Kirk has ceased to be the dominant civic institution, the local congregation can still flourish and attest the gospel even when it expresses the faith of a minority.

Other features of the 400th anniversary celebrations included a strong commitment to the democratic and egalitarian nature of Scottish Presbyterianism and a residual sense that Roman Catholicism remained a foreign religion. 'Romanism' indeed was a term that continued to be used frequently in 1960, two years prior to Vatican II. The Principal of Aberdeen University, Sir Thomas Taylor, an elder of the Kirk, is quoted. 'If Scotland had fallen England would have followed and the whole history of Europe would have been changed. The Inquisition might have been found in the streets of Edinburgh. One man saved Scotland—John Knox.'[3]

In the years prior to 1960, we should also recall that the Church of Scotland rejected the so-called 'Bishops Report' which would have introduced bishops into presbyteries, thus paving the way for a union of the Church of Scotland with the Church of England. This episode requires further historical investigation, but it is clear that a decisive factor in the defeat of these proposals was the role played by the *Scottish Daily Express*, then the best-selling paper in the land.[4] Arguing that bishops were an English and Erastian form of church government fundamentally at odds with the more Scottish and egalitarian Presbyterian order, the *Scottish Daily Express* persuaded many that the sacrifices of the Reformers and covenanters had served the nation well. These should not be overturned by a misplaced ecumenical enthusiasm for an alien form of church polity. This episode reveals two features of the articulation of Scottish identity at the time. The first is that Scottishness is closely associated with a form of Protestantism. The country continues to display a monolithic religious identity that reflects a national character which has evolved over several centuries. Secondly, this identity could be happily expressed within the United Kingdom. The *Scottish Daily Express* of course was a staunchly unionist newspaper and affirmed a distinctive Scottish identity within the British nation. We should also recall that the last time the Conservative and Unionist Party held a majority of seats in Scotland was at the 1955 General Election, the high watermark of conservative politics coinciding with the peaking of Kirk membership at 1.32m. (In 1955, the Con-

3 *Life and Work* (1960), p. 268.

4 See the account in Harry Reid, *Deadline: The Story of the Scottish Press* (Edinburgh: St Andrew Press, 2006).

servatives secured 36 out of 72 seats in Scotland with 50.1% of the popular vote.) So up until 1960, Scottishness tended for many to be associated with being Protestant or more particularly Presbyterian, this taking place within the context of a commitment to the United Kingdom, itself a Protestant state.

2. HISTORICAL SOUNDINGS

In what follows, I shall offer some historical and theological observations on the religious construction of Scottishness. Although these are not intended as a comprehensive treatment of religion and Scottish national identity, they may help to expand and qualify the aforementioned observations.

(i) Prior to the Reformation, we find ways in which Catholic Christianity reinforces a sense of Scottish identity. The Declaration of Arbroath (1320) had fused religious and political aspirations by comparing Bruce with biblical figures such as Joshua or Judas Maccabaeus, political leaders who had been raised by God to liberate their people. In the 15th century, we find the temporal rule of the Scottish monarch aligned with the spiritual rule of the bishops and the Pope. This partnership of crown and church is apparent in the foundation of the three medieval universities in St Andrews, Glasgow and Aberdeen. (Edinburgh of course is a modern civic institution.) Other features of Scottish religious identity included devotion to national saints (e.g. Columba) and pilgrimages to their shrines. So the notion that Scotland may in part be defined by its particular expression of Christianity is already present long before the 16th century Reformation.[5] In some ways, the recent retrieval of Celtic Christianity can be seen as an attempt to recover an indigenous Scottish tradition that is owned by both Catholics and Protestants. Despite questions about its historical provenance and distinctive theological identity, Celtic Christianity may still serve some ecumenical purpose in its celebration of Columba, missionary to Scotland.

Nevertheless, both before and after 1560, there were more secular ways of constructing Scottish identity. Michael Lynch has pointed to the significance of the legal system, the practice of map making, the transmission of medieval epics of Wallace and Bruce, and the writing of Scottish history itself as multiple attempts to develop a sense of Scottishness.[6]

---

5 See for example William F. Storrar, *Scottish Identity: A Christian Vision* (Edinburgh: Handsel, 1990), and William Ferguson, *The Identity of the Scottish Nation: A Historic Quest* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998).

6 See Michael Lynch, 'A Nation Born Again? Scottish Identity in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries' in *Image and Identity: The Making and Re-Mak-*

(ii) The Reformation itself is a complex phenomenon in relation to Scotland's national identity. In significant respects, it is a European and British movement. Knox had ministered to English exiles in Geneva. With his associates, he imported the theology of Bucer, Calvin, and Bullinger through the Scots Confession. The Protestant movement succeeded against a Catholic monarch in part through the support of the English crown. The Bible that was read in Scotland was the Geneva Bible, an English not a Scots translation. Hence the Reformation contributed significantly to the decline of Scots as a literary language. My colleague Jane Dawson, who is writing a new biography of John Knox, claims that he can be enlisted for the causes of unionism, independence, or devo max depending on what you take from him. In this respect, he is a politically ambivalent figure who does not easily fit modern stereotypes. Nevertheless, as the Reformation proceeds in Scotland we can discern the development of an identity that is both political and religious. This differentiates Scotland as a nation, albeit within a United Kingdom following the union of crowns in 1603. Roger Mason has written:

> In terms of imagining Scotland…one can say with some certainty that the fundamental objective of the Scottish kirk was the creation of a godly commonwealth ruled by a godly prince in accordance with the law of God.[7]

This idea runs deep in the political theology of the covenanters. By virtue of the Reformation in 1560, Scotland was a covenanted nation which had entered into a pact with God. Or, to put it another way, Scotland had been singled out by divine providence to play a distinctive role amongst the nations. This determined all areas of national life whether secular or religious. Equations of Scotland with Old Testament Israel are apparent in the writings of many leading Scottish divines of the 17th century. In 1634, Samuel Rutherford could write, 'Now, O Scotland, God be thanked, thy name is in the Bible'.[8]

The vision of a godly commonwealth has been the cause of much celebration with respect to its ideals of comprehensive education, poor relief and the accountability of political rulers to the law of God. This is apparent in the *First Book of Discipline* in 1560, its sequel in 1578, and other foundational documents of the Reformation. From our late modern perspective, however, it can also be seen to generate several problems. First,

---

ing of Scotland through the Ages, ed. by Dauvit Broun, R. J. Finlay and Michael Lynch (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1998), pp. 82–104.

7 Roger Mason, *Imagining Scotland: Scottish Political Thought and the Problem of Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 12.

8 Ibid., p. 13.

there is the theological difficulty in reading Scotland as a new Israel. This political exceptionalism is not warranted by Scripture. There is only one Israel, chosen by God. Much of its history is characterised in any case by political failure and a very ambivalent reading of the authority of the earthly monarch. In the New Testament, we find little warrant for constructing the church as a political entity that will take its place alongside other empires, nations and secular regimes. If anything, there is now a clearer differentiation of the secular and the religious. The church is an international movement that flourishes within a political order that is under the law of God. But it does not require a godly prince to legislate in favour of the church. Even more remote is the notion of a nation state that is peculiarly blessed by God as a latter day chosen people. To perceive one's own country as a new Israel, another covenant nation raised up in human history by God, is to risk distorting the significance of the only Israel and the church.

A second and related difficulty concerns religious diversity. The vision of the godly commonwealth seems to assume that there is only one church in the realm to which all of its citizens belong. This is a feature shared with medieval Christendom. By virtue of birth, each child is baptized into the church and thereafter is under its discipline. Hooker's celebrated remark that every member of the commonwealth is a member of the Church of England (and vice-versa) might equally well have applied to Scotland and its Kirk. Within this ideal of a nation defined by its unitary religious faith there is little scope for dissent, diversity, or even a pluralism of Protestant groupings. Significantly, two of the most powerful 17th century treatises written against the emerging ideal of religious toleration were produced by George Gillespie and Samuel Rutherford in Scotland. Their opposition to diversity was animated by the conviction that a nation should aspire to ordering the totality of its life according to the Word of God. Hence while England witnessed the burgeoning of different groupings, sects, and churches in the second half of the 17th century, Scotland retained a more unitary ecclesiastical culture.

(iii) The 18th century was in some respects the golden age of Scottish Presbyterian identity within the Union.[9] Supportive of patronage, the economic and cultural benefits of the Union, and the Protestant hegemony within the UK, the dominant moderate party within the Kirk could celebrate its dual identity as Scottish and British. The Scotland over which

[9] See Duncan B. Forrester, 'Ecclesia Scoticana', in *Forrester on Christian Ethics and Practical Theology: Collected Writings on Christianity, India, and the Social Order* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), pp. 259–66.

the Kirk presided has been described by Devine as 'the parish state'.[10] National life was shaped by the aims of the Church of Scotland, particularly with respect to education, poor relief and moral discipline. Although their theology was markedly different from that of their covenanting grandparents, the moderates viewed the establishment of Protestantism and its Scottish variant as a mark of divine providence. The benefits of the Protestant establishment, the Union of 1707, and the advance of the British empire were all celebrated by Scottish preachers through much of the 18th century. The leader of the moderate party, Principal William Robertson, epitomises much of this era.

Robertson of course remains connected to the older theological traditions and practices that he is self-consciously revising. Affirming the moral and social cohesion created by religion, he is a strong supporter of the establishment of the Church of Scotland while also in favour of extending greater toleration to Roman Catholics. The moral texture of society is given close attention (as it is in Adam Smith) and, like other moderate thinkers, Robertson is committed to a programme of national virtue that is advanced not only by scholars and politicians but also by preachers. But the Moderates are not politically complacent or morally lax. Richard Sher has pointed to the way in which the rhetorical device of the 'jeremiad' is brilliantly adapted by moderate preachers such as Blair and Carlyle.[11] With echoes of the covenanting sermons of the 17th century, they castigate their congregations for moral laxity, greed and selfishness. Fast days are called at times of national crisis, especially during the American war of independence. Their sermons urge repentance and a return to the ways of true religion. Within this preaching, the Reformation discourse of 'providence' is again marked. There is a sense in which God has particularly blessed the people of Scotland (and Britain) although this is combined with a lament about backsliding and a call for acts of penance and reform.

Nevertheless, the cracks within this vision of a Scottish Presbyterian nation are increasingly apparent by 1800. The secessions of the 18th century had eroded the monopoly of the established church as had the rise of independent and free churches. Callum Brown has estimated that by 1820, around one third of Scots already adhered to other churches.[12] This

[10] T. M. Devine, *The Scottish Nation: 1700-2000* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1999), pp. 84–104.

[11] Richard Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment: The Moderate Literati of Edinburgh* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1985), pp. 207–12.

[12] Callum Brown, *The Social History of Religion in Scotland since 1730* (London: Methuen, 1987), p. 31.

figure would rise dramatically after the Disruption of 1843 with only one third remaining within the auld Kirk. One consequence of this much greater plurality was the decline of church discipline across the country. Kirk sessions could no longer regulate the behaviour of persons adhering to other churches. The default assumption that everyone was subject to the discipline of the national church no longer seemed plausible. With urbanisation and migration, the population of Scotland became more mobile and so less easy to monitor.

(iv) Into the 19th and 20th centuries, the story is one of religious resurgence with belated attempts to reinvigorate the Reformed notion of a godly commonwealth. Sometimes presented as an era of doubt and lost faith, the Victorian period in Scotland was as much a time of religious renewal. This is true of the Disruption, the rebellion of the pious against a system of patronage in the national Kirk. Chalmers and his followers initially attempted to create a rival establishment, purer in form that the one from which they had seceded. Only later did his successors come to embrace voluntarist principles with enthusiasm, as did their United Presbyterian counterparts. At the same time, the Kirk gradually recovered its self-confidence through the work of leading figures such as John Tulloch, John Caird, and Norman McLeod. Its worship was renewed according to more catholic principles, as a result of the influence of reforming ministers such as Robert Lee, William Millican, and James Cooper.

Nevertheless, the late Victorian period is also a time of continuing religious diversity. Three large Presbyterian blocks emerged, following the appearance of the United Presbyterian Church. This proliferation accounts today for the multiplicity of church buildings in all our towns and cities. The Scottish Episcopal Church also exhibited a renewed confidence and embarks on an ambitious programme of church building. Immigrants arrived from Ireland to work in Scottish cities, their Catholic identity being preserved and nurtured by the increased presence of priest also from Ireland. If the Church of Scotland struggled to maintain its links with an urban working class, the same could not be said of the Roman Catholic Church.

With the reunion of the Presbyterian churches in 1929, we find once again attempts to reassert the pan-Protestant identity of Scotland with the Kirk as its principal means of expression. The chief architect of the union was the formidable Dr John White, minister of the Barony Kirk in Glasgow. Yet his achievements and reputation were tarnished by a series of intemperate attacks on Irish Catholics whom he represented as racially and religiously alien to Scotland. He was not alone in this, as reports from the General Assembly in the 1920s make evident. Under White's leader-

ship, the Church and Nation Committee in 1923 resolved to petition the government to restrict further immigration from the Irish Free State and even to deport those Irish-born Catholics who received poor relief or held a prison record.[13] White's biographer, Augustus Muir, made not a single reference to this episode, perhaps because it had become an embarrassment to the Kirk by the mid-20th century. It was left to Professor Stewart Brown from Chicago to set the record straight on his arrival at New College in 1988.

Within this socio-historical context, we should read the Articles Declaratory of the Church of Scotland. These were recognised by the Church of Scotland Act of 1921. Declaratory Article III is the most relevant in this context.

> As a national Church representative of the Christian Faith of the Scottish people it acknowledges its distinctive call and duty to bring the ordinances of religion to the people in every parish of Scotland through a territorial ministry.[14]

One might argue that the use of the indefinite article draws the sting from any claim that the Kirk is *the* national church, but it seems clear that this latter construction is exactly what was intended by the subsequent remark about bringing the ordinances of religion to 'the people' as opposed to any portion or sub-section of the population. Recent readings of this text have attempted to see this as expressive of a worthy missionary reach to all the people of Scotland.[15] No-one is excluded. The Church of Scotland exists not just for its own members but for all of Scottish society. How this is received by our ecumenical partners is not clear to me and whether they have even been asked is doubtful. To suggest that this distinguishes the Kirk from other bodies is dangerously hubristic. In 1921 the wording of Declaratory Article III seemed to assume that Scotland was a Protestant nation and that therefore the Kirk had a duty to supply the 'ordinances of religion' to its people. It represented not so much a mission to the whole people as the maintenance of an indigenous Protestant identity. This idea has persisted even into the 21st century. As Lord High Commissioner, the Prince of Wales remarked to the General Assembly in 2000. 'I could not be more proud to stand before you this morning as Lord High

[13] Stewart J. Brown, 'The Social Ideal of the Church of Scotland during the 1930s', in *God's Will in a Time of Crisis*, ed. by Andrew Morton (Edinburgh: Centre for Theology & Public Issues, 1994), pp. 14–31.

[14] See Douglas Murray, *Freedom to Reform: The 'Articles Declaratory' of the Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), p. 143.

[15] *Church of Scotland 2010 General Assembly* (Edinburgh, 2010), Section 25.

Commissioner … because this Office is a precious symbol of the long history which has bound together Church and Sovereign for nearly 450 years in a relationship of shared responsibility in their care for the people of Scotland.'[16]

Despite attempts of the General Assembly to maintain the notion that the Church of Scotland is the national church of Scotland, I believe that we do better to recognise that this article belongs to a different historical context. It is not one that is likely to be recovered in any foreseeable future, partly on account of secularism, partly on account of religious pluralism and partly on account of ecumenism. We have always been a hybrid nation—ethnically, tribally, religiously, linguistically, and culturally- and we are likely to become increasingly so in the future. The churches can provide some seasoning or leavening to this amorphous lump, but it should not seek to construct it in a way that is religiously monolithic.

3. SCOTLAND TODAY

The time has passed when the Kirk can speak *for* the people of Scotland, as if it were the institutional expression of an indigenous religious identity. The future is one in which the church must speak *to* the nation. What we require is not so much a theology of the Scottish nation as a public theology relevant to the socio-political context of contemporary Scotland. There are rich resources in our traditions which will assist with this task, but these will be better discriminated and released by forsaking outmoded notions of a Protestant nation. In some ways, this new setting may be experienced as liberating. For too long we have had to put up with a negative stereotyping of Christianity, especially its Calvinist variant in Scotland. It is time for a more balanced and judicious reception of the past. There is much of importance in Catholic and Protestant social thought about the commonweal, the significance of community, the need for public accountability of politicians, the ends of economic life and the care of the poor and disadvantaged.

The millennium celebrations took place a year after the return of the Scottish Parliament. This raised some important questions about whether the Kirk was recognised by the Scottish Parliament in much the same way as it is by Westminster. Its *de jure* status is probably unaltered, although independence would raise some interesting questions. But the *de facto* position of the Scottish Parliament is that all faiths should be treated in an even-handed way without the privileging of any group or body. We

[16] Cited by Ian Bradley, *God Save the Queen* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2002), p. 193.

see this in the weekly moment of spiritual reflection at Holyrood and in the attempt to communicate and consult with ecumenical and inter-faith bodies. Johnson Mackay offered this comment in the run-up to the new parliament:

> It is clear that those preparing for a Scottish Parliament expect it to be even-handed not only as between Christian denominations but as between different faiths. In an ecumenical multi-cultural Scotland, the traditional status of the Church of Scotland as the national Church is irrelevant to the role which the communities of faith can play.[17]

Not much has happened since 1999 to change that verdict, although we might note the ease with which the new Parliament has now adopted a regular service of kirking at St Giles, provided that it is seen as an ecumenical and multi-faith occasion. In some respects, this attests the continuing relevance of the Kirk to the public realm, providing what Grace Davie has called 'vicarious religion'.[18] Yet the current disposition of the Scottish Parliament represents not only the increasing diversity and secularism of modern Scotland but also the conviction that Scottish identity is no longer articulated by ethnicity, race or religion. If you live here, you count as Scottish no matter where you're from or what you believe.

This is reinforced by many of the significant social changes that have taken place since the 1960s. These have been described vividly by Callum Brown in his 2001 study *The Death of Christian Britain*.[19] Secularism is not so much a long slow process lasting centuries as a sudden series of upheavals that has brought about a growing dissociation of church from society over one or two generations. This is evident in the loss of Sunday as a day of rest, in the decline in baptisms and church marriages, the closure of many buildings as centres of worship, weekly church attendance falling to a figure of *c*. 7%, and the near total absence of young people in many of our congregations. With it, there is an accompanying loss of public significance, authority, visibility and political salience. The trends suggest that this is unlikely to change in the near future. What conclusions might we draw from all of this?

---

17 Johnston Mackay, 'Is the Kirk Still Relevant? Home Truths about Influence as a National Institution', in *The Realm of Reform: Presbyterianism and Calvinism in a Changing Scotland*, ed. by R. D. Kernohan (Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1999), p. 63.

18 Grace Davie, *Europe: The Exceptional Case: Parameters of Faith in the Modern World* (London: Darton Longman and Todd, 2002), pp. 19–20.

19 Callum Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation 1800-2000* (London: Routledge, 2001).

Since 1960 we have witnessed a resurgence of Scottish culture, this coinciding with the growth of Scottish nationalism. These trends, however, have coincided with the decline of the churches. This has ensured that very little attention has been devoted to religion in recent discussions of Scottish identity.[20] In some ways, this might be welcomed. After all, it was never the burden of apostolic Christianity to represent ethnic or national identities. When it has become too closely aligned with nationalist movements, the church invariably faces the temptation of subordinating its claims and practices to more secular ends. National churches have too often blessed foreign wars of conquest and aggression. Released from the obligation to maintain a Protestant national identity across the whole territory of Scotland, the churches might find other forms of mission and ministry.

The churches have generally been more politically salient where their local presence is strongest and most influential. Without an earthed commitment to place and community, the church's voice lacks authenticity at a more national level. This is the primary location for mission to a post-Christian society—the proclamation and enactment of the faith in ways that contribute positively to social capital, public well-being and personal transformation. To this extent, the local enhancement of communities and ministries of Word and sacrament as noted earlier by Principal Burleigh in his 1960 address continues to repay attention. The church is where its people are. It does not derive its identity from a centralised office or hierarchical structure. *Salt of the Earth*—the study of the social capital generated by faith communities in Glasgow—remains one of the most encouraging studies for church today,[21] suggesting that their influence may be much more significant than you would believe from the media.

Insofar as a renascent Scottish culture will continue to draw upon earlier resources—artistic, philosophical, literary, educational, and scientific—we should expect Scottish church history and theology to become

---

[20] Note however the commendable discussion of the possible status of the Church of Scotland in an independent Scotland in *The Church of Scotland General Assembly 2013* (Edinburgh: 2013), Section 22. 'Any constitutional settlement should secure a democratic, civil and plural Scotland, in which religion is neither imposed upon nor excluded from public life, but its presence and influence in the public sphere negotiated in democratic forums.' 22/6.

[21] Meg Lindsay (text), *The Salt of the Earth: A Report on the Contribution of the Churches to Glasgow's Renewal and Regeneration* (Glasgow: Neil Baxter Associates on behalf of Glasgow Churches Action, 2007); cf. the account of the report's work by the BBC <http://j.mp/BBCsalt> [last accessed, 18 May 2013].

increasingly important fields of study. If we can avoid either hyper-criticism or slavish adherence to the formulations of the past, then we might find that these continue to contribute insights and resources for contemporary Scotland. One area in which this is badly needed is in the construction of a cultural Protestantism that is more benign and positive than most of the constructions on offer today. Cultural Catholicism flourishes through the celebration of Irish folk culture but Protestant analogues are much harder to find in contemporary Scotland. This task might require attention being devoted to Scottish language, literature, philosophy, and other traditions, both religious and secular, in an effort to see Protestant culture as more than the mere negation of the Catholic Other.[22]

None of what I have argued should suggest that faith is now to be relegated to a domain of private life-style choice. The churches remain the largest voluntary bodies in Scottish society and they can continue to contribute to the formation of civic well-being, international cooperation and good government. But they do so not alone and not as the state's exclusive partner—their contribution takes place alongside other faiths and secular bodies, often with the need to form strategic alliances, to work alongside and to learn from best practice elsewhere.[23]

As we have seen, Scottish identity has morphed over several centuries with religion often playing an important role in its construction. If its capacity to express national identity has declined, we may yet see this as an opportunity for other forms of public engagement by which the Christian faith continues to display its significance for our society. The 500th anniversary of the Scottish Reformation in 2060 will inevitably provide a further benchmark for assessing the public role of the Kirk in Scottish life. Doubtless future commentators, who are even now making their appearance in our maternity wards, will have little difficulty in detecting the ephemeral nature of these reflections.

---

22 Cairns Craig has provided some important points of reference for this task in *Intending Scotland: Explorations in Scottish Culture Since the Enlightenment* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009).

23 I have sought to argue this in *Church, State and Civil Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

Is a Christian Vision of Scottish Identity Viable in the Early 21st Century?

Doug Gay

School of Critical Studies, 4 University Gardens, Glasgow, G12 8QQ
Doug.Gay@glasgow.ac.uk

This paper draws on a book in preparation, currently titled 'Honey From The Lion: Christian Theology and the Ethics of Nationalism'. Many of us grew up with a green and gold honey tin in our kitchen cupboards, bearing a picture on the front of bees emerging from a lion's carcass. 'Out of the strong came forth sweetness' is Tate & Lyle's take on (and from) Judges 14. I have stuck to it, if you'll excuse the pun, because I am interested in how sweetness comes forth from strength, and also because the wider Samson narratives themselves raise troubling questions about relationships between Israelites and Philistines.

It is the Lord's will and promise that the people of God should take possession of a land flowing with milk and honey. In the song of the Psalmist, in the 19th Psalm, we hear a celebration of a politics in which the righteous judgments and ordinances of God are like the drippings of the honeycomb, but even sweeter. When the Lion is of the Tribe of Judah and the Root of David, we may imagine with C.S. Lewis that even though his roar is deafening, his breath is honeyed. And yet even this Lion, when we look for him in Revelation 5, morphs into the form of the slain lamb. How much more then, when the Lion *rampant* or Lions *passant* represent the power of an earthly state, might they be in need of a breaking open in order to release sweetness? We are talking of course about the problem in political theology of the relationship between power and goodness, between power and virtue.

In Chapter 2 of the Westminster Confession, we are reminded: 'God has all life, glory, goodness, blessedness, in and of Himself… He alone is the fountain of all being, of whom, through whom, and to whom are all things; and has most sovereign dominion over them.' While power and goodness are indivisibly united in the life and work of the Holy Trinity and by extension in the City of God, the same is not true in the Earthly City, where the possibility of a godly commonwealth is constantly threatened by the love of power—Augustine's *libido dominandi*—by its effects and consequences. In this paper I want to try to redeem the term 'nationalism' as part of a viable vision of Scottish identity. I argue that to redeem

it we will need to break it open, in the hope that a broken and contrite nationalism, God will not despise, but will bless.

DEFINING NATIONALISM

Nationalism, not only but primarily Scottish Nationalism, is now centre stage in British politics and seems likely to remain so until the independence referendum is held in 2013 or 2014, depending whose will prevails.[1] I want to begin with a bit of what Stanley Hauerwas calls swamp clearing—there is a degree of wilful stupidity which afflicts debates around nationalism—yes there are nationalists in power in Holyrood, but there are also nationalists in power in Westminster. Critics of explicit nationalism such as that of the SNP or Plaid, very often struggle to acknowledge their own British nationalism. When this is not just partisan dissembling, it is usually an example of what political theorist Michael Billig calls 'banal nationalism'; a kind of nationalism which people simply assume and therefore become blind to, because they have become habituated to its constructions and conventions in their daily lives. We need to stop pretending that nationalism is like an accent, something other people have and we don't. Instead, as the young people say, we need to 'fess up to our own nationalisms. This confession needs to be both an admission and a repentance, but it also needs to be effective at a theoretical level.

Among the best recent books on theories of nationalism is Jonathan Hearn's 2006 volume, *Rethinking Nationalism*.[2] Hearn is an American academic, an anthropologist who works at Edinburgh University, whose earlier book *Claiming Scotland* also has interesting things to say about the covenanting tradition and the Disruption in relation to Scottish political theology.[3] I want to draw attention to some key arguments in Hearn book. He suggests that we should look at the politics of stable democratic regimes as 'the routinization, rather than the overcoming of nationalism', and that the 'process of nationalism is very deeply embedded in civil society and electoral systems and not simply an elite- or state-led process. It is part of the normal functioning of democratic regimes'.[4] If we accept this normalized understanding, Hearn argues we will see that:

---

1 At the time of the lecture, unionist parties were pressing for an early referendum date.

2 Jonathan Hearn, *Rethinking Nationalism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

3 Jonathan Hearn, *Claiming Scotland: National Identity and Liberal Culture* (Edinburgh: Polygon at Edinburgh, 2000).

4 Hearn, *Rethinking Nationalism*, pp. 145, 165.

> Liberal democracies do not so much transcend nationalism as domesticate it, routinizing its dynamic by channeling it through core political institutions. On the one hand, nationalism is seriously altered by this context, de-fanged for the most part and rendered less dangerous. But on the other hand it is an indispensable aspect of the state's ongoing need for legitimacy and inevitable competition between social groups to define the wider society of which they are members. Nationalism is a basic part of how relatively stable democracies legitimate and re-legitimate themselves.[5]

Drawing on the work of Beetham,[6] Hearn argues that processes of legitimation are constantly at work in modern states, through voting, conformity to laws and justification of rules and laws in terms of shared beliefs and norms. He adds 'what is at stake is contending visions of how a population within a given territory should be governed, and such visions are normally underwritten by a certain conception of the population's common *identity*, embodied in shared beliefs and values, what Rogers Smith (2003) has called "stories of peoplehood".'[7] Recognising civil society as the key space of 'delegitimation and relegitimation'[8] where political parties compete to win votes by making claims to represent the entire national population, Hearn claims that:

> far from transcending nationalism, normal democratic party politics keeps national identity on a constant 'slow boil'. Nationalism is an essential resource for the maintenance of legitimacy in democratic regimes, which harness and contain its frequently dangerous energies, while also utilizing them. So just as Ernest Gellner argued that nationalism is the demand to be ruled by those co-ethnic with oneself, I am suggesting that it is also at work in the demand to be ruled by people who share one's moral values and beliefs.[9]

Echoing and concurring with Billig's work on banal nationalism, Hearn insists that 'Nationalism is not just residual background noise in democratic regimes, it is a key legitimizing resource that can be activated and

---

5 Ibid., p. 166.

6 D. Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1991).

7 Hearn, pp. 166-7; cf. Rogers M. Smith, *Stories of Peoplehood: The Politics and Morals of Political Membership* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

8 N. Bobbio, *Democracy and Dictatorship* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), p. 26, cited by Hearn, p. 167.

9 Ibid., p. 168.

brought into the foreground, for example, during times of war and other social crises'.[10]

To summarize: nationalism, for Hearn, while it may be a beast with fangs,[11] is not a strange and exotic creature. It is part of the normal functioning of democratic regimes. Above all, and here is where we get back to power and virtue, it is a key part of how they legitimize themselves.

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

With that idea of legitimacy, we are brought firmly into the territory of theology, of dogmatics and ethics. Taking a metaphor from card games, for Christians there are certain key stories which must always trump all other stories. The narratives of Creation and Redemption are always trumps within Christian political theology; they always lead or even force the conclusions that we should only ever make a singular use of the language of race. We are all as Hamish Henderson says, the Bairns O' Adam and as C.S. Lewis says, the Daughters of Eve. The *imago dei* given in creation undercuts and overcomes all other distinctions. This image, as it is restored and renewed in redemption, leads also to an insistence on the other great singular of *one church*, entry into which is by virtue of one baptism; so that for Christian theology, water is always thicker than blood.

Here we have to do with some of what has recently been engaging the interest of some (post) Marxist critical theorists in their readings of Paul; the capacity of these particular narrative traditions of Judaism and Christianity to fund and fashion universal claims, claims of common humanity and of liberating election, which trump all attempts to place one class, gender or ethnicity above others. I want to claim that this same capacity to fund universal claims can be read out of the detail of the Genesis narratives. In the early chapters of Genesis we are faced with two great sendings: on the one hand the one human race is sent by God to fill the earth, we are sent into Eden to fill it. After the fall, human beings are sent out of the garden to make their home East of Eden. These two sendings suggest two truths about how we belong in the world; the first sending forth to fill the world affirms the value of every place within creation. As the Puritans used to say, every place is immediate unto God. There are no parts of the world which are in principle God forsaken (not even England).

---

[10] Ibid.

[11] See his comment above about it being 'de-fanged', n. 5 above; cf. my Judges 'lion' metaphor.

The second sending, the sending out of the garden, when humans are forced to improvise home East of Eden and away from the presence of God, is a sending out into a world marked by death and violence and insecurity. Every place in this scenario is equally alienated from the presence of God. The poet Edwin Muir spoke of humans living 'since Eden shut the gate that's everywhere and nowhere'. There are no parts of the world which will in Genesis terms, escape the flood, or which are in principle closer to God than others (not even Scotland).

We have then a double theological verdict applied to every place on earth where people make their homes which is another universal claim: that every society is both affirmed and judged, every place is a place of both vocation and alienation.

If we stay within Genesis, we come to the pivotal story for nationalism of Babel and its Tower in Genesis 11. Conventionally read in terms of a divine curse and a fall from unity, in *The Meaning of the City* the French theologian Jaques Ellul suggests an alternative reading, in which what is cursed is the imperialistic, even fascistic project of *ein Volk, eine Sprache*. God's way of frustrating and resisting this demonic form of unity is through the blessings of Babel, the gifts of linguistic and cultural diversity. In Ellul's reading, these become resources which enable resistance to imperialism. Implied here is a new mandate of stewardship, a stewardship of cultural diversity. This is a mandate affirmed by the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, who is revealed as the Spirit of *translation*, giving birth to a church whose catholicity transcends cultural difference without abolishing it. It is a providential mandate whose value within history is dramatized and celebrated by the great vision of Revelation, in which heaven itself displays every tribe and language and people.[12]

Here I think we are beginning to edge closer to the potential for some kind of nationalism to be a legitimate and even necessary part of the human vocation. We approach this if we begin to think the idea of cultural diversity all over the world as something which God sees and about which God says 'it is good'. Its goodness echoes the goodness of the whole creation but it also represents a form of providential goodness; something which is provided by God, given into the human historical future, in the face of human evil, to defend human flourishing. It is given, in particular, to protect the weak and those who are most likely to become the victims of empire. Such a narrative dogmatics, implies a narrative ethics. If we follow this trajectory of reading scripture, the universal scope of

[12] See Jacques Ellul, *The Meaning of the City* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1970); also a discussion influenced by this in Ch. 11 of J.A. Walter, *A Long Way From Home* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1979).

this blessing implies an ethic of equal regard. It summons us to an ethic of neighbourliness which binds us into loving our neighbour's culture, language and place as we love our own. There is a pluralism here which is saved from being relativistic by the earlier double judgment I spoke of, the sense that all cultures take their place on the earth in relation to both a divine affirmation and a divine judgment. In the words of Lamin Sanneh:

> Christianity is first and foremost a pluralist religion… As Paul affirmed, there is no respect of persons with God (Rom 2:11) and nothing in itself is unclean (Rom 14:14). The positive sides of these statements are equally valid: all persons are precious in God's sight (1 Pet 2:4) and all things indeed are pure (Rom 14:20). In the same fashion, no one is the exclusive or normative pattern for anyone else and no one culture can be God's favourite.[13]

My stewardship of my culture involves both celebration and penitence and I should also expect that from you in your stewardship of your culture. Furthermore, I am my brother's and my sister's keeper. I am charged not to do violence to your culture, just because it is different from mine. As Dewi Hughes might put it, I am charged to keep, not to castrate your culture.

CONTEMPORARY CONTEXTS

So far then, I have been trying to explore and sketch out a broad Christian perspective on human cultural diversity and I have been trying to do this using the resources of a biblical imagination. The difficulties come when we try to exercise this biblical imagination within particular contexts. In particular, things get more difficult when we have to move from these rather fuzzy ideas about cultural identity and bring them into dialogue with modern ideas of the nation and the state. Here we must confront the toxic history of nationalism and the role of a renegade biblical imaginary in constructing this. Adrian Hastings, in his important study *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism*,[14] highlights the crucial role played by the Bible in the emergence of European national identities. In particular he points to the OT stories of Israel as a single nation, existing within a land, with a particular capital, religion, and monarchy. A common thread across many early nationalisms is the way in which nations imagined themselves to have inherited Israel's elec-

[13] Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (New York: Orbis, 1989), p. 30.

[14] Adrian Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

tion as the chosen people. The form this took would often be laughable, if its effects had not proved so lethal in constructing myths of national superiority which could be harnessed to imperial ambitions.

The most profound dilemma and problem associated with nationalism has to do with the fundamental political question of how to relate government and territory; with questions, therefore, of sovereignty and borders. The idea of the nation-state has emerged in the modern era as the dominant global model for organising political life. Stanley Hauerwas has argued that this is where we find a profound deficit at the heart of liberal political theory. Liberal political theory, based in universalist notions of human rights and voluntarist understandings of social contract, has, he says, particular problems in accounting for borders, in positing land and territory as organizing principles—in giving, therefore, an adequate account of the nation-state.[15]

In the aftermath of World War I, the American president Woodrow Wilson famously tried to set out an account of liberal democracy, which balanced the right to national self-determination with safeguards to individual liberties within sovereign independent states. Wilson's vision which called nation-states to work together peacefully in a 'League of Nations' was desperately over optimistic and it foundered in the face of a new wave of fascistic and imperialistic nationalisms which led the world within a generation into a Second World War. The battle against these nationalisms, in particular the versions developed in Germany, Italy, Spain and Japan, had a profound effect on the reputation of nationalism. Out of a generation sickened by the carnage and division of a second world war, many people and not least many Christian people, emerged with a deep conviction that nationalism was the root of a great evil and needed to be opposed root and branch. That position is still very common today.

There are three major problems with that distaste. The first is that when it came to facing the task of post-war reconstruction, the idea of the nation-state remained the only game in town and the only plausible candidate on which patterns of governance could be based. The new international organization was of course christened the UN, the United Nations. Its charter embodied the principle of national self-determination in Article 1.[16]

---

15 Stanley Hauerwas, *After Christendom? How the Church is to Behave if Freedom, Justice, and a Christian Nation are Bad Ideas* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), pp. 33-4.

16 'To develop friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples...' (Article 1, para 2).

The second key development which has challenged the distaste for nationalism in the post-war period is that nationalism became a crucial vehicle for those arguing and working for decolonisation. Here we see some instantiation of the Babel argument we made earlier. Nationalism was an ideology which could be used to oppose imperialism and assert the rights of those who had been colonised to throw off the yoke of the oppressor. It also became a vehicle for validating and re-asserting the value of languages, cultures and traditions which had been despised and suppressed under imperial rule. Nationalism therefore became a crucial part of the struggle for freedom, first for the countries of the global South and later, in the years before and after 1989, for the peoples of Eastern Europe.

The third problem with western liberal and leftist disdain for nationalism harks back to Michael Billig's idea, mentioned at the beginning, of 'banal nationalism', which is to say that much of the time critics of nationalism were and are deeply hypocritical. They often assumed and ignored their own 'banal nationalism' and indeed, which is the point, failed to recognise it as nationalism at all, while condemning the 'bad nationalism' of others who were aspiring to the same kind of political settlements they already enjoyed.

The question we face, though, is whether Christian theology can approve this rehabilitation of nationalism and on what terms? In *The Desire of Nations*, Oliver O'Donovan, (unlike Hauerwas who gives up on this task) does try to help us think theologically about the state. In his chapter on 'The Obedience of Rulers', he argues that the provisional character of the state is revealed in a Christological understanding of trumps/triumphs:

> The most truly Christian state understands itself most thoroughly as 'secular'. It makes the confession of Christ's victory and accepts the relegation of its own authority. The only corresponding service the church can render to this passing authority is to help it make this act of self-*denying* recognition. It may urge this recognition upon it, and share with it the tasks of practical deliberation and policy which seek to embody and implement it. … The church has to instruct it in the ways of the humble state.[17]

[17] Oliver O'Donovan, *The Desire of Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 219 (italics added).

CONCLUSIONS

I want to draw these thoughts to a conclusion, by reflecting on what this might mean for a viable Christian vision of national identity. Following O'Donovan here, and in the spirit of the sixth of the Kirk's articles declaratory, can we see what the kirking of a parliament ceremonially must imply theologically? The church, as it confesses its own brokenness, must call for a breaking of the nationalism by which the state seeks to legitimate itself. In making its own confession, it must also call for a national *metanoia*. For the power of nationalism to be sweetened, there must be a turning from the three great evils of absolutism, imperialism and essentialism. That means the nation must be, in the language of Barmen, under God; it must renounce domination and practice recognition; and it must renounce a biological nationalism based on the *ius sanguinis* or law of the blood in favour of a habitat based nationalism, based solely on the *ius solis*, on the law of territory.

Even when it has done that, O'Donovan's tasks of 'practical deliberation and policy' still remain. Should the goal be a re-covenanted parliamentary Union which seeks to give fuller recognition and respect to its constituent nations or should it be a social union made up of a confederation between those parts of the UK which wish to be independent?

Judgments as to which of these is a viable Christian vision of Scottish identity will involve attending to the tests Jamie Grant set for us in his lecture which began this conference, asking what best reflects the Kingdom of God and serves the Mission of God. It will involve considering the sober reassessment of church and state urged on us by David Fergusson in his paper. It will involve us in weighing how we can hear Dewi's call to resist the Babel syndrome which has characterized English nationalism and to do justice to the stewardship of Scottish national identity which has been entrusted to us.

For my part, I am convinced that independence for Scotland within a reworked Social Union of the Isles and within the European Union, offers the most promising way forward. The version of the nationalist project currently represented by the SNP is already broken in most of the right places. It does turn away from these three great evils and it offers compelling opportunities to turn towards a number of great goods. Here, finally, are seven civic virtues and public goods which I hope independence could help us to move towards:

- Humility – finding our place in the world. I think of Feargas MacFionnlaigh's wonderful poem *The Midge*: 'I am small and like small things—the buried seed that splits the stone, the little country, the little language…';

- Peace – we have a once in a generation opportunity to reject and perhaps fatally undermine the Trident programme of weapons of mass destruction;

- Equity – building upon the social justice tradition in Scotland and working to embrace a social democratic project of reducing inequality;

- Hospitality – the freedom to develop a new and humane approach to asylum seekers and refugees;

- Mutuality – rethinking the whole concept of the national interest in an interdependent world, beginning with 'independence within Europe'. The only kind of nationalism worth having is the internationalist kind, which is predicated on recognition of the other;

- Subsidiarity – independence and the changes it can drive for our democracy : completing, reform of the voting system, abolition of the House of Lords, a new empowerment of civil society, drive for participative democracy;

- Ecology/Responsibility – warming to a reformed theme of stewardship of creation. We have a once in a generation chance to end nuclear power in Scotland and to rethink our energy policy. We can be good stewards of the gifts God has given us: of wind, sea, rain and sun and of land to grow timber.

My claim then, is that a theological construal of nationalism along the lines I have suggested can lead a case for independence as a liberating option for Scotland (and England). One in which Scotland's lion rampant is not a predatory and devouring beast, but a nationalism in which we, like Samson, can get honey from the lion; and about which we can tell this theo-political riddle:

> *"Out of the strong came something sweet*
> *Out of the eater, came something to eat."*
> Judges 14:14

Christian Witness in Postmodern Scotland: Reflections On The Renewing Of The Local Church For Mission

Angus Morrison

41 Auld Mart Road, Milnathort, Kinross, KY13 9FR
angusmorrison3@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

Every major branch of the Christian church in the West finds itself at present caught up in an exercise of intense self-analysis and self-searching, driven in part by an urgent quest 'for the kind of change that will enable the Church to do the work of God in a healthy and forthright manner',[1] but also fuelled in part by fear that the church in the Western world may be going the way of the church in Roman North Africa, not so long after Augustine's day. In his illuminating book on the future of Judaism, *Future Tense*, Jonathan Sacks quotes the legendary politician: 'Yesterday we stood at the edge of the abyss, but today we have taken *a giant step forward*.'[2] Christian history, like Jewish history, can sometimes feel like that. It would be easy, in the current situation, for our reflections to take the form of a sustained lament about the state of contemporary society, and even louder lament about the state of the church in Scotland. After all, as William Abraham states, 'the lament and the jeremiad are culturally favoured forms of discourse in the modern Church'. As Abraham says, this approach, while 'understandable… is also self-defeating and unrealistic'. Apart from the fact that 'Much of our lamenting and breast-beating is really an expression of fear and anger at the loss of our position among the cultural elites of the West,' they also reveal 'a lack of realism about all that God has done and is doing in our lives, in the Church, in history, and in creation at large….' Abraham tellingly adds: 'Whatever the case, we cannot gainsay the fact that Christ has come, Christ has died, Christ is risen, and Christ will come again. Anyone who shares these convictions cannot entertain any ultimate pessimism about the long-term future of the gospel and the Church.'[3]

---

1 W.J. Abraham, *The Logic of Renewal* (London: SPCK, 2003), p. 1.

2 J. Sacks, *Future Tense: A Vision for Jews and Judaism in the Global Culture* (London: Hodder, 2009), p. 1.

3 Abraham, *Logic of Renewal*, pp. 127-8.

Similarly, the late Colin Gunton encourages us to give to our reflections a more positive orientation: 'Like much of the modern church,' he writes, 'we are in danger of worrying ourselves into extinction because we seem less the players in a great drama of redemption than the last remnants of a great experiment. But that is to mistake our situation.' What is necessary, maintains Gunton, in words first spoken to his own local congregation, where he preached regularly for many years:

> is to realise that what is causing our malaise, our feeling of impotence and failure, is precisely our opportunity. We are apparently left on the sidelines because the modern world has decided to follow other gods than the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. And that decision is destroying it … But that is also our opportunity … We have to begin to organize our church life so that everything we do is ordered to mission. We are the details of God's plan for his world. Every one of those details needs to be in place.[4]

Again, in *Future Tense*, Sacks refers to the well-known fact that the Chinese ideogram for 'crisis' also means 'opportunity'. He notes, however, that 'Hebrew is more hopeful still. The word for "crisis", *mashber*, also means a "childbirth chair".' Sacks comments that 'the Jewish reflex is to see difficult times as birth pangs. Something new is being born.'[5] We may feel encouraged to hope that the difficult times through which the church in Scotland is now passing, may prove to be just that: the birth pangs of new creation life in our country.

Gunton's call to reconfigure everything in the life of the church for mission is echoed by a distinguished voice from our Scottish heritage. At another critical time in the life of the church in Scotland, Dr Thomas Chalmers spoke trenchant words that offer the perspective needed by a church serious about rising to the challenges and opportunities we currently face:

> Who cares about the Free Church compared with the Christian good of Scotland? Who cares about any Church but as an instrument of Christian good? For be assured that the moral and religious well-being of the population is of infinitely higher importance than the advancement of any sect.[6]

---

4 C.E.Gunton, *Theology through Preaching. The Gospel and the Christian Life* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2001), pp. 140, 142.

5 Sacks, *Future Tense*, p. 55.

6 W.G. Blaikie, *Thomas Chalmers* (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson and Ferrier, 1896), p. 142.

Words which, as Peter Neilson rightly says, continue to 'remind us of our calling under God as the Church of Jesus Christ in Scotland—that the grace of God may flow to every nook and cranny of our land for the good of the people through the presence of Christian individuals and communities in every part of the nation's life.'[7] He refers to words adopted by the Church of Scotland's then Board of National Mission, and which its successor body, the Mission and Discipleship Council, was happy to adopt as its own prayer vision:

> That the people of Scotland in all it parts may hear the gospel of Jesus Christ, see the life of his Spirit among his people, and come to know the love of God the Father.[8]

The dominant theme of this paper is the place and significance of the local church within the imperative call to Christian witness and mission within contemporary Scotland. What the late Professor David Wright wrote about evangelism is equally applicable to mission in its more comprehensive reality, namely that, without ignoring Christian outreach in other contexts, 'what will count in the long run will be evangelism grounded in the local church. The congregation renewed for mission is God's primary evangelistic agency.'[9] This holds whether we are thinking about 'inherited' congregations or 'fresh expressions' of local church.[10]

POSTMODERN SCOTLAND

The Scotland that calls urgently for Christian mission today represents a very different society and culture not only from those of Chalmers' day but from what we knew only a few decades ago. The writer recently heard Professor Phil Hanlon, Professor of Public Health at the University of Glasgow, suggest that the 'tectonic' movement is of such a nature as to indicate that we are experiencing in our time not so much the usual relatively minor generational shifts (except that they are happening somewhat faster these days), as something more profound: not so much 'an age of change' as 'a change of age'. Many signs of distress in our society,

---

7 P. Neilson, *New Church, New Generation, New Scotland* (Glasgow: Covenanters Press, 2005), p. 16.

8 Ibid.

9 D.F. Wright and A.H. Gray, eds, *Local Church Evangelism. Patterns and Approaches* (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1987), p. 10.

10 For a recent and illuminating contribution to discussions about the emerging church movement, see D. Gay, *Remixing the Church. Towards an emerging Ecclesiology* (London: SCM Press, 2011).

not least increasingly prevalent obesity, addictive behaviour, depression, and family breakdown, reflect a widespread sense of purposelessness and pessimism regarding the future, arising in no little measure from the 'absence of a sustaining redemptive vision for our society'. It was shocking to learn that 60% of children in the city of Glasgow are being raised by only one parent. Hanlon suggested that reactions to the presence of the enormous forces of change that swirl around us are typically one of three: neurotic—we don't want to know; regressive—we get angry and upset; or transformative.[11] And transformation, it is worth recalling, is what we are about in the church of Christ.

Part of our responsibility as God's people is to appraise any new ethos that shapes the culture in which it is our calling to articulate and embody the Gospel. As the late John Stott taught us, it is our duty to listen to God's world as well as to God's Word. While we must recognize, with Andrew Walker, that 'mission activity should be determined by the content of faith and not the context of culture', since 'too much attention to culture distorts the message, and Christianity becomes not inculturated but domesticated',[12] it remains the case that our faith always required to be properly contextualised. In today's Scotland, which by the later years of the twentieth century had become 'a leading-edge postmodern nation',[13] we have no alternative but to live out our Christian commitment in the midst of a culture, and to bear Christian witness to an emerging generation, in which postmodern ideas, attitudes and values are very widespread.

There is, right away, the difficulty of trying to comprehend contemporary culture. David Smith reminds us of the challenge of a valid contextualisation of the gospel at such a time of change in the culture—a culture

---

11 In an address at 'The Shaping of Things to Come' conference, at Gartmore House Conference Centre, Stirling, 20-22 March 2012.

12 A. Walker, *Telling the Story: Gospel Mission and Culture* (London: SPCK, 1996), p. 6. Writing within the American context (but with a wider relevance), Brueggemann comments on the church's loss of 'power to believe or to act', through its widespread inculturation to 'the … ethos of consumerism', an enculturation caused by 'our loss of identity through the abandonment of the faith tradition. Our consumer culture is organized against history. There is a depreciation of memory and a ridicule of hope, which means everything must be held in the now, either an urgent now or an eternal now.' W. Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1978), p. 11.

13 W. Storrar, with reference to the argument of the sociologist David McCrone. W. Storrar, 'A Tale of Two Paradigms: Mission in Scotland from 1946', in *Death or Glory: The Church's Mission in Scotland's Changing Society*, ed. by D. Searle (Fearn/Edinburgh: Mentor/Rutherford House), p. 68.

that can leave us 'bewildered by shifting patterns of family and household living, short-term and part-time unemployment, multi-channel television and multi-screen entertainment, the global media and information highways… seven-day shopping in cathedral-like shopping malls… alternative therapies and new age spiritualities, the rainbow of single issue campaigning groups, and a myriad of other cultural trends.'[14] Little wonder that the struggle to get one's head round contemporary culture has been described as one in which, 'We see through a kaleidoscope darkly.'[15] In the interests of Christian mission, it is important that we do not give up in this endeavour, while reminding ourselves that, in the most fundamental sense, the Gospel does not need to be made relevant. To paraphrase Bonhoeffer, its relevance is axiomatic.

'Postmodernism' and 'postmodernity' (sometimes the two are distinguished, sometimes they are used interchangeably) are notoriously slippery terms—perhaps, in Anthony Thistleton's view, 'ultimately undefinable'. Thistleton believes we should take 'postmodern' as referring more to a mood than to a period of history—a mood that is heavily determined by the perceived failings of modernism.[16] Within the diversity that is postmodernism, a number of important and, for our purposes, relevant themes can be traced. The most important, according to McGrath is the 'rejection of modernism's quest for objective, essentially knowable truth and beauty; its belief that a totality and unity can still be found within the frequented world we inhabit, so that the world can be known, understood, and mastered through rational and scientific means'.[17]

Respect for the Other is another major feature of postmodernism. As against the individualism of the modern world, with its focus on the 'autonomous human person', postmodernism inculcates respect and tolerance for differences. As a cultural mood it 'celebrates diversity of belief, seeing any attempt to coerce individuals to accept the viewpoints of another as being oppressive'.[18]

The removal of any controlling 'centre' as offering an ultimate guarantee of meaning, is essential to the postmodern ethos since it leads, in the view of Derrida, 'to a systematic attempt to exclude by ignoring,

---

14 See D. Smith, *Crying in the Wilderness: Evangelism and Mission in Today's Culture* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2000), p. 73.

15 Ibid.

16 A.C. Thistleton, *The Living Paul: An Introduction to the Apostle and his Thought* (London: SPCK, 2009), p. 148.

17 A. McGrath, *The Twilight of Atheism: The Rise and fall of Disbelief in the Modern World* (London: Rider, 2004), p. 225.

18 McGrath, *Twilight of Atheism*, p. 227. McGrath quotes Derrida: 'Deconstruction is not an enclosure in nothingness, but an openness to the other.'

repressing or marginalizing others'. Such 'decentring' is seen as necessary for the removal of the oppression that forces the periphery to conform to the centre, arising from a refusal to tolerate alternatives, something Derrida sees as characteristic of the way in which western powers have sought to refashion the world, often by the use of violence, in accordance with its own ethnocentric beliefs and practices.[19]

This rejection of a unifying 'centre' to reality leads to a situation in which 'we have no fixed vantage point beyond our own structuring of the world from which to gain a purely objective view of whatever reality might be out there'.[20] It has the effect of removing 'any common standards of appeal in people's efforts to measure, judge, or value, ideas, opinions or life-style choices'. Postmodernism rejects the possibility of a single, all-encompassing world-view. The moderns 'believed that they were building a new society on the foundation of universal rationality alone… Postmoderns contend that we can no longer reasonably hold out the prospect of discovering the one, symbolic universal world that unites humanity at a level deeper than that of our apparent differences.[21]

'Simplifying to the extreme, I define *postmodern* as incredulity to metanarratives': so famously wrote the postmodernist philosopher Jean-François Lyotard.[22] In other words, not only have all reigning metanarratives come under suspicion, since in Terry Eagleton's words they all alleged have a 'secretly terroristic function', namely 'to ground and legitimate the illusion of a "universal" human history', the very notion of a grand narrative is apparently no longer credible.[23] For our comfort we are left with local narratives, and 'Local and partial insights are to be welcomed and respected, in contrast to the suspicion with which totalizing claims are to be treated.'[24] In the postmodern mood, all belief systems are equally plausible: something is true for you if it is true for you.

Also rejected in postmodernism is the dualistic division of reality into 'mind' and 'matter' on which the Enlightenment project was built, with its consequent view of the human person as 'soul' (thinking substance) and 'body' (physical substance). An emerging generation influenced by postmodern ideas are more interested in the human person as a unified whole.

---

19 Ibid., p. 228.

20 S.J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), p. 41.

21 Grenz, *Primer*, pp. 42-3.

22 J.-F. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. G. Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. xxiv.

23 See McGrath, *Twilight of Atheism*, p. 248.

24 Ibid., p. 226.

In seeing postmodern as constituting a mood rather than a period, Anthony Thistleton quotes approvingly a comment of Richard Roberts: 'Postmodernity does not exist as an epoch… Pre-modern, modern and postmodern coexist within individual communities and within countries.'[25] Interestingly Thistleton goes on to identify characteristics of postmodernism which he finds deeply reminiscent of the mood in Corinth, with which Paul had to contend: '*pluralism*; multiple value-systems; emphasis upon *rhetoric* rather than truth; concern about *perception* rather than reality; its regard for the *local* and rejection of the universal; and its social construction, rather than its acceptance of what is given.'[26] Thistelton argues that Paul would have been both critical and approving of different aspects of both 'modernity' and 'postmodernity'. In at least three respects he would have been in sympathy with the postmodern mood: while critical of its 'pluriformity' and 'relativism', he would have agreed that 'All human kind is *relational*': that the self cannot 'fully develop without interaction with the community'; secondly, 'like many postmodern writers, he rejects the "myths" of the control of the universe by "powers"', which 'powers', 'including the imperial power of Rome… were the equivalent in the ancient world of "legitimizing" forces with grand narratives'; and thirdly, with regard to the Other, 'Paul no longer felt "anger, alienation, anxiety," or "racism and sexism," when he urged that in the Church, "There is no longer Jew or Gentile, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female: for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3: 28).'[27]

Doubtless, in the highly diverse contexts in which we seek to bear Christian witness in Scotland today, all three moods or mindsets—premodern, modern and postmodern—can be found and require to be addressed in ways correspondingly appropriate. The postmodern mood, however, remains pervasive, and in this situation we must retain confidence that the Gospel which turned the first century world upside down, is well able do the same in postmodern Scotland. As Tom Wright has said:

> Paul's view of truth, of reality, of the self, of the controlling story of the Creator and the cosmos, of the covenant God and his covenant people—these can serve very well as the true and vital answer to post-modernity's attempt to deconstruct truth and reality, to destabilize and decentre the self, and to

[25] Thistleton, *The Living Paul*, p. 149. The quotation is from R. Roberts, 'A Postmodern Church?', in *Essentials of Christian Community: Essays for Daniel W. Hardy*, ed. by D.F. Ford and D.L. Stamps (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1996), p. 182.

[26] Thistleton, *The Living Paul*, p. 149.

[27] Ibid., p. 150.

> destroy all metanarratives. I believe, in other words, that Paul's Gospel… has the power to do for the world and the church of today what they did in Paul's own day.[28]

POST-CHRISTENDOM SCOTLAND

Of course, it is not only in a postmodern but in a post-Christendom Scotland, that Christian witness today must take place. The advantages of Christendom for the church were many, not least in the provision of a common moral discourse. The disadvantages, however, were considerable. The French scholar Jacques Ellul went so far as to say, 'Christendom astutely abolished Christianity by making us all Christians.' Christianity, he argues, ceased to be 'an explosive ferment calling everything into question in the name of the truth that is in Jesus Christ' and became instead 'the structural ideology of this particular society.'[29] As David Smith comments, 'The Christ who came to be the Lord and Saviour of every human culture was co-opted by one particular civilisation and was thus reduced to the role of the guarantor of its values.'[30] Smith recalls the way in which the late Francis Schaeffer recognized in the pain and loss of privilege now faced by the Western church, 'a door to the discovery of a new hope and a fresh vision for the future', in which would be found 'a recovery of the apostolic understanding of the church and its mission, in which the authentic mark of Christians—mutual love—would again become central to Christian identity.'[31]

In similar vein, Brueggemann believes the church in the West is called to face the numbing reality of her loss of status: 'The task of prophetic imagination is to cut through the numbness, to penetrate the self-deception, so that 'the God of endings is confessed as Lord.'[32] Brueggemann expressed his conviction that 'the churches of the West can move through a time of great change with relief and gratitude that we are not summoned

---

28 N.T. Wright, *What St Paul Really Said* (Oxford: Lion Publishing, 1997), p. 165.

29 J. Ellul, *The Subversion of Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), p. 39.

30 D. Smith, *Mission after Christendom* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2003), p. 40.

31 Smith, *Mission after Christendom*, p. 42. See F. Schaeffer, *The Church at the End of the Twentieth Century* (London: The Norfolk Press, 1970).

32 W. Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1978), p. 49.

to be an echo of culture, either to administer its economics, to embrace its psychology, or to certify its morality. To us is gifted an alternative way.'[33]

AN ALTERNATIVE WAY

To find an authentic model for this 'alternative way', we are compelled to give renewed consideration to the position of the early church, as it made its way within the then Roman Empire. Regarding its message, 'Christian mission made sense only on the premise that the crucified Jesus had been enthroned as the true Lord of the whole world, and thus claiming the allegiance of the whole world.' Had the new Christian movement taken its place as 'simply another private cultus among the myriad that the empire boasted,' it would 'have been accorded a ready welcome.' The early Christians had to refuse the offer: 'For them Jesus was not a deified man, like the emperors the senate decreed to be divine; nor was he a mythical hero like Hercules. His labours had been real: the humiliating agony of a cross in the reign of Tiberias.'[34]

Equally subversive within the Roman Empire was the lifestyle which the message produced. The Christians behaved 'as a new social grouping in the ancient world…

> as a new social grouping in the ancient world … They believed themselves to be a "third race", neither Jewish nor Gentile but drawing men and women from both … The gospel constituted a new category of human being, a new way of being human. Their primary identity was found in a new familial community whose social inclusiveness was unparalleled. Despite their marginal social status, their vision embraced the whole empire and beyond. They believed they were the means by which God was bringing to fulfilment the Jewish hope of a global peace, while they themselves were *paroikoi* (1 Peter 2:11)—resident aliens—at home everywhere, but settled nowhere.' [35]

These early Christians believed that 'all cultures in their distinctiveness could serve the one God's unfolding purpose for human life… No cultures were inherently unclean, and none was absolutized in its particularity.' Linguistic and other cultural resources were 'rummaged for tools through which the message of Jesus could be conveyed'.[36]

---

[33] W. Brueggemann, *Hope within History* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1987), pp. 105-7; quoted in Smith, *Mission after Christendom*, p. 42.

[34] V. Ramachandra, *The Recovery of Mission: Beyond the Pluralist Paradigm* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1996), p. 226.

[35] Ramachandra, *Recovery of Mission*, p. 226.

[36] Ibid., pp. 226-7.

All of this constitutes a great challenge and encouragement to the contemporary church. As Newbigin argues, the gospel of the risen Christ offers the world a whole new starting point for human thought and action. The lordship of Jesus 'means that he is Lord not only of the Church but of the world, not only in the religious life but in all life, not merely over some peoples but over all peoples. He is not just my saviour, but the saviour of the world.'[37] What the church of Christ has to offer, humbly but boldly, to the society and culture of postmodern Scotland is nothing less than her salvation.

A METANARRATIVE TO TRUMP ALL METANARRATIVES

Darrell Guder has reminded us of Hans Küng's contention that the church's origins are in the Gospel—'the good news told in the New Testament, news that is continually spawning the church in every time and place.' What makes the church the *church* is that, for all the inevitable diversity of its forms across time and space, 'its life is birthed by the Holy Spirit as the Holy Spirit gives meaning and response to the gospel'.[38] The church is therefore 'an eschatological community of salvation', and, as such, it 'comes from the preaching of the reign of God—the reign of God is its beginning and its foundation. And it moves towards the revealed consummation of the reign of God—the reign of God is its goal, its limitation, its judgement.'[39]

Do we urgently need as Scottish Christians to give to the gospel a fresh hearing as 'an effort to get back to roots in order to be clearer about the essence of what it means to be the church'[40]—to be the church of Christ in Scotland and for Scotland at this time? To do so is to (re) discover the central significance of mission for such an understanding.

Arguably, not the least of our difficulties in addressing the challenges of mission in Scotland today is the seriously defective ecclesiology many of us have inherited—an ecclesiology formulated within a Christendom context, and which, partly on that account, had almost nothing to say about mission.

In his important book, *The Mission of God*, Chris Wright, as others of course have done, shows clearly that from first to last the biblical story is 'all about mission'—the mission of God himself (*missio Dei*) to save

---

37 L. Newbigin, *Truth to Tell: the Gospel as Public Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), pp. 38-9.

38 D. Guder, ed., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), p. 86.

39 H. Küng, *The Church* (Tunbridge Wells: Search Press, 1968), pp. 81, 95.

40 Guder, *Missional Church*, p. 86.

lost humanity, and to put to rights through Jesus Christ all that has gone wrong in the world he created in love, and to which he remains passionately committed.[41] The gospel is Jesus himself in his life, death and resurrection, 'as the action of God that both reveals God's passion for the world and achieves God's purpose for the world'.[42] The church is defined by its origins in a gospel that is centred deeply in the announcement that the reign of God is at hand. The Good News of the Kingdom which he proclaimed and which he sent out his disciples to proclaim was also to be central in the future mission of the whole church: 'And this good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the world, as a testimony to all the nations; and then the end will come' (Matt. 24:14).

The good news to which we are called to bear witness in today's postmodern Scotland is a message that is radically orientated towards a great future hope. The creation that came perfect from God's hand, and was subsequently corrupted and disfigured by sin and death, is to be fully and finally reconciled to God—a reconciliation accomplished in the death and resurrection of Jesus. The prophetic anticipation of God's future for the world, summed up in the one word *shalom*, envisages 'the full prosperity of a people of God living under the covenant of God's demanding care and compassionate rule.'[43] Such *shalom* comes hand in hand with justice, for 'without justice there can be no real peace, and without peace no real justice. Indeed only in a social world full of a peace grounded in justice can there come the full expression of joy and celebration.'[44] The sin which has corrupted all four dimensions of human life and experience—the spiritual, the rational, the physical and the social—is fully dealt with, and God's reconciled and healed people, from every tribe, people, nation and language, will sing God's praise in the now fully reconciled and healed new creation.

This great theocentric story is the metanarrative in which the people of Scotland, as people everywhere, can and need to find new meaning and hope. The Big Story that stretches from creation to new creation, that takes account of absolutely everything in between, that is radically subversive of all human power games, relativizing all our places in the great divine scheme of things. It is the story postmodern Scotland is waiting to hear: the Story that makes ultimate sense of the realities of contemporary life, telling us 'where we have come from, how we got to be here, who

41 C.J.H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Nottingham: IVP, 2006).

42 Guder, *Missional Church*, p. 87.

43 Ibid., p. 91.

44 Ibid.

we are, why the world is in the mess it is, how it can be (and has been) changed, and where we are ultimately going'. By placing the mission of God at the very centre of all existence, not only does it offer, as Wright says, 'a healthy corrective to the egocentric obsession of much Western culture—including sadly even Western Christian culture',[45] it provides the needed key to unlock the prison of postmodern society's hopelessness and despair.

And as, in terms of the biblical story, 'Christ crucified and risen is the key to all of history, for he is the one who accomplished the mission of God for all creation,' it is the *crucified* Jesus who must be seen to subvert all postmodern opposition to this unique Grand Narrative, as it was 'the risen Jesus … who opened the eyes of the disciples to understand the scriptures by reading them in the double light of his own identity as the Messiah and of their ongoing mission to all nations in the power of the Spirit. "This is what is written, … and you will be my witnesses… to the ends of the earth"'.[46]

'THE ONLY GOSPEL HERMENEUTIC'

G.K. Chesterton once wrote, 'The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult and left untried.'[47] He questioned 'whether the civilization calling itself "Christian" had ever seriously attempted to live the vision bequeathed to us by the New Testament.' This kind of generalisation brings home to us, as Douglas John Hall expresses it, 'the fact that the way of Jesus Christ… always exceeds our actual performance as Christians… In a real sense the way of Jesus Christ is always still waiting to be tried. *Christendom*… is ending; *Christianity* once more waits to be tried.'[48] Hall affirms that the difficulty we face as twenty-first century Western Christians is, that 'unless we are able, as Christians, to discover ways of conducting our life and our mission that differ radically from the Christendom form of the church that has dominated throughout most of Christian history, we shall be doomed in the future to be part of the world's problem and not its solution.'[49]

A central challenge here is to reflect on the relationship between the church and the coming kingdom of God. If in Christendom the church was regularly equated with the reign of God, in Scripture *ecclesia* and

45 Wright, *Mission of God*, p. 533.

46 Ibid., p. 534-5.

47 G.K. Chesterton, *What's Wrong with the World* (London: Cassel, 1910), p. 22.

48 D.J. Hall, 'Finding Our Way into the Future', *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin*, 27/ 2 n.s. (2006) , p. 122.

49 Ibid., p. 123.

basileia are quite separate concepts, although 'the two are intimately bound together'.[50] God's reign is pure gift, and therefore 'The call to receive warms against the consequence of rejecting the gift . The invitation to enter casts a shadow on hesitation at the door.'[51] The issues of repentance and faith are involved here: 'Receiving and entering are actions that mark a turning from other hopes and loyalties that we may accumulate, to a singular hope in the one true God.'[52] To enter the kingdom is 'to turn to God from idols,' (1 Thess. 1:9) abandoning sinful rejection of his rule.

Postmodern Scotland needs to see that sin is idolatry, and that idolatry is the constructing of our deepest identity in relation to any other god, whether Mammon, Gaia, Aphrodite, or the generalised plurality of the gods of our time, including that ideological nationalism, and that idolatry is destructive and de-humanising. Nothing is more ultimate and final than this: *Iēsous Kurios*—Jesus is Lord. And authentic humanness—the kind for which the times cry out—is grown as we form our individual and corporate identity under, and in relation to, his sovereign, gentle, liberating reign. Such an affirmation, of course, is as profoundly countercultural as it was in the Roman Empire of the first century.

By viewing the church as 'constituted by those who are entering and receiving the reign of God, … and where the children of the reign corporately manifest the presence and characteristic features of God's reign', Guder argues that a much 'more dynamic sense of the church's identity and mission in the world' is found.[53] For one thing, it directs us to a more humble starting point for mission, since 'the first mission is always the internal mission: the church evangelized by the Holy Spirit again and again in the echoing word of Jesus inviting us to receive the reign of God and to enter it';[54] and, for another, we have here a 'far more welcoming framework for evangelism. Evangelism would move from an act of recruiting or co-opting those outside the church, to an invitation to companionship.'[55]

This emphasis on humility and companionship is of great importance for our witness to the gospel at this time. Particularly when many

---

50 Guder, *Missional Church*, pp. 97-8.

51 Ibid., p. 96.

52 Ibid.

53 Ibid., p. 99.

54 Ibid., p. 96. Arguably, renewed attention needs urgently to be given in the church to the whole subject of spiritual revival. For a helpful recent discussion of biblical criteria by which revival may be defined and assessed, see N. Scotland, 'Towards a Biblical Understanding and Assessment of Revival', *Evangelical Quarterly*, 85/ 2 (2013), 121-34.

55 Guder, *Missional Church*, p. 97.

voices remind us of 'how problematic are human claims to knowledge', and 'in a culture that increasingly resists and resents anyone who seeks the conversion of another, we must,' argues John Stackhouse, 'commend our faith in a new mode: with a different voice and in a different posture.' We must do it with humility, for several reasons, but chiefly because God himself comes to us in humility, seeking our love and drawing us to him.[56] As Douglas John Hall reminds us, 'there are ways of expressing Christian faith and discipleship that do not falsely offend and humiliate other people or substitute a quest for power for a quest for truth, justice, peace and love.' Most of these ways 'may be called the *befriending* of the world—the compassionate caring for human and other creatures and processes that is signified by the foundational category of Christian ethics, *agape*—suffering love.' When 'such work is done, such compassion shown, such justice undertaken, it will raise in some people—in enough people—the question, "Why?"'. For, as Hall rightly says, 'to express real hope in concrete ways in our overtly and covertly despairing world is to invite that question. Genuine hope—hope in word and deed—does not explain itself. As the first epistle of Peter says, true hope begs an accounting for.'[57]

Christian witness in Scotland urgently requires the renewal of churches in all our communities in such a way that the hope we represent simply begs such an accounting for. The hope-filled gospel of the resurrection makes sense to those looking in from outside only when it is genuinely embodied in an actual community of Christian people in a particular place. 'How is it possible,' asks Lesslie Newbigin, 'that the gospel should be credible, that people should come to believe that the power which has the last word in human affairs is represented by a man hanging on a cross? I am suggesting that the only answer, the only hermeneutic of the gospel, is a congregation of men and women who believe it and live by it.'[58]

It is striking how little is said in the New Testament about what we would normally refer to as 'evangelism'. The reality of course is not lacking, but it is not a major emphasis. As Guder points out, the 'New Testament writings were addressed to communities already in mission; the

---

[56] J. G. Stackhouse, Jr., *Humble Apologetics: Defending the Faith Today* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 227.

[57] Hall, 'Finding Our Way', p. 136.

[58] L. Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (London: SPCK, 1989), p. 227. Friedrich Nietzsche famously wrote: 'They would need to sing better songs for me to have faith in their Redeemer; and his disciples would have to look more redeemed.' ('On Priests', *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, II.xxvi.)

purpose of the canonical Scriptures was (and is) to enable them to continue that mission.'[59]

In Ephesians, for example, the verb *euangelizomai* is entirely lacking. What we have rather, in very general terms, is a wonderful portrayal of the over-arching purpose of God from creation to new creation, and a call to live as people of the new creation—God's kingdom people—whose corporate life, grounded in love, will bear powerful witness to the truth of the gospel. A church where each individual is cherished, where the priesthood of all believers is a practised reality, and the gifts of all are deployed; and so a place where 'the indwelling of the Spirit common to everyone… make the church into a communion corresponding to the Trinity, a communion in which personhood and sociality are equiprimal.'[60] The reality of that cannot go unnoticed, and such churches become what churches are meant to be: 'places where people can begin to understand and feel and experience what life is like under God's rule, what a community might look like that really lived in Jesus' kingdom'.[61]

It seems fair to say that 'the issue that the churches must face up to… is not so much that people do not believe in God, but that they do not find the churches credible'.[62] Or, as Tomlin states, 'unless there is something about church, or Christians, or Christian faith that intrigues, provokes or entices, then all the evangelism in the world will fall on deaf ears. If churches cannot convey a sense of 'reality' then all our 'truth' will count for nothing.'[63]

In other words, a church renewed for mission in and to postmodern Scotland would be the kind of church prepared to witness

> that its members like others hunger for the hope that there is a God who reigns in love and intends the good of the whole earth. The community of the church would testify that they have heard the announcement that such a reign is coming, and indeed is already breaking into the world. They would confirm that they have heard the open welcome and received it daily, and they would invite others to join them as those who also have been extended God's welcome. To those invited the church would offer itself to assist their entrance

59 Guder, *Missional Church*, p. 223.

60 M. Volf, *After Our Likeness. The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), p. 213.

61 G. Tomlin, *The Provocative Church*, 3rd edn (London: SPCK, 2008), p. 60.

62 N. McCulloch, *A Gospel to Proclaim* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1992), p. 84.

63 Tomlin, *Provocative Church*, p. 10.

> into the reign of God and to travel with them as co-pilgrims. Here lies a path for the renewal of the heart of the church and its evangelism.[64]

Examples of such churches, taking many different forms, are to be found increasingly all over Scotland. Seeds of fresh hope may be discovered in many places.[65]

A 'SPIRITUAL' PEOPLE

One final point. It would be a huge mistake to imagine that contemporary Scotland has lost interest in matters of the spirit. There is clear evidence of a massive spiritual movement in Scotland that has nothing to do with the institutional church. Much of it has nothing to do (yet) with Christianity either. In recent years, books on *atheist* spirituality have appeared on the shelves of our bookshops and are selling in large numbers.[66] We should not really be surprised, for the evidence is massive that religion is the default position of the human spirit. There is a short journey from the premodern Augustine's, 'Thou hast made us for thyself, and our heart is restless until it rests in Thee,' to the postmodern Douglas Coupland's *Life after God*, where he confesses:

> Now—here is my secret:
>
> I tell it to you with an openness of heart that I doubt I shall ever achieve again, so I pray that you are in a quiet room as you hear these words. My secret is that I need God—that I am sick and can no longer make it alone. I need God to help me give, because I no longer seem capable of giving; to help me be kind, as I no longer seem capable of kindness; to help me love, as I seem beyond being able to love.[67]

---

64 Guder, *Missional Church*, p. 97.

65 A valuable resource for churches concerned to engage with postmodern Scotland is found in various online articles by Tim Keller of Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York. Keller has a deep understanding of, and has enjoyed remarkably successful engagement with, a cultural context with many correspondences to our own. Insightful articles on mission can be accessed at <http://j.mp/KellerGC> [last accessed 20 May 2013].

66 Two highly popular examples are: André Comte-Sponville, *The Book of Atheist Spirituality* (London: Bantam Press, 2008), and Alain de Botton, *Religion for Atheists: A Non-believer's Guide to the Uses of Religion* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2012).

67 D. Coupland, *Life after God* (London: Touchstone Books, 1994), p. 359.

David Smith comments that 'the problem for the Christian mission in the postmodern West is not the absence of spiritual hunger within the postmodern generation, but rather the church's failure to recognize the existence and significance of this quest on the part of thousands of people beyond its doors.'[68]

Possibly the greatest challenge and opportunity before a renewed and missionary church in Scotland, as representatives of Christ's sovereign reign and grace, is to engage with this huge movement of spirituality in such a way as to redirect a spiritually hungry, yet distressed and despairing generation, to the One who fulfils all the longings of the human heart; to welcome them unreservedly into his loving gentle reign; and to walk together with them as fellow pilgrims who are nourished by a hope too wonderful to take in; and in that journey together, rejoicing in the constant companionship of the unseen Christ, whose promise to his church for every day of its present sojourn, through all the changing days and aeons is: 'Lo I am with you always, even till the end of the age' (Matt. 28: 20).

At this time, many feel threatened by the apparently accelerating pace of change in which we find ourselves caught up. It is tempting to look to the future, and to the future of the church in Scotland, with dark foreboding. Yet as Kierkegaard saw clearly, 'the future is not utterly new, because there is nothing new under the sun.'69 The Christian's and the church's task, he recognized, is to struggle with the future in prayer, knowing that to do so is to exercise a believing expectancy that cannot be disappointed. Because the mission we are concerned about is ultimately *missio Dei*, prayer must become central in all our work. In preparing for the future we may well pay heed to the Dane's wise words:

> When the sailor is out on the ocean, when everything is changing all around him, when the waves are born and die, he does not stare down at the waves, because they are changing. He looks at the stars. Why? Because they are faithful; they have the same location now that they had for our ancestors and will have for generations to come.[70]

---

68 Smith, *Mission after Christendom*, p. 73.

69 S. Kierkegaard, 'The Expectancy of Faith', in *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, trans. H.V. Hong and E.H. Hong, *Kierkegaard's Writings* V (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 18.

70 Ibid., p.19.

Amos and Ecclesiastes: Toward Developing a Theological Response to Oppression[1]

Russell L. Meek

Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 5001 N. Oak Trafficway,
Kansas City, MO 64118 USA
rmeek@mbts.edu

INTRODUCTION

In his study on the theology of Ecclesiastes, Craig Bartholomew states that his aim is 'to explore its message in the context of the canon as a whole and thereby relates its theology to contemporary theology'.[2] In a similar vein, the present study aims to look at the theological responses to oppression from two different voices in Old Testament canon—Amos and Ecclesiastes—with the purpose of allowing these to voices to inform the church's theological response to oppression. Liberation theologians have long recognized the importance of the Hebrew prophets' voice for speaking against the unjust suffering and oppression that is common in the developing nations of the world, and for good reason.[3] Exemplified by the book of Amos, the prophetic voice of the Old Testament loudly decries the oppression of the poor and promises dire consequences for those who run rough shod over the 'least of these'. There is, however, another voice in the Old Testament that speaks to oppression and, as a part of the canon, should also inform our response to oppression. Wisdom Literature is not well-known for its stance on oppression, yet it also broaches the subject, albeit from a different vantage point.[4] In particular, the book of Ecclesias-

1 I would like to thank David Reimer for his careful reading of an earlier draft of this manuscript and for his many insightful remarks. Any errors and shortcomings, of course, remain my own.

2 Craig G. Bartholomew, 'The Theology of Ecclesiastes', in *The Words of the Wise are Like Goads: Qohelet for the 21st Century*, ed. by Mark J. Boda, Tremper Longman III, and Cristian Rata (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013), p. 367.

3 See, for example, Gustavo Guitiérrez, *Teología de la Liberación: Perspectivas* (Lima: Ediciones Sigueme, 1971) and Jose P. Miranda, *Marx and the Bible: A Critique of the Philosophy of Oppression* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1974).

4 However, see Duane Garrett, 'Qoheleth on the Use and Abuse of Political Power', *Trinity Journal* 8 (1987), 159-77.

tes, with its realistic (and yes, perhaps pessimistic) examination of life as it is, speaks to the oppressed in order to offer hope in the face of circumstances over which they have no power, a hope that is found in trusting God.

Amos and Ecclesiastes are not usually examined together and the present study may come under criticism for placing them side-by-side, but the justification for doing so lies in the fact that they speak to the same problem, from the same canon, but with different voices. The one, Amos, delivers a caustic invective against oppression that clearly condemns it. The book argues that the people of Israel have forsaken Yahweh and failed to fulfil their covenant obligation to care for the poor. The other, Ecclesiastes, virtually ignores the culpability of the powerful when it addresses oppression. Instead, it gives its readers a way to live in light of the daily reality of unjust suffering. In order to develop a theological response to oppression today, it is vital to determine how to respond both to oppressed and oppressor; the combination of these two texts allows the reader to do just that. Therefore, in what follows I explore the theological responses of both Amos and Ecclesiastes with an eye toward allowing them to inform a contemporary response to oppression. To accomplish such a task, this study will briefly outline the historical and cultural context of Amos and Ecclesiastes, examine relevant passages in each book, and then draw conclusions concerning how these two voices together should inform our own theological response to oppression.[5]

AMOS

Historical and Cultural Context.

The title of Amos (1:1) places his ministry during the reigns of Uzziah of Judah and Jeroboam of Israel. There is considerable debate over the exact dates during which Amos prophesied, but one can be certain that his ministry occurred sometime during the overlap of these two kings'

[5] Since this study is interested in what these books have to say about injustice and oppression, it treats Amos and Ecclesiastes in their canonical form. It will not address issues of authorship and redaction history unless they bear directly on the present argument. For a full treatment of these issues in Amos see Tchavdar Hadjiev, *The Composition and Redaction of the Book of Amos* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009); for Ecclesiastes see Craig G. Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009) and Daniel C. Fredericks, *Qoheleth's Language: Re-Evaluating its Nature and Date* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1989).

reigns.[6] The significance for this study lies not in the specific dates of Amos's ministry, but in the wider cultural context in which the book is situated. Amos prophesied during a time of significant prosperity for the nation of Israel.[7] Wealth was considered 'a normal reward for righteous living', and not inherently immoral.[8] The problem for Amos was the disproportionate distribution of wealth that led to the oppression of the poor. Regarding the situation as Amos saw it, Joseph Blenkinsopp states:

> The drive toward centralization, the need to subsidize a royal court and an elaborate cult, heavy taxation ('exactions of wheat', 5:11), frequent confiscation of patrimonial domain following on insolvency, military service, and forced labor were the major factors undermining the old order and leading to a kind of rent capitalism. The great expansion of trade, especially with the Phoenician cities, and the wealth confiscated during successful military campaigns brought about a new prosperity that, however, did not trickle down to the lower social levels.[9]

Amos thus spoke strongly against the civil and religious leaders who were abusing the very people they should have been protecting. Amos's voice represents the most well-known aspect of the Old Testament's stance against oppression.

Amos's Response to Oppression

Amos 2:6-8

Thus says the Yahweh: Concerning three transgressions of Israel,
and concerning four, I will not turn back;

---

6 For example, B. K. Smith and F. S. Page date his ministry to 783-46 B.C.E. in *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah* (NAC; Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1995), p. 24; Douglas Stuart dates his ministry to 767-42 B.C.E. *Hosea-Jonah* (WBC 31; Waco, TX: Word, 1987), p. 297. C. H. Bullock argues for a smaller window, from 767 to 753 B.C.E. in *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophetic Books*, 2nd edn (Chicago: Moody, 2007), p. 72. See also Shalom Paul, *Amos* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2009), pp. 1-7.

7 Robert Ellis, 'Amos Economics', *RE*, 107 (2010), 464-5. Abraham Heschel notes, 'During this entire period Assyria was weak, and Syria on the decline; Jeroboam took advantage of the weakness of both to extend his dominion, foster commerce, and accumulate wealth' *The Prophets*, Prince Press edn (Peabody, MA: Prince, 2004), p. 27.

8 Ellis, 'Amos Economics', p. 466. See Deuteronomy 7:11-15, though also note the discussion of the relationship between blessing and obedience in Job.

9 Joseph Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel*, rev. edn (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1996), p. 81.

concerning their selling for silver the righteous,
and the poor for a pair of sandals—
those who trample upon the dust of the earth as the head of the poor,
and the way of the poor they turn aside;
and a man and his father and go to the same girl,
in order to profane my holy name;
and on garments pledged,
they lay beside every altar;
and wine of those fined
they drink in the house of their god.[10]

After gaining the applause of his audience by proclaiming Yahweh's displeasure with Israel's neighbours, Amos confronts those in Israel who have transgressed the Torah of Yahweh, specifically the community's civil and religious leaders. As Francis Andersen and David Noel Freedman note, Israel's crimes occur in four distinct locations—the market, the place where loans are certified, the courts, and the religious centres—the very places where the civil and religious leaders conducted their business.[11]

Amos lists three specific violations of Torah—selling the righteous for silver (Lev. 25:39),[12] having sexual relations with one's daughter-in-law (Lev 18:10), and refusing to return a garment taken in pledge (Exod. 22:26; Deut. 24:10-13). By juxtaposing transgressions that relate to oppression of the poor, sexuality, and the cult, Amos demonstrates that oppression and injustice are indeed a religious issue.[13] The way in which people and communities treat the less fortunate significantly impacts their relationship to Yahweh—a lesson that modern readers would do well to learn. Oppression is not simply a matter of economics or 'might makes right', but it is an affront to Torah, for which Yahweh will hold Israel accountable.

---

10 All translations are the author's own.

11 Francis I. Andersen and David N. Freedman, *Amos* (AB 24A; New York: Doubleday, 1989), pp. 321-2.

12 Shalom Paul notes that two different issues may be in view here (*Amos*, p. 77). Either the indictment concerns the bribery of judges, for which textual evidence is scant, or it refers to selling innocent people into slavery for trivial debts.

13 See R. Reed Lessing, *Amos* (Concordia Commentary; St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 2009), p. 184. He points out that exploitation of the poor is condemned in the Book of the Covenant, the Holiness Code, and the re-ratification of the covenant in Moab.

Amos 4:1-3

Hear this word, cows of Bashan,
who are on Mount Samaria,
oppressors the poor, crushers of the needy,
those who say to their husbands, 'Bring in, that we may drink'!
Adonai Yahweh has sworn by his holiness
that behold, days are coming upon you,
when they will take you away with hooks,
the last of you with fishhooks.
Through breaches you will leave,
a woman in front of her; and you will be thrown to Harmon,
declares Yahweh.

After Amos's first indictment against Israel, he goes on to condemn the 'cows of Bashan' (4:1), the 'uppity upper-class women of northern Israel, who, by their incessant demand upon their husbands to provide for their gluttonous needs to carouse and feast, are responsible for goading them on to impoverish even further the poor'.[14] In this text Amos broadens his indictment beyond those who actively oppress others (Amos 2:6–8) to include those who, by their voracious appetites for more, indirectly cause the oppression of the poor. He thus negates the argument that one must be actively involved in oppression to incur guilt, making it clear to those of us in the developing world that we must ask the question, 'Does our consumption cause oppression'?

Amos 8:4–6

Hear this, tramplers of the needy
and destroyers of the poor of the land,
saying, 'When will the new moon pass,
that we may sell grain;
and the Sabbath,
that we may open grain?
To make the ephah small and to increase the shekel,
And to make balances deceitful,
to buy with silver the poor
and the needy for a pair of sandals
and to sell the refuse of wheat'.

[14] Paul, *Amos*, p. 128. Compare with Emmanuel Nwaoru, who argues that the term 'cows' refers both to males and females, 'A Fresh Look at Amos 4:1-3 and Its Imagery', *VT* 59 (2009), p. 465.

Here Amos addresses the 'religious' whose religion plays no role in their businesses—they are squirming in their seats, as it were, waiting for the New Moon and Sabbath to end so that they can exploit the poor through their unjust trade practices. Amos once again relies on Torah to indict his hearers, who rob the poor both 'coming and going'.[15] The merchants give less to their customers than promised by making the ephah smaller, and they take more product from wholesaling farmers by making the shekel greater.[16] Amos goes on to condemn them with shockingly violent language, which highlights the seriousness with which Yahweh views exploitation and oppression. They sun will be darkened during the day (8:9), mourning will be heard everywhere (8:10), and a famine of the word of the Lord will engulf the land (8:11).

As in the aforementioned texts, this passage makes it clear that oppression is a matter of one's relationship with Yahweh. Those who oppress others through unjust trade have broken the Torah of Yahweh, and will suffer greatly for it. Those who feast at the expense of the poor will now experience famine for lack of 'hearing the words of the LORD' (8:11).

These passages (2:6-8; 4:1-3; 8:4-6) highlight three important features of Amos's view of oppression: (1) Oppression of the poor adversely affects one's relationship with Yahweh; he will fiercely judge oppressors. (2) Both direct and indirect oppression are sinful. Alongside treating the poor equitably, one must also take care that one's consumption of goods does not cause harm. (3) Amos's invectives are directed at oppressors. Certainly the oppressed will find solace in Amos's words, but his target audience is oppressors, not their victims. Amos's fierce warning to those who would further their own lives at the cost of others thus forms the first aspect of the Old Testament's view of oppression.

ECCLESIASTES

Historical and Cultural Context.

Placing the book of Ecclesiastes in its historical and cultural context proves to be much more difficult than the task with Amos.[17] The book itself claims to be the words of the 'son of David, king in Jerusalem' (1:1). If this refers to Solomon, then its composition would have occurred during

[15] Ellis, 'Amos Economics', p. 469.

[16] Ibid.

[17] I will use 'Qohelet' to refer to the book's author and 'Ecclesiastes' to refer to the book itself.

the 10th century B.C.E.[18] However, scholars contest the significance of this statement. Representing the classical interpretation of this verse, the Targum explicitly ascribes the book to Solomon, stating that it records Solomon's prophetic vision concerning the future division of Israel, the destruction of the Temple, and the Babylonian exile.[19] This traditional association with Solomon has come under scrutiny for some time. As early as the as the fourth century, Didymus the Blind argued that '[a]ctually the Spirit is the author of the divinely inspired Scriptures... Either the real author is Solomon, or some [other] wise men have written it. Maybe we should opt for the latter so that nobody may say that the speaker talks about himself'.[20] The Babylonian Talmud holds a similar view, attributing the book to Hezekiah (*b. Baba Bathra* 15a). Centuries later, Martin Luther cast doubt on Solomonic authorship,[21] and since the work of Grotius in the seventeenth century, scholars have been much more apt to attribute the book to someone other than Solomon.[22]

In his examination of narrative strategy in Ecclesiastes, Eric Christianson argues that the book's reference to Solomon is deliberately vague so that it could adopt the 'Solomonic Guise', a literary device used to critique kingship.[23] Tremper Longman similarly argues that the Solomonic

---

18 John Bright, *A History of Israel*, 4th edn (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2000), p. 211.

19 Peter S. Knobel, *The Targum of Qohelet* (Aramaic Bible, 15; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1991), p. 20.

20 Didymus the Blind, *Commentary on Ecclesiastes* 7.9, in *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon* (ACCS IX; ed. J. Robert Wright; Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2005), p. 192.

21 Martin Luther, *Luthers Werke*, 1:207, cited by Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, p. 44. However, note Eric Christianson (*Ecclesiastes through the Centuries*, p. 95), who follows Theodore Preston in arguing that Luther does not in fact deny Solomonic authorship in this text. *The Hebrew Text, and a Latin Version of the Book of Solomon Called Ecclesiastes; with Original Notes, Philological and Exegetical, and a Translation of the Commentary of Mendlessohn from the Rabbinic Hebrew; Also a Newly Arranged Version of Ecclesiastes* (London: John W. Parker, 1845), p. 12. See also the discussion by Al Wolters, 'Ecclesiastes and the Reformers', in *The Words of the Wise are Like Goads: Qohelet for the 21st Century*, ed. by Mark Boda, Tremper Longman, and Christian Rata (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, forthcoming), pp. 62-4.

22 Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, p. 44; citing C. D. Ginsburg, *Coheleth, Commonly Called the book of Ecclesiastes* (London: Longman, Green, Longman and Roberts, 1861), p. 146, who in turn cites H. Grotius, *Annotationes in Vetus Testamentum*, 1:434-5.

23 Eric Christianson, *A Time to Tell: Narrative Strategies in Ecclesiastes* (JSOTSS 280; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1990), pp. 128-72. See also Jürgen van

persona is a fiction by pointing out parallels with the Akkadian genre of fictional autobiography.[24] Daniel Fredericks, among others, has responded to the current trend of denying Solomonic authorship in his recent commentary, stating that 'the absence of Solomon's name is hardly important, since everything short of that is announced—the editor simply chooses not to state the obvious'.[25]

The debate over the authorship, and consequently the date, of Ecclesiastes will continue, but its importance for this study lies in the fact that the book is clearly intended to be read as if it were the words of the 'son of David, king in Jerusalem' (1:1).[26] This is significant because the book approaches topics from the perspective of a king, one who ostensibly has the power to right wrongs and relieve oppression and suffering. The book

---

Oorschot, 'König und Mensch: Biografie und Autobiografie bei Kohelet und in der alttestamentlichen Literaturgeschichte', in *Mensch und König: Studien zur Anthropologie des Alten Testaments: Rüdiger Luz zum 60. Geburststag*, ed. by Angelika Berlejung and Raik Heckl (Herders biblische Studien 53; Freiburg: Herder, 2008), pp. 109-22.

24 Tremper Longman, *Ecclesiastes* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 15-20. See also, idem, *Fictional Akkadian Autobiography: A Generic and Comparative Study* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990).

25 Daniel C. Fredericks, *Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs* (AOTC 16; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity 2010), p. 31. See also Gleeson L. Archer, 'The Linguistic Evidence for the Date of "Ecclesiastes"', *JETS* 12 (1969), pp. 167-81; Duane Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs* (NAC 14; Nashville, TN: B & H, 1993); Walter Kaiser, Jr., *Ecclesiastes: Total Life* (EBC; Chicago: Moody, 1979); James Bollhagen, *Ecclesiastes* (Concordia Commentary; St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 2011). Regarding the linguistic argument for dating Ecclesiastes late, see Martin Shields, *The End of Wisdom: A Reappraisal of the Historical and Canonical Function of Ecclesiastes* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006), p. 23. Cf. Ian Young, *Diversity in Pre-exilic Hebrew* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1993), pp. 145-55; idem, 'Concluding Reflections', in *Biblical Hebrew: Chronology and Typology*, ed. Ian Young, JSOTSS 369 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2003), pp. 276-311 in which Young 'constructs a history of the Hebrew language in which Qoheleth's language could plausibly be preexilic' (cited by Shields, *End of Wisdom*, p. 23 n.6). However, note Oswald Loretz, who argues that the language of Qoheleth is the *only* aspect of the book that provides any basis for dating (*Qohelet und der Alte Orient: Untersuchungen zu Stil und theologischer Thematik des Buches Qohelet* [Herder: Freiburg, 1964], pp. 23-9, esp. p. 29]).

26 See C. L. Seow, who states that Eccl. 2 'call[s] to mind the activities and fabulous wealth of Solomon in 1 Kgs 3–11. Indeed it is difficult not to think of Solomon when the author concludes in 2:9 that he 'became great and surpassed' all who preceded him in Jerusalem' (*Ecclesiastes* [AB 18C; New York: Doubleday, 1997], p. 150).

does not, however, speak out against oppression as one would perhaps expect. Some scholars argue that the absence of a voice against oppression indicates that its author was powerless to stop it.[27] This may very well be the case, but it is at least clear that the author understood that his readers themselves were powerless against oppression by the powerful. For this reason, he offers his readers a coping mechanism: in light of a world turned upside-down, in which people cannot control anything, their only recourse is to trust God and to enjoy his gifts: eating, drinking, working, and companionship.[28] Therefore, while Amos addressed oppression from a position that could possibly effect change, or at the least announce Yahweh's judgment, Ecclesiastes broaches the issue from a place of realism—or perhaps resignation—concerning what the oppressed could actually do.

ECCLESIASTES'S RESPONSE TO OPPRESSION

Ecclesiastes 3:16-17

> And again I saw under the sun, in the place of justice there was wickedness, and in the place and in the place of righteousness there was wickedness. I said to myself in my heart, 'the righteous and the wicked God will judge, for a there is a time for every matter and for every deed'.

The first mention of injustice in Ecclesiastes concerns the reversal of the normal order of wickedness and righteousness. Where one would expect justice, namely the city gates, instead one finds wickedness and injustice.[29] Qohelet speaks here about the same issues seen earlier in Amos: the people obligated to protect society's underclass—the elders—are the very ones causing the oppression. James Crenshaw, who argues that Ecclesiastes represents a strain of pessimism in Israel, states that Qohelet's cynicism is explicit in 3:16: God does not help the oppressed.[30] However, this

---

27 E.g., Longman, who argues that these verses indicate that Solomon could not have been the book's author (*Ecclesiastes*, pp. 4-6).

28 See Eccles. 2:24-26; 3:10-15; 3:16-22; 5:18-20 [EVV 17-19]; 9:7-10; 11:7-10. The significance of these passages for the meaning of Ecclesiastes is certain, though they are interpreted in vastly different ways depending on one's view of the book as a whole. For an overview of interpretive options, see Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, pp. 150-3. Regarding the coping strategy offered by Ecclesiastes, see Daniel C. Fredericks, *Coping with Transience: Ecclesiastes on the Brevity of Life* (The Biblical Seminar 18; Sheffield: JSOT, 1993).

29 Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, p. 177.

30 Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, pp. 101-2.

is not a foregone conclusion. It is true that Qohelet does not condemn the oppressors or offer to end the suffering, as one would expect of a king such as Solomon, but the following verse (Eccles. 3:17) offers comfort for the oppressed: there is a time for judgment, a time in which all will be made right. Ecclesiastes does not offer an *immediate* solution to the problem, but it does give hope of a time in which injustice is righted and suffering alleviated, not unlike the New Testament.[31] Qohelet points the oppressed to God—the ultimate deliverer—rather than encouraging trust in leaders who have already evidenced corruption.

That Ecclesiastes addresses the powerless is further demonstrated by the passage's surrounding context. Ecclesiastes 3:16-18 comes after the poem that details the proper time for life experiences (Eccles. 3:1-8), laying the foundation for verse 17 in which Qohelet states assuredly that God will judge the wicked because 'he has appointed a time for every matter' (Eccles. 3:17). Just as humans can take comfort in creation's order—even though it lies beyond their control—they can trust that God has appointed a time for the punishment of oppressors.[32]

Ecclesiastes 3 also contains two explicit admonitions to enjoy God's gifts, both before and after its discussion of oppression (Eccles. 3:12-13, 22). In the first instance, Qohelet states that the ways of God are hidden (Eccles. 3:11), which leads him to encourage his readers to 'to rejoice and to do good' and 'eat, drink, and see good in all their toil' (Eccles. 3:12-13). The second admonition comes on the heels of a discussion concerning the difference between humans and animals, in which Qohelet concludes that both suffer the same fate—death. In light of this fact, the book advises that every person should enjoy their work (Eccles. 3:22). Both of these admonitions concern how humans should respond to things over which they have no control. Instead of clamouring for control, they should trust in God's timing and enjoy what can be enjoyed—food, drink, and work.

Ecclesiastes 4:1-3

> Again I turned and I saw all the oppression that is done under the sun, and behold, the tears of the oppressed, and there was none to comfort them. And in the hand of their oppressors was power, and there was none to comfort them. So I praised the dead, who already died more than those who are yet living. But better than both is the one who has not yet been, who has not seen the evil work that is done under the sun.

---

31 See, for example, Rev. 21:3-4.

32 Robert Alter, *The Wisdom Books: Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes* (New York: Norton, 2010), p. 355. See also Ogden, *Qoheleth*, p. 64.

The tenor of Qohelet's pain at oppression reaches its highest pitch in this passage. Abuse of the poor is so overwhelming that he advocates death over life, and never having been born over both. Again, one would expect a text consciously written from a king's perspective to advocate for the oppressed in at least some small way. Nevertheless, as Longman points out, Qohelet 'does not personally engage the subject or enjoin others to resist the oppressors'.[33] Longman and Bartholomew both indicate that Qohelet's silence at this juncture is a further indication that the Solomonic language in the early chapters of Ecclesiastes is a rhetorical device.[34] However, is it possible that Qohelet remains silent because his intent is not to rectify unjust situations, but to provide a way to endure those situations? Qohelet provides that way by emphasizing the extreme distress oppression causes him and by implying that suffering will cease, even if it is death that brings relief.[35] The oppressed can thus take solace in the certainty that God will judge evil (Eccles. 3:17) and that their affliction will not always be.

Ecclesiastes 5:8-9

> If you see oppression of the poor and denial of justice and righteousness in the province, do not be shocked at the sight, for one official watches another, and an official is over both of them. But profit from the land is taken by all; a king is served by the field.

Duane Garrett has pointed out the difficulties of translating these verses, particularly verse 8.[36] Nevertheless, the reader can be certain that Qohelet knows that oppression is alive and well, ostensibly due to the corruption he sees as inherent in bureaucracy. C. L. Seow rightly states that the issue for Qohelet here, as in 3:16-17, is not so much *where* ('in the province') injustice occurs geographically, but that it occurs in places where justice should reign.[37] Despite Qohelet's concern for the oppressed, it once again becomes apparent that the book is not interested in condemning oppressors; rather, it advises the oppressed not to be shocked at injustice.

This admonition, combined with Qohelet's insistence that God will judge wickedness and ultimately end oppression, gives readers a pro-

33 Longman, *Ecclesiastes*, p. 132.

34 Ibid.; Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, p. 187.

35 Garrett is careful to note that Ecclesiastes is not advocating suicide as a means of escape. Rather, he is expressing personal turmoil caused by seeing oppression in the world ('Qoheleth', p. 163).

36 Ibid., pp. 165-6. Compare with Graham Ogden, *Qoheleth*, 2nd edn (Readings: A New Biblical Commentary; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2007), pp. 84-6.

37 Choon-Leong Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, p. 202.

gram of coping with injustice. They are to trust in God's sovereignty, wait patiently, and not be surprised when they experience unjust suffering. Qohelet's advice makes it apparent that the book forms the Old Testament's other perspective on oppression by offering those who are suffering a way to persevere under oppression.

TOWARD A THEOLOGICAL RESPONSE TO OPPRESSION

A theological response to oppression must be fully informed by the entire canon. In this regard the thoughts of Walter Brueggemann may prove helpful. In two essays in *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* he outlined 'a shape for Old Testament Theology' that included what he calls 'structure legitimation' and 'embrace of pain.'[38] The 'structure legitimation' aspect of the Old Testament is that with which we are perhaps most familiar: simply put, the idea that certain actions result in certain consequences. Thus, when Amos decries the oppression of the poor by the ruling class, he presents what Brueggemann calls the 'common theology' of the Old Testament.[39] The ruling class has sinned against both God and people and must therefore pay the appropriate price. Such an indictment upholds God's justice, and it is not an indictment away from which we should shy. Thus, while Amos's voice is very much 'bottom-up' in the sense that he speaks truth to power, it also is 'top-down' in the sense that he pronounces the well-known Deuteronomic curses against those who have broken covenant with Yahweh.

Amos's voice is one that believers today must be willing to heed. We must speak and act clearly and loudly against oppression. We must also realize that we are often not quite as innocent as we would like to believe. As Amos shows us, the insatiable appetites of these 'cows of Bashan' cemented their guilt. Yet, we must not allow Amos alone to inform our theological response to oppression, for he gives only one side of the story. Amos confirms for us that Yahweh is a God who judges, a God who acts, a God who does not look lightly upon those who would break his covenant by their actions against others. This is all appropriate and very much true.

Nevertheless, there is another voice that we must hear as well, a voice that embraces the pain, to use Bruegemmann's characterization, of those who do in fact follow Yahweh, and yet who still suffer unjustly under the heavy burden of oppression thrust upon them by others. To that end, we have engaged Ecclesiastes as a conversation partner in the attempt to

[38] See Walter Brueggemann, 'A Shape for Old Testament Theology, I: Structure Legitimation', *CBQ* 47 (1985), 28-46; idem, 'A Shape for Old Testament Theology, II: Embrace of Pain', *CBQ* 47 (1985), 395-415.

[39] Brueggemann, 'Structure Legitimation'.

develop a fitting response to oppression. Ecclesiastes comes to us as the words of 'the son of David, king in Jerusalem' and thus we rightly expect a 'top-down' perspective on oppression. In this expectation we certainly are not disappointed, though why a king of Israel would not end oppression remains a thread to be fully unravelled. We also find that Ecclesiastes presents a 'bottom-up' perspective on oppression in that he seeks embrace the pain of the sufferer, thus upending our expectation that the royal class would stand against the oppressed. Qohelet is bold enough to broach the question of why the righteous suffer while the wicked live pleasant lives. In his questioning, the author of Ecclesiastes presents a much-needed second viewpoint.

Whereas Amos cried out forcefully against oppression, Qohelet accepts it as a given, though lamenting its existence. Whereas Amos condemns the oppressor, thus upholding the 'common theology' of the Old Testament, Qohelet questions the apparent failure of this theology when he observes the unjust suffering of the righteous. While the king of Israel could possibly have ended oppression, we know that this end to injustice would last at the most until his own death. Thus, instead of decrying oppression, in the end Qohelet plots a way forward that offers a way for the oppressed to cope with their lot in life: they must fear God, enjoy his gifts, and trust that he will one day set things aright.

For followers of Christ today, a full response to oppression will have to integrate other Scriptures that address it, such as those passages found in Deuteronomy and the Gospels. In an effort to come closer that aim, this study has sought to bring together two Old Testament voices that we are not accustomed to hearing side-by-side so that we might move closer to a fully informed theological response to oppressed and oppressor. With Amos, we must stand against the oppressor both in speech and in deed. With Qohelet, we must comfort the oppressed. And yet, we must also realize that there is nothing we can physically do to end *all* oppression, so we must therefore consent to God's sovereignty. After having done our part, we must entrust the care of the oppressed to him, and in turn ask them to do the same, just as the Israelite sage did so many centuries ago. The church's theological response to oppression must therefore combine these two Old Testament voices to decry oppression and to comfort the oppressed, and finally to point them to the gospel of Jesus Christ, who will finally wipe away every tear and end all suffering.

Conflict or Concord? A Review Article[1]

K. Scott Oliphint

Westminster Theological Seminary, P.O. Box 27009, Philadelphia, PA 19118, USA
communications@wts.edu

Where the Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion, and Naturalism. By Alvin Plantinga. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. ISBN 978-0-19-981209-7. xvi + 359 pp. £17.99.

As with most everything that Alvin Plantinga has written, this book offers a rare combination of philosophical insight, technical depth and humor that is virtually non-existent in books of this kind. For that reason alone, this book is worth reading.

The book is taken from Plantinga's Gifford Lectures, which were given in 2005 at the University of St Andrews. His 'overall claim' in the book, as he puts it, is this: *there is superficial conflict but deep concord between science and theistic religion, but superficial concord and deep conflict between science and naturalism* (p. ix). The rest of the book expands on each of these. It is divided into four parts, including, 'Alleged Conflict', 'Superficial Conflict', 'Concord', and 'Deep Conflict'. His aim, given this structure, is to diffuse the alleged conflict, to affirm (some kind of) superficial conflict, to show how theistic belief and science are concordant, and then to lay out the deep conflict that inheres between science and naturalism.

ALLEGED CONFLICT

First, the 'alleged conflict' (chs. 1-4). The first two chapters of the book are a two part discussion of 'Evolution and Christian Belief'. In the first chapter, Plantinga gives us a brief survey of Darwinism, and then takes a look at Richard Dawkins' work, *The Blind Watchmaker*. Plantinga thinks Dawkins' arguments for Darwinism are weak. 'Dawkins claims that he will show that the entire living world came to be without design; what he actually argues is only that this is possible and we don't know that it is astronomically improbable; for all we know it's not astronomically improbable. But mere possibility claims are not impressive' (p. 25). In the end, says Plantinga, 'Dawkins gives us no reason whatever to think that current biological science is in conflict with Christian belief' (p. 30).

---

[1] Originally pubished in *Westminster Theological Journal* 75.1 (Spring, 2013); reproduced here with the kind permission of the editor and author.

In the second chapter, and second part of 'Evolution and Christian Belief', Plantinga deals with Daniel Dennett, in part concluding that Dennett's foray into religious epistemology is disappointing, at best. Dennett simply assumes that theistic belief is 'childish' or 'irrational'. And why does he think such a thing? '[H]e assumes that rational belief in God would require broadly scientific evidence and proposes or rather just assumes that there isn't any other source of warrant or rationality for belief in God...' (p. 42). In his arguments, located primarily in *Darwin's Dangerous Idea*, Dennett seems unaware of defenses offered that there can be sources of knowledge in addition to reason. For example, William Alston argues that epistemological requirements often imposed on religious belief are not imposed on other sources of belief. There seems to be, in Dennett, an epistemological double standard when it comes to religious belief. So, for example, we could ask whether we can show by rational intuition that memory beliefs, or perceptual beliefs are reliable? Alston's answer is 'No'. Plantinga continues, 'Nor can we give a decent, noncircular rational argument that reason itself is indeed reliable; in trying to give such an argument, we would of course be *presupposing* that reason is reliable' (p. 48). In other words, when it comes to basic and fundamental sources or modes of knowing, the only way adequately to affirm and argue for them is by presupposing them in the argument. 'Naturally,' says Plantinga, 'these defenses might be mistaken; but to show that they are requires more than a silly story and an airy wave of the hand' (p. 46). In concluding these first two chapters, Plantinga makes clear just exactly what he *is* arguing, and what he is *not*. He is arguing that evolutionary theory is *not* incompatible with Christian belief, rather, 'what is incompatible with [Christian belief] is the idea that evolution, natural selection, is *unguided*. But that idea isn't part of evolutionary theory as such; it's instead a metaphysical or theological addition' (pp. 62-3).

Chapters 3 and 4 discuss the issue of divine action in relation to (ch. 3) 'the Old Picture' (Newton, LaPlace) and (ch. 4) 'the New Picture' (Quantum Mechanics). Continuing his discussion of an 'alleged conflict', Plantinga wants to address a supposed conflict between the belief that God acts in the world and (some) scientific theories. In chapter 3, Plantinga notes the views of Langdon Gilkey, John Macquarrie, and Rudolph Bultmann that deny God's actions in the world due to such actions being in some way incompatible with science. Plantinga's argument here is that the Newtonian picture, with a Laplacean codicil, is alone sufficient to give credence to the Gilkey, Macquarrie, and Bultman complaint. The Laplacean codicil to Newton includes the fact that the universe is causally closed. 'This Laplacean picture, clearly enough, is the one guiding the thought of Bultmann, Macquarrie, Gikey, et al. There is interesting irony,

here, in the fact that these theologians, in the name of being scientific and up to date... urge on us an understanding of classical science that goes well beyond what classical science actually propounds (and... they also urge on us a picture of the world that is scientifically out of date by many decades)' (p. 90). So, the 'Old Picture' of science is no threat to a belief in divine action in the world.

In a discussion of the possibility of miracles relative to the 'New Picture' of Quantum Mechanics, Plantinga argues, in chapter 4, that there are no real difficulties. The supposed conflict appears when some consider the 'intervention' aspect of divine action in the world. After a fascinating and enlightening discussion on notions of intervention and different versions of Quantum Mechanics, Plantinga rightly assesses the warrant of Christian belief relative to that of science:

> [I]f Christian belief is true, the warrant for belief in special divine action doesn't come from quantum mechanics or current science or indeed any science at all; these beliefs have their own independent source of warrant. That means that in case of conflict between Christian belief and current science, it isn't automatically current science that has more warrant or positive epistemic status; perhaps the warrant enjoyed by Christian belief is greater than that enjoyed by the conflicting scientific belief. (p. 120)

He then concludes:

> What we should think of special divine action, therefore, doesn't depend on QM or versions thereof, or on current science more generally. Indeed, what we should think of current science can quite properly depend, in part, on theology. For example, science has not spoken with a single voice about the question whether the universe has a beginning: first the idea was that it did, but then the steady state theory triumphed, but then big bang cosmology achieved ascendancy, but now there are straws in the wind suggesting a reversion to the thought that the universe is without a beginning.… But where Christian or theistic belief and current science can fit nicely together... so much the better; and if one of the current versions of QM fits better with such belief than the others, that's a perfectly proper reason to accept that version. (p. 121)

SUPERFICIAL CONFLICT

Having looked at the 'Alleged Conflict' between science and Christian belief in Part I, Part II (which includes chapters 5 and 6) deals with 'Superficial Conflict'. In this section, Plantinga wants to deal with areas of science 'where the appearance of conflict [between science and Chris-

tian belief] is matched by reality' (p. 130). Specifically, he is interested in looking at (1) evolutionary psychology and (2) scientific scripture scholarship (historical biblical criticism). Plantinga believes that evolutionary psychology is gaining in prominence and prestige currently. Highlighting its conflict with religion, Plantinga states: 'A recent high (or maybe low) point is a book in which a new understanding of *religion* is proposed. At a certain stage in our evolutionary history, so the claim goes, we human beings made the transition from being prey to being predators. Naturally that occasioned great joy, and religion arose as a celebration of that happy moment! Granted, that sounds a little far-fetched: wouldn't we have needed the consolations of religion even more when we were still prey?' (p. 133).

In a brief discussion about the place of music in our supposed evolutionary development, Plantinga notes arguments that contend that the importance of music is linked to activities such as 'walking and marching and other rhythmical activities' (p. 132). But, asks Plantinga,

> Is an activity important only if it has played a prominent role in our evolution, enabling our ancestors to survive and reproduce? What about physics, mathematics, and philosophy, and evolutionary biology itself: do (did) they have evolutionary significance? After all, it is only the occasional assistant professor of mathematics or logic that needs to be able to prove Gödel's theorem in order to survive and reproduce. Indeed, given the nerdness factor, undue interest in such things would have been counterproductive in the Pleistocene. What prehistoric woman would be interested in some guy who prefers thinking about set theory to hunting? (p. 133)

(In case the reader misses the humour here, Plantinga repeats this in ch. 9, p. 287).

Plantinga concludes chapter 5 with a question that hints toward the power of the disagreement between science and religion. Do the conflicts presented present the Christian or theist with *defeaters* for the theistic beliefs themselves? That question he takes up in chapter 6.

In this chapter of the 'Superficial Conflict' section, Plantinga dubs scientific theories that are incompatible with Christian belief 'Simonean science' in honor of Herbert Simon (p. 164). After certain definitions, discussions and explanations, the bulk of the chapter is asking the question whether Simonean science is a defeater for Christian belief (pp. 174ff.). Plantinga answers this question, in part, by showing the relevance of one's evidence base to one's beliefs, and by discussing the 'so-called problem of faith and reason' (p. 178). The rest of Plantinga's discussion is calculated to show how one's evidence base, including the relationship of the deliver-

ances of reason to the deliverances of faith, allow for nothing more than a superficial conflict between science and Christian belief.

OF CONFLICT AND CONCORD

Part III, 'Concord,' consists of chapters 7-9. In chapter 7, Plantinga considers cosmological fine-tuning arguments for the conclusion that our world has been designed. After much discussion, his conclusion is modest 'the FTA [fine-tuning argument] offers some slight support for theism... but only mild support' (p. 224).

In chapter 8, 'Design Discourse', Plantinga moves the discussion from a notion of arguments to the notion of 'discourses':

> Behe's design discourses do not constitute irrefragable arguments for theism, or even for the proposition that the structures he considers have in fact been designed. Taken not as arguments but as design discourses they fare better. They present us with epistemic situations in which the rational response is design belief—design belief for which there aren't strong defeaters. The proper conclusion to be drawn, I think, is that Behe's design discourses do support theism, although it isn't easy to say how much support they offer. I realize this is a wet noodle conclusion: can't I say something more definite and exciting? (p. 264)

This discussion, it seems to me, is quite helpful in that it changes the debate from notions of strict and demonstrative *proofs*, to the more biblically sound context of persuasion (though Plantinga does not use those terms). He argues, for example, that Paley, et al., present something like *perceptions* on the basis of which we find ourselves forming basic beliefs about design, etc.

The final chapter in Part III, 'Deep Concord: Christian Theism and the Deep Roots of Science,' is, as the chapter title makes obvious, the climax of this 'Concord' section. In this chapter, Plantinga waxes theological. A few of the subtitles give away the crux of his theological discussion: 'Science and the Divine Image,' 'Reliability and Regularity,' 'Law,' (including 'Law and Constancy' and 'Law and Necessity'). Plantinga does a fine job in these sections of showing the bankruptcy of naturalism to account for central aspects of the scientific enterprise. In a section on the relationship of mathematics to science and theism, Plantinga looks at the efficacy and accessibility of mathematics, as well as its nature and its abstract objects. On its efficacy, Plantinga says, 'That mathematics of this sort should be applicable to the world is indeed astounding. It is also properly thought of as unreasonable, in the sense that from a naturalistic perspective it would be wholly unreasonable to expect this sort of mathematics to be useful in

describing our world. It makes eminently good sense from the perspective of theism, however' (p. 285). Plantinga goes on to show how scientific induction, the preference for simplicity of theory and contingency all cohere with theism and cannot be reasonably sustained by naturalistic theories of science.

In his last and final section, 'Deep Conflict,' (ch. 10) Plantinga argues that there is deep conflict between science and evolutionary naturalism. Here, he says,

> My quarrel is certainly not with the scientific theory of evolution. Nor is it an argument for the conclusion that unguided evolution could not produce creatures with reliable belief-producing faculties; I very much doubt that it could, but that it *couldn't* is neither a premise nor the conclusion of my argument. Still further, my argument will not be for the conclusion that naturalism is false, although of course I believe that it is. What I *will* argue is that naturalism in in conflict with evolution, a main pillar of contemporary science. (p. 310)

Readers of Plantinga will be reminded in this chapter of much that he has written before concerning the probability that our cognitive faculties are reliable, given naturalism and evolution, i.e., P(R/N&E).

In the end, as we would expect, Plantinga concludes: 'Given that naturalism is at least a quasi-religion, there is indeed a science/religion conflict, all right, but it is not between science and theistic religion: it is between science and naturalism. That's where the conflict really lies' (p. 350).

PERSPECTIVES ON PLANTINGA

As I said in the beginning, like almost everything Plantinga writes, this book is well worth reading. As far as I know, there is nothing like it in terms of its penchant to dismantle naturalism and an unguided view of evolution. There is, however, an Achilles heel to the entire discussion that, while in no way muting the significant strengths of Plantinga's argument, nevertheless renders the overall premise of his discussion moot with respect to historic Christianity. For a book of such depth, breadth, wit and acumen, this is most unfortunate.

The moot factor enters in when we recognize the central, crucial, biblical significance of God's special creation of Adam (and, from him, Eve). This significance is *not*, we should note, simply *that* Adam was created in history; Plantinga's notion of guided evolution could affirm that. But it is also significant for Christians (biblically, theologically and historically) to affirm *how* Adam was created. The matter is not simply that there was

a man in history named Adam, who was designated the covenant head of the human race. Rather, with respect to biblical and theological orthodox teaching, Christians must affirm (and have historically affirmed) that Adam was *the first* man, created specially by God *from* the dust and with *expired* life (i.e., life given, because *breathed out*, by God to him). There was no living thing, no other 'one', nor some 'thing', (apart from the dust) that preceded Adam's special creation.

This truth—of the reality of Adam *in history* as the *first man*—is not simply an argument about 'origins', it is rather, as Paul makes clear (e.g., Romans 5:12-21), an argument about the nature of creation, of man, of death, of eternal punishment and of redemption in Christ. Once we begin to tamper with the 'first man in history' of Adam, we begin, by entailment, to tamper with central truths of the gospel itself.

So, unfortunately, given the orthodox necessity of affirming Adam as the first man in history, the overriding notion in this book of 'where the conflict really lies' is not advanced in this discussion (though many topics in the book *do* advance the discussion), but the conflict itself reverts back to that between evolutionary theories and Christianity. In the context of the four parts of this book, then, we can affirm much that Plantinga affirms, and his discussions—particularly with respect to his deconstruction of much that passes for 'science'—is quite useful. Even his discussion of the 'deep conflict' between science and naturalism is on point. In a book that seeks to dismantle a number of scientific tenets, however, it is disappointing that there is no sustained scrutiny of the view of evolution itself, which view remains, despite the cultural narrative, decidedly absent any hard evidence.

What is needed, therefore, in these discussions, is more exegesis, more (historically orthodox) theology, along with the dismantling of naturalism *and* of evolution, whether (supposedly) guided or not. If (since) this is true, the conflict really lies between historic Christianity and evolutionary science (guided or unguided); there remains, therefore, a 'deep conflict' between evolutionary science and Christianity. The only way to appease that conflict is either to concede to science what it itself has not been able (nor will it be able) to show, i.e., that man has come (guided or not) from non-man, or to accept the biblical teaching on man's origin (and the biblical/theological truths entailed by that origin). The notion that man has evolved from non-man, evidentially and otherwise, is, even from a scientific standpoint, eminently unreasonable, and thus singularly *un*scientific.

Reviews

Canon Revisited: Establishing the Origins and Authority of the New Testament Books. By Michael J. Kruger. Wheaton, IL:Crossway, 2012. ISBN 978-1-4335-0500-3. 362 pp. £19.99.

The author of this important study teaches New Testament at Reformed Theological Seminary, Charlotte, NC, and his publications major on the transitional period between the beginnings of Christianity and its consolidation. The growth and development of the Christian canon of Scripture during this time is a major problem that has now returned to the centre of scholarly interest. While not ignoring the historical question, 'How was the canon formed and accepted?', Kruger limits himself to the more theological type of question: 'How can we as believing Christians know that we have the right books in the canon?' Put in other words: is it possible and theologically sound to believe that there is a closed collection of books that can rightly be understood as possessing divine authority for the church? Have we as believing Christians 'intellectually sufficient grounds' (i.e. a rational basis) for affirming that only the 27 books that comprise the New Testament rightfully belong together in it?

The resulting enquiry covers a very wide field, but the author is thoroughly familiar with the ancient sources and the relevant contemporary scholarship, and he brings an acute critical mind to the discussion. The argument is clearly summarised on pp. 23-24. There are three proposed ways of understanding the situation.

First, some think that the canon is created by the church expressing its mind on the matter. Canonicity is thus not so much something inherent in the canonical books that makes them canonical as rather the fact that historically the church conferred authority upon them. The effect is to make canonicity a verdict conferred upon a book by the authority of the church, with the implication that it is a higher authority than the canonical books themselves. And were these books already canonical in the historical period before this ecclesiastical decision? This view makes canonicity something that is done to the books rather than something intrinsic to them. It is a typically Roman Catholic view.

Second, alongside this view there is the 'historically determined model', where the emphasis lies on the historical merits of the canonical books. Historical investigations will show if a book has authentic Jesus tradition or apostolic content. Again the criticism is this subjects the canon to the human investigators whose views may change over time, and it ceases to be the final authority.

Over against these views Kruger expounds and defends the 'self-authenticating' model: 'God has created the proper epistemic environment wherein a Christian's belief in the New Testament canon can be reliably formed' (p. 94). The criterion for canonicity is not an independent principle administered by individuals or the church but 'the way in which the Scripture sets the terms for how its own origins are to be investigated and explored' (p. 85). This was the view of various Reformed theologians, especially Calvin, Owen, Turretin and Bavinck. Kruger admits that this is a circular procedure, but in this case a necessarily circular process. There has to be a providential exposure of canonical books to the church. Providential non-preservation of some documents (1 Cor 5:9) implies that they were not canonical. Canonical books are recognised as such by their inherent divine qualities, 'beauty, efficacy and harmony', but these qualities cannot be perceived by us apart from the internal *testimonium* of the Holy Spirit to believers, and this takes place communally rather than individually. Such books have apostolic origins, canonisation being understood as due to recognition of their apostolicity. But what about doubts concerning the apostolic origins of some books in some scholars? Here Kruger appeals to the combination of self-authenticating qualities and argues that the two ways he rejects above do have a limited legitimate role in this process of recognising and affirming the canonicity of the New Testament books. (Presumably his criticisms of them are directed against using them independently of this basic criterion.)

Developing the topic in greater detail, Kruger maintains that the beauty of the Scriptures is something that is spiritual, not necessarily rhetorical or literary, and there is also their efficacy in bringing God's Word to believers, and their unity and harmony in the message that they severally bring. But the presence of these features is often denied by critics. Kruger has to defend them, and does so by claiming that we have no grounds for thinking that those 'without the Spirit can rightly discern such things'.

It is here that my doubts about some aspects of the argument begin to emerge. The argument is, as Kruger frankly admits, circular: you can only discern these features if you are filled with the Spirit, and if you deny their presence, this is not an indication of their absence but of your lack of the Spirit. Now I know several scholars who find contradictions and errors in Scripture but of whose spirituality and faith I have no doubts but rather will positively affirm it. To say that they are 'without the Spirit' would be a false accusation, based on the fact that they do not see and recognise the divine features (such as inerrancy) that some of us claim that we can see. I suspect also that there is here a complex mixture of phenomena that are perceived by ordinary intellectual means and those that are apparently

perceived by some kind of spiritual insight that I can perceive because I have the Spirit, and if somebody else tells me that she cannot see them, my rejoinder according to Kruger should be to say that she is spiritually blind. Surely, however, if I find a discrepancy between factual information in Kings and in Chronicles, this is a matter of mental competence rather than spiritual declension.

The argument proceeds, secondly, by arguing from the redemptive-historical unity of Scripture and again there is an overlap between what is mentally observed and that which is spiritually discerned. Kruger argues there is a unity based on the christocentric character of the New Testament (and of the Old Testament). But arguably some early Christian books were christocentric yet not canonised, and to describe the *whole* of the Old Testament as christocentric, as is often done, is simply unconvincing to me. Kruger finds a covenantal structure that reflects a genre in some ancient near-eastern documents. But that doesn't make these documents canonical, and there is some further confusion in the argument between literary structure and theological underlying basis.

Third, similar doubts attend the claims made for apostolicity. Apostolicity is the basis of the authority of the New Testament books, apparently referring to the authors being apostles (or being influenced by apostles); this argument depends partly on identifying as many of the authors as possible as actual named apostles and partly also on holding that only the particular writings that got into the canon by this means were apostolic, even though their authors also wrote other Christian documents (back to 1 Cor. 5:9). The writings emerge from the new covenant made by God which had to have documentation. So works like Hebrews (anonymous in the sense that the name of the author has not survived) depend on knowledge gained from an apostle. Some books show authorial awareness of apostolic status. But what about those that allegedly show signs of using somebody else's name, giving the name of (say) Paul but Paul himself did not write them, and doing so in order to deceive the readers? Kruger follows the usual track of noting that in every case there is a cohort of scholars who adopt the minority position that the documents were the actual work of the named author (or written by an amanuensis), and we should follow their example. This can result sometimes in the acceptance of somewhat unlikely hypotheses, such as that Paul himself wrote the Pastoral Epistles but a brilliant theologian (or theologians) wrote Romans and 2 Corinthians, somebody who was far more competent in theology and composition than Paul when left to himself. (Maybe we should stop writing books entitled 'The Theology of Paul' and shift our theme to 'The theology of Tertius'?) This specific example is emphatically not a hypothesis adopted by Kruger himself, but one adopted by some other conserva-

tive scholars. But again we are dealing with a characteristic of the books that can be defended or questioned on critical grounds rather than necessarily by some kind of spiritual awareness.

Finally, there is the fact that the early church accepted these books. This is a reliable indicator of canonicity, regardless of the existence of tensions and diversity in the books chosen. It is important to show that this acceptance came at an early stage, and Kruger gives an excellent display of the evidence, paying especial attention to the development of collections of MSS and how they were used.

This is a comprehensive and able contribution to the study of canonisation, giving lots of information and argumentation that cannot be found so easily elsewhere. What happens when Christian believers appraise it? Has Kruger expounded a case that stands up under the scrutiny of other Spirit-filled believers? There are several points of tension that have emerged and others can be added. In particular, there are questions regarding the way in which he tends to assume that statements of a self-authenticating nature apply to every word of canonical books and guarantee their inspiration; but this simply means that another book is needed to explore this area.

Similar problems arise, of course, with other aspects of theology. If I believe in the goodness of God, I have to deal with the apparent evidence of actions that may seem incompatible with it (such as the famous Lisbon Earthquake), and I can put myself in an impregnable position by saying that my critics lack the spiritual insight to recognise the hand of God for good in natural disasters. In his atheistic days Tony Flew used to pose the question to believers: what sort of thing would count as evidence that forces you to abandon theism? He found it frustrating that Christians could have a high pile of unanswered problems that they were prepared to put on one side while they continued believing. But of course if you have good reason for faith, you're not going to abandon it simply because of some difficulties; on balance you continue to believe. So too while this approach to canonicity is not problem-free, it clears up other difficulties that readers may have, and takes its place as essential reading on the topic.

I. Howard Marshall, University of Aberdeen

The Ashgate Research Companion to John Owen's Theology. Edited by Kelly M. Kapic and Mark Jones. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2012. ISBN: 978-1-4094-3488-7. xviii + 352 pp. £85.00

In the summer of 2008, several scholars gathered at Westminster College, Cambridge, for the 'John Owen Today' conference. The papers that were presented at this conference by numerous theologians, pastors and

church historians formed the basis for *The Ashgate Research Companion to John Owen's Theology*. The book is composed of seventeen chapters divided into three sections: method, theology, and practice. This volume is an enlightening, refreshing, and helpful book focused upon the life, thought, and legacy of John Owen.

The book opens with a preface by Carl Trueman that focuses on the significance of Owen and his thought. The first section of the book, on method, has contributions by Ryan Kelly, Sebastian Rehnman, John Tweeddale, Willem J. van Asselt, Gert van den Brink, and Crawford Gribben. All six of these chapters are of very high quality. Willem van Asselt's chapter on the covenant theology of Owen and Johannes Cocceius is particularly good, as is Sebastian Rehnman's chapter on Owen's understanding of faith and reason. One very interesting and enjoyable chapter was Crawford Gribben's essay on Edward Millington's *Bibliotheca Oweniana*, the auction catalogue made of Owen's library after his death.

The second section on Owen's theology has contributions by Kelly Kapic, Suzanne McDonald, Edwin Tay, Alan Spence, Robert Letham, and George Hunsinger. Suzanne McDonald's chapter on Owen's understanding of the beatific vision is excellent. McDonald notes that Owen reoriented the traditional doctrine of the beatific vision in a Christological direction. Edwin Tay's chapter on the oblation and intercession of Christ the high priest is significant in that it highlights a central theme of Owen's thought. The only chapter here that has problematic elements is Robert Letham's essay on Owen's doctrine of the Trinity. Letham fails to accurately assess Owen's subtle and nuanced doctrine of the *pactum salutis*, instead characterizing it as a binitarian conception that divides the Trinity. Letham also inaccurately states that Owen denied divine simplicity in his *Commentary on Hebrews*. Owen actually would have seen such a denial as Socinian, and the passages that Letham quotes are nearly identical to passages found in *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, where Owen strongly defends divine simplicity (pp. 193-4).

The third and final section on practise has contributions by Tim Cooper, John Coffey, Daniel Hyde, Lee Gatiss and Martin Foord. Tim Cooper has a very interesting chapter on Owen's personality. Daniel Hyde has a chapter on Owen's understanding of prayer and the work of the Spirit. Lee Gatiss examines Owen's thought on infant baptism and salvation. These chapters are very good, and for the most part straightforward. The book concludes with a very helpful bibliography that has been compiled by John W. Tweeddale. The bibliography is a valuable resource for Owen scholars, theologians, historians, and pastors.

The Ashgate Research Companion to John Owen's Theology is very well written, and very well put together. It is not unnecessarily compli-

cated, and the editors have done a fine job at avoiding tedium. One of the strengths of this book is that there are numerous essays that examine theological topics and issues that were very important to Owen. This book is thus highly valuable because Owen's concerns are valuable. Owen's priorities of communion with the Triune God, mortification of sin, and the priesthood of Christ, to name a few, are essential concerns for the church in any age. The church in our era will be enriched and strengthened by a consistent commitment to those same priorities that were so important to Owen.

Christopher Cleveland, Florida, USA

The Theology of Jonathan Edwards. By Michael J. McClymond and Gerald R. McDermott. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. ISBN 978-0-19-979160-6. xii + 757 pp. £40.00.

2012 saw the publication of two massive volumes that cover, in encyclopaedic fashion, the theology of the Puritan tradition. One of these was Joel Beeke and Mark Jones's *A Puritan Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), which summarises the output of the scores of Puritans who were active between the 1560s and the 1660s. The book reviewed here, which is nearly as large, deals with but one of their successors in the following century: Jonathan Edwards (1703-58).

The Theology of Jonathan Edwards is a testament to the diligent labours of two leading Edwards scholars, Michael McClymond and Gerald McDermott. Both men are able historical theologians, and have complementary strengths in the allied disciplines such as cultural history and philosophy of religion. Of particular interest to *SBET* readers, both are also Reformed evangelicals who are almost entirely sympathetic to Edwards. Indeed, it is wonderful to see what scholarship from a shared perspective can do for the subject. Those who have endured the sometimes hopelessly maladroit interpretations of non-evangelical academics would understand the relief of reading something recognisable as Edwards on these topics. Indeed, if one takes the example of Perry Miller, it would seem that the further away the personal theological perspective, the less accurate even a very informed interpretation of Edwards seems to be. This book will be a landmark in Edwards studies for its combination of rigorous scholarship and sympathetic rendering. Although evangelicals have been active in the field from the start, McClymond and McDermott represent a changing of the guard in which evangelicals appear to have gained the ascendency.

The book has forty five chapters and is divided into three parts. The first part provides a very helpful introduction to Edwards' historical situ-

ation as well as constructing a memorable framework for understanding his work: that of a symphony. The authors remind us that, in navigating this voluminous corpus, it is possible to focus on the 'music' of one individual part to the neglect of the others. The framework encourages us to keep in mind that Edwards' thought is a cohesive whole, echoing the words and works of a harmonious Triune God.

The heart of the book is the large second part dealing with 31 topics in Edwards' theology, covering all the usual loci of theology plus many other distinctively Edwardsean themes such as beauty, typology and revival. Although pitched at a level that is not beyond the newcomer, scholars will find much to learn here in terms of significant primary material which has rarely seen the light of day and historical influences which have often gone without sufficient notice. As for secondary scholarship, McClymond and McDermott wisely adopt an approach of judicious appreciation—even those whose work they might have critiqued elsewhere often find some positive appropriation in this massive volume. This approach will likely be rewarded with widespread acceptance.

Similarly, the authors show an admirable restraint relating to their own distinctive agendas. The only major exception is their take on Edwards' theology concerning the 'heathen'. McClymond and McDermott think that Edwards:

> became preoccupied with non-Christian nations and cultures and their possible role within God's redemptive plan. Hundreds of notebook entries discussed the theme. Edwards was increasingly convinced that true religion might be found outside of Western monotheistic cultures (ch. 36). Furthermore, he developed a plan for his *magnum opus*—the *History of the Work of Redemption*—that would trace out the historical purposes of God within all global cultures (chs. 10, 12). (p. 563)

There are two related elements in this line of argument. One is that Edwards 'was increasingly convinced that true religion might be found outside of Western monotheistic cultures.' Now if the sentence said only that Edwards was convinced *religious truth* might be found in the various world religions, no one would argue; the authors convincingly describe how Edwards thought that God was preparing the world for the gospel by enabling certain aspects of the truth to be embedded into heathen traditions. However, to use instead the words *'true religion'*—a term that Edwards reserved for biblical Christianity—could easily be misinterpreted.

The other part of the argument is a demonstration of how God was working in world religions would have been a defining feature of the

planned History of the Work of Redemption project. The authors point out that Edwards does not mention this particular subject in the only comprehensive description we have of the project, the one found in his letter to the Princeton trustees, remarking: 'One is struck by the differences between the description of the "great work" in the letter to the trustees and what may be inferred from both the redemption notebook and the later *Miscellanies*' (p. 189). In other words, this disparity could be explained in terms that Edwards purposefully concealed this part of his project from his future employers. (cf. p. 186) Or, this disparity could be explained that, although Edwards clearly intended for world religions to play a part in his universal account, it did not loom large enough in his own mind to warrant special mention in the letter. It would seem difficult to prove conclusively which of these is the case, and the authors rightly distinguish between the objective data and their interpretation of it.

Such issues constitute a tiny fraction of the book, however. Those who know and like Edwards will be reminded of why they are attracted to his writings—the brilliant mind, the warm evangelical heart, the heavenly-mindedness, the grand scope of his kingdom ambitions, all coinciding in one who whose intentions were deeply orthodox. Early on, we are reminded of Edwards' stand for the truth even when he was a graduating student at Yale:

> One year before, the rector of Yale had closed commencement with words from the Book of Common Prayer, signalling that the leadership of Yale had passed to what Edwards and Reformed orthodoxy believed was crypto-Catholic Arminian heresy. Edwards's *Quaestio* (academic disputation) on justification by faith was intended to move Yale back toward Reformation truths. (p. 26)

Were that the young seminarians of today as discerning and courageous. In addition to the larger themes, useful little gems from Edwards' corpus abound, such as 'Edwards stated sweepingly that "every true Christian has the spirit of a martyr"' (p. 231). The book is thus of great help to pastors, both in the sense of personal devotional content and also in terms of direct appropriation for preaching.

Beyond a helpful consolidation of what we might have already known, there is little doubt that even the most serious of Edwards hobbyists will learn something new in the course of this book. One potential example would be Edwards' nuanced view regarding the Covenant of Redemption, which involved the full consent of all three persons yet was only a covenant proper between the Father and the Son: 'redemption was "determined by the perfect *consent* of *all*, and... *consultation* among the *three*

persons about it... there was a joint *agreement of all*, but not properly a covenant between 'em all"' (p. 199).

Readers of Edwards find that their attention is often drawn towards some parts of the 'symphony' more than others. Thus, much of the learning experience has to do with the encyclopaedic nature of the book wherein every topic is dealt with in turn. However, it is also this aspect that ends up exposing some of Edwards' flaws, notwithstanding the author's very sympathetic approach. For instance, I was forced to reckon with just how mistaken Edwards' abstracted account of ethics was in *The Nature of True Virtue*:

> In a work that never quotes the Bible and was plainly intended to appeal to those who did not share his theological vision, Edwards explained that all human beings share certain moral goals…. Edwards … spoke of consent to universal being, a notion that does not necessarily imply the existence of God. (pp. 514-15)

Unsurprisingly, as McClymond and McDermott report, most Reformed theologians have rejected this account. If so much of Calvin's lasting worth is to be found in his uniform regularity and reliability, the picture is Edwards is more variegated. There are many instances of great brilliance, rising far above the ordinary treatments, but there are also some irregularities. These later are related to a penchant for 'speculating on deep and perhaps unanswerable questions' that the authors rightly identify (pp. 355-6). Nonetheless, such blemishes are there to remind us that the best of men have feet of clay and that our dependence should be on Christ alone.

In summary, this is a very impressive book on the theology of one of the greatest minds ever given to God's church. Those with an interest in Edwards certainly must get a copy. Ministers or serious-minded Christians would also be well served by having this excellent volume.

William M. Schweitzer, Gateshead Presbyterian Church

Jonathan Edwards' Social Augustinian Trinitarianism in Historical and Contemporary Pespectives. By Steven M. Studebaker. Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2008. ISBN: 978-1-59333-846-6. xi + 301 pp. £92.00.

Studebaker's monograph is the first to focus solely on Jonathan Edwards' doctrine of the Trinity, and critically engages contemporary perspectives concerning the categorization of Edwards' view. Against various interpretations, Studebaker argues that Edwards appropriates an Augustinian view of the Trinity, with specific emphasis on the 'mutual love' image in

Augustine's *De Trinitate*. Studebaker argues that the prevailing mistake in contemporary literature has been the adoption of a faulty historical paradigm. This paradigm, what he deems the 'threeness-oneness paradigm', forces a cleavage in the tradition between Western trinitarian formulation, which gives primacy to the oneness of God, and the Eastern depiction, which privileges the threeness of God. By imposing this threeness-oneness paradigm on Edwards' analysis of the Trinity, scholarship has read Edwards' social imagery against his more classic trinitarian formulation.

Studebaker's work takes on a broad twofold structure. First, it is a mapping of contemporary scholarship on Edwards' trinitarian thought and provide an alternative portrayal. In criticizing the use of a threeness-oneness paradigm, Studebaker focuses his attention on Amy Plantinga Pauw's work on Edwards' doctrine, arguing that her method, which he understands as the archetypal example of the threeness-oneness paradigm, advances an overgeneralization of the tradition and a misguided hermeneutical principle. Second, Studebaker's work is a constructive proposal arguing for a continuity between Edwards' trinitarian thought and Augustine's. In order to develop this line, Studebaker extracts what he believes are the five 'central characteristics' of the Augustine mutual love tradition. In short, Studebaker's ground-clearing efforts unravel the bulk of the secondarily literature, showing, in my mind definitively, that the bifurcation of Edwards' view into psychological and social analogies fails to do justice to Edwards' position. Furthermore, Studebaker questions the value of the threeness-oneness paradigm both as an historical model and as a hermeneutical principle. On the other hand, Studebaker's constructive task fails at several points, both in giving an accurate depiction of Edwards' doctrine of the Trinity as well as providing a helpful corrective to the misguided categorizations in the secondary literature.

With respect to the last point, it is unclear to this reader that Studebaker's five charateristics provide necessary and sufficient conditions for a *helpful* categorization. As Amy Plantinga Pauw points out, Edwards directly contradicts an explicit statement concerning the nature of the divine persons in his development of the 'mutual love model', and yet this is not problematic on Studebaker's view. Instead of engaging specifically with criticism from Edwards scholars that his view is 'not that Augustinian', Studebaker simply condemns methodologies and reemphasizes his five characteristics of a mutual love model. It is not clear that these characteristics do justice to Augustine, the tradition or Edwards' own trinitarian model. Furthermore, by developing a series of principles abstracted from their theological and historical contexts, Studebaker simply develops a new kind of paradigm from which to read Edwards' trinitarian thought.

In other words, by attempting to read the tradition according to a five-point lowest common denomination, Studebaker's analysis ignores the theological orientation, polemics and key idiosyncratic features of historic presentations broadly and Edwards' work specifically. This does not mean that Studebaker's analysis is wrong – Edwards can be understood to be Augustinian in a broad sense – only that a delineation so broad fails to be meaningful. Despite these drawbacks, Studebaker's volume is an important resource in a growing discussion on the nature of Edwards' trinitarian theology.

Kyle Strobel, Grand Canyon University, AZ, USA

Baptism: Three Views. Edited by David F. Wright. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009. ISBN: 978-0-8308-3856-1. 200 pp. £9.99.

Much of David Wright's research and writings focused on Christian baptism and the accompanying theological issues because he believed that the increasingly pluralistic and post-Christian ethos of western societies demanded an apologia of the Christian claim of 'one Lord, one faith, and one baptism' (Eph. 4:5).

Because of Wright's death in February 2008, Daniel Reid, the Inter-Varsity Press editor, authors the introduction. He notes that the book intends to be 'a thoughtful reconsideration of the meaning of this "one baptism" that we profess as Christians in the midst of increasingly non-Christian Western societies.' Reid rightfully prompts the reader to consider that 'one's view of baptism is bound up with other theological and hermeneutical considerations' and implores the reader to pay particular attention to how the contributors handle these nuances (p. 14).

Bruce Ware, representing the believer's baptism view, begins with a stinging rebuke of paedobaptists, asserting that 'large portions of the church are living in disobedience to Christ' (p. 20) for their failure to affirm believer's baptism in accordance with Jesus' command in the Matthean Great Commission. His defence of credobaptism attempts to marshal the New Testament evidence to define the subjects and mode of Christian baptism in light of the etymology of *baptizō*, concluding that only believers in Christ are to be immersed in water. Although his main argument emphasizes the discontinuity between the Testaments, specifically between circumcision and baptism, Ware does observe a similarity between paedobaptists and credobaptists in the affirmation of baptism as a 'sign and seal of the new covenant' (p. 41). His observation, though, is theologically thin and begs to be developed from a Baptist perspective. In the end, he commends credobaptism for its vivid picture of being buried with Christ and as the basis for a regenerate church membership.

Sinclair Ferguson, representing the infant baptism view, strikes an irenic tone by noting that 'we are all baptists' since 'paedobaptists baptize *believers* and their children, including infants' (p. 78). He frames his advocacy for paedobaptism within a covenantal and redemptive-historical understanding of the gospel whereby the triune God promises and provides for the salvation of his people, which is 'signified and sealed by physical symbols' (p. 96). Baptism does not function *ex opera operato* nor is it merely a *signum nudum*. Rather, it 'signifies and seals the work of Christ, crucified and resurrected, and the communion with God which is ours through faith' (p. 100). Although Ferguson meagerly addresses the discontinuity, his argument rests on the continuity between the Testaments and God's covenantal promises to his people and their children, including infants. Thus, infant baptism, set within the context of the family of God, accentuates the gospel's call to a life of continuous conversion through repentance and faith, rather than reducing conversion merely to a single moment.

Anthony Lane, representing the dual-practice baptism view, deduces a four-fold pattern from the apostolic preaching in Acts, namely repentance, faith, baptism, and reception of the Holy Spirit. This pattern uniquely ties baptism to conversion. What, though, of the children and infants of these new converts? Lane remarks: 'Unfortunately neither Luke nor any other New Testament writer gives an unequivocal, explicit answer' to the question of what happened to the children of believing parents (p. 143). Yet, because of the unity of baptism and faith, baptism of children must be an adaptation of adult believer's baptism. To address the ambiguity, Lane employs a 'seismological approach' that examines the 'effects [within the early church] two to three hundred years later' (p. 144). He concludes, without offering a doctrinal basis, that there is no evidence to object '*in principle* to either the baptism or nonbaptism of babies' thereby allowing for a diversity of viewpoints, which enriches and balances the communal life of the church (p. 163).

This book does little to achieve its stated purpose to reconsider thoughtfully the meaning of 'one baptism' or Wright's hope, for that matter, to elevate the discussion. The respondent and rebuttal essays only seem to solidify common dividing lines (though this will be useful for those looking to understand the different perspectives). This book would have benefited from an insightful postscript or conclusion that traces the contours of the pertinent theological and hermeneutical issues raised by the various participants, charting a path forward that gestures toward 'one faith, one Lord, one baptism' without glossing over distinctions.

Stephen M. Garrett, International Institute for Christian Studies

The Portal of Beauty: Towards a Theology of Aesthetics. By Bruno Forte. Translated by David Glenday and Paul McPartlan. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008. ISBN: 978-0-8028-3280-1. 129 pp. £16.99.

Peering through the looking glass of Bruno Forte's, *The Portal of Beauty*, a rich theological account of beauty emerges where 'the crucified God is the form and splendor of eternity in time' thereby contributing to a fuller theological 'rereading of the beauty that happens in music, cinema, and poetry' (p. viii). Forte develops this counterintuitive and controversial thesis by tracing the contours of a theology of beauty in the thought of Augustine, Aquinas, Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky, Balthasar, and Evdokimov, making a seminal theological contribution to the burgeoning conversation between theology and the arts.

Forte offers a succinct account of Augustine's understanding of beauty, highlighting its intrinsic, objective nature as mere fragments reflecting the wholeness and unity found in the triune God. Such notions of beauty should point us toward the perfect beauty of the eternal Godhead. Yet wherefore art thou beauty in the disorder of suffering, particularly Christ's death? Forte concludes that Augustine's neglect to address such antinomies urges us to consider other paths toward a theology of beauty.

Along these pathways, Forte introduces readers first to Aquinas who renders beauty christologically in the splendour of form. Such splendour, such transcendence, takes us to the dark limits of our human finitude, propelling us along Kierkegaard's dialectical journey through the aesthetic, ethical, and religious stages of life. Here, beauty compels us to move beyond our illusory imaginings, according to Forte, to an encounter with the Eternal One. Such 'beauty will save the world', yet only if this beauty accounts for the world's suffering rather than avoiding it through some ethereal escapism (p. 43). In Forte's opinion, Dostoevsky accounts for such suffering in his depiction of God's beauty as that which inhabits its opposite since Christ takes on death and rises in glorious victory, giving beauty an eschatological quality.

Balthasar's emphasis on God's glory, says Forte, highlights this eschatological quality as God reveals and conceals his beauty in 'the tragic character of the *mysterium paschale*' of Christ's death and descent—the 'event of absolutely free and unpredictable self-giving of the divine Whole in the fragment' (pp. 53-4). Forte further contends that Evdokimov amplifies God's glory with his 'Trinitarian "metaphysics" of light' such that God's glorious light finds expression in and through the icon (p. 68).

Forte applies aspects of this theological trajectory to describe and ascertain beauty's presence in music, the cinema, and poetry. Can music, cinema, and poetry mediate the divine? Forte believes so, since there is

an analogical relationship 'between the unforeseeable and unpredictable action of the Spirit… and the docile response to him of a believing heart' (p. 99). Beauty in music and poetry materializes, then, 'by way of interruption, negation, surprise, silence, no less than of harmony, measure, and relationship' (p. 100) while the cinema opens the viewer to 'the Transcendent' through a 'narrative structure' found in the icon and the story—the symbolic and the narrative (p. 112).

Forte rightly identifies the key theological concept that contributes to a thicker understanding of our experience of beauty, namely God's beauty. His understanding of the Spirit as 'the enduring openness and outgoingness of the Silence of the Father and of the Word' is an intriguing notion for how God communicates his unspeakable beauty to the world. What is missing, though, is a clear articulation of God's beauty that weaves together the various threads Forte identifies in the Christian tradition. This omission becomes apparent in Forte's chapter on 'Cinema and the Sacred' when his focus turns to the doctrine of analogy, the icon, and story to illumine the thorny topic of God's incommensurability rather than how God's beauty contributes to the possibility of 'sacred' cinema. Perhaps, if Forte were to bring these threads together, the *dramatic* nature of God's beauty might be more apparent, intimating at how we might reread our experience of beauty in the cinema in light of God's dramatic beauty.

The Portal of Beauty is particularly important for newcomers to the theology/arts discussion as it cogently introduces important theological issues through an adept articulation of the Christian tradition. Veterans will find Forte's theological nuances insightful while they pine for further explanation. His trinitarian account of God's beauty is laudable and rich. Forte's work should gain wide acceptance as a 'portal of beauty' into the discipline of theological aesthetics.

Stephen M. Garrett, International Institute for Christian Studies

Nouvelle Théologie—New Theology: Inheritor of Modernism, Precursor of Vatican II. By Jürgen Mettepenningen. London: T & T Clark, 2010. ISBN 978-0-567-03410-6. xv + 218 pp. £19.99.

Jürgen Mettepenningen, research fellow at the Catholic University of Louvain, Belgium, presents in this book a historical-theological discussion of *nouvelle théologie*. The movement of *nouvelle théologie* is well-known in Catholic circles, since it is this group of theologians who made waves in the Catholic world between the late 1930s and the Second Vatican Council (1962-5). In fact, as Mettepenningen rightly points out, the reforms of Vatican II would have been unthinkable without the movement of *nou-*

velle théologie. We might want to add that Catholic-Protestant dialogue, too, would have been unthinkable without this movement. Mettepenningen's book is written in obvious sympathy with the *nouvelle* theologians. This sympathy also entails strong disagreement with the scholastic neo-Thomism that dominated Catholic theology especially since the late 1960s. In the Catholic world of today, such hegemony of neo-Thomism is almost unthinkable, and Mettepenningen's book is an illustration of this. When opponents are no longer there to be feared, it of course becomes easier to distance oneself from them. At times, one wishes that Mettepenningen would be a bit more cautious and objective in his descriptions of neo-Thomism and of the politics of Rome that went along with it. That said, he is certainly right to insist that *nouvelle théologie* should be seen as a reaction against the neo-scholastic establishment of the time.

Mettepenningen begins his book in Part I with a broad description of the theological background of *nouvelle théologie* (including discussions of the Tübingen School, of John Henry Newman, and of the Modernist Crisis), and with an overview of the various phases of *nouvelle théologie's* historical development. This is followed in Part II with a more detailed analysis of the various theologians and their writings. Here Mettepenningen focuses, in turn, on the Dominicans of Le Saulchoir and Louvain (Yves Congar, Marie-Dominique Chenu, Henri-Marie Féret, Louis Charlier, and René Draguet), the Jesuits of Fourvière (Henri Bouillard, Jean Daniélou, and Henri de Lubac), and the Dutch theologians Edward Schillebeeckx and Piet Schoonenberg.

The books's main argument—that *nouvelle théologie* should be seen as a hinge between the Modernist movement of the early twentieth century and the Second Vatican Council—is a controversial one, and in the end I am not persuaded by it. I am also less than convinced that we should include the Dutch theologians Schillebeeckx and Schoonenberg within the movement of *nouvelle théologie*. Mettepenningen is right, however, to highlight some of *nouvelle théologie*'s emphases, such as the significance of history, the link between experience and theology, and a retrieval of patristic and medieval sources. The greatest strength of this book is the erudite engagement with historical sources, and it gives a helpful overview of the various figures and controversies surrounding *nouvelle théologie*.

Hans Boersma, Regent College, BC, Canada

Embracing Truth: Homosexuality and the Word of God. Edited by David W. Torrance and Jock Stein. Haddington: Handsel Press, 2012. ISBN 978-1-871828-74-0. 252 pp. £6.95.

It is a long time since such a comprehensive, scholarly—yet readable—book has been published which unashamedly states faithfully and compassionately the biblical ('traditional') view on the vexed issue of homosexuality which is disturbing and dividing the church of God in our generation. In the present reviewer's opinion, this is a major work which deserves the widest possible readership on both sides of the theological divide.

The book is a symposium with thirteen contributors; the editors each contribute chapters, David Torrance three and Jock Stein one. There are four main sections. The first is entitled, 'Clearing the ground' with studies by Andrew Goddard, Stanton L. Jones and David Randall. Dr Goddard reviews the immense changes of the past forty years and handles skillfully nine contemporary objections to the traditional view: they are objections arising from biblical interpretation, science and reason and contemporary culture. Jones is no less thorough in his examination of the case the social sciences seek to make to settle the moral status of homosexuality; his treatment is honest and humble. Randall gives us a survey of 'Facts and Figures'. His chapter makes for extremely disturbing reading as he lays out the incontrovertible facts regarding the (lack of) stability in civil partnerships (compared to contemporary traditional marriage partnerships), and the (lack of) duration in a high percentage of homosexual relationships. Randall's concerns for the future and his conclusions are alarming. There are four appendices to his chapter which, even if taken alone, fully justify the book's title, *Embracing Truth*. The medical and physical consequences of homosexual practice are one of the best kept secrets of contemporary culture, from governmental level right down to pre-school nurseries.

The second section, 'Christian belief', is equally well done. David Torrance's three chapters on scriptural authority, marriage, and theological pointers concerning homosexuality deserve careful reading. I found his handling of the vexed question, 'Is the Bible the Word of God or does it only contain the Word of God', quite superb though his preamble to that theme would, I felt, lose many readers in its very philosophical approach. Tom Smail deals with the topic of sex per se and the Bible's affirmation of it; as one would expect from him, Smail's treatment is logical, biblical and gracious. (Sadly, Tom died three months before *Embracing Truth* was published.) Angus Morrison's paper on the Church's traditional view is

an extremely fine piece of work. In my view it could be published as a separate pamphlet.

The book's third section is on 'The Bible and Homosexual Practice' and mainly consists in writings by Robert Gagnon. First, Paul Burgess gives the reader an extended review of Gagnon's major work, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002). The other two chapters are by Gagnon. One would have to search long and hard to find such a scholarly and comprehensive treatment of this theme. Gagnon takes in the hot issue of 'Accommodation and pastoral concern: what does the Bible say?' as well as dealing faithfully with the question, 'How seriously does Scripture treat the issue of homosexual practice?' Included are three pages of a select bibliography.

The book's final section, 'Wisdom and obedience', explores the painful path for homosexuals of celibacy (Calum MacKellar), matters of the heart (Mark S. Koonz on James E. Loder), a pastoral defense of marriage (Philip Tartaglia) and 'compassion and community' (Jock Stein). MacKellar's honesty is very moving. I found the final two pages of his chapter deeply thought-provoking as he uses biblical marriage as an analogy of Christ's union with the church; his handling of it directed me to new ground. Loder's experience of counselling provides material that is wise, enlightening and authoritative. The same must said of Tartaglia's defence of marriage. Jock Stein's final chapter does not always make for comfortable reading. Jock challenges the reader—and indeed the whole Christian Church—to handle the issues raised by the book with honesty and realism, as well as faithfully; it is a fine piece of writing and, one supposes, about the only way to gather together the mass of material that has been covered in nearly 250 pages.

Gaelic speakers will no doubt be able to pronounce with ease the name of the writer of the book's epilogue: Fearghas MacFhionnlaigh. Fearghas 'draws a line in the sand' using as his 'speleological guide' the Dutch philosopher, Herman Dooyeweerd. As I read this essay I wondered how ever the liberals and revisionists would answer it with their inevitable counter-arguments. And indeed that applies to the whole of *Embracing Truth*. It is a most formidable, robust and challenging publication. The charge so often leveled at traditionalists is that our views are mere knee-jerk reactions. We await to see how knee-jerk the responses will be that seek to dismiss the meticulous, scholarly material that has been gathered into this volume which urges Christians across the world to 'embrace truth'.

Those commending the book on its back cover include Kenny Borthwick, R.T. Kendal, Ann Allen, Michael Green and Kevin Vanhoozer. The last of the these writes: 'This bracing collection of interdisciplinary essays encourages the church to stand fast against the prevailing socio-cultural

winds and offers helpful directions for navigating its course with a canonical compass oriented to the church's north star, Jesus Christ.'

David C. Searle, Arbroath

The Hole in Our Holiness: Filling the Gap between Gospel Passion and the Pursuit of Godliness. By Kevin DeYoung. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012. ISBN 978-1-4335-3334-1. 160 pp. £11.99.

Whatever may be said about this particular book, a cursory glance at the Christian church alerts us to the solemn fact that the subject of holiness, or rather the lack of it, is one of urgent concern. Of the many words used, even in church circles, to describe Christian character and conduct, the word 'holy' seldom appears.

Kevin DeYoung's book goes a long part of the way to address the issue. Not only is there an alarming lack of holiness, but there is even an apparent lack of interest in it. DeYoung confronts the rigid legalism which purports to be a close adherence to God, but which is seemingly hard and lacking in love and compassion, such as Jesus showed. On the other hand, there is a liberalism, which thinks it is the freedom of grace, but is only antinomianism with a twist to appear as being evangelical. The author traces the root of the innate human problem when he writes that we are not born with a natural concern for holiness. 'You didn't grow up with a concern for holiness… The hole in our holiness is that we don't really care much about it'. From this, DeYoung rightly asserts that the beginning and pursuit of holiness is essentially a work of God for, and in us. The seriously compromised state of morals and social conduct in the Christian church is shameful. Especially so when people who profess to be Christians ridicule holiness, and reject biblical truths which challenge them to a greater and purer commitment to Christ. It is this failure that has led to so much collapse into the acceptance of behaviour and relationships which are clearly condemned by the God of truth who calls us to be holy people. In this volume, DeYoung cites, in support of his contention, many other writers, including Puritans who viewed holiness as Christians 'becoming visible saints' (p. 13). The book is replete with quotes worth retelling. Let me mention one from J. I. Packer, that both challenges and encourages. 'In reality, holiness is the goal of our redemption' (p. 24).

The chapter on 'Saints and Sexual Immorality' would be profitable reading for all Christians, but especially for young Christians exploring relationships, as they grow up in a society obsessed with sexual issues. I wish that I had read this book over fifty years ago, but it was not written then!

The thrust of this highly recommended book is a call back to the Christianity of the Bible, to the call of Jesus on our lives that we deny ourselves and follow him. It is a reminder that to profess the name of Jesus is to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts and to live soberly and righteously in this world. As Jerry Bridges is quoted as saying, 'God has made it possible for us to walk in holiness. But he has given us the responsibility of doing the walking' (p. 89).

Malcolm MacInnes, Inverness

John Calvin: Reformer for the 21st Century. By William Stacy Johnson. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009. ISBN 9780664234089. ix + 142 pp. £10.99.

This is one of the multitude of volumes which followed the 500th anniversary of the birth of John Calvin in 2009. The author is an Associate Professor at Princeton but this book is intended for the general reader, at the popular end of the market. It is extremely readable and engaging and contains a great deal of helpful information.

Without any 'heavy' structure, the author takes us through the main themes of Calvin's writing. After a chapter on his life and influence, he covers the great themes of salvation: 'Grace Alone, Christ Alone, Faith Alone.' Thereafter we have chapters on Scripture, election, sin & salvation, the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer, and law and gospel. The author then turns to wider themes, including the church, worship, the sacraments and also political and socio-economic issues. The final chapter reminds us that we should be 'always reforming.'

The problem for this reviewer is that the author effectively undermines Calvin's position at every turn. Having (in most cases) clearly and honestly presented Calvin's view, he almost always goes on to say something like, 'Today few of us would agree with Calvin...', or Calvin's view 'is difficult for most 21st century Christians to accept'. He further compounds the move away from Calvin when, in the chapter on the Holy Spirit, he suggests that instead of rediscovering the doctrinal tenets of the great Genevan Reformer, the use of 'sanctified imagination' is the way forward, and that the church should devote its energy towards such 'reimagining'.

To have such a readable book, with so much helpful material and to end up being disappointed, is a pity but sadly it is not uncommon today for those in the broadly Reformed tradition to pay homage to Calvin while actually denying the substantial content of his main doctrinal themes. Given the number of fine books to have come out of the 2009 anniversary, this is one I would pass over.

A.T.B. McGowan, University of the Highlands and Islands

Every Good Endeavour: Connecting Your Work to God's Plan for the World. By Timothy Keller and Katharine Leary Alsdorf. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2012. ISBN 978-1-444-70259-0. 287 pp. £12.99.

The purpose of this book is stated in its epilogue: it is the theological rationale behind Keller's Redeemer Church Center for Faith and Work (http://www.faithandwork.org/).

The book is helpfully divided into three parts: (i) God's original vision for human work, (ii) the reality of what sin has done to human work, and (iii) what believing and living the gospel can do to enhance work for God's glory. While the first two parts are revisiting the same themes as most theologies of works, the third part is much more enthralling to the seasoned theologian of work. This latter part tries to introduce how everyday work can be used of the triune God for his purposes, interspersed with many helpful anecdotes and examples.

Initially, the authors set the scene by using J. R. R. Tolkien's short paper 'Leaf by Niggle'. This scene-setting is eschatological in focus. Oddly, after this intriguing introduction the authors do not flesh out any eschatological vision or relate their views on work back to it, making the reader wonder why they began with it. Indeed, this book is lacking an eschatological vision for work despite this promising beginning. It appears to have just been a fleeting flirtation with an idea for the authors. Yet without an eschatological bent Keller and Alsdorf never fully address why developing human culture is deserving of our effort and is of any eternal worth to God.

Another initial criticism is aimed at several instances of loose language, for example, 'All work has dignity because it reflects God's image in us' (p. 51). It would not take much arguing to show the authors that terrorist endeavours, sex trafficking, or bank robberies fail to reveal any dignity or demonstration of God's image. There were several loose overstatements of this sort at different stages in the argument.

Nevertheless, this book reminds me of the richness of puritan Richard Baxter's *A Christian Directory*, who with great diligence sought to help his fellow disciples authentically live out the gospel. There is a very healthy attention given to biblical analysis and the adoption of a typically American historical/grammatical commitment to biblical hermeneutics throughout. This book is certainly a modern day equivalent of *A Christian Directory*, albeit lacking the sheer volume of Baxter's work.

Keller and Alsdorf claim this book is unique in its uniting four stands of work: (i) work guided by the biblical narrative, (ii) work that crucially stewards the earth responsibly, (iii) work that is ethically guided by the gospel, and (iv) work that is motivated by the inner power of the gospel.

Taking note of the bibliography, it is curious that they should claim this uniqueness, as fellow American evangelical, Darrell Cosden, has already fulfilled such interweaving components in his vision for faith and work in his *The Heavenly Good of Earthly Work* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006). Given how widely Keller and Alsdorf have read, this is a significant omission from their thinking and awareness.

Nevertheless, the authors' breadth of learning is unquestionably impressive as they closely rely upon Reformer Martin Luther, Anglo-Catholic Dorothy Sayers, Calvinist Lee Hardy, Evangelical Derek Kidner, and Roman Catholics Robert Bellah and Josef Pieper. This demonstrates how influenced the authors are by the broadness of Christian theology. This exudes a great strength of this book.

Another asset of this book is its account of common grace. Keller and Alsdorf give a careful analysis of how God uses those who do not belong to the Church in the development of a better world. They write, 'Because Christians are never as good as their beliefs should make them and non-Christians are never as bad as their wrong beliefs should make them, we will adopt a stance of critical enjoyment of human culture and its expressions in every field of work' (p. 197). Reflections upon this topic are nuanced and very insightful.

The nagging question, however, that I am left with after considering this book is, 'why write this book, what does it offer that has not already been written before by say, Leland Ryken?' Honestly, I do not know. The authors are restating that which has already been set forth many times before. Having said this, what they do offer, by way of Keller's popularity, is a vast readership. This will be the factor that this well written book thrives on. For the instilling of a vision of a robust theology of work to a large number of people is never a waste of time.

Stuart C. Weir, International Christian College, Glasgow

Christ the Key. By Kathryn Tanner. Current Issues in Theology; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. ISBN 978-0521732772. xxii + 309 pp. £18.99.

Kathryn Tanner's thesis in *Christ the Key* is quite simple—Christ is the key to understanding every doctrine —and the contents of the book follow her application of this approach to the doctrines of human nature (ch. 1), grace (chs. 2-3), trinitarian life (ch. 4), politics (ch. 5), death and sacrifice (ch. 6), and the working of the Spirit (ch. 7). Although the Yale professor upholds the traditional protestant approach of the centrality of Christ, she does so within a framework that emphasizes the goal of the Christian life as participation with God and the means for this as Christ's

incarnation (referring not merely to his birth, but to the union of divinity and humanity in himself).

In chapter one, Tanner gives a Christological interpretation of the *imago dei*, claiming that it is Jesus, rather than human nature, that is the image of God. Humans can only image God by being attached to the incarnate Christ who is both the model and the means for our participating in and becoming the image of God. Since the way one defines the problem will determine the nature of the solution, chapters two and three are crucial to Tanner's entire system because they explain the need, and therefore nature, of grace. 'Human beings need grace to become images of God, not because they are sunk in sin but because they cannot be images of any strong sort simply in virtue of what they are' (p. 59). This 'grace completing nature' schema, which views grace not as a response to sin but as the fulfillment of nature, becomes dominant for Tanner and goes hand in hand with her emphasis on the incarnation. Tanner does, however, acknowledge the potential for downplaying the seriousness of sin and therefore attempts to subsume a western emphasis on sin within her system.

Chapter four demonstrates that Jesus' life is the key to understanding the doctrine of the Trinity, focusing on the irreducible roles of the trinitarian persons as a way of upholding emphases from the East and West. Jesus' trinitarian way of life provides a model for humans who are united to the Son by the Spirit in order to live a life of ascent (worship) and descent (service). If Jesus is our model for relating with the triune God, then chapter five shows that Jesus (not the Trinity) is also our model for ethics and politics. Tanner argues strongly against certain forms of social trinitarianism, claiming that people are not called to imitate the Trinity, but rather to participate in it through Christ's incarnation. In chapter six Tanner presents an 'incarnational view of the atonement' (p. 262) that takes a radical departure from traditional descriptions of the cross in an attempt to do justice to the criticisms of feminist and womanist theologians. Tanner rejects any forensic or propitiatory understanding of the cross, redefines sacrifice in terms of communal harmony, and argues for the incarnation as 'the primary mechanism of atonement' (p. 252). In the final chapter Tanner builds on her non-competitive account of divine human relations by arguing that the Spirit works primarily in a natural and gradual way through human fallibility rather than an immediate and miraculous way that leads to infallible certainty.

Tanner's book is provocative, creative, and certainly meets Cambridge's series aim of 'questioning existing paradigms or rethinking perspectives' and 'providing original insights.' Though Christ is certainly the key for Tanner, the door that she opens with this key leads far from the

traditions within which she writes. Whether others follow her down this hallway remains to be seen.

Jeremy R. Treat, Wheaton College, IL, USA

The Life of God in the Soul of the Church: The Root and Fruit of Spiritual Fellowship. By Thabiti Anyabwile. Fearn: Christian Focus Publications, 2012. ISBN: 978-1-84550-923-1. 243 pp. £8.99.

Thabiti Anyabwile is the senior pastor of First Baptist Church, Grand Cayman and *The Life of God in the Soul of the Church* is a lightly edited series of sermons preached to his congregation on the practical outworking of the doctrine of union with Christ in the context of church fellowship.

The sermons arose from Anyabwile's reading of Henry Scougal's influential little book *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*. Scougal was writing in the seventeenth century to a friend, encouraging him to cultivate those virtues, of love, humility and purity which arise from inner spiritual experience rather than the outward adornment of religion. According to Scougal, true religion is 'The image of the Almighty shining in the soul of man: nay it is a real participation of his nature, it is a beam of the eternal light, a drop of that infinite ocean of goodness; and they who are endued with it, may be said to have Christ "dwelling in their souls," and "Christ formed within them".' (Henry Scougal, *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*, Fearn: Christian Focus Publications, 1996). J. I. Packer in the introduction to this edition of Scougal's work regrets Scougal's failure to articulate how we appropriate this true religious experience through union with Christ.

Anyabwile identifies another weakness, namely the individualistic nature of the approach. This arises largely from the form of the book: Scougal is allowing us to listen in, as it were, as he counsels a friend. Anyabwile's desire is to do build on Scougal's work whilst addressing these two weaknesses.

The Life of God in the Soul of the Church thus represents a twenty-first century call to relational holiness. The book's thesis is that 'spiritual holiness is the life of God in the soul of man experienced personally by believing the truth and shared relationally in the church and leading to holiness' (p. 17). After two opening chapters laying the doctrinal foundations of union with Christ, the doctrine is then applied to various aspects of church life. These include mutual love, spiritual gifts, partnership in the gospel, restoration and encouragement, suffering, forgiveness, singing to one another, giving and acceptance.

The book succeeds admirably in achieving its goals. Union with Christ is not simply introduced as a theological concept only to be abandoned for more practical concerns. It is consistently demonstrated to be the principle from which our life together must flow. Thus the need to confront sin within the fellowship and restore the penitent sinner arises from our own experience of being confronted, corrected and restored by Christ. Again, suffering in the church and the wider world is something we are to be alive to rather than tune out and to recognise that it reflects the spiritual reality of union with Christ and with one another.

The book is marked by theological precision and eschews the easy pragmatism that often mars 'evangelical' preaching. The sermons serve as a model of the value of systematic theology in the service of preaching.

The sermons are vivid in style, full of memorable expressions. Speaking of those who come looking for seeker sensitive services at First Baptist, he writes, 'We don't need seeker friendly services as much as we need seeker-friendly lives' (p. 101). On the subject of singing to one another as well as to the Lord in corporate worship he writes, 'Too many Christians think the gathering of the church is basically a couple of hundred people having their personal quiet time in the same place.'

Of great value to the preacher-reader will be the evangelistic appeals which are made in the course of most of these sermons. These arise naturally from the text. For example he concludes the exposition on accepting one another by turning to the non-Christians in the congregation (he always assumes that there will be unconverted listeners present), and says, 'I wonder if you've thought about whether or not you've been accepted by God and what it means if you're not' (p. 213). He goes on to make an urgent evangelistic appeal based on the cross. The manner in which Anyabwile weaves evangelistic appeal into expository preaching will repay careful study.

One of the strongest chapters is that on forgiveness. This chapter is worth the price of the book in itself. Anyabwile carefully negotiates the complexities of forgiveness that arise when the offending party does not acknowledge wrong. This is no ivory tower theorising. This is theology in its working clothes.

The weakest chapter is probably that on fellowship and spiritual gifts where Anyabwile's continuationist position is not underpinned by the same Biblical rigour as is evidenced elsewhere. For example, not all will be persuaded by his assertion that New Testament prophecy was akin to modern preaching and was not authoritative in the way Old Testament prophecy was (p. 81).

The sermonic format is helpful in grounding the teaching in the life of the church but the format also has its downside. For example, the chapter

on gospel partnership has six pages (pp. 100-5) devoted to lists of individuals and their work in First Baptist Church. This material is less engaging to the outsider and would have benefited from greater editing.

This is an excellent book from an excellent communicator which will inspire and challenge.

Ivor MacDonald, Hope Church (Free Church of Scotland), Coatbridge

The Seed and the Soil: Engaging with the Word of God. By Pauline Hoggarth. Carlisle: Global Christian Books, an imprint of Langham Creative Projects, 2011. ISBN 978-1-907713-09-5. 156 pp. £7.99.

This is an important book on the Bible. The author has had long experience with Scripture Union and the book is in a series which the Langham Partnership International has published for pastors, students and lay leaders in the Developing World. The author was born in South America and has worked in several countries in that part of the world.

Taking the parable of the Sower and the Seed, Hoggarth first of all examines the seed. She helpfully discusses the authority of the Scripture and its inspiration. A good section on hermeneutics follows this. There are eight principles for the interpretation of the Bible. The rest of the book explores Bible teaching and seeks to apply it to modern issues. This is done in the context of the various soils of the parable, I think it is a necessary and brave thing to do. It is important to remember this book is written for people who are beginning to engage in issues which confront the thoughtful Christian. The issues are war, the Bible's understanding of women, homosexuality, Islam, children and youth, the church and the word of God. At the end of this book there is a short appendix which gives a number of resources for those who wish to look up further material on these subjects.

The difficulty in reading this book is that in bravely tackling these difficult subjects the author leaves important and basic questions unanswered. For instance on women in the Bible, Hoggarth writes 'all opportunities for theological reflection and exploring the Christian faith must be available to women and men alike as both equally serve the purposes of God's kingdom in communicating his truth in action and word' (p. 74). She is obviously asserting the equality of women in ministry but entirely fails to mention the many verses where Paul spoke on the headship of the husband for this is the theological rock on which those who oppose the ministry of leadership of women over men is built. The pattern of relationships in homes should be reflected in the congregation and cannot be ignored.

We cannot escape making up our minds on the subject of homosexuality. The push for the rights of two people of the same sex to marry is taking place in all western countries. Hoggarth carefully looks at the relatively few Biblical passages where it is discussed. She takes the advice which is often given to a person of homosexual orientation and is a Christian believer which is that such a person should be celibate. Hoggarth agrees that for a few this is an option. But she believes it to be an inadequate response. It overlooks that humans are wired for relationships by God himself. And 'we cannot demand that people of homosexual orientation live lives of righteousness—if we are not prepared to offer them embrace rather than exclusion' (p. 81). She does not say that they should be welcomed into the life of a congregation but that is the consequence of her pastoral treatment of the subject. Then the hard questions need to be asked like, 'Are such persons available for ministry position?' 'What kind of welcome would it appear to be if it is hedged around with restrictions?' The subject is too big and too important to leave these practical questions in the air.

Nevertheless I am glad to commend a book which takes the Bible and seeks to engage with the world and its immense needs.

John R. Reid, Bishop, Sydney, NSW, Australia

The Fire of the Word: Meeting God on Holy Ground. By Chris Webb. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012. ISBN 978-0-8308-3563-8. 197 pp. £10.99.

The author was a Buddhist and was given some words of Jesus to meditate upon and discovered the life-giving power of the Scriptures. The first five chapters made my heart and mind sing with joy as I read. The aim of the book is to open the eyes of the reader to the Bible as the place where we may meet the living God. Webb writes,

> the inspiration of Scripture is something greater, some thing wholly other: a life and presence has breathed into Scripture, some power, some flash of divine fire… The Bible contains—or more accurately, fails to contain, to hold back—the divine Author himself. Here the voice of God is heard; but God not only speaks, he makes himself fully present—gentle as the still small whisper on the mountain, terrible as an army with banners—breaking through the pages into our hearts, our lives, our world. (p. 57)

The question which we ask as we read this is, 'How can we find the divine fire in the Scriptures?' Webb says we must come to the Bible as lovers. He draws frequently on the Song of Solomon to teach us what a lover does. The Bible is the 'space where the image and likeness of God can be found,

experienced and encountered. When we open the Bible, it does not say to us, "Listen; God is there!" Instead, the voice of the Spirit whispers through each line, "Look: I am here!"' (p. 61).

The following eight chapters are intended to show a long tradition of how people have found the Bible a book of divine power. He draws on that form of spirituality which arose out of the Counter Reformation commencing in the sixteenth century. Webb makes it clear that all forms of prayer are to be evaluated by the Bible. But there are some surprises. While discussing the Exercises of Ignatius Loyola he writes, 'many Jesuit centers offer directors who would be willing to guide you through these Exercises; I can testify from my own experience to their life-transforming effect' (p. 121). I know that a Jesuit would affirm faith, grace and the centrality of Christ, but a Jesuit worth his salt would not affirm that the spirituality we seek is by faith alone, by grace alone, and by Christ alone. These are at the heart of evangelical theology. It is possible to have a director whose approach is more on counselling insights and illustrated by biblical verses. It does not seem to matter what the theological position of the director is in that case, but theology matters to evangelicals. This part of the book reflects the path which the author has trodden on his journey to find Christ in all the Scriptures. You will be stimulated to learn of Aquinas, Guigo, Teresa and so on.

The other matter which I regretted was there is no reference to the rich writing about prayer and our relationship with God which is found in the reformed tradition. Think of Calvin, Cranmer or The Reformed Pastor of Richard Baxter. Before Teresa, Baxter visualised the believer's life to be like a house and Christ was to be invited into every room. Then there is the great contribution of John Bunyan. I am told that at a theological conference in the USA Cardinal Ratzinger as he was then, remarked that he often referred to the Institutes of John Calvin and thought nothing finer had been written on prayer than that section of the book.

At the end of each chapter in this book are seven Bible passages which can be read over the week before the next chapter is read. However the book can also be read without recourse to the Bible readings. I would commend this book for the challenge it has made to me think about how I read the Bible.

John R. Reid, Bishop, Sydney, NSW, Australia