

Perichoresis

THE THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL OF
EMANUEL UNIVERSITY OF ORADEA

VOLUME 6
ISSUE 2
2008



BOARD OF EDITORS

Prof. Dr. PAUL NEGRUȚ, The Rector of Emanuel University (Systematic Theology)
Dr. MARIUS D. CRUCERU, Editor-in-Chief (Patristics and Classical Languages)
Dr. Dr. CORNELIU C. SIMUȚ, Asst. Editor-in-Chief
(Reformation Studies, Historical and Dogmatic Theology)
Dr. DAN A. BOTICA, Theological Editor (Old and New Testament Studies)

EDITORIAL ADVISORS

Prof. Dr. DrHC. JAMES MCMAHON, Albert Ellis Institute (Applied Theology)
Prof. Dr. FRANK A. JAMES III, Reformed Theological Seminary
(Reformation Studies)
Prof. Dr. HAMILTON MOORE, Irish Baptist College, Queen's University of Belfast
(Biblical Theology)
Asst. Prof. Dr. STEVEN SMITH, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary
(Homiletics and Pastoral Theology)

MANAGING EDITOR

Dr. Dr. CORNELIU C. SIMUȚ

The theological research of Emanuel University is developed mainly by The Faculty of Theology and The Brian Griffiths School of Management. The research activity of the Emanuel University is carried out by the The Centre for the Research and Promotion of Evangelical Values.

Perichoresis is published twice a year at the end of each academic semestre (March and September) by The Centre for the Research and Promotion of Evangelical Values and Emanuel University Press in cooperation with colleagues and contributors from abroad. Thus, the ideas expressed in various articles may not represent the formal dogmatic confession of Emanuel University and they should be acknowledged as such.

For permission to reproduce information from *Perichoresis*, please write to the Board of Editors at Universitatea Emanuel din Oradea/Emanuel University of Oradea, Facultatea de Teologie/The Faculty of Theology, Str. Nufărului Nr. 87, 410597 Oradea, Bihor, România/Romania, or to the Managing Editor at perichoresis@emanuel.ro.

Any aspect of the correspondence concerning subscriptions should be addressed to Editura Universității Emanuel/Emanuel University Press, Str. Nufărului Nr. 87, 410597 Oradea, Bihor, România/Romania.

You can also contact us by email at perichoresis@emanuel.ro.

THE PRICE OF AN ISSUE IS EUR 20, including postage and handling charges.

Contents

Evangelicalism and British Culture DAVID W. BEBBINGTON	131
Election and Assurance in the Theology of Martin Bucer ROBERT LETHAM	155
Luther versus Luther? The Problem of Christ's Descent into Hell in the Long Sixteenth Century DAVID V. N. BAGCHI	175
Progressive, Conservative or Roman-Catholic? On the Theology of Joseph Ratzinger in Evangelical Perspective LEONARDO DE CHIRICO	201
Kingdom of God and Postmodern Thought: Friends or Foes? RONALD T. MICHENER	219
Erasmus and Luther: A Brief Presentation MAURICE DOWLING	241
The Relationships between the Church and the State. The Situation of Neoprottestant Denominations in Bihor County within the Last Years of the Second World War ANTONIO FAUR	249
The Politics of the Communist State towards Religious Denominations. A Case Study: Bihor County in 1987 ANTONIO FAUR	255

Evangelicalism and British Culture

DAVID W. BEBBINGTON

University of Stirling

ABSTRACT. The culture of modern Britain has interacted with Evangelical Christianity at a popular level by affinity and repulsion, but at a high level it has moulded it. The Enlightenment fostered empiricism, optimism and pragmatism and Romanticism generated the conservative trends of premillennial eschatology, the faith principle of mission and Keswick teaching. The broadening Romantic influence, however, simultaneously encouraged a new emphasis on the Fatherhood of God, the incarnation rather than the atonement and biblical criticism that affected the Evangelicals of the Church of England, Methodism and the Reformed traditions, but much less the Baptists. The Expressivism of the twentieth century was embodied in the Oxford Group of the 1930s and, more powerfully, in the charismatic renewal movement from the 1960s. Evangelicals in Britain have therefore been deeply embedded in their cultural setting.

KEYWORDS: Evangelicalism, culture, Enlightenment, Romanticism, Expressivism

“To say”, declared W. H. Groser, secretary of the Sunday School Union, in 1900, “that the Church has remained unaffected by influences permeating our national life would be to assert that we are independent of our social environment”.¹ That supposition, he assumed, was absurd. People are moulded by their circumstances and consequently the Christian community is swayed by its setting. That process takes place in many ways.

¹ *Sunday School Chronicle* (1900), 729, quoted by P. B. Cliff, *The Rise and Development of the Sunday School Movement in England, 1780-1980* (Redhill: National Christian Education Council, 1986), 197.

Political factors can impinge on churches, absorbing their time and energy in exercising power or else in avoiding its exercise. Perhaps the impact of the state is greatest when it is hostile, but during the era since the eighteenth century, with a few notable exceptions, the public authorities in Britain have been generally benign, or at worst neutral, towards religion. Likewise economic conditions can shape church life, with abundant or restricted resources drastically affecting the conduct of congregational affairs. Wealth or poverty have certainly altered church methods in Britain, but usually the chief effect has been on the scale of operations rather than their substance. The concern of this paper is with a more fundamental aspect of the condition of human beings, their cultural formation. The subject is the basic assumptions that have coloured the way Evangelical Christians have looked at the world and ordered their affairs—what we might call the spectacles behind their eyes. How have cultural attitudes shaped the expression of the Christian gospel in Britain?

One aspect of culture that undoubtedly affected Evangelicals was its popular dimension. There were deep-seated patterns of inherited custom among the common people that necessarily interacted with the gospel. This was the plebeian culture celebrated by E. P. Thompson, with a respect for fairness, a strain of neighbourliness and a variety of rough but vibrant ways.² It was remoulded by the process of industrialisation and the growth of literacy but nevertheless retained much of its resilience into the twentieth century before it was transformed once more by the mass media. It included a great deal of superstition, with traditional events such as bonfires and well dressings marking the cycle of the seasons and consultations with wise women as in the novels of Thomas Hardy. Popular beliefs of this kind were by no means confined to the countryside but still flourished in London in the early twentieth century.

² E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Penguin, 1968), chapter 3.

Charms, amulets and a powerful sense of luck remained deeply rooted among cockneys.³ This dimension of popular culture, open to the supernatural, seems to have formed an initial advantage to evangelists on entering an area. Thus in west Cornwall belief in a shadowy local spirit called “Bucca” who had to be propitiated if fisherman were to expect success helped prepare the way for the huge impact of Methodism on the region.⁴ Although there were tensions between superstition and orthodoxy, the locals at least had a lively awareness of a spiritual dimension to life. As Evangelical faith put down roots in an area, furthermore, its sacred worldview often meshed into folk religion. At Staithes on the North Yorkshire coast, for example, a Methodist harvest festival of the late twentieth century was plausibly explained by a visiting sociologist as having as much to do with the potency of nature as with distinctively Christian faith.⁵ There seems to have been, for good or ill, a great deal of common ground between Evangelicalism and popular culture.

Nevertheless the relationship between the two was more often one of antagonism. Many of the earliest Methodist preachers of the eighteenth century were greeted with fierce opposition, often encouraged by local clergy or gentry but generated chiefly by a sense that the community was under attack by outsiders. Thus in Pendle Forest in Lancashire in 1748, John Bennet’s singing band of Methodists was resisted by a rabble with drums, music and guns.⁶ For much of the nineteenth century respectable Evangelicals were sharply marked off from the rough element in the parish who never darkened the doors of a place of worship. Their entertainments, which seemed an alter-

³ S. C. Williams, *Religious Belief and Popular Culture in Southwark, c. 1880-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

⁴ William Bottrell, *Traditions and Hearthside Stories of West Cornwall*, 2nd series (Penzance: For the Author by Beare and Son, 1873), 246.

⁵ David Clark, *Between Pew and Pulpit: Folk Religion in a North Yorkshire Fishing Village* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 104-105.

⁶ David Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 90.

native to true religion and a source of perennial temptation, came under severe Evangelical censure. At Derby, for instance, the annual races, which had long been a haunt of betting touts and their cronies, were eventually suppressed by the magistrates in 1835 as a result of Evangelical pressure.⁷ The sharpest encounters often took place over drink. The centre of male sociability among the poor was the alehouse and the number of drink outlets was immense. In Lambeth in 1905 there were 172 churches, chapels and mission halls but as many as 430 public houses and beerhouses.⁸ Drunkenness was always a target of church censure, but down to the middle years of the nineteenth century total abstinence was rare except in Primitive Methodism. Increasingly, however, drink seemed the supreme obstacle to conversion. From the 1870s Nonconformity and much of Scottish Presbyterianism turned decisively against alcohol. Even the Church of England launched a strong temperance society, supported chiefly by Evangelical clergy. There were annual temperance sermons; Bands of Hope encouraged the young to take the pledge; and the temperance campaign turned into a political cause. Plebeian culture, on the other hand, remained wedded to the public house. A gulf was created between the poor who liked a drink and the churchgoers who on principle shunned alcohol. Consequently gospel and culture in its popular dimension were in perpetual collision for much of the twentieth century.

Other features of culture, however, became indigenised within the Evangelical movement and the bulk of this paper will take them as its theme. High culture is usually contrasted with the popular variety, but in reality tendencies that began in the elevated circles of cultural innovators gradually spread to a much wider public over time. The rank and file of Evangelicals

⁷ Anthony Delves, "Popular Recreation and Social Conflict in Derby, 1800-1850", in Eileen and Stephen Yeo (eds), *Popular Culture and Class Conflict, 1590-1914* (Brighton: Harvester, 1981), 107.

⁸ Jeffrey Cox, *The English Churches in a Secular Society: Lambeth, 1870-1930* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 24.

were therefore affected by the steady dissemination of the main currents in western civilisation over the last three centuries. The first major wave of influence that percolated down to them was the Enlightenment, emphasising the ability of reason to discover truth and improve the human lot. John Locke and Sir Isaac Newton, the chief progenitors of Enlightenment in the English-speaking world, both contended that received knowledge was not to be taken on trust. That stance is often supposed to have made the Enlightenment intrinsically anti-religious, with human reason pitted against divine revelation. It is true that Voltaire, one of its greatest luminaries, set the tone of the French Enlightenment with his cry of *écrasez l'infâme*, a rallying call against the institutional embodiment of revealed religion. It is also true that many of the British religious thinkers of the eighteenth century who were most affected by the spirit of the age, whether latitudinarians in the Church of England, moderates in the Church of Scotland or Socinians in Dissent, became in varying degree detached from traditional Christian convictions. Recent scholarship, however, has shown that the Enlightenment was immensely varied in its expressions, so that, in north Germany for example, it was closely bound up with pietism.⁹ Similarly in England and Scotland, although there were outright opponents of Christian teaching such as the Deists and David Hume, there was a great deal of overlap between Enlightenment thinking and orthodox theology. There was no automatic antagonism between the intellectual temper of the age and the rising Evangelical movement.

On the contrary, Evangelicalism was permeated with Enlightenment values from the inception of the movement and on into the nineteenth century. Both, in the first place, were dedicated to empirical method. Locke and Newton equally favoured investigation as the method for discovering truth. Each man was deeply respected by Evangelicals, even though they were most

⁹ Roy Porter and Mikulas Teich (eds), *The Enlightenment in National Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

devoted to the common sense philosophy of Thomas Reid, a product of the Scottish Enlightenment, as a foundation for their thinking. Although the Scottish school held that first principles have to be assumed, its methods were essentially empirical, not deductive. Its texts were standard in the curriculum of nineteenth-century theological colleges. Respect for empirical method led to sympathy for science. Natural theology, the prevailing British tradition of apologetic, formed a bridge between science and religion. Evangelicals heartily approved when, in 1802, William Paley published his *Natural Theology*. They frequently followed Paley in appealing to the evidences of a designing purpose in the world that confirmed the existence of a Designer. The most popular work by Thomas Chalmers, the leader of the Evangelical party in the Church of Scotland, was a series of *Astronomical Discourses* (1819) on the wonders of the heavens and the glories of their Maker. Natural theology remained the framework within which Evangelical theologians came to terms with Darwin after 1859. Purpose, they argued, could still be discerned in an evolutionary world so long as it was not assumed to be absent. An Enlightenment framework continued to ensure that there was little or no gulf between science and religion in Evangelical thought for most of the nineteenth century.¹⁰

A second bond between Evangelicalism and the Enlightenment was optimism. A leading characteristic of the later Enlightenment of the second half of the eighteenth century was the idea of progress, the notion that humanity is advancing morally towards a better future. A similar optimistic temper marked Evangelicals. "More will in the end be saved than will perish", declared Thomas Scott, the leading Anglican Evangelical commentator on the Bible. "Diseases, wars, passions", he went on,

¹⁰ D. W. Bebbington, "Science and Evangelical Theology in Britain from Wesley to Orr", in D. H. Livingstone et al (eds), *Evangelicals and Science in Historical Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 120-141.

“will all be subdued.”¹¹ Scott’s confidence in the elimination of the scourges of humanity was a result of postmillennial teaching, the belief that the second coming of Jesus will not take place until after a millennium of peace and prosperity. On this reading of biblical prophecy, the millennium will dawn as a result of the gradual extension of the gospel and the consequent spread of Christian values throughout the world. In this vein the *General Baptist Magazine* carried an article in 1854 on the millennium envisaging not only the disappearance of moral evils but also such secular benefits as the end of “the oppressive weight of taxes that grind nations to the dust”. “Governments will still probably exist”, the writer remarked, “but theirs will then be an easy office; for all will be a law unto themselves.” This happy state of affairs might take some time, but could be expected to arrive around the year 2016.¹² The postmillennial view was not unanimous among eighteenth-century Evangelicals, but, in the wake of the upheavals of the French Revolution, it became their general opinion. The launching of the missionary movement at the same juncture seemed to vindicate the expectation of the universal triumph of the gospel. The vigour of Evangelical postmillennialism goes a long way towards explaining the strength of the Victorian idea of progress. They were mutually reinforcing and, as the century wore on, virtually indistinguishable.

Perhaps the most characteristic feature of Enlightenment was its pragmatism. Traditional institutions, it was insisted, must be reformed so as to make them efficient. This was the stance of Jeremy Bentham and the current of utilitarian thought with which he was associated. Equally it was to be found amongst Evangelicals. They were far less committed than earlier generations of Protestants, whether Churchmen or Dissenters, to pre-

¹¹ J. H. Pratt, *The Thought of the Evangelical Leaders: Notes of the Discussions of the Eclectic Society, London, during the Years 1798-1814* [1856] (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1978), 257 (7 June 1802).

¹² *General Baptist Magazine*, July 1854, 308, 309.

cise forms of church order. Instead they were willing to experiment. Because their grand goal was the rapid propagation of the gospel, they were impatient with any obstacles posed by traditional ways in the churches. Lay agency is one of the most significant expressions of their pragmatic temper. Christian initiatives were not left to the professional clergy but were taken up by laypeople, female as well as male. Thus Methodism was run by society stewards and the great majority of its sermons delivered by lay preachers. Likewise in the Church of Scotland Chalmers revived the office of deacon in 1819 so that businessmen could deploy their talents in the service of the church.¹³ There were many other instances of a new flexibility in the area of ecclesiology. Thus early Anglican Evangelical clergy, eager to preach wherever there were needy sinners, often entirely ignored the parochial system of the church. Likewise during the early nineteenth century the Baptists, despite their existence as a denomination being predicated on their practice of believer's baptism, largely abandoned their insistence on the rite as a condition of participation in communion.¹⁴ Matters of lesser importance than the proclamation of the gospel could be adapted for the sake of greater effectiveness. Societies rather than churchly agencies were likely to be better managed, and so the British and Foreign Bible Society and similar organisations were typical expressions of the Evangelical temper. If secular Enlightenment thinkers aimed to promote utility, Evangelical biographers frequently praised the usefulness of their subjects. The assimilation of the spirit of the age by Evangelicals meant that there was a close affinity between the two approaches.

Another high cultural force, however, impinged on religion in the early nineteenth century. The new mood, Romanticism, developed in pioneering literary circles, especially in Germany,

¹³ S. J. Brown, *Thomas Chalmers and the Godly Commonwealth in Scotland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 132-133.

¹⁴ M. J. Walker, *Baptists at the Table: The Theology of the Lord's Supper amongst English Baptists in the Nineteenth Century* (Didcot: Baptist Historical Society, 1992), chapter 2.

from the last years of the eighteenth century. In Britain its most celebrated exponents were the Lake Poets, William Wordsworth and S. T. Coleridge, and the historical novelist Sir Walter Scott. The term "Romantic", however, is used here not in a sense restricted to that generation of authors, but rather it encompasses the whole cultural wave that spread out from them, enveloping first some of the highly educated and then a slowly increasing proportion of the population as the century wore on. The preferences of the era of Enlightenment were gradually – but by no means entirely – supplanted over the decades. Instead of the Enlightenment exaltation of reason there was an emphasis on will, emotion and intuition. Simplicity was replaced by mystery, the artificial by the natural and the novel by the traditional. The new taste underlay the appeal to history of the Oxford Movement in the Church of England and the ornate display of Ultramontane ritual in the Roman-Catholic Church. Coleridge was a major inspiration for other Anglicans such as Thomas Arnold who shaped subsequent Broad Church theology. So Romanticism exerted a powerful influence over the direction of Christian thought in the Victorian age.

Evangelicalism was far from immune. Edward Irving, a minister of the Church of Scotland in London, acknowledged Coleridge as his mentor. It was Irving who, more than any other, transposed Evangelical doctrine into a Romantic key. In a memorable sermon lasting over six hours delivered before the London Missionary Society in 1824, he denounced unsparingly the methods of his host organisation. The society, he claimed, had capitulated to modern business methods in a spirit of expediency. Missionaries should instead go out without resources other than a total reliance on the Almighty for their support. The rational calculation of the Enlightenment must be abandoned in favour of radical faith. Again, Irving was ready with Romantic eyes to recognise dramatic events as bearing the authentic hallmarks of the supernatural. Accordingly when, in 1831, speaking in tongues broke out in his congregation, he readily accepted its miraculous credentials. The legitimacy of

speaking in tongues was to be an article of faith in the Catholic Apostolic Church that institutionalised Irving's convictions. Most significantly of all, Irving came to believe that Jesus would return soon and in person. In 1827 he published *The Coming of Messiah in Glory and Majesty*, a translation from Spanish of a work by a Chilean Jesuit, contending for Jesus' "own personal appearance in flaming fire".¹⁵ In the book he dropped the postmillennial expectation of the gradual advance of the gospel in order to embrace the premillennial hope that the second coming would precede the millennium. That was to abandon the characteristic eschatology of the Enlightenment for that typical of Romanticism. Irving was the person who did most to inject Romantic presuppositions into the Evangelical bloodstream.

Another man who seconded Irving's efforts was J. N. Darby. The outlook of Darby was coloured by Romantic taste. Poetry, for Darby, was an attempt "to create, by imagination, a sphere beyond materialism, which faith gives in realities".¹⁶ There are the hallmarks of the new sensibility: imagination, the supersession of the material and faith itself. At first, as an Irish clergyman, he held views of apostolic succession comparable to those of the Oxford Movement. Then, as he moved into Brethren circles, he developed as strong an insistence on the supremacy of faith over reason as Irving. His species of premillennial teaching, dispensationalism, bore the mark of a characteristic feature of Romantic thought, cultural relativism. There were no permanent standards by which to evaluate every part of human history, but rather the dispensations were separate stages when God's dealings with humanity were distinct—a principle that enabled him to repudiate Irving's acceptance of the revival of the gift of tongues as something alien to the present age. Other men who left a substantial legacy to Brethren also drank deeply

¹⁵ J. J. Ben-Ezra, *The Coming of Messiah in Glory and Majesty*, trans. Edward Irving (London: L. B. Seeley, 1827), vi.

¹⁶ Heyman Wreford, *Memories of the Life and Last Days of William Kelly* (London: F. E. Race, n.d.), 81, quoted by M. S. Weremchuk, *John Nelson Darby* (Neptune: Loizeaux Brothers, 1992), 167.

from the Romantic well. A. N. Groves was the epitome of the wandering missionary depending wholly on the Almighty that Irving had envisaged and George Müller was an immensely influential exemplar of living by faith rather than by rational planning. Brethren as a whole embraced an ecclesiology that bore the Romantic impress. Christian assemblies were formed not by human act but by “gathering to the Lord”. They had no defined membership, but consisted of those who were “in fellowship”, vital elements in an organic community. Their leadership was not constituted by formal procedures but by the emergence of men with appropriate gifts. All was natural and spiritual. The Brethren movement can be seen as adopting a Romantic version of Evangelical faith.¹⁷

The main effect of the Romantic mood in the Evangelical movement as a whole, however, was to push many of its adherents in a more theologically liberal direction. The central shift was in the doctrine of God. The theologians who had written under the sway of Enlightenment had understood the Almighty primarily as the just governor of the universe. A younger generation falling under Romantic influences, by contrast, saw him primarily as Father. The pacesetters of the new view were the Scots John McLeod Campbell and Thomas Erskine, who complained that earlier writers depicted God in legal imagery rather than in terms of the family.¹⁸ The Almighty was now seen, however, essentially as father of all, so that no distinction was drawn between those who were adopted into his family and those who were not. The effect of this doctrine of the fatherhood of God was therefore to blur the line between the converted and the unconverted. There were other Romantic innovations. They included a shift in emphasis away from the atone-

¹⁷ This point is developed in D. W. Bebbington, “The Place of the Brethren Movement in International Evangelicalism”, in N. T. R. Dickson and Tim Grass (eds), *The Growth of the Brethren Movement* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006), 247-250.

¹⁸ D. W. Bebbington, *The Dominance of Evangelicalism: The Age of Spurgeon and Moody* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2005), 156-157.

ment to the incarnation, the premier doctrine in the estimate of High Churchmen and Broad Churchmen alike. Theologians influenced by F. D. Maurice such as the Wesleyan John Scott Lidgett commonly took this path. The problem here was that the centrality of the cross was being eclipsed. Again, the biblical higher criticism that impinged on Evangelical scholarship in the later Victorian years was founded on German Romantic premises. The development of doctrine in ancient Israel, it was believed, must have conformed to an evolutionary pattern. After much debate, William Robertson Smith was dismissed from the Free Church College at Aberdeen in 1881 for embracing this point of view. So Romantic currents of thought were beginning to erode the accepted understandings of conversion, the cross and the Bible, three of the Evangelical fundamentals.

Yet aspects of the Romantic vision could also point in a theologically conservative direction. The faith principle became in the later years of the nineteenth century the animating idea behind a wave of new missionary bodies beginning in 1865 with Hudson Taylor's China Inland Mission. Premillennialism stiffened the backbone of Evangelicals in the Church of England, though not spreading to many people outside its ranks other than Brethren. And the Keswick movement, beginning in 1875, taught a Romantic prescription for holy living. The Lake District, where its annual convention gathered, had once been the home of Wordsworth and Coleridge. Those associated with Keswick, such as Frances Ridley Havergal, often possessed poetic taste or talent. The substance of the teaching, that holiness was attainable by faith rather than by effort, bore witness to the twin Romantic emphases on moments of crisis and personal trust. The mode in which sin was dealt with, according to Keswick teachers, was not by removing it ("eradication") but by repressing it ("victory"), an enduring process that was typical of Romantic categories. The whole enterprise can be recognised as a recasting of spirituality in a Romantic style. By 1900, despite dogged resistance by J. C. Ryle, it had come to dominate Angli-

can Evangelicalism.¹⁹ Before the end of the nineteenth century parts of the Romantic inheritance had strengthened theological conservatism within the Evangelical movement.

It was in the twentieth century, however, that a Romantic way of looking at the world became most widespread in the British public. In the Garden City movement at the start of the century, for example, the advocacy of rural features in new cities such as front gardens and open spaces can be seen as an expression of the wistful quest for the purer influences of the countryside that was near the heart of Romantic sensibility. Again, when the Labour MPs of 1906 were asked who had moulded them most intellectually, the reply was not Karl Marx but John Ruskin, the prophet of fostering the beautiful in the world of work and one of the greatest Romantic prose writers. The Roman-Catholic Church exercised a fascination over sensitive minds in the earlier twentieth century because of its insistence on the value of tradition inherited from the past and the capacity of faith to respond to symbols. The continuing Ultramontane ethos of the mass had what Ronald Knox, the son of an Anglican Evangelical bishop but himself a Catholic convert, called a “dramatic and appealing character”.²⁰ The first half of the twentieth century was an era when the cultural legacy of Romanticism reached its apogee.

The effects were felt in all the strands of Evangelical life. From the first decade of the twentieth century “liberal Evangelicals” started to emerge in the Church of England. At first the phrase was used of Evangelicals who leant not in a Broad Church direction, towards a more liberal theology, but in a High Church direction, towards a more Catholic form of churchmanship. Typically it described those clergy who wished to adopt liturgical practices once thought alien to Evangelica-

¹⁹ D. W. Bebbington, *Holiness in Nineteenth-Century England* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2000), chapter 4.

²⁰ Horton Davies, *Worship and Theology in England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961-75), vol. 5, 261.

lism such as vestments, a choir and flowers on the communion table. In 1904 one self-professed “Liberal Evangelical” explained that his standpoint meant that he was able to introduce flowers to his church without “noxious teaching”.²¹ The reason often given was that young people, because of their improved aesthetic preferences, could be retained only by a higher churchmanship. Liberal Evangelicals organised themselves from 1906 in a body which from 1923 took the title the Anglican Evangelical Group Movement. By the 1920s it had become more committed to a broader theology, especially in wholeheartedly welcoming biblical criticism. Its ethos was most fully expressed in the Cromer Convention, an annual devotional gathering on the lines of Keswick. It was exclusively Anglican, highly clerical and tolerant of addresses that verged on pantheism. Edward Woods, later Bishop of Lichfield, would go out on the cliffs carrying a copy of Wordsworth in his pocket.²² The convention was a carrier of the Romantic spirit.

The Methodists possessed a parallel body in the Fellowship of the Kingdom, which emerged at the end of the First World War. It recast traditional Methodist teaching in terms of three watchwords, Quest, Crusade and Fellowship. The Quest sought spiritual experience; the Crusade meant outreach; and the Fellowship was for members meeting in fortnightly groups. The very terminology was redolent of knightly enterprise at the court of King Arthur. Its publications illustrate the same Romantic ethos. J. Arundel Chapman, for instance, described biblical inspiration in these terms:

A poem such as Wordsworth’s *Michael*, the picture of the Austrian Tyrol in June, a piece of music such as Bach’s Mass in B Minor, the view of the Langdale Pikes, differ markedly, but they are all alike in this – that they get us.²³

²¹ *Record*, 23 September 1904, 954 (A. H. Hope-Smith).

²² I. M. Randall, *Evangelical Experiences: A Study in the Spirituality of English Evangelicalism, 1918-1939* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1999), 56.

²³ J. Arundel Chapman, *The Bible and its Inspiration* (n.d., n.p.), 5.

Inevitably many Methodists gravitated in a High Church direction, a Methodist Sacramental Fellowship being launched in 1935. According to K. Harley Boyns, a minister who wrote a pamphlet called *Our Catholic Heritage*, "The past, with its conquests, its fragrance, its saints, its immortal splendour, is ours".²⁴ The echoes of the Oxford Movement's discovery of an idealised Christian tradition nearly a century before are unmistakable.

A similar pattern is evident among churches possessing a Reformed inheritance. Many congregations of the Church of Scotland, largely reunited from 1929, introduced more frequent communion, service books with fixed liturgies and the observance of the Christian year. So close did the Church of Scotland move to the Church of England that by the 1950s there was nearly a merger of the two established churches. Although a campaign by the *Scottish Daily Express* ensured the scheme's rejection because it entailed the acceptance of bishops, the Presbyterian leaders themselves were willing to embrace episcopacy.²⁵ In Wales the trend was less marked, but greater dignity of worship did appear among the Calvinistic Methodists, from 1930 called the Presbyterian Church of Wales. A book about the home missionary work of the Welsh Presbyterians published in the late 1940s captured in its title the same spirit as the Methodist Fellowship of the Kingdom: *The Romance of the Forward Movement*.²⁶ Among the English Congregationalists there were two tendencies shaped by Romantic influences, pointing in different directions. On the one hand there was an advance of theological liberalism, which proceeded far beyond the bounds of

²⁴ K. Harley Boyns, *Our Catholic Heritage* (n.d., n.p.), 8.

²⁵ Tom Gallagher, "The Press and Popular Protestant Culture: A Case-Study of the *Scottish Daily Express*", in Graham Walker and Tom Gallagher (eds), *Sermons and Battle Hymns: Protestant Popular Culture in Scotland* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990), 193-212.

²⁶ Howell Williams, *The Romance of the Forward Movement* (Denbigh: Gee and Son, 1949?).

Evangelicalism. Thus T. Rhondda Williams, one of its leading exponents and chairman of the Congregational Union in 1929, regretted that Wesley and Whitefield had been burdened by “the incubus of a traditional theology”.²⁷ On the other hand there was the so-called Genevan movement that gathered around Nathaniel Micklem of Mansfield College, Oxford, from the 1930s. Micklem stressed the place of Calvinists within any fully developed understanding of Catholic tradition. His friend B. L. Manning of Jesus College, Cambridge, shared his vision, extending it to the other Free Churches. For him the early Methodists of Lincolnshire singing the hymns of Charles Wesley about the cross were the modern equivalents of mediaeval penitents wending their way across the same wolds chanting of the five wounds of Christ.²⁸ The evocation of the past once more provided a sanction for the exaltation of the church and the sacraments. The supreme instance was W. E. Orchard, the minister who conducted high mass at the Congregational King’s Weigh House Chapel in London before seceding to Rome.²⁹ The High Church remodelling of the Reformed tradition could hardly go further.

Baptists had a rather different blend of currents flowing amongst them. Many of the denominational leaders such as the Cambridge classicist T. R. Glover fitted into much the same liberal Evangelical mould as the Anglican Evangelical Group Movement. Among the rank and file, however, there were sympathies for the more conservative expressions of the Romantic legacy. Queensberry Street Baptist Church, Old Basford, Nottingham, is an instructive case-study. In 1929 an energetic member still in his twenties, a children’s dress manufacturer named

²⁷ T. Rhondda Williams, *The Working Faith of a Liberal Theologian* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1914), 40, quoted by A. P. F. Sell, *Nonconformist Theology in the Twentieth Century* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006), 15.

²⁸ B. L. Manning, *The Making of Modern English Religion* (London: Student Christian Movement, 1929), 141-142.

²⁹ Elaine Kaye, *The History of the King’s Weigh House Church* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1968), chapter 8.

Douglas Stocken, stayed in the Aberystwyth holiday home run by the Young Life Campaign, a dynamic evangelistic organisation. There Stocken was quickened by its version of Keswick spirituality centring on “full surrender”. Returning to Nottingham, he threw himself into Young Life Campaign activities and became church secretary three years later. The church was renewed by the Keswick message, becoming the most vigorous Baptist cause in the area. There was a range of striking changes. The church began to concentrate on “soul winning”. Bazaars were abandoned as worldly entertainments. The church now raised money only by voluntary giving. Premillennial teaching became standard. Queensberry Street drew away from other Baptist churches but closer to Anglican Evangelicals and Brethren who also supported the Young Life Campaign and Keswick. There was, in short, a transformation of cultural atmosphere. The Romantic style had at last filtered down to a Nottingham suburb.³⁰ Baptists included in their ranks a good number professing similar higher life and Adventist beliefs. That helps explain the alignment of more Baptists than of other Nonconformists with the conservative Evangelical coalition in the post-war era.

The pattern of Evangelical life in the early twentieth century was therefore moulded by the cultural inheritance from the previous century. The Romantic legacy made it common to present the Christian faith in rather ethereal form, blurring the sharp lines of doctrine and concentrating on the fatherly love of God. That generated the liberal tendency. At the same time certain doctrinal themes, especially those surrounding the church, sacraments and ministry, chimed in with Romantic preoccupations. The same trend that made the Roman-Catholic Church especially attractive gave rise to a higher churchmanship among many Evangelicals. Yet Romantic influence had also generated beliefs with conservative implications. Keswick teaching and

³⁰ D. W. Bebbington, *A History of Queensberry Street Baptist Church, Old Basford, Nottingham* (Nottingham: For the Church, 1977), 38-39.

the advent hope, popular among Anglicans, Brethren and others such as the Baptists of Queensberry Street, stiffened resistance to liberalism. The cultural mood that had animated the avant-garde of the early nineteenth century had spread so as to become a diffuse but potent element in the church life of the twentieth century.

The first major challenge to these ecclesiastical styles arose in the 1930s. It came from the Oxford Group led by Frank Buchman, a Pennsylvania Lutheran minister. Teams of life-changers, often Oxford undergraduates, visited an area to urge personal surrender to God. Individuals were drawn into groups where they talked frankly about their efforts to achieve the four ethical absolutes: honesty, purity, unselfishness, love. Adherents were encouraged to spend daily quiet times jotting down thoughts in note books as a way of discovering the guidance of God. The Oxford Group aroused suspicion in many Evangelical quarters because its meetings often dispensed with prayers, hymns or scripture readings. "Such a movement", darkly observed the Brethren magazine the *Witness*, "(...) can only have one end (Revelation 3:16)".³¹ The later history of the Oxford Group, which turned in 1938 into Moral Rearmament, might seem to have borne out this judgement for it became less distinctively Christian. For a while, however, at the depth of the great depression, the movement attracted attention to the Christian message, won converts and in the eyes of some observers seemed to presage revival. For all its idiosyncrasies, it brought a fresh burst of evangelistic vitality into the land.

The impact of the Oxford Group can be traced to its cultural role. Buchman wanted to remove every obstacle to the transmission of the gospel and so deliberately adopted the latest fashions. His movement therefore reflected the new cultural mood that had been created by the literary and artistic avant-garde in the years before and after 1900. This was the phenomenon variously called "Modernism" or "Expressivism". It bore

³¹ *Witness*, January 1937, 17.

little relation to the contemporary movement of theological modernism, which was an advanced form of liberalism, but took its name because it embraced the modern as an alternative to Romantic nostalgia for the past. It could equally be called “Expressivist” because of a characteristic commitment to free self-expression. Cultural Modernism was as original a phase in the history of Western civilisation as the Enlightenment or Romanticism, and can best be understood as a cultural wave succeeding them. Its origins can be traced particularly to Friedrich Nietzsche in the 1870s and Sigmund Freud in the 1890s. From Nietzsche came the belief that there is no intrinsic order in the universe. Hence, it came to be held, there is no correspondence between words and things so that language cannot represent reality. From Freud, Jung and their circle came the perceptions of depth psychology. There was exploration of the recesses of the subconscious, leading to the view that thought cannot be distinguished from feeling. The novelists such as James Joyce who explored the stream-of-consciousness technique and the artists such as the Surrealists who turned the world of dreams into their subject-matter were typical exponents of this fresh cultural manner. The Oxford Group was its leading embodiment in religion.

The Buchmanites therefore displayed many of the most typical characteristics of the period’s cultural pioneers. They believed in self-expression, telling each other in their groups how they really felt. Accepting the basics of depth psychology, they pursued mutual counselling. Personal relations had to be authentic, and so the Groupers went in for first names. They would even, according to a critical representation, have called Saint Peter “Pete”.³² Like Modernist artists, they rejected any notion of boundaries, not distinguishing the sacred from the secular and so, to the scandal of most Evangelicals of their day, going for rambles on a Sunday. Their doctrine was unspecific, for, like the mood they represented, they refused to pin down

³² John Moore, *Brensham Village* [1946] (London: Collins, 1966), 171.

words to a single meaning. In the spirit of the Bohemian creators of Modernist art, they disliked institutions and so normally sat loose to the churches. Yet, because they were so anti-institutional, they relied on authority to hold them together and gave a degree of control to Buchman that some contemporaries likened to that of Hitler. For a while during the 1930s these techniques had an enormous appeal for the young, the prosperous and the educated, the sector of the population most swayed by recent cultural innovations. As war supervened and Moral Re-armament turned in fresh directions, the permeation of the churches and of society largely came to a halt. The lasting penetration of Evangelicalism by the new cultural mode in this period was therefore very limited.³³

The major impact of Modernism/Expressivism was therefore deferred until the 1960s, the decade of the expressive revolution in society at large. By then the cultural movement had evolved as it spread to a wider public, but it had not been superseded. The phenomenon that has come to be called "Postmodernism", which many would date from the 1960s, did not replace Modernism. Postmodernism is so called because it rejects Modernity, the legacy of the Enlightenment, not Modernism. In reality the two formed one stream of cultural influence. Thus in the field of architecture the Bauhaus school of the 1920s constituted the cutting edge of the "Modern Movement". Its central principle was giving precedence to the functional over questions of traditional design. A major Postmodernist monument, Richard Rogers's Pompidou Centre in Paris, by placing its service ducts on the outside, bears witness to the same priority. For all the differences of appearance, there is an underlying continuity between the two. The essence of both is authenticity, the hallmark of Expressivism. Late twentieth-century Postmodernism was an

³³ D. W. Bebbington, "The Oxford Group between the Wars", in W. J. Sheils and Diana Wood (eds), *Voluntary Religion* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), 495-507, id., *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 235-240.

increasingly diffused version of the cultural forces that sprang into being around the opening of the same century.

The chief way in which this cultural phenomenon impinged on Evangelicals was through charismatic renewal. Charismatics baptised the rising cultural mood into a Christian guise. Its characteristics therefore echo those of the Oxford Group in the 1930s. There are exceptions: the Group had none of the exuberant worship that was so salient in the renewal movement, but in the earlier period there was no question of altering the existing style of church services. Nevertheless the similarities are marked. The worship style of the charismatic movement was itself about self-expression, showing by gestures such as hand raising how people felt inside. The prayer counselling therapy that became a feature of renewal drew extensively on depth psychology. An insistence on authentic personal relations led to a rejection of individualistic churchgoing and sometimes to the creation of Christian communities. The sacred and the secular were not held apart so that, for example, there was an unprecedented surge of creativity in such matters as the making of banners and the inclusion of dance in worship. There was a tendency to downgrade fixed theological formulas and even, in some charismatic house churches, to insist that theology must be expected to change over time. There was a dislike of the institutionalism of existing denominations that provided much of the spur to form new house churches. And at certain points, especially in the 1970s, there were authoritarian tendencies within the movement. The so-called "heavy shepherding" of that juncture, sometimes extending to the choosing of life partners for adherents, was subsequently largely repudiated, but the attributes of leadership became a much more common theme at conferences. The charismatic movement represented the rising temper of the age.

The growth of charismatic renewal is one of the most striking features of late twentieth-century Christian history. It revitalised many existing congregations and gave rise to substantial networks of new churches. Even where it did not come to domi-

nate, it commonly affected the style of church life, especially in worship. Seconded by technological improvements, a multiplicity of instruments was introduced and the visual came to rival the verbal. One symbolic change was the legitimization of applause. Noise in church had been frowned on in the period when Romantic norms prevailed since it was conceived to be a profane intrusion on the sacred. The expressive revolution in worship, however, encouraged clapping both to keep time with the rhythm of the music and to show appreciation of particular contributions to services.³⁴ All this was specially welcome to the young, the educated and the successful. The young appreciated worship that approximated to pop music; the educated were aware of the latest cultural trends; and the successful could pay for their taste to be gratified. Holy Trinity, Brompton, the leading bellwether congregation among Evangelicals by the end of the twentieth century, was full of the young, the educated and the successful. The appeal of Holy Trinity was partly a consequence of the clear exposition of the gospel that the church set out in its Alpha evangelistic programme, but it was also partly the result of its close adaptation to the cultural currents of the time. Just as the gospel in its Enlightenment form had exerted a strong appeal in the early decades of the Evangelical movement and in its Romantic style in the century or so from the 1830s, so its embodiment in a Modernist/Expressivist idiom proved to be powerful in the years around 2000.

A number of conclusions flow from this analysis. In the first place, it is evident that Evangelicals have been deeply embedded in their cultural settings. W. H. Groser was right to claim that churches are moulded by their environments. It is impossible to understand the patterns of theological and ecclesiastical change without attention to the cultural context. Secondly, popular culture did not shape the trends in the expression of the gospel as much as developments in high culture. It is true that

³⁴ D. W. Bebbington, "Evangelicals and Public Worship, 1965-2005", *Evangelical Quarterly* 79 (2007), 3-22, specifically 20.

local customs impinged on how Evangelicals spread and lived the faith, but the deferred impact of intellectual innovations was far greater because they soon meshed with major theological concerns. Popular culture in the sense of secular ways of life probably exerted its greatest influence by repulsion, creating a gulf between the churches and the mass of the people. The high cultural movement of the Enlightenment, in the third place, provided the intellectual framework within which early Evangelicals operated. Empiricism, optimism and pragmatism all constituted common ground between Evangelicals and their progressive contemporaries, so giving them a powerful apologetic advantage. The growth of the movement owes a great deal to this extensive intellectual affinity. Fourthly, the succeeding cultural wave of Romanticism immersed many Evangelicals. Its consequences were manifold, fostering liberal developments in theology and more elaborate liturgical practice, but also giving rise to distinctly conservative doctrinal trends, especially through the faith principle, premillennial teaching and the Keswick Convention. And finally the emergence of a novel Modernist/Expressivist mood exercised a comparable effect on the Evangelical movement in the twentieth century. After a stunted initial impact in the 1930s, it exerted a transforming influence over Evangelical life in the decades after the 1960s. Overall it is clear not only that the host culture has helped shape the articulation of the gospel but also that it has contributed in no small measure to its degree of success.

Election and Assurance in the Theology of Martin Bucer

ROBERT LETHAM

Wales Evangelical School of Theology

ABSTRACT. The immediacy of God is perhaps a category appropriate to describe Bucer's theology. As such, election brings the eternal divine decision into direct relation in this world to faith. Flowing from the *homoousion*, the will of Christ makes known the Father's will. The immediate spiritual but real presence of Christ is experienced in the sacraments. In the covenant of grace there is the sovereign action of God. The Holy Spirit is directly present and active in all areas of soteriology and church. As for faith, it is assurance of eschatological salvation. Election is a part of the overwhelming nearness of God, the greatest of all his benefits, the contemplation of which will strengthen faith. Far from undermining assurance in Bucer's theology, election both enables and reinforces it.

KEYWORDS: Election, assurance, Christ, faith, covenant

Introduction

The relation between election and assurance is a topic often raised in discussions of early Reformed theology, from Perry Miller to R. T. Kendall and onwards. In varying ways the issue of particularism has been held to pose serious problems for assurance and to have created the pietistic introspection of Puritanism as well as the drive to wealth creation of early industrial entrepreneurial capitalism. Since he was in so many ways a strategic figure in the Reformation, not least in his interaction with Calvin, Bucer warrants some attention in this connection.

Election

While Lang may have overstated his case for its importance, the prominence of election in Bucer's theology is unmistakable. Peter Stephens argues compellingly that election undergirds Bucer's soteriology. In particular, he sees Romans 8:29-30 as a crux,¹ election being the fount and origin of calling, justification, sanctification and glorification—the entire *ordo salutis* shaped by God's electing decree. This, Stephens maintains, remains throughout Bucer's career with little essential alteration. I have no reason to disagree with Stephens' assessment.

Bucer does indeed have a strong doctrine of election. In his lectures on Ephesians (delivered at Cambridge in 1550-1551 and, admittedly, somewhat problematic in accuracy of transmission) he indicates it is “the first locus of theology Paul considers”, the greatest of all God's benefits.² He adopts an infralapsarian perspective.³ In his commentaries on John and Romans, he describes election as a decree made by God before the foun-

¹ W. Peter Stephens, *The Holy Spirit in the Theology of Martin Bucer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 23ff. In discussing election in his commentary on Matthew, Bucer refers the reader to Romans 8:29-30; see Martin Bucer, *Enarrationum in evangelia Matthaei, Marci et Lucae libri duo* (Strassburg, 1527), 244a. Hereafter we shall refer to this work as *Gospels*.

² Martin Bucer, *Praelectiones doctiss. in epistolam D. P. ad Ephesios* (Basel: 1561), 19c. Kroon argues that in Bucer's work *De Regno Christi* (1550) predestination no longer is as significant; Marijn de Kroon, *Martin Bucer und Johannes Calvin: Reformatorische perspektiven: einleitung und texte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991), 230. However, this is a mistake. Bucer defines the kingdom of Christ, the subject of this treatise as “(...) the administration and care of the eternal life of the elect of God in this world”, *Martin Bucer: De Regno Christi*; ed. Wilhelm Pauck [The Library of Christian Classics, 19] (London: SPCK, 1969), 225. While he provides no extended treatment of election and predestination as such, the entire work nevertheless unfolds their implications and consequences.

³ “(...) ut sit aliquorum hominum ex communi perdita massa, ad cognitionem voluntatis Dei, & demum ad vitam aeternam designatio, ex mera gratia Dei.” Bucer, *ad Ephesios*, 21a.

dation of the world⁴ and, as such, unchangeable.⁵ He holds consistently throughout his works to double predestination.⁶ Historically, Abraham's two sons were a microcosm of the elect and reprobate.⁷ The reprobate cannot avoid opposing God,⁸ while the elect cannot fail to come to the Lord.⁹ Like election, reprobation dates from before the foundation of the world but it only becomes apparent to us when the reprobate reject the grace offered in the gospel. It is their rejection of grace, not God's decree, that is the cause of their condemnation and punishment.¹⁰ Thus, for Bucer human moral responsibility is in no way offset by God's decree.¹¹

Bucer attempts to relate election to Christ. According to the Ephesians lectures (1550-1551), God's choice had regard not to us but to himself and his Son. From eternity Christ was head of the church and our mediator. Thus the cause of election is the

⁴ Irena Backus (ed.), *Martini Bucer Opera Latina: Volume II; Enarratio in evangelion Iohannis* (1528, 1530, 1536) (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988), 35 [on John 1:12-13]. Hereafter reference will be to J 577, OL 35, J referring to the pagination of the 1536 edition, OL to the pagination of the critical edition of Backus. See also Martin Bucer, *Metaphrasis et enarratio in epistolam D. Pauli apostoli ad Romanos* (Strassburg, 1536), 397a. Hereafter references to Bucer's Romans commentary will be as *ad Romanos*. Sometimes we will cite the 1562 Basel edition and on other occasions both together.

⁵ Bucer, on John 6:25-40, J 672, OL 240.

⁶ Bucer, *ad Romanos* (1536) 406b; (1562) 410e; on John 1:51, J 610, OL 107; on John 2:11, J 613, OL 114. "Auch hierbei steht Bucer im Schatten Calvins", Kroon, 20. Kroon argues that Bucer shrinks from including reprobation within his definition of predestination. This is hard to support in the light of Bucer's discussion in his Romans commentary. He considers the objections of some to regarding the rejection of the wicked as predestination — and dismisses them.

⁷ Bucer, on John 3:14, J 627, OL 144.

⁸ Bucer, on John 2:19, J 617, OL 122.

⁹ Bucer, on John 3:8, J 623, OL 135.

¹⁰ Bucer, on John 3:19, J 635, OL 160.

¹¹ Indeed, Kroon argues strongly that ethics lies at the heart of Bucer's thought.

love of God who embraced us in his Son.¹² However, he does not develop this to any marked extent and he could hardly avoid saying something along these lines in an exegesis of Ephesians 1:4. He is, however, able to assert that assurance is grounded on Christ.¹³ In our own history, election and reprobation are made visible in division over Christ, in terms of faith and unbelief.¹⁴

Assurance of Election

Bucer's characteristic insistence is that assurance of election is not merely possible but is in fact indispensable for the Christian. In his commentary on Romans he develops this idea. The first thing we owe God is to believe that he chose us. If we doubt this we doubt our calling, justification, sanctification, glorification—indeed all the promises of God and the gospel itself.¹⁵ Assurance of election is as essential as faith in the promises of God. Thus predestination, far from undermining our faith and creating nagging and threatening doubts, should on

¹² "Deus enim se tantum respexit & filium suum in nostri electione, & non nos." Bucer, *ad Ephesios* (1561), 21b. The cause of election "(...) est sola Dei immensa dilectio, qua nos in filio amplectitur." Ibid., 22e. See also 23a.

¹³ "Inculcat Christum, quia in eo est certitudo fidei (...)" Bucer, *ad Ephesios* (1561), 22e. The correspondence with Calvin, *Institutes*, 3:24:4-5 is clear. The question of who influenced who is beyond the scope of this paper and, as Wendel suggests, is a matter fraught with difficulties; F. Wendel, *Calvin: The Origins and Development of his Religious Thought* (London, 1963), 137-144. However, Wendel concludes that predestination was an aspect in which Bucer almost certainly had an influence over Calvin.

¹⁴ Bucer, on John 10:19, *J* 715, *OL* 345. See his comments on John 6:25-40, *J* 672, *OL* 240; on John 6:61, *J* 683, *OL* 275.

¹⁵ "Ad nihil sane aliud. quam ut de salute tua certior sis, & firmior inhaereas promissionibus Dei (...) Itaque primum quod Deo debes, est ut credas esse te ab eo praedestinatum: (...) Proinde si dubitas te praedestinatum esse, dubitare quoque necesse est, te esse vocatum ut salvus fias, esse iustificatum, esse denique glorificandum: hoc est, necesse est te dubitare de omni promissione salutis tuae, dubitare de Evangelio: hoc est, Deo nihil credere omnium quae tibi in Evangelio offert." Bucer, *ad Romanos* (1562), 411b.

the contrary *confirm* our faith in God's promise.¹⁶ The immutability of election underwrites assurance too, since it gives reality to perseverance—not that perseverance is an automatic deduction, for it is perseverance *in faith*, a reflex of God's gracious purpose.¹⁷ It is the same in the later Ephesians lectures where Bucer argues that we cannot expect eternal life if we deprive ourselves of this certainty, nor can there be true piety or love of God if we nourish doubt.¹⁸ Election is thus a firm basis against temptations.¹⁹ Indeed, he cites Melanchthon's comment that we should consider predestination so as to be more certain of eternal life.²⁰

Sanctification also confirms our election. The more careful the concern for right living the stronger the certainty of calling and election.²¹

And this is the piety and integrity which assures (*confirmat*) our conscience, since it is produced by the Holy Spirit, who is the incontrovertible guarantee of eternal life. That is why John says whoever obeys the commandments knows he is of God. This is the

¹⁶ Ibid., 411c. Also: "(...) certitudinem salutis, quae est a praedestinatione", 413b.

¹⁷ Ibid., 413b.

¹⁸ "Si huius electionis memoria & meditatio nobis auferretur, (...) quomodo resisteremus diabolo? Quoties etiam Diabolus tentat fides nostram, nunquam autem non tentat, tunc semper ad electionem est nobis recurrendum, & de ea cogitandum, atque ita cogitandum, ut omnem dubitationem excludamus. Nam si hac fidei certitudine careamus, si de ea persuasi non sumus, non possumus vitam aeternam expectare: Deum pro patre, & Christum pro redemptore non possumus agnoscere: nihil denique solidae pietatis, & verae dilectionis Dei in nobis esse potest." Bucer, *ad Ephesios* (1561), 21a.

¹⁹ See also Bucer, on John 17:2-3, J 770, OL 472.

²⁰ Bucer, *ad Romanos* (1562) 411b.

²¹ "Verum quidem est, quo amplius iustitiae studeas, hoc tibi & aliis magis firmatur certitudo de tua vocatione & electione (...)," Bucer, *ad Romanos* (1562), 412d. See also Ibid., 445.

testimony of a good conscience. Whoever does not have this support (*confirmantur*) cannot be certain of his election.²²

True, this occupies only a subordinate function in Bucer's thought. In no sense is sanctification the *basis* of assurance of election. It has this role only once certainty is grounded *extra nos*, on the promise of God and Christ. Moreover, since sanctification is the gift of God, the assurance we derive from it comes *from God* and his promise not from any righteousness in us.²³ Works are testimonies of election but they do not of themselves engender certainty of it.²⁴

The Impact of Election on Other Aspects of Bucer's Theology

Bucer insists that all things depend on divine election.²⁵ Christ openly declares this to be so, he claims.²⁶ We already observed, following Stephens, how the *ordo salutis* of Romans 8:29-30 is crucial for his soteriology. However, election extends its tentacles through various other elements of the theological spectrum.

²² "Atque haec est sanctitas & integritas quae confirmat nostram conscientiam: quia est opus spiritus sancti, qui est certissimus arrabo vitae aeternae. Propterea dicit Ioannes, qui servat mandata, novit quod sit Dei. Hoc bono conscientiae testimonio, qui non confirmantur, non possunt de sua electione esse certi, nec de illis quae electis sunt reposita." Bucer, *ad Ephesios* (1561), 22d.

²³ "Sed quia manca adeo & mutila est omnis nostra iustitia, ut eius merito nunquam de salute nostra certi esse possimus (neque enim ea legi dei satisfacit) praedestinationis & electionis nostrae certitudo ex sola dei promissione & vocatione petenda est, & animus semper a nostra iustitia, quae in oculis Domini per se semper abominatio est, in promissionem Dei attollendus." Bucer, *ad Romanos* (1562) 412d. See also 412d-413a.

²⁴ Bucer, *Gospels*, 318b.

²⁵ Bucer, on John 10:27, J 716, OL 347. "Et hoc ut dixi potissimum docere hic Apostolus instituit, omnia apud homines pendere a libera Dei electione (...)", Bucer, *ad Romanos* (1536), 407a.

²⁶ Bucer, *Gospels* 244a.

First, God made the covenant of grace with the elect.²⁷ Thus, in terms of salvation history, Abraham and his seed (the parties with whom God made his covenant) are the equivalent of the elect.²⁸ In Psalm 16:3 he understands the psalmist's comment on "the saints of the earth, the excellent in whom my soul delights" as a reference to the elect.²⁹ He tends to see the covenant more in promissory than conditional terms.³⁰

Second, the work of Christ (the atonement included) is intended for the elect. Christ carries out the decree of election.³¹ Thus, Christ's atonement was made for the elect. By his death Christ made expiation for the sins of the elect, thus redeeming them.³² In terms of the parable of John 10, Christ the good she-

²⁷ "(...) in foedere domini cum electis suis (...)", Bucer, *ad Romanos* (1562), 518e. See also Bucer, *Gospels*, 334b-335; on John 1:29-34, J 598-9, OL 81f; on John 3:9-21, J 627-8, OL 144; on John 6:53-60, OL 269.

²⁸ Bucer, on John 3:14, J 627, OL 143.

²⁹ Martin Bucer, *S. Psalmorum liberi quinque ad Ebraicum veritatem versi, et familiariter explanatione elucidati* (Strassburg, 1529), 90a.

³⁰ "Utcunque autem de eo sit, certe primum est in foedere domini cum electis suis, ut peccata illis remittat, & huius eos certos reddat." Bucer, *ad Romanos* (1536) 445b, (1562) 518e. See also (1536) 384a-b, (1562) 440e; *ad Ephesios*, 78e. Thus, faith in God's promise is the heart of the covenant, *ad Romanos* (1536) 225a, 229a. This is a promise of remission of sins, God's benevolence and salvation, *Ibid.*, 220a, 384a-b; "Utcumque autem de eo sit, certe primum est in foedere domini cum electis suis, ut peccata illis remittat, & huius eos certos reddat." *Ibid.*, 445a-b.

³¹ Martin Bucer, *De Regno Christi*, 201. Also "Quanquam videtur hic peculiariter de electis Dominus loqui, hi ita communes Patri et Christo sunt, ut Christus non assumat salvandos nisi quos Deus in hoc elegit. Et quoscumque Deus elegit, eos suae fidei concreditos Christus habeat atque salvos reddat." Bucer, on John 17:10-11, J 771, OL 476. See also his comments on John 17:6, J 771, OL 475.

³² "Quia Filium suum Pater in mundum, hominem factum, miserat ut reposita in se omnis peccati expertem, omnium semel electorum peccata morte sua expiaret—hoc enim piaculum divina iustitia requisivit—Iohannes agnum Dei illum (...). Mors enim eius omnium semel, ut dixi, electorum redemptio fuit. Id mox a morte eius vel eo declaratum est quod evangelium vitae sparsum est in universum mundum congregarique qui dispersi per orbem erant filii Dei, illico coeptum." Bucer, on John 1:29, J 590, OL 61. Also, "Populum suum

pherd dies specifically for his sheep, who Bucer (following Augustine) regards as his elect.³³ Claims that Beza *introduced* limited atonement into Reformed theology need revision.³⁴

Similarly, the kingdom of Christ consists in his Spirit illuminating his elect and giving them heavenly glory.³⁵ Christ is proclaimed by the church so that the elect will seek him.³⁶ God gives the elect to Christ. They will not follow others – only Christ, so consequently they will persevere.³⁷ Bucer argues that in John “the world” sometimes means “the elect”; thus Jesus’ statement

salvum faciet, hoc est, electos, quos ipsi Pater adducit (...). Ita autem salvum facit: Morte sua omnium electorum peccata semel expiavit, meriutque ut Pater illis propitius, suum Spiritum donet: eo renovati, hanc Dei gratiam agnoscit, eaque fidunt: quare & plene ipsam tandem percipiunt (...). Martin Bucer, *In sacra quatuor evangelia, enarrationes perpetuae* (Basel, 1553), 5b (commenting on Matthew 1:21). See also Stephens, 106, who cites a passage from Bucer’s *Getreue warnung*; BW 2:250:19-25; Lang writes, “Er hat für alle Erwählten genug gethan, und in Ewigkeit vollendet „die geheiligten, das ist, die erwölten, die jm gott von der welt erlesen hat.” Ebenso einfach und entschieden drückt sich Butzer auch später aus: [he cites passages in the Matthew commentary] (...). Wie aber Christus und sein Verdienst, so ist auch der geist nur für die Erwählten da.” August Lang, *Der evangelienkommentar Martin Butzers und die gründzuge seiner theologie* (Studien zur geschichte der theologie und der kirche, 10) (Weisbaden: Scientia Verlag Aalen, 1972), 165-166. See also Bucer’s comments on Matthew in *Gospels* 1:214a-b, (1536) 1:177; cf. 1:98, (1530) 1:32b, (1536) 1:78f; 2:25b, (1536) 2:225.

³³ “Hoc mandatum accepi a Patre. Hoc est: in hoc missus sum ut moriar pro peccatis ovium, id est electorum, et resurgam propter iustificationem eorum, Rom. 4.” Bucer, on John 10:18, J 715, OL 345. Similarly, also commenting on John 10, where Jesus the good shepherd gives his life for his sheep (those who believe in him and follow him), these sheep Bucer identifies (following Augustine) as the elect: “Sed oves, hoc est electi (...)”, on John 10:1f, J 714, OL 341. It is the elect who yield to Christ, enter the sheepfold and follow him, *Ibid.*, OL 341-342.

³⁴ See Basil Hall, “Calvin against the Calvinists”, in Gervase E. Duffield (ed.) *John Calvin* (Appleford: Sutton Courtenay Press, 1966), 19-37; R. T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 29-38.

³⁵ Bucer, on John 2:22, J 616, OL 121.

³⁶ Bucer, *De Regno Christi* (1969), 197.

³⁷ Bucer, on John 10:1-5, J 714, OL 342-3.

"I give life to the world" means he gives life to the elect.³⁸ Indeed, it is due to God's election alone that we are the sheep of Christ.³⁹ Consequently, Christ's sheep (the elect) cannot perish. It is certain they will be saved, since the Father and the Son are one and are both pledged to preserve them.⁴⁰

Third, faith is a gift of God, given only to the elect.⁴¹ Once given, it never leaves them.⁴² In turn, unbelief indicates that a person is not of the elect, is destitute of the Spirit of God and, indeed, unable to believe in the Lord.⁴³ It is the elect who believe in Christ.⁴⁴

Fourth, and related directly to the above, God gives the Holy Spirit only to his elect.⁴⁵ At this point there is a direct connec-

³⁸ Bucer, on John 6:33, J 671, OL 238. See also Bucer, on John 17:1-2, J 770, OL 474.

³⁹ "(...) a sola Dei electione esse ut *oves* simus et Christum sequamur (...)" Bucer, on John 10:28-30, J 716-7, OL 348.

⁴⁰ "Non possunt perire electi (...) Unum siquidem *sunt ipse et Pater*, eadem est utriusque virtus et potentia (...) Dum igitur aeternum in manu salvatrice Christi oves perseverant, *perire* certe *nunquam* possunt necesseque est eas vitam habere aeternam." Bucer, on John 10:27-8, J 716, OL 347-8.

⁴¹ "In Actis 13 legitur: *Et crediderunt quotquot erant ordinati in vitam aeternam*. Hinc certe Spiritus datur quia, quos *praedefinivit Deus*, hos et vocat. Hic Spiritus semen Dei est quo nunquam electi destituuntur." Bucer, on John 6:53-60, OL 268. See also Bucer, *ad Romanos* (1536), Preface 6a-b, 15a-b; 80b.

⁴² "Deus enim semper suum electum sustentat." Bucer, *ad Ephesios*, 34.

⁴³ Writing of Jesus' opponents, Bucer can say: "*Sed non erant ex ovibus Domini, hoc est donatis Christo a Patre*. Non erant ex electis ad vitam, ideo omni Spiritu Dei bono carebant animales toti. Neque potuerant Domino credere aut ut Servatorem ipsum amplecti." Bucer, on John 10:25, J 715, OL 347.

⁴⁴ Bucer, on John 17:20, J 773, OL 480.

⁴⁵ "Solut siquidem Pater per Christum Spiritum donat qui omnem veritatem inducit et donat iis quos *ad id ante conditum mundum delegit*, non iis modo qui audierint concilia." Bucer, on John, Preface, J 563 OL 7. Also on John 10:27, J 716, OL 347.

tion with the *ordo salutis*, expounded by Stephens.⁴⁶ Election is right at the centre of Bucer's entire soteriology.⁴⁷

Given such prominence to election in a context of double predestination, the question follows as to how Bucer can at the same time assert the necessity of assurance of final salvation. To understand this we shall now explore some other areas of his theology.

The Character of God

Bucer, unlike the scholastics, engages in no speculation on the essence of God. Rather, God's character is seen in his actions, his being in his acts. The gospel reveals his mercy, love and grace—the three causes of salvation.⁴⁸ The gospel promise pre-eminently reveals God's benevolence towards us. Since God cannot fail his mercy is certain.⁴⁹ Goodness is, if anything, God's central characteristic,⁵⁰ seen clearest in his pardoning our sins. Bucer recognizes the nature of God governs saving faith, assurance deriving from the faithfulness of God and thus the reliability of his promise.⁵¹ Time and again he describes the gos-

⁴⁶ See Stephens (1970), 1-100.

⁴⁷ See his comments on free will; Bucer, on John 6:44, J 674-67, 7, OL 244-247, 251. In August Lang's words, "So hängt denn alles Heil in letzten Grunde wie auf jeder Stufe allein von der Auswahl Gottes ab (...)." Lang, 166.

⁴⁸ "Haec tertia causa est nostrae salutis. Prima est: Misericordia, in qua ipse dives est. Secunda est: Dilectio eius erga nos, priusquam eum noverimus: Tertia: Gratia est. Est autem gratia, benevolentia, qua quis alium amplectitur ex mero suo affectu & animo (...). Non est gratia ulla modo, si non est gratuita omni modo." Bucer, *ad Ephesios*, 58f.

⁴⁹ "Sententia haec per se credentibus nota est, idque ex ingenio & natura Dei, qui cum sit ipsa sapientia & bonitas." Bucer, *ad Romanos* (1562) 515b. Also: "Illud etiam liquet ex ingenio Dei, is enim cum nec fallere possit nec falli (...)." Ibid., 227c; "Tam clare & diserte Spiritus ipse sanctus omnem nostram salutem tribuit bonitati & charitati Dei per Christum (...)." See *ad Ephesios*, 21c; see also 172d.

⁵⁰ Bucer, *ad Ephesios*, 100d; *ad Romanos* (1536), Preface 6b, 11b, 14b, 15a, 16a, 17b, 18a; 80b, 81b, 82a, 214b, 216a, 231a, 262a.

⁵¹ "Illud etiam liquet ex ingenio Dei, is enim tum nec fallere possit nec falli, necesse est, ut qui Deo non omnia credit, is ei prorsus nihil credat, nam quic-

pel, the promise of the covenant in terms of God's goodness or benevolence.⁵² In his exposition of Romans 1:17 he links the righteousness of God (*iustitia Dei*) with his goodness (*bonitas*) and the gospel (*evangelio*), such that they are mutually defining.⁵³ Thus God's righteousness, revealed from heaven by Christ, is nothing less than a demonstration of God's good will for the salvation of all the faithful. Again, in considering Paul's comparison of Adam and Christ in Romans 5:12-21, Bucer stresses that God's grace is far greater than all human sin for his *benevolentia* and *misericordia* in Christ outweigh his wrath against the sin of Adam and the human race.⁵⁴

quid Deo quis credat, si id ipsi pure credit, ideo credit quia agnoscit eum veracem, & ut Deum, qui ut non fallere, ita nec falli potest (...)." Bucer, *ad Romanos* (1536), 215a.

⁵² Bucer, *ad Romanos* (1536). Preface 6a-b "paterna benevolentia (...) Dei bonitate (...) charitas Dei (...) benignitatem Dei (...)" ; Preface 11b "(...) ut certo agnoscamus Deum nobis bene velle (...)" ; Preface 14b "(...) misericordia (...) paterna benevolentia (...) bonitate" ; Preface 15a "(...) bonitas" ; Preface 16a "Unde in omni Dei de se doctrina, promissiones insunt bonitatis eius erga nos (...) bonitatis eius promissio" ; Preface 17b, "Nihil hic quod sanctis de dilectione Dei erga se dubitandum sit" ; Preface 18a "(...) de gratia ac benevolentia erga se Dei" ; 80b "(...) de Dei bonitate (...) Evangelion namque cum renunciat, & offert iustitiam Dei, hanc Dei bonitatem, qua nobis peccata remittere (...)" ; 81b "(...) bonitas & misericordia (...) ex fide de Dei erga se bonitate habet omnia" ; 214b "(...) credat eum sibi bene velle, aut favere iam haec fides est (...) semper fidem nostram niti ipsa dei in nos gratuita benevolentia (...) Fides (...) quae nitit Dei misericordia" ; 216a "infinita sua benevolentia" ; 231a "promissionis gratuita (...) promissam Dei benevolentiam" ; 260a "benevolentia ista Dei nobis" ; 262a "benevolentiam hanc & misericordiam Dei".

⁵³ "Evangelion namque cum renunciat, & offert iustitiam Dei, hanc Dei bonitatem, qua nobis peccata remittere (...) iam iustitia ista Dei, nostri servatrix, nobis exhibita est (...) Evangelion virtus Dei est salvifica, sed credenti, ita etiam credentibus solis iustitiam Dei revelat." Bucer, *ad Romanos* (1536) 80b. "Monemur tum demum Evangelium rite praedicari, cum nihil quam Dei iustitia, summam bonitas & misericordia praedicatur, qua ille gratis peccata remittit, & spiritum iustitiae donat." *Ibid.*, 81b.

⁵⁴ "manifestum igitur, plura per Christum mala submota esse, quam Adam obtulerat (...) benevolentiam hanc & misericordiam Dei esse effusorem, quam ira Dei fuerit in peccatum." Bucer, *ad Romanos* (1536), 262a. In the previ-

However, it would be wrong to argue that Bucer abstracted any particular facet of God's character. He also stressed the justice and the law of God.⁵⁵ Moreover, he is the God who made the decree of reprobation. Nevertheless, the primacy of God's goodness paves way for his definition of saving faith and his equation of faith and assurance.⁵⁶

The Covenant of Grace

Bucer is one of the earliest Reformed exponents of the covenant of grace.⁵⁷ He saw the covenant as made by the Lord. The grace of God is primary. The covenant is made with the elect.⁵⁸ The Davidic covenant is inviolable.⁵⁹ The Hebrew term *berith* is best translated as *testamentum* in places such as Hebrews 9,⁶⁰ but in many other contexts is better rendered *foedus*⁶¹ as it represents a *pactum* between two living parties. As such, there is an inbuilt ambiguity in Bucer's handling of covenant. On the one hand, he talks of conditions of the covenant but these are, at the same

ous paragraph Bucer has argued that the grace of God in Christ is greater than all human sins. According to Romans 5, all sins originate from the first sin of Adam. Christ's grace is greater than the disobedience of Adam. Therefore Christ's grace is greater than all human sins.

⁵⁵ Bucer, *ad Romanos* (1562), 210d, 283b, 484f; *ad Ephesios*, 80d-e, 90f.

⁵⁶ "Est enim vera fides donum Dei & certa persuasio, quod Deus velit hominem servatum & participem vitae & aeternae felicitatis, cohaeredemque Christi propter meram bonitatem suam in Christo (...) Itaque, per fidem, id est, assentimur Evangelio offerenti illam vitam & salutem a Deo & Christo omnium electorum capite, ut non dubitemus de venia, de reconciliatione, de gratia dei, de eius favore, de adoptione, de haereditate aeterna (...). Speramus quoque certa omnia bona a Deo, & expectamus perfectam liberationem ab hoc seculo nequam. Nam assensus certae & immutabilis veritatis perinde est, atque consecutio promissorum: quia Deus non fallit." Bucer, *ad Ephesios*, 59c-60d.

⁵⁷ Bucer, *Gospels*, 334a-335.

⁵⁸ Bucer, *Gospels* 334b-335a; also on Psalm 89:4, *Psalms*, 300a.

⁵⁹ Bucer, on Psalm 89:1, 2, *Psalms*, 300a.

⁶⁰ Bucer, on Psalm 89:4, *Psalms*, 300a; *ad Romanos* (1536), 384a.

⁶¹ Bucer, *Psalms*, 300b; *ad Romanos* (1536), 384a.

time, all promises.⁶² The Mosaic covenant was clearly conditional but Christ has now freed us from it, its pedagogical nature now obsolete.⁶³ Despite this more bilateral emphasis, he maintains that God made his covenant with the elect, for they are the rightful seed of Abraham.⁶⁴ Thus, the covenant is made by the sovereign action of God and is not a *quid pro quo* agreement. The elect from Gentiles as well as Jews constitute one church gathered under Christ.⁶⁵

Christology

Only Christ can send the Holy Spirit.⁶⁶ Christ is the light of the world to everyone, reprobate as well as elect.⁶⁷ Christ satisfied for the sins of the elect, including those who lived before he came.⁶⁸ Christ sends the Holy Spirit who teaches all things and gives eternal life.⁶⁹ Thus Bucer, following church dogma, considers Christ to be God incarnate. In exegeting Romans 9:5, he suggests that, while it may be possible for the doxology to be addressed to *theos* (God), since Paul focuses on Israel's rejection of Christ it is best to see it as referring to Christ, thereby describing him as *theos*. Whatever one's interpretation of the language, Bucer adds, it is fitting to understand it of Christ since God

⁶² "Nulla omnino alia conditio est huius foederis, quam ut credamus, & in unum corpus coalescamus, & fidem per veram charitatem confiteamur." Bucer, *ad Ephesios*, 79b. See also *Ibid.*, 75b. See also *ad Romanos* (1536), 220a, 229a, 384a-b, 445a-b.

⁶³ Bucer, *ad Ephesios*, 78f-79a.

⁶⁴ Abraham and his seed (with whom God made his covenant) are the elect: on John 3:14, J 627, OL 143.

⁶⁵ Bucer, *ad Romanos* (1536), 228b. He distances himself from Origen, arguing that the church is not the same as all people: on John 10:16, J 715, OL 344.

⁶⁶ Bucer, on John J 7:37-39, 695, OL 302; on John 1:15f, J 583, OL 46-48.

⁶⁷ Bucer, on John 1:9, J 578, OL 37.

⁶⁸ Bucer, on John 1:29, J 590, OL 62.

⁶⁹ "(...) Christus autor sanctorum sit vitaeque Spiritu donatorum (...)." Bucer, on John 3:14, J 627, OL 143. "Cum itaque Christus a Patre omnia accipit, etiam facultatem dispensandi *Spiritum Sanctum*, eum Doctorem *qui omnia docet* et ad vitam aeternam innovat, audiendibus utique prae omnibus est." Bucer, on John 3:31, J 639, OL 169.

is in Christ and Christ is God.⁷⁰ Thus, Christ and the Father have one will concerning salvation⁷¹ since they are one in essence.⁷² There can be no discrepancy between the teaching of Christ and the will of the Father.

Saving Faith and Assurance

For Bucer, faith is a gift of God given only to the elect. During Jesus' ministry the elect received him but the cities did not.⁷³ As we mentioned above, the Holy Spirit is necessary for faith.⁷⁴ Faith is given through the hearing of the word of God⁷⁵ by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit gives faith through the preaching of the gospel.⁷⁶ It does not normally arise apart from the external word.⁷⁷

In terms of its nature, first of all, saving faith assents to all the word of God,⁷⁸ especially the promises.⁷⁹ This assent is based on the authority of God.⁸⁰ In his commentary on Matthew (1527) Bucer cites Hebrews 11:1 as a definition of faith: "Est autem fides earum rerum, quae sperantur substantia, argumentum eorum, quae non videntur."⁸¹

⁷⁰ Bucer, *ad Romanos* (1536), 385a.

⁷¹ "Unum sunt et idem volunt Pater et Filius." Bucer, on John 6:37, J 671, OL 238-239.

⁷² Bucer, on John 17:5, J 771, OL 475; on John 1:1-2, J 572-5, OL 23-9; on John 10:28-31, J 716-7, OL 348; on John 14:5-12, J 746-7, OL 417-20. He writes that Christ is the only begotten of God, was with God and is himself the true God; Bucer, *ad Romanos* (1536) 23a-b.

⁷³ Bucer, *Gospels* 103a.

⁷⁴ Bucer, on John 10:16, J 715, OL 345-6.

⁷⁵ "Impossibile igitur est ad fidem pervenire, pervenire ad vitam aeternam, nisi audieris Evangelium, idque administratum per hominem." Bucer, *ad Romanos* (1562), 488f. See Stephens, 173-212.

⁷⁶ Bucer, *ad Romanos* (1562), 245b, 282f, 488f-489a, Preface, 15, 16, 18-21; Stephens, 67.

⁷⁷ Bucer, *Gospels*, 2:32a.

⁷⁸ Bucer, *ad Ephesios*, 6d, 59c, 60e, 62e.

⁷⁹ Bucer, *ad Romanos* (1536), Preface, 15a, 17b; (1562), 14, 16; *Gospels*, 19a.

⁸⁰ Bucer, *ad Romanos* (1536), Preface 15a; (1562), 14; (1536), 229b.

⁸¹ Bucer, *Gospels*, 19b.

Its most characteristic feature is persuasion,⁸² sure and certain.⁸³ Later, in his Romans commentary (1536), Bucer produces a definition of saving faith almost exactly like the one Calvin was to adopt. Indeed, he repeats it with minor variations on innumerable occasions:

(...) necesse igitur est, intellexerit appellatione fidei, persuasionem de Dei erga nos misericordia & paterna benevolentia indubitata, factam per Spiritum S. & nitentem litationi Christi (...).⁸⁴

Hence, faith is certainty,⁸⁵ in particular certainty that Jesus Christ is saviour.⁸⁶ Thus Bucer equates saving faith with assurance of salvation.⁸⁷ All doubt is excluded.⁸⁸ Yet, in reality, the faithful have to battle with doubts, for certainty is never perfect. Nevertheless, doubts arise from the flesh, while faith comes

⁸² Bucer, *ad Romanos* (1562), Preface, 21; *ad Ephesios*, 32d. Also, "Paulo itaque fides proprie persuasio est, qua mens de verbis DOMINI nihil addubitat, persuasa scilicet a spiritu sancto", Martin Bucer, *ad Ephesios* (1527), 18b. See also Bucer, *ad Romanos* (1536), Preface 6a-b, 14b, 15a-b; 229a-b, 230a-b.

⁸³ "Haec, etsi ab evidentia non sit, tamen est scientia, et firma ac certa cognitio, multo certior, quam quae evidentia, & per causas contingit (...) Paulus dicit se scire, & certa persuasio habere." Bucer, *ad Ephesios* (1561), 32d; also 32e, 27c, 29a.

⁸⁴ Bucer, *ad Romanos* (1562), Preface, 14. Note that Calvin had a very different formulation in his 1536 *Institutes* but that, after his stay in Strassburg (1538-41) he adopted a very similar definition.

⁸⁵ Bucer, on John 6:64-66, J 684, OL 277. "(...) certissima persuasione concepta", Bucer, *ad Romanos* (1536), 230a. See also 81b, Preface 6a-b.

⁸⁶ "(...) credere in Iesum vel Iesu, hoc est: certum de eo esse persuasumque habere quod is sit quem Prophetae illum et ipse quoque semet esse dixit, minirum filiorum Dei caput et Servatorem." Bucer, on John 1:12, J 578, OL 36.

⁸⁷ Bucer, *ad Romanos* (1536), Preface, 6a-b, 11b, 14b; (1562), 14; also (1536) 81b, 445b et. al.; on John 3:33, J 639, OL 169. "Ubi enim vere Deus ut omnis boni fons et autor agnoscitur, dumque per Christum certi sumus illum nobis favere atque in hoc nos de mundo elegerit ut sibi nos per Spiritum suum similes reddat (...) indubitato se filios Dei sciunt (...)", on John 17:2-3, J 770-1, OL 474; "Animi enim est de bonitate erga se Dei persuasi eoque non dubitantis in salutem sibi cuncta eum operari" on John 14:27, J 756, OL 439.

⁸⁸ Bucer, *ad Romanos* (1562), 246d-f.

from the Holy Spirit. The faithful are involved in a battle between the flesh and the spirit. However, faith is the opposite of doubt, which comes from elsewhere. The faithful know they believe, the reprobate doubt this. For the faithful, faith overcomes doubts.⁸⁹

Bucer shows a certain reticence to define faith as trust, in contrast to Bullinger and even Zwingli. While later Wolfgang Musculus thought of faith only as an act of trust, Bucer on the other hand (like Calvin) tends to see trust as an *effect* of faith.⁹⁰ On the other hand, Stephens is correct when he takes issue with Mueller. Mueller regarded Bucer to have separated persuasion and trust. Stephens shows that Bucer often uses terms interchangeably.⁹¹ Thus, trust is not something separate from faith and faith resides in the heart as well as the mind. So, consequently, repentance follows faith—Bucer denies the reverse.⁹² Therefore good works cannot be the *ground* of assurance.⁹³

Thus, for Bucer saving faith *is* assurance of salvation. This he combines with the strong doctrine of double predestination we outlined above. Before we comment on this relationship, there are a few other relevant theological co-ordinates we can mention.

⁸⁹ See Bucer, *ad Ephesios*, 33c, 35b, 59c, 60d; *De Regno Christi*, 198; *De iustificatione*, 47, 99, 129-30, 198, 200, 480-5, 504, 516.

⁹⁰ "(...) provabit ab effectu fidei illo primario, qui est fiducia certa de gratia & benevolentia Dei: ostendit enim hanc fiduciam nobis sola fide in Christum constare: ex quo liquet, ipsam etiam iustificationem sola fide constare." Bucer, *ad Romanos* (1562), 424e. See also Bucer, *ad Ephesios*, 6f, 19a, 33c-34, 59b, 60e. However, Stephens is correct when he takes issue with Mueller and indicates that Bucer often uses terms interchangeably; Stephens, 62ff.

⁹¹ Stephens, 62-67.

⁹² "Verum vitae mutatio non praecedit iustificationem (...) sed eam sequitur." Bucer, *ad Ephesios*, 65c. Also, "Propterea impii non ducuntur poenitentia, quia Deum non noverunt, quare de ipso diffisi poenitere non possunt, sed tantum pii poenitentiam agunt, quorum est fides, sensusque magnitudinis peccati, & remissionis per Christum." Ibid., 66f.

⁹³ Ibid., 62e-f.

The Sacraments

Bucer sees baptism and the eucharist as means of grace, Christ being present by the Holy Spirit. They are, in Augustine's terms, visible words of God. God's part in the sacraments is primary, for they impart what they signify, not automatically as Rome held but through the sovereign action of the Holy Spirit.⁹⁴

The chief thing in baptism, says Bucer in his mature thought (allowing for the distinct nuancing of his polemics against Rome and the anabaptists), is the covenant of salvation. Baptism is an instrument of the divine mercy,⁹⁵ pointing principally to what God does, not what we do, for the church baptizes in the name of God, not of ourselves.⁹⁶ The promise of God is the basis of baptism. It is this that constitutes the adult or infant part of God's covenant. Because of this status, the sign must follow. His predestinarianism allows him to regard the covenant as something God made, Christ fulfilled and the Spirit effects.⁹⁷

In Bucer's thought as it develops after 1530 the Lord's Supper involves a true communication of the body and blood of Christ by the Holy Spirit to the faithful.⁹⁸ Again he considers "the action of the sacrament is essentially God's action through his Holy Spirit, rather than man's action in believing and remembering."⁹⁹ The sacrament benefits the elect alone. Communion with Christ is not automatic, for faith is necessary and only the elect have it, nor is it absent as if the anabaptist stress on human remembering was all there is. Thus the elect, through faith and by the Holy Spirit, truly receive the body and blood of Christ as they eat the bread and drink the wine.

⁹⁴ Stephens, 215-217.

⁹⁵ Bucer, *ad Ephesios*, 146.

⁹⁶ Martin Bucer, *Quid de baptisate infantium* (Strassburg, 1533), A.7b-A.8b. See my article, "Baptism in the Writings of the Reformers", *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 7 (1989), 21-44.

⁹⁷ Bucer, *ad Romanos* (1562), 440, 518; *ad Ephesios*, 75-79.

⁹⁸ Bucer, *Gospels*, 338b. Christ, he says, lives in us and gives us his flesh and blood; Bucer, *Bericht*, aa.3. a.6-9.

⁹⁹ Stephens, 252.

Summary

As W. van't Spijker argues, Bucer more than any Reformer considered election in a thorough manner and integrated it into his whole theology. Structurally, he introduced a major difference in placing it no longer under the doctrine of God but in soteriology, reflecting his strong pastoral interests. Van't Spijker also points to a strong influence by Bucer on Calvin during the latter's time in Strassburg. In contrast to his relation to the other Reformers, there is no significant difference between the two on predestination, including the certainty of predestination, although Calvin is much more systematically organized.¹⁰⁰

We shall now summarize some of the principal ways Bucer's theology encourages an identification of saving faith with assurance, despite (or because of) his powerful doctrine of double predestination. First, for Bucer election is in Christ. Thus he relates election to the person and work of Christ, to the gospel and so to faith. The decree is not something lurking in the background separated from the gospel promise. Second, God's character is revealed in his word and in the promise of the gospel. This is a testimony of his benevolence towards us. Hence, faith believes that God is good and his promise brings that close to us. Third, Christ is one with the Father and so his will is the Father's also. Thus, the gospel promise is a true manifestation of what God is like and what God wants. Fourth, Christ's work secures the salvation of the elect so there is no doubt as to whether they shall be saved. Fifth, the centrality of the work of the Spirit in salvation and church brings the person, presence and activity of God into direct connection with the life of the faithful. Sixth, since grace is conveyed in the sacraments, in the eucharist there occurs by the Spirit the personal presence and

¹⁰⁰ W. van't Spijker, "Prädestination bei Bucer und Calvin", in W. H. Neuser (ed.), *Calvinus theologus: die referate des Europäischen Kongresses für Calvinforschung vom 16. bis 19. September 1974 in Amsterdam* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1976), 85-111.

communication of Christ to the elect. Finally, we note with Kroon Bucer's concern to relate his theology to practical, pastoral matters. If Kroon possibly overplays his contrast between the pastoral and systematic he is nevertheless correct in his general observations at this point.¹⁰¹

Perhaps the immediacy of God is a category appropriate to describe Bucer's theology here? This relates from the theological perspective to Kroon's identification of *pietas* from the side of the faithful.¹⁰² As such, election brings the eternal divine decision into direct relation in this world to faith. Flowing from the *homoousion*, the will of Christ makes known the Father's will. In the sacraments the immediate spiritual but real presence of Christ is experienced. In terms of the covenant, there is the sovereign action of God. As for the Holy Spirit, he is directly present and active in all areas of soteriology and church. As for faith, it is assurance of eschatological salvation. As such, election is a part of the overwhelming nearness of God, the greatest of all his benefits, the contemplation of which will strengthen faith.¹⁰³ Far from undermining assurance in Bucer's theology, election both enables and reinforces it.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ Kroon, 230.

¹⁰² Kroon, 125-169, 233-235.

¹⁰³ Bucer, *ad Ephesios*, 20e.

¹⁰⁴ This paper was read at a session of the Sixteenth Century Studies Conference, Atlanta, Georgia, USA, on October 24, 1992.

Luther versus Luther? The Problem of Christ's Descent into Hell in the Long Sixteenth Century

DAVID V. N. BAGCHI

University of Hull

ABSTRACT. Despite its lowly rank in the hierarchy of Christian beliefs, the doctrine of Christ's descent into hell was frequently a cause of intra-Protestant debate in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, especially in Britain and Germany. In this article, Bagchi describes the context and the courses of the various controversies over the *descensus Christi*, and argues that, despite the different forms the debate took, the essential issue was whether the descent should be interpreted as one of suffering or of triumph. He argues that the inner dynamic of the debate can therefore best be analysed by reference to Luther, who maintained both views simultaneously. Bagchi concludes that Luther consistently favoured the suffering approach as the one of most value to the individual believer, but regarded the physical, triumphant descent as an important safeguard against an over-spiritual Christology. In this respect, the *descensus* controversy illustrates a tension between affective and dogmatic theology.

KEYWORDS: Christ, descent, Hell, harrowing, Luther, Reformation

Did Christ descend into hell in order to conquer it – the traditional idea of the “harrowing of hell” – or in order to suffer its torments as part of his work of redemption? To frame the same question in liturgical terms, should Holy Saturday be regarded as a foretaste of the Christ's victory on Easter Sunday, or as a continuation and intensification of his passion and death on Good Friday? This question has been thrust into the theological limelight in recent years because of the prominence of Hans Urs

von Balthasar's "theology of Holy Saturday", as set out most clearly in his *Theologie der Drei Tage*.¹ His understanding of the descent as one of suffering seems to show many points of contact with that of Luther and Calvin. That an otherwise conservative Roman-Catholic (who was nominated to the cardinalate shortly before his death in 1988) should echo the founders of Protestantism so closely has led some commentators to stress the rich possibilities here for ecumenical encounter – and others practically to arraign Balthasar posthumously for heresy.²

This is not the first occasion on which the doctrine of Christ's descent into hell has caused theological opinion to polarize. In fact it was one of the most disputed of all the credal articles in the Reformation period.³ Although the assertion of the Apos-

¹ First published in 1970, but not available in English until after Balthasar's death. See H. U. von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale: The Mystery of Easter*, translated by Aidan Nichols, OP (Edinburgh, 1990).

² An example of the first category is David Lauber, *Barth on the Descent into Hell: God, Atonement and the Christian Life* (Aldershot, 2004). The case for Balthasar's heterodoxy is made by Alyssa Lyra Pitstick, *Light in Darkness. Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Catholic Doctrine of Christ's Descent into Hell* (Grand Rapids, 2007). Pitstick is careful not to accuse Balthasar of heresy explicitly, but she identifies in his *descensus* theology "a *de facto* rejection of the Catholic Tradition and its authority", having already established that "[i]n the case of such rejection, theology becomes subjected to fallen reason's fancy, which inevitably leads to heresy"; see 346.

³ For treatments of the doctrine in this period, see especially E. Quilliet, "Descente de Jésus aux Enfers", in *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique*, ed. A. Vacant & E. Mangenot, vol. 4 (Paris, 1920), cols 565-619; Erich Vogelsang, "Weltbild und Kreuzestheologie in den Höllenfahrtsstreitigkeiten der Reformationszeit", *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 38 (1941), 90-132; Constance I. Smith, "Descensus ad inferos – again", *Journal of the History of Ideas* 28 (1967), 87-88; Dewey D. Wallace Jr., "Puritan and Anglican: the interpretation of Christ's descent into Hell in Elizabethan theology", *ARG* 69 (1978), 248-87; Jerome Friedman, "Christ's descent into Hell and redemption through evil: a Radical Reformation perspective", *ARG* 76 (1985), 217-30; Markwart Herzog, "Descensus ad inferos": Eine religionsphilosophische Untersuchung der Motive und Interpretationen mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der monographistischen Literatur seit dem 16. Jahrhundert, *Frankfurter theologische Studien* 53 (Frankfurt am Main, 1997); Peter Marshall, "The map of God's word: geographies of the af-

bles' Creed that Christ *descendit ad inferos* does not obviously touch upon any standard Reformation *cause célèbre* (whether between Catholics and Protestants or within Protestant ranks), it generated a controversy which rumbled, on and off, throughout the "long" sixteenth century, and which spread beyond its German origins to spark conflagrations elsewhere, most notably in England. However, this polarization did not take place along predictable lines. To a peculiar and possibly unique degree, the controversy over the *descensus* subverted confessional allegiances: Lutherans would adopt Reformed positions, and Reformed Lutheran, and representatives of both camps would find themselves from time to time aligned with Catholic views.⁴ A principal cause of this confusion was Martin Luther himself, who held simultaneously two interpretations that would in time be deemed contradictory and mutually exclusive. In this essay I propose to describe briefly the context and the course of the Reformation controversy over Christ's descent into hell, and to suggest that, despite the many forms the debate took, over several decades and in many different locations, the essential issues at stake in it can be traced back to Luther's own, apparently contradictory, statements about the matter.

terlife in Tudor and early Stuart England", in Bruce Gordon & Peter Marshall (eds), *The Place of the Dead. Death and Remembrance in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 2000), 110-30; idem, "The reformation of hell? Protestant and Catholic infernalisms in England, c. 1560-1640", *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* (forthcoming). I am grateful to Professor Marshall for letting me see his study in advance of publication.

⁴ See for instance Robert Kolb, "Christ's descent into Hell as christological locus in the era of the Formula of Concord: Luther's 'Torgau Sermon' revisited", *Lutherjahrbuch* 69 (2002), 101-118, at 105 n. 14, where it is noted that "[t]he issue of the soteriological significance of Christ's descent into hell cuts across the usual "party lines" of the period; Melancthon, his Philippist disciples, as well as Gnesio-Lutheran students of his like Chemnitz, interpreted it as part of Christ's triumph; Johannes Brenz (1499-1570) and Andreae shared a position similar to that of their Calvinist opponents in viewing it as a part of his suffering."

The Background to the Controversies

It was at the Synod of Sirmium in 359, in the so-called fourth formula of that council, that the doctrine of Christ's descent was first incorporated into a creed; and indeed it was most probably in the East, probably in Syria, that the belief originated. It spread to the West, where it was included in the Apostles' Creed in the form *descendit ad inferos* ("to those below") or *ad inferna* ("to the lower regions").⁵ *Inferi* and *inferna* both render the Greek *hades*, from the Septuagint word for the Hebrew *sheol*. This is significant, because the New Testament uses two rather different words which are both normally translated "hell" in English and other Germanic languages: the first is *hades*, indicating simply the place of the dead; the second is *Gehenna*, which signifies the place of punishment. So it is likely that the *descensus* article was originally intended simply to emphasize the fact that Christ was well and truly dead, and therefore that the resurrection was not a mere resuscitation: he died, his body was buried in the ground, and his soul went to the place where the souls of the dead go. But within a short space of time, the article accrued a richer meaning in Christian art and literature. This was due, to some extent at least, to the popularity of the second part of the apocryphal *Gospel of Nicodemus* (also known as *The Acts of Pilate*), a fifth—or sixth—century account which dramatically portrayed Christ's triumphal storming of the gates of hell in a way typical of Gnostic redeemer-myths.⁶ It was this work which went on to influence portrayals of the harrowing of hell in the Middle Ages. The harrowing according to *The Gospel of Nicodemus* had no place for Christ's preaching to the imprisoned spirits in 1 Peter 3-4, and perhaps for this reason, but more likely because St Augustine failed to link the two events, scholastic theologians hardly ever interpreted that passage in

⁵ J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, 3rd edn (London, 1972), 378-383.

⁶ For the various versions of the *descensus* section of the Gospel of Nicodemus, see *The Apocryphal New Testament*, ed. J. K. Elliott (Oxford, 2005), 185-204; see *Ibid.*, 165 for the question of dating.

connection with the descent into hell.⁷ The verse of Scripture most often associated with it was Psalm 15 (16):10, "For you will not abandon my soul to *sheol/hades*, or let your Holy One see corruption". This interpretation had of course the authority of St. Peter, according to Acts 2:2-7.

The development of the doctrine up to the thirteenth century was concisely summarized by Aquinas.⁸ Christ descended in his person only to the *limbus* of the fathers, one of the outskirts of hell. The fathers were immediately freed by Christ. Other parts of hell experienced him in effect, not in person: in purgatory, the suffering souls received hope and encouragement; but in hell proper, the hell of the damned, the souls were further condemned for their disbelief and wickedness. All this was entirely consistent with the traditional view of the descent as the harrowing of hell. But Aquinas also implies another way of looking at the descent. In the very first article of his *quaestio de descensu*, he explains why the descent was necessary. Two of the consequences of the Fall for humankind had been the death of the body and the going down of the soul into hell. It was right therefore that the Christ who has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows should not only die in order to deliver us from death but also descend into hell in order to deliver us from its pains.⁹ It is difficult to see how Christ's descent can be both the vicarious suffering of a penalty and a triumphal progress, and Aquinas does not attempt to reconcile the two: indeed, in the final article of this *quaestio* he explicitly denies that Christ's descent was for the purpose of offering satisfaction.¹⁰ But he had

⁷ Augustine, in his letter to Evodius (Ep. 63, *MPL* 33: 709-18), expressly denied that the Petrine verses referred to the descent, and his interpretation was generally followed by medieval theologians, including Aquinas. See Quilliet, *Descente de Jésus*, col. 594.

⁸ *Summa Theologiae* III, qu. 52, "De descensu Christi ad inferos", in *Summa Theologiae* (Alba & Rome, 1962), 2124-2130.

⁹ *Ibid.*, art. 1, resp. 1 (2124).

¹⁰ "Descensus autem Christi ad inferos non fuit satisfactorius. Operabatur tamen in virtute passionis, quae fuit satisfactoria." *Ibid.*, art. 8 ad 2 (2130). Aq-

hinted at another way of understanding the words "He descended into Hell": not as part of the triumph of Easter, but as the continuation of the suffering of Good Friday.

Two centuries later, Aquinas's inadvertent suggestion had been developed into a fully-fledged idea of a descent in suffering. Nicholas of Cusa expounded it in a sermon preached of 1457, in which he distinguished between the two "deaths" that Christ suffered.¹¹ His physical death on the cross was the "first death". The second death was his descent into hell, not just to the *limbus* of the fathers but (and here Cusanus goes beyond Aquinas) to the place of the damned. In this place Christ experienced the punishments of hell in our stead and suffered, along with the damned, the *visio mortis*. It was at this point, when the jaws of death were closing about him, that God raised him up on Easter Sunday, fulfilling the prophecy of the Psalmist.

This extraordinary insight (which presumably owed much to the mystical experience of abandonment) challenged the traditional depictions, both in theology and art, of a harrowing of hell. It is hardly surprising that Nicholas deliberately expressed more conventional views on the subject shortly afterwards.¹² As

uinas' concern was to demonstrate that faithful souls are still liable to the punishments of purgatory.

¹¹ Nicholas of Cusa, *Excitationum ex sermonibus*, book 10, ("Ex sermone, Qui per spiritum sanctum semetipsum obtulit", preached 3 April 1457), in *Haec accurata recognitio trium voluminum operum clariss. P. Nicolae Cusae Card.*, ed. Jacques Lefevre d'Étaples (Paris, 1514), vol. 2, fols 176^v-177^r.

¹² Cusanus's words evidently created a stir. Shortly afterwards he was obliged to preach a sermon on the article "Descendit ad inferna", where the emphasis was on Christ's perfect obedience to the Father (*Ibid.*, fols 181^v-182^r). In a sermon preached shortly after that, on 2 May 1457, on the duties of a shepherd of the flock, Cusanus again returned to the theme: a good shepherd would be damned in hell for the sake of his flock: "Pastor non debet ad se respicere: dummodo qualitercunque in pascendo ea faciat quae deus praecipit pastori bono / etiam si propterea conciperet se in inferno damnandum." But lest his fellow pastors were unduly alarmed, he immediately added that a man who demonstrated such love would not be damned in hell, because "a righteous man in hell would not suffer there the *poena* of the unrighteous". ("Nam si quis tantae charitatis esset: ille utique non esset damna-

developments in the next century were to prove, however, it was an idea whose time had come. In the first edition of his *Quincuplex Psalterium* (1509) Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples followed Nicholas of Cusa's interpretation of Psalm 29 (30), speaking again in terms of Christ's suffering of hellish penalties as his "second death". Lefèvre confesses that, when he first came across Cusa's interpretation, he found it "non modo extranea sed & stupenda & horrenda" and, like Cusa himself, he puts forward the view with some caution.¹³ By the time of the second edition of the *Psalterium*, just four years later, he had evidently come under pressure from the ecclesiastical authorities to retract his earlier support for Cusanus's position: he still describes the idea as "at first sight not only outlandish but also shocking and horrifying", but then sets forth what he now feels to be the correct view of the descent as a glorious triumph. And with even greater care he distances his own views from those he is obliged to report: "the foregoing treatment has contained no assertion, only discussion".¹⁴

The Reformation Debates

What we might call the new approach to the descent had been championed, however briefly, by a fifteenth-century mystic and a sixteenth-century biblical scholar. Nourished by both the mystical and humanist traditions, the Reformation provided fertile ground for the growth of a variety of *descensus* theories. The descent was seen in the sixteenth century variously as literal or

tus in inferno. Iustus enim in inferno: non habet poenam iniustorum"). See *Excitationum ex sermonibus*, book 10, "Ex sermone 'Ministrat nobis fratres'", fol. 182r. It is at best an indirect correction, for no explicit reference is made here to Christ. However, one of the leading authorities on Nicholas's theology, Rudolf Haubst, believes that the "ingenious idea" of Christ's vicarious suffering in hell is marginal to Cusanus's overall understanding of the descent. See the literature quoted in Herzog, *Descensus*, 172-173.

¹³ Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples, *Quincuplex Psalterium: Gallicum, Romanum, Hebraicum, Vetus, Conciliatum* (Paris, 1509), fols 50v-51r, at Ps. 29 (30) v. 11.

¹⁴ See Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples, *Quincuplex Psalterium. Fac-similé de l'édition de 1513* [Travaux d'Humanisme et Renaissance 170] (Geneva, 1979), fol. 47r.

metaphorical, as corporeal or spiritual, as implying motion from one place to another or not, and of course as a descent in triumph or in suffering. "Hell" itself was understood as Hades or as Gehenna, as the place of the dead or the place of punishment, or even (an interpretation which appealed particularly to the more humanistically-minded of the Reformers, on the basis of 1 Peter) a place where enlightened pagan philosophers were given a chance of hearing the Gospel.

Concern with the *descensus* doctrine was fairly constant throughout the sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries, but on four occasions that concern was especially intense. The first such occasion, around 1550, engulfed theologians in Germany and England in two separate controversies. In Hamburg, an intra-Lutheran debate was sparked by the pastor Johann Aepinus, who caused offence by his understanding of the descent in terms of suffering.¹⁵ At the same time, he insisted in good Lutheran fashion that the descent was to be understood literally, involving the motion of Christ's body through space. The Hamburg controversy raged from 1549 to 1551, and it was to prove highly significant. Although Aepinus was eventually vindicated by the Marburg city council (largely because his opponent, Johann Gratz, refused to submit to the council's moratorium on further public debate), Melanchthon himself intervened with an opinion that would shape the Lutheran understanding of the descent for centuries.¹⁶ The Hamburg controversy was also sig-

¹⁵ For the course of the Hamburg controversy, see Vogelsang, "Höllenfahrtsstreitigkeiten", 107-119, an account which emphasizes the differences between Aepinus and Luther; D. G. Truemper, "The *Descensus ad inferos* from Luther to the Formula of Concord" (STD dissertation, Concordia Seminary in Exile (Seminex) in Cooperation with the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, 1974), 218-271, which challenges Vogelsang's evaluation of Aepinus on the basis of a previously undiscovered manuscript; and Herzog, *Descensus*, 176-181.

¹⁶ The text of Melanchthon's (and Bugenhagen's) opinion is given in *Corpus Reformatorum: Philippi Melanthonis Opera Quae Supersunt Omnia*, ed. K. G. Bretschneider & E. Bindseil, 28 vols. (Halle & Brunswick, 1834-1860), 7:666-

nificant for providing labels for the two positions represented: proponents of a suffering descent became known as "Infernalists", from their belief that Christ continued his vicarious work of atonement in hell; proponents of a triumphal descent were known as "Consummatists", from their argument that Christ's last word from the cross ("Consummatum est", John 19:30) proved that his suffering was complete. Meanwhile, in England, the idea of the suffering descent, by now firmly associated with the name of Calvin, was being promoted by the former bishop of Worcester, Hugh Latimer, and the bishop of Gloucester, John Hooper.¹⁷ Possibly in an attempt by the Edwardian regime to deflect attention from intra-Protestant debates on the subject, a disputation was arranged in Cambridge in autumn 1552 to disprove the Catholic doctrine of the *limbus patrum*, with Christopher Carlile acting for the defence and Sir John Cheke for the prosecution.¹⁸ Genuine Catholic voices were to be heard on this topic, but not until the early years of Elizabeth's reign, and then only from exile.¹⁹

668. For an analysis of Melanchthon's contribution to the Hamburg debate, see Truemper, 206-208 and 238-239.

¹⁷ In a sermon preached before Edward VI in 1549, Latimer (after summing up controversies over the descent in typically direct fashion as "much ado"), suggested tentatively that "[Christ] suffered in hell such pains as the damned spirits did suffer there". See *Sermons of Hugh Latimer*, ed. George E. Corrie, Parker Society no. 27 (Cambridge, 1844), 234. Hooper expressed a similar view in his *Brief and Clear Confession* of c. 1550. See *Later Writings of Bishop Hooper, Together with his Letters and Other Pieces*, ed. Charles Nevinson, Parker Society no. 21 (Cambridge, 1852), 30.

¹⁸ See Christopher Carlile, *A Discourse concerning two divine Positions. The first effectually concluding, that the soules of the faithfull fathers, deceased before Christ, went immediately to heaven. The second sufficiently setting foorth unto us Christians what we are to conceive, touching the descension of our Saviour Christ into Hell: Publicquely disputed at a Commencement in Cambridge, anno domini 1552. Purposely written at the first by way of a confutation, against a Booke of Richard Smith of Oxford* ([London], 1562). Further details of the disputation are given in John Strype, *The Life of the Learned Sir John Cheke* (Oxford, 1821), 89-90.

¹⁹ While Catholic writers were generally cheered by disagreement on this doctrine within Protestant ranks, the idea of a suffering descent struck them

The next peak of activity came in the early 1560s. In England, it was occasioned by the revision of the articles of religion. The *Forty-two Articles* of 1553 had contained a minimal statement: "As Christ died, and was buried for us: so also it is to be believed that He went down into hell. For the body lay in the sepulchre until the resurrection: but his ghost departing from Him was with the ghosts that were in prison or in hell, and did preach to the same, as the place of St Peter doth testify."²⁰ In the changed circumstances of 1563, this formula seemed to say both too much and too little. On one hand, the reference to a "prison", with its suggestion of temporary detention, could imply the existence of a *limbus patrum* or even of purgatory.²¹ On the other, the idea that Christ himself suffered the pangs of hell, an interpretation that was being popularized by the marginal comments of the Geneva Bible of 1560, was now noticeable by its absence.²² The revision of the articles provided a perfect opportunity to bring greater clarity and precision to the Church's understanding of this doctrine, and this was the plea to Convocation of William Alley, bishop of Exeter. Alley complained that his diocese was rent by "great invective between preachers", with some denying a literal descent, others understanding it as a descent in suffering, and still others claiming that the doctrine was a late addition to the creed which deserved to be aban-

as particularly offensive. This "Calvinist" doctrine was attacked by Richard Smith in his *Refutatio luculenta crassae et exitiosae haeresis Joannis Calvini et Christophori Carlilius Angli; qua astruunt Christum non descendisse ad Inferos alium, quam ad Infernum infimum* ([London], 1562).

²⁰ E. C. S. Gibson, *The Thirty-Nine Articles Explained with an Introduction* (London, 1906), 159.

²¹ The original form of the article added a clause which explained that during his descent Christ freed no souls from imprisonment or torment. This would in effect have excluded the notion of a *limbus patrum*. It was, however, omitted from the article in its final form. See Gibson, *Thirty-Nine Articles*, 159.

²² The Geneva Bible's marginal notes relate Psalm 16:10, Matthew 26:37, 27:46, Ephesians 4:8 and 1 Peter 3:19 to Christ's suffering in hell.

doned altogether.²³ Alley's request was not heeded. Instead, the revisers decided to reduce the scope of dissent by striking out the second sentence of the 1553 article. To this day, the article "Of the going down of Christ into Hell" remains the shortest of the *Thirty-nine Articles*.

In Germany, meanwhile, the Lutherans erupted into controversy once more, this time in the south. It began in 1565 with an epistolary challenge delivered by Johann Matsperger (a champion of a literal descent by Christ in victory) to Johann Parsimonius.²⁴ News of Parsimonius's preaching of a metaphorical descent in suffering had evidently travelled the fifty miles or so from Stuttgart to Augsburg. The controversy is remarkable because, although Matsperger's view was eventually to prevail within Lutheranism, in this particular case it was Parsimonius who was vindicated and Matsperger who was deposed from his preaching office.²⁵ As with the Hamburg controversy, proponents of Christ's harrowing of hell proved to be (perhaps not inappropriately) the more belligerent of the two sides and fell foul of regulations designed to prevent inflammatory preaching. The same year, 1565, witnessed two other events in Germany which were more reliable indicators of the way the Lutheran wind was blowing on this subject. The first was the publication in Frankfurt of Nicholas Selneccer's influential exposition of the Apostles' Creed. This came down clearly on the side of a literal descent into hell, "body and soul".²⁶ The second was the confutation, by the Lutheran theologians of Mansfeld, of the Reformed Heidelberg Catechism, which picked out that Catechism's understanding of the descent as the suffering of Christ as its primary target. For the Lutherans, the way in which the Heidel-

²³ See the summary of Alley's paper given in Wallace, "Puritan and Anglican", 260.

²⁴ For accounts of the south German controversy, see Vogelsang, "Höllensstreitigkeiten", 120-123, and Truemper, "Descensus", 277-291.

²⁵ A point made forcefully in Truemper, "Descensus", 279-280.

²⁶ Selneccer, *Paedagogia Christiana continens capita et locos doctrinae Christianae, forma & serie catechetica vere, perspicue explicata* (Frankfurt am Main, 1565), 570.

berg theologians had approached this article of faith was symptomatic of their fundamental theological weaknesses.²⁷

The third peak of controversial activity concerning the doctrine of the *descensus Christi* occurred in the mid-1580s, and consisted of a concerted effort by Catholic polemicists to exploit the lack of a united Protestant front on the issue, in the wake of the appearance of the Lutheran Book of Concord (1580). This was not a new tactic; the conservative Oxford theologian Richard Smith had tried to use the doctrine to drive a wedge between moderate and Calvinist Protestants in England. What was new was the concentration of theological firepower. In quick succession appeared substantial treatments by Henri de Vicq from Antwerp, Heinrich Ebingshausen from Cologne, and Hieronymus Montanus from Ingolstadt.²⁸ The contemporary appearance of Bellarmine's masterwork from the Ingolstadt presses might have been coincidental, but he took a similar line to the others in exposing Protestant divisions over the descent.²⁹

The final flurry of debates on the *descensus* was a purely English phenomenon, and marked the last years of Elizabeth's reign and the first of James's. It has been suggested that it was occasioned by a "conformist" backlash against extreme Calvinism, the fight being chosen over this issue partly because Lutheran Orthodoxy had provided the conformists with such a store of ready-made arguments.³⁰ The battle-lines drawn up

²⁷ For an account of the Mansfelders' response, see Kolb, "Christ's descent", 106-115. Kolb argues that it was this response (or at least the thinking behind it), and not the Hamburg controversy, which inspired the ninth article of the Formula of Concord.

²⁸ Henri de Vicq (Vicus), *De descensu Iesu Christi ad inferos, ex symbolo apostolorum et sacris scripturis liber* (Antwerp, 1586); Heinrich Ebingshausen, *De descensu Christi ad inferos disputatio theologica* (Cologne, 1586); Hieronymus Montanus, *Theses de Descensu Christ ad Inferos, et eiusdem ad caelos ascensu. In quibus refutator impia et in Christum blasphema doctrina Lutheranorum & Calvinianorum de hoc utroque fidei articulo* (Ingolstadt, 1587).

²⁹ For a summary of Bellarmine's approach, see Quilliet, "Descente de Jésus", cols. 582-83.

³⁰ See Wallace, "Puritan and Anglican", 269.

were between a literal view of the descent with a belief in the harrowing of hell on the one side, and, on the other, a metaphorical view of the descent (often associated with a philological approach which explained Hades as merely a synonym for the grave) combined with a belief that Christ suffered the pangs of hell on the cross or in the garden of Gethsemane. The opening exchanges in 1592/3 involved Adam Hill arguing for the first position and Alexander Hume for the second.³¹ They were succeeded by a protracted exchange, which lasted from 1597 to 1604, with Thomas Bilson, bishop of Winchester, and Henry Jacob, replacing Hill and Hume respectively.³² Meanwhile, in 1602, a John Higgins launched a literalist attack on the earlier writings of William Perkins.³³ In 1604, Bilson and Jacob gave way to two new antagonists, Richard Parkes and Andrew Willet respectively, who exchanged treatises for three more years.³⁴ The blockbuster of this bombardment of books appeared in 1611, a four-volume defence of the metaphorical/suffering interpretation begun by Hugh Sanford and completed by Robert Parker.³⁵ By this time, however, the conformist counter-attack had run out of steam. On the other side, the idea of a suffering descent was also abandoned, and the idea that the "hell" to which Christ descended was merely the grave, not the place of punishment, predominated.

This survey of the Reformation debates demonstrates that the questions which most commonly exercised the theologians were the related ones of understanding the descent literally or

³¹ Adam Hill, *Defence of the Article: Christ descended into Hell. With Arguments obiected agains the truth of the same doctrine: of one Alexander Humes* (London, 1592) and Alexander Hume, *A reioynder to Doctor Hill Concerning the Descense of Christ into Hell* (Edinburgh, 1593).

³² For an account of the debate, see Wallace, "Puritan and Anglican", 273-277.

³³ John Higgins, *An Answer to Master William Perkins, Concerning Christs Descension into Hell* (Oxford, 1602).

³⁴ See Wallace, "Puritan and Anglican", 277-279.

³⁵ Hugh Sanford, *De Descensu Domini Nostri Jesu Christi ad inferos, Libri quatuor*, ed. Robert Parker (Amsterdam, 1611).

metaphorically and as a victory or a punishment. It was however a feature of the case for a suffering descent that—as with Cusanus and Lefèvre earlier—it did not generally attract the most steadfast of proponents. Two examples illustrate this point. Anton Zimmermann had been a student at Wittenberg University and could even have been present at Luther's second course of lectures on the Psalms (1519-1521) in which Luther expressed the same views as Cusanus and the earlier Lefèvre on the descent.³⁶ By 1525 he was a Lutheran pastor, and preached at Weißenfels a sermon on John 6:44-47 in which he argued that, before his resurrection, Christ descended into hell and suffered there the punishment of the damned in our stead. His hearers, a congregation of about forty fellow pastors, objected that by this opinion he had diminished Christ's majesty. In response, Zimmermann sent the Weißenfelsers a defence filled with biblical references. Zimmermann published only two works: the first, in 1525, was the printed version of his defence. The second, in 1526, was, bizarrely, a refutation and recantation of his views published in the first book. His principled stand had lasted at best a matter of months.³⁷ A similar example is provided by the case of Jakob Thiele. Little is known about him except that he was a Lutheran pastor in Pomerania who in 1554 had preached the idea of a descent in suffering. Before the year was out, he had been summoned before the synod of Greifs-

³⁶ E.g. WA 5, 606.10-20. Interestingly, in his marginal notes on the 1509 edition of the *Quincuplex Psalterium* (at WA 4, 487), which he used in preparing for his 1513/15 *Dictata super Psalterium*, Luther seemed less than impressed by the orthodoxy of Lefèvre's suggestion. He commented that, although Cusanus and Lefèvre appear to be on to something ("[q]uanquam ista argumenta aliquid esse appareant"), their views conflict with Christ's promise to the good thief, "Today you will be with me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43). In confirmation, Luther cited John Cassian (*Collationes Patrum* 1:14). See *Cassiani Opera: Collationes XXIII*, ed. Michael Petschenig, *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* 13 (Vienna, 2004), 23, lines 8-20.

³⁷ On Zimmermann see Truemper, 153-159; Herzog, 186-204.

wald, had renounced his former views, and received absolution from his brother-pastors.³⁸

Lefèvre, Zimmermann and Thiele were not therefore very staunch defenders of the suffering motif in the face of pressure, and collapsed at once. This might just be par for the course: most people in the sixteenth century did not go to stake for their beliefs. But I think the reason for these volte-faces is to be found not just in pusillanimity but in the nature of the insight itself. Not for nothing did Lefèvre find this way of looking at the *descensus* initially outlandish, shocking and horrible. The idea that Christ died in despair and went down to the hell of the damned, bereft of the beatific vision and filled with the vision of death, is a shocking idea. It is also not easy to maintain in terms of orthodox Christology, for it presupposes that Christ's divine consciousness, the Logos, was at least temporarily absent or suspended. The logical difficulties of when, where and how such a descent took place were not in themselves insuperable, but further weighted the scales against such an interpretation. A suffering descent could find some support in the prophetic and therefore indirect witness of the Psalms, but the New Testament told uniformly against it: among Jesus's last words from the cross, he seemed to confirm in the cry "It is finished!"³⁹ that his sufferings were completed by his death, while the promise to the good thief⁴⁰ rules out anything more than a fleeting visit to the infernal regions. The most direct attestation of the descent in the New Testament depicts Christ more as a heavenly prison visitor than as a fellow inmate.⁴¹ So it is not surprising that the defenders of this view were so easily persuaded to abandon it publicly, whatever they may have continued to believe privately. This makes all the more valuable the case of Martin Luther, who was not noted for renouncing his beliefs once

³⁸ Truemper, 273-276.

³⁹ John 19:30.

⁴⁰ Luke 23:43.

⁴¹ 1 Peter 3-4.

he had made up his mind. His case is extraordinary because he held both these contradictory views of the descent, not successively (as Lefèvre, Zimmermann and Thiele did) but simultaneously. Luther's ambiguous position is the central problem of a generally problematic history of the doctrine in the sixteenth century, and I think one can best understand the dynamic of the wider debates by sorting out what is going on in the internal debate, as it were, within Luther's own mind.

Luther versus Luther

The victory motif in Luther is the one which, historically, most Lutherans have been familiar with. The ninth article of the Formula of Concord, on the descent of Christ into hell, refers the reader to Luther's so-called "Torgau sermon" (1532) for his definitive treatment of the topic, and this presents an entirely traditional view of the harrowing of hell.⁴² "Hold fast to your creed", he says, which proclaims "I believe in Christ, the whole man, body and soul, who descended to Hell in body and soul and destroyed Hell."⁴³ His insistence on a corporeal descent is striking, but Luther is not concerned with the difficulties that entails. Indeed, he explicitly dismisses those pedants who point out that the banner Christ was carrying would have burst into flames as he approached hell.⁴⁴ Luther insists that the only way of understanding the doctrine is not by biblical or theological expertise but by looking at the traditional depictions and singing the hymns (such as *Salve festa dies*) that everyone is familiar with. And then he says something that was once thought uncharacteristic of Reformation thinking, before we knew better:

⁴² For the texts of article IX, see *The Book of Concord*, ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia, 1959), 492 (the Epitome), 610 (the Solid Declaration). The text of the "Torgau sermon" for Easter 1533 may be found in WA 37:62-72, while the text of the sermon for the afternoon of Easter Day (31 March) 1532, which is believed to be the more reliable text for a sermon that was later wrongly dated (see below), may be found at WA 36:159-64.

⁴³ WA 36:160.22-24.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 160.6-9.

you will be saved, he assures his congregation, by gazing upon those pictures, in the same way that the Israelites were saved in the wilderness by looking upon the brazen serpent.⁴⁵

So this is the sermon that made it into the Formula of Concord, and it is as forceful an affirmation of the harrowing of hell as could be imagined. As a result, it became axiomatic within Lutheran Orthodoxy that Luther taught the harrowing of hell, so much so that Lutherans came to reject as a matter of principle any spiritual or suffering interpretation as "Calvinist". But in doing this they were actually condemning the way in which Luther himself far more characteristically spoke of the descent. From his earliest sustained theological writing in 1513/14 (the first Psalms lectures) to the last (his lectures on Genesis in 1544), the suffering interpretation is paramount. When expounding Psalm 21 (22), he interpreted Christ's sense of abandonment by God, expressed in the cry of dereliction, as an experience of the pain of hell. "To have the same consciousness as the damned – that is death, that is the descent into Hell".⁴⁶ In his lectures on Genesis, Luther again affirmed that, in the Garden of Gethsemane, "Christ our Lord and liberator was in very Hell for all our sakes. For truly he experienced death and Hell in his body."⁴⁷

This interpretation recurred throughout his writings. In 1527, a year in which he himself suffered particularly acutely from depression, Luther wrote in exposition of Ephesians 4,

Christ has first descended, that is, he has become the least and most despised of all, so that he could not go deeper, and indeed no-one could fall lower than him, (...) because he has made himself the lowest of all, beneath the Law, beneath the Devil, death,

⁴⁵ Ibid., 160.102.

⁴⁶ WA 5:604.

⁴⁷ "Ita Christus Dominus et liberator noster pro nobis omnibus fuit in ipsisimo inferno. Vere enim sensit mortem et infernum in corpore suo." *Lectures on Genesis*, 1544 (WA 44:524.6-7).

sin, and Hell, that is, I think, to the lowest and uttermost deep (...).⁴⁸

Luther's most sustained treatment of this theme came in the German version of his exposition of the Book of Jonah (1525-1526). Jonah's sojourn in the belly of the whale for three days was a type of Christ's descent, but Luther sees Jonah more as a type of the believer who feels himself under the judgment of God, especially *in articulo mortis*. Jonah equates his experience with hell ("out of the belly of Sheol I cried"⁴⁹), which Luther regards as a characteristic biblical trope, beloved not only of Jonah but also of the Psalmist. "Hell" signifies the depths of despair and God-forsakenness in this life. But what does that mean for hell proper?

But what Hell may be before the Last Judgement, I am not altogether sure. That it is some specific place ("eyn sonderlicher ort"), where the souls of the damned already suffer, as the painters paint and the belly-preachers preach, is nonsense. For the devils are not in Hell but, as Peter says, are bound to Hell by ropes (2 Peter 2:4). (...) Everyone carries his own Hell with him, wherever he goes, while he endures death's last agonies and God's wrath (...).⁵⁰

It will be evident that the purpose of this belief for Luther was not to establish a recondite point about Christ's post-mortem whereabouts, but to comfort those who, like Luther himself, experienced anxiety over their final destination and especially feared that they did not measure up to God's demands—or rather that God had positively rejected them. The use of the *descensus* for this purpose had been present from his first consolatory

⁴⁸ *Eine gute Predigt von ger Kraft der Himmelfahrt Christi*, 31 May 1527 (WA 23:702.11-703.1). For a description of the context of Luther's breakdown in 1527, see Heinrich Bornkamm, *Luther in Mid-Career, 1521-1530* (London, 1983), 554-561.

⁴⁹ Jonah 2:2.

⁵⁰ *Der Prophet Jona ausgelegt*, 1526 (WA 19:225.12-16, 28-29 = LW 19:75).

writings. In his sermon of 1519 on the art of dying, for instance, he had already urged the saving function of pictures, physical and mental:

Look upon that heavenly image of Christ, who for your sake descended into Hell and was abandoned by God as one of those damned for all eternity, as he said from the cross, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani—My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Look upon it, and in that image your [*sic!*] Hell is overcome and your uncertain hope is made certain.⁵¹

Given that this theme not only abounds in Luther's corpus but also serves such a crucial pastoral purpose, it is surprising that it was so completely overlaid by the approach taken by Lutheran Orthodoxy. It was only when the *Weimarer Ausgabe* began publishing all his writings in 1883 that the theme was once more unearthed. For scholars such as Althaus and Vogelsang in the first part of the twentieth century, this was a revelation.⁵² For them it proved that the suffering motif was determinative for Luther, even when occasionally (as in the "Torgau sermon") he suggested other ways of looking at the descent. And it demonstrated the irony that, in persecuting "Calvinist" interpretations, the theologians of Lutheran Orthodoxy were in reality persecuting Luther.

Although Vogelsang and Althaus undoubtedly had a case (their positions were not identical, as Althaus felt that Vogelsang had stressed the suffering motif in Luther too one-sidedly),⁵³ it went unheard or at least unacknowledged in much of worldwide Lutheranism, not least in North America. The edito-

⁵¹ *Ein Sermon von der Bereitung zum Sterben*, 1519 (WA 2:690.17-22 = LW 42:105).

⁵² See esp. Erich Vogelsang, "Luthers Torgauer Predigt von Jesu Christo vom Jahre 1532", *Luther Jahrbuch* 13 (1931), 114-130; idem, *Der angefochtene Christus bei Luther* (Berlin & Leipzig, 1932); idem, "Höllenfahrtsstreitigkeiten", 90-132; Paul Althaus, "Niedergefahren zur Hölle", *Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie* 19 (1942), 365-384.

⁵³ See Althaus, "Niedergefahren", 379 n. 1.

rial comments of the American edition of *Luther's Works* from the 1950s and 1960s, for instance, still reflect the viewpoint of Lutheran Orthodoxy.⁵⁴ It was not until 1974, in a Chicago doctoral dissertation that remains unpublished, that a determined attempt was made to re-evaluate Luther's *descensus* theology in the light of this research.⁵⁵

The thesis, by David G. Truemper, attempts to reconcile the two conflicting themes of victory and suffering in Luther's *descensus* doctrine by appealing to his theology of the cross, in which victory and suffering are not two incompatible interpretations of the *descensus*, but two sides of the same coin. The sufferings of Christ, no matter how great, would have no effect whatever if it were not for the victory of Easter Sunday. On the other hand, the victory that God gave Christ and which he promises to believers is exclusively by way of the cross. Holy Saturday therefore has a dual nature, looking back to Good Friday and forward to Easter.⁵⁶ I think this is a very convincing interpretation, but the neatness of this theological solution requires Truemper to give equal weight to Luther's two interpretations of the *descensus*, when in fact the suffering motif is far more common in Luther than the theme of the harrowing of hell, and in fact the "Torgau sermon" is quite atypical of his output. Truemper takes the "Torgau sermon" as his starting-point (for understandable confessional reasons), and as such it overshadows his entire subsequent discussion of Luther's views. The result was that Truemper gives shorter shrift to the merits of Vogelsang's case than he should. I believe that had Truemper

⁵⁴ See, for example, *LW* 22:325, n. 38, where a descent-as-suffering interpretation is glossed in the following words: "Here Luther seems to equate the descent into hell with the death of Christ; ordinarily he distinguishes these two actions, as in the Torgau sermons of April 1533."

⁵⁵ David G. Truemper, "The *Descensus ad inferos* from Luther to the Formula of Concord" (unpublished STD dissertation, Concordia Seminary in Exile (Seminex) in Cooperation with Lutheran School of Theology Chicago, 1974).

⁵⁶ Truemper, "Descensus", 135.

situated the "Torgau sermon" in its context, it would have been more obvious why Luther spoke in this way on this occasion.

The sermon was most probably given on Easter Day (31 March) 1532, at Wittenberg, not Torgau, and we know a good deal about Luther's personal and public circumstances at this time.⁵⁷ There was a new addition in the Luther household, a son by the name of Martin who was now four months old. One can only hope that young Martin spent most of his time sleeping, because his father was not in the best of health. The elder Martin took to his bed during Holy Week and was not well enough to preach the Good Friday sermon. He did manage to write or dictate a letter from his sickbed: "I don't want to eat or drink. I am already dead. If only I were buried!"⁵⁸ On Holy Saturday, discussions began that would result in a truce between the Schmalkaldic League and the Emperor. Luther was for once a dove rather than a hawk in this initiative. His view was that the peace negotiations should not be jeopardized by a desire to get all one's demands accepted.⁵⁹ On Sunday he was recovered enough to enter the pulpit and began to preach, "even though", he explained, "I am sick and the Enthusiasts (*Schwermer*) are troubling me".⁶⁰ This was a reference to an open letter on the Lord's Supper he had written earlier in the year against some Schwenckfelders who had settled in the Prussian territories of the Teutonic Knights, but which had caused great offence amongst the south German reformers.⁶¹ And I think this is the key to understanding the line Luther takes in the "Torgau ser-

⁵⁷ I follow here, as does Truemper, Vogelsang's reconstruction. This demonstrates that the document known to the compilers of the Formula of Concord as Luther's "Torgau sermon" of 1533 (in fact, the third and most extensive of three sermons) is a transcription of the sermon Luther gave on Easter Day (31 March) 1532 at Wittenberg. See Vogelsang, "Torgauer Predigt", 114-30.

⁵⁸ See Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: Shaping and Defining the Reformation, 1521-1532* (Minneapolis, 1990), 430.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 421-427.

⁶⁰ WA 36:159.8.

⁶¹ Brecht, *Shaping and Defining*, 450.

mon". The so-called sacramentarians denied the real presence in the Eucharist on the grounds that it is impossible for Christ's natural body to be in more places than one. Since it is in heaven, seated at the right hand of God, it cannot also be in every consecrated host throughout the world. I believe that Luther's treatment of Holy Saturday was heavily coloured by this debate. He was keen to affirm that, by virtue of the *communicatio idiomatum*, the sharing of the properties of divine and human, it was perfectly possible for Christ's human body on Holy Saturday to be both lying in the tomb, and at the same time in heaven (for had he not promised the good thief "*Today* you will be with me in paradise"?), and at the same time throwing its weight around in hell, breaking down bronze gates, and doing other physical things that only a natural human body can do. In that context, with the south German notions of spiritual presence ringing in his ears, Luther could not afford to imply a spiritual (what we might call a "metaphorical") descent by Christ into hell, but was obliged to point to the clear words of the creed: "Hold fast to what your creed tells you, that he descended into Hell". This was exactly the same tactic he had employed earlier in the eucharistic debate: ignore all the clever sophistries and hold fast to the words, "This is my body".⁶²

Despite Truemper's valiant attempt to assert the equal importance of both beliefs within the theology of the cross, it is clear from the sheer weight of evidence that, for Luther, the descent into hell that had the most value to a believer was the conviction that Christ himself had experienced abandonment by God, and that this was a guarantee to the believer that God was present even in absence: however far someone might fall from God, God in Christ has fallen further. The idea was not original to Luther, but had been learned from mystical writers

⁶² Robert Kolb also proposes that the "Torgau sermon" was influenced by Christological considerations arising out of the sacramentarian controversies, though he relates this to Zwingli's death in 1531 rather than to the south German hostility to Luther's anti-Schwenkfeldian letter in 1532: Kolb, "Christ's descent", 116.

such as Johann Tauler and the author of the *Theologia deutsch*, and it was a vital stage in his gaining of a new understanding of grace, righteousness, and faith.⁶³ As Vogelsang maintained, this understanding remained the primary way in which Luther thought about the descent. The alternative approach, that of the harrowing of hell, was also valued by him and forcefully preached; but there were relatively few occasions that it sprang to his mind as, as it were, a primary association, except when he was in fierce controversy with the south German reformers over their denial of the ubiquity of Christ's body. Even then, the two understandings sat so awkwardly with one another that he was forced to develop clearly unsatisfactory explanations, such as his idea that there must have been two descents into hell, a suffering one before death and a triumphant one after.⁶⁴

⁶³ Chapter 11 of the *Theologia deutsch* opens with the words "Christ's soul had to visit hell before it came to heaven. This is also the pattern for man's soul." See *The Theologia Germanica of Martin Luther*, ed. Bengt Hoffman (London, 1980), 72. The descent into Hell was not an explicit concern of Tauler, whose focus was on the sufferings of Christ on the cross. However, his leading idea of following Christ through suffering; his conviction that, in the spiritual life, "the greater the descent, the greater the ascent"; and perhaps also his notion that the *resignatio ad infernum*—cheerfully accepting eternal separation from God for God's sake—is the highest stage of the Christian life, all helped to point Luther towards what he called the *descensio spiritualis*. On the *resignatio*, see *Johannes Tauler: Sermons*, ed. Maria Schrady (New York, 1985), 96.

⁶⁴ See Luther's notorious expression in the macaronic transcript of his sermon for Holy Saturday 1538: "Das ist die heubtmeinung, quod Christus non propter se, sed propter nos ist zum andern mal inn die helle, i.e. dominus factus supra Teufel, mortem, peccatum, hat eingenomen die herrschaft" (WA 46:308.15-17). "This is the chief point: it was not for himself that Christ descended into hell a second time, but for us. That is to say, having been made lord over Devil, death, and sin, he now received the lordship." The date is important, and refutes any suggestion that the "Torgau sermon" represents Luther's "mature" thoughts on the subject or that they superseded his earlier beliefs in a "first" or spiritual descent.

Conclusion

The persistence and at times the intensity of the Reformation debates over Christ's descent into hell surprise us today, because the doctrine is not one we associate with the theological preoccupations of the era. We might even be tempted to dismiss it as an inevitable consequence of the "scholastic turn" taken by later Protestantism, with all the associations of time-wasting and nit-picking that the word "scholastic" connotes. That would be a mistake. At the risk of sounding either pompous or providentialist, it could be said that Christianity requires both "infernalist" and "consummatist" views of the descent, and that the recurrence of the debates between them, in the Reformation and at other times, reflects the indispensability of both. Luther was apparently alone in the sixteenth century in holding both views in unresolved tension. In that, he exemplifies an ever-present tension in Christian thought between two types of theology: affective or mystical theology on the one hand, and speculative or dogmatic theology on the other. The first is essentially personal; it is pastoral in intent and often geared to the specific religious needs of an individual. For this reason it can be exaggerated or one-sided, sometimes violently so. Luther's theology was almost all of this type: at times it worked spectacularly well, as the enormous popularity of his early consolatory writings testify; at times it was misunderstood or misinterpreted. The second type of theology is essentially public, accessible, carefully balanced and scrupulously documented; it must be geared to the demands of unifying a believing community and defending it from false teaching; its doctrines must be verifiable by reference to Scripture and other authorities.

The *descensus* controversies of the sixteenth century show ultimately that Protestantism was no more successful at resolving the tension between the two types of theology than the medieval Church had been. Cusanus's idea of a descent of suffering was tolerable because it was expressed in the context of a sermon restricted to a limited audience. The same idea, expressed in the context of Lefèvre's commentary on the Psalms, a work of

scholarship in the public domain, was not tolerable and Lefèvre himself (who could remember how shocking he had found the notion when he first read it) could see the objection. The same process operated after the Reformation in the case of the Lutherans Zimmermann and Thiele: the notion of Christ's descent in suffering was made for personal edification, but it could not be tolerated when broadcast in sermons and vernacular pamphlets. The Catholic controversialist Caspar Schatzgeyer evidently shared the view of the Lutheran authorities on this point, for he objected to Zimmermann that, for a doctrine to be publicly preached and then circulated in a pamphlet, it needs to be authorized by Scripture, Tradition and reason.⁶⁵

There was less of a tension for the Reformed tradition, because of its more critical attitude towards some standards of public theology such as creeds. That Calvin adopted an understanding of the descent as suffering was not scandalous in a climate in which Theodore Beza could delete the entire article "descendit ad inferos" from his version of the creed. But when brought into contact with other traditions, the Calvinist position seemed bizarre. One thinks here not only of the knee-jerk reaction of Lutheran Orthodoxy, but also of more credally minded Anglicans in the context of the *descensus* disputes in England in the 1590s and 1600s. Indeed, Wallace (in his study of these disputes) goes so far as to credit these *descensus* disputes with the birth of "Anglicanism", as the more patristic-orientated and credally minded members of the Church of England parted company with those who held fast to the Puritan's affective *pietas crucis*. Wallace's more far-reaching claims about the nature and progress of Anglicanism have perhaps not stood up well to more recent advances in scholarship; but the bifurcation

⁶⁵ Kaspar Schatzgeyer, *Verwerffung eines irrigenn artickels das die seel Christi nach abschaidt vom leib in absteigung zu den hellen hab darinn geliden hellische pein. Mit erklerung der warhayt warumb Christus zu der hellen gestigenn sey* (Landshut, 1526), Gii^v.

he notes between dogmatic and mystical strands in England is one that can be paralleled in other denominations at this time.⁶⁶

The tension between affective and dogmatic approaches to theology remains to this day. The popularity of Balthasar's "theology of Holy Saturday" is evidence that the idea of a suffering descent and a suffering Messiah has much more to offer to the Church—and the world—of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries than the traditional idea of the harrowing of hell. But when an affective theology is weighed in the balance of dogmatic theology, it will often be found wanting.

⁶⁶ Wallace, "Puritan and Anglican", 248-287.

Progressive, Conservative or Roman-Catholic? On the Theology of Joseph Ratzinger in Evangelical Perspective

LEONARDO DE CHIRICO

Istituto di Formazione Evangelica e Documentazione, Padova

ABSTRACT. Joseph Ratzinger is one of the pivotal figures in the theological scene following the Second Council of Vatican. His theology magnificently epitomises the catholicity of Roman-Catholic thought. For instance, the Bible is always read in light of the authoritative magisterium. Nicene Christology is always intertwined to “objective” Roman-Catholic ecclesiology. The Apostles Creed is confessed as well as the Canons of Trent and Vatican I. The cross of Christ is always related to the representation of the sacrifice of the Eucharist. The Spirit is always linked to the hierarchical structure of the Church. Ecumenism is always thought of in terms of other Christians being defective and the Church of Rome being the “catholic” Church. The mission of the Church is always pursued having in mind the catholic project to embrace the whole world. Evangelical reactions to his election to the papacy have applauded his “Bible-focused” theology. Yet, the question whether the Reformation is over is urgent and appropriate.

KEYWORDS: progressive, conservative, Roman-Catholic, Ratzinger [Benedict XVI], Evangelical

The second half of the XX century has seen different popes leading the Roman-Catholic Church through and beyond the most significant event of its recent history, i.e. the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). John XXIII (1958-1963) was the theologically conservative, yet pastorally alert pope who saw the need to end the introspective age of Vatican I and to develop a new phase in the life of the Church in confronting the modern world. Paul VI

(1963-1978) was the thoughtful intellectual who had to administer the most difficult part of Vatican II (i.e. the final years) and oversee the beginning of its controversial implementation.

The reign of John Paul I (1978) passed unnoticed for its sheer brevity. John Paul II (1978-2005) was the genial interpreter of Vatican II, conservative in doctrine and morals, and progressive in social issues and world appeal. With him, the Church regained centrality in the world, re-launching the task of a “new evangelisation” and Catholic presence. Whereas the pre-Vatican II Church was living a process of gradual decay, she was revitalised by this pro-active pope and stirred to recover the centre stage in the global world. A Thomistic philosopher and charismatic leader, Wojtyła in his pontificate embodied the *aggiornamento* (i.e. updating) that was encouraged by Vatican II without loosing the organic ties with tradition.

Now the election of Benedict XVI represents an interesting development in the same line, i.e. the reception, elaboration and application of Vatican II with its message of *gaudium et spes* (joy and hope) for the world through the *lumen gentium* (light of all nations) who is the Christ represented by the Church.

Ratzinger’s Theological Catholicity

Joseph Ratzinger’s image before the public opinion is that of a conservative theologian who is opposed to liberation theology, cultural relativism, modern liturgical trends which downplay the mystery of the Mass and the solemnity of the rites, and Eucharistic inter-communion with other Christians.

The press has depicted Ratzinger as a grown old reformer who has become disillusioned and suspicious of any change. However, the image of the “enforcer of the faith” is just half of the truth.¹ The other side is perhaps less known, but still important. For example, Spanish reformed theologian Jorge Ruiz re-

¹ This is the title that was given to him by a biographer. John L. Allen, *Cardinal Ratzinger: The Vatican’s Enforcer of the Faith* (London-New York: Continuum 2000).

calls Ratzinger's role within the Pontifical Biblical Commission in the Eighties in officially endorsing an accommodating view of the Bible with respect to liberal understandings of Biblical revelation. As far as the Bible is concerned, Ratzinger represents "a moderate view within the liberal orientation of the Roman-Catholic Church of Vatican II".² The 1993 document by the Pontifical Biblical Commission—at the time headed by Ratzinger—"The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church" is an example of the reception of liberal presuppositions within the overarching exegetical tradition endorsed by the Church. Even the acclaimed new book on *Jesus of Nazareth*, while criticising radical applications of historical-critical methods, still encourages research to be pursued within their confines in a milder way.³

Early Evangelical reactions to his election to the papacy have applauded his "Bible-focused" theology.⁴ His commitment to the Bible, however, must be understood in the context of his moderate liberalism as far as Biblical revelation is concerned. Moreover, his views of Scripture stem from traditional Catholicism which combines the Scriptures and the tradition of the Church. According to Vatican II language, they "are to be accepted and venerated with the same sense of devotion and reverence" (DV 9). In this sense, he is a modern conservative within the boundaries of a revitalised Roman Catholicism.

Ratzinger, in fact, has been one of the pivotal figures in the theological and ecclesiastical scene following Vatican II. As a young and brilliant theologian at the Council, he significantly contributed to the implementation of its main directives, while not relinquishing the traditional dogmatic outlook of the Church. He has been considered "progressive" in his youthful

² Jorge Ruiz, "El eslabón perdido entre Castelar, Zapatero y Benedicto XVI", *Nueva Reforma* 70 (Jul-Sept 2005), 12.

³ Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: Doubleday 2007).

⁴ Timothy George, "The Promise of Benedict XVI", *Christianity Today* (June 2005), 49-52. We should come back again to this article because it indicates the rather uncritical and positive impression that seems to be shared in some Evangelical circles.

theological engagement for the renewal of the Church, and then “conservative” in his long-term service to his Church as Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith. Ratzinger is often pictured as if he were the left wing theologian who became right wing in his mature years. These labels, of course, do not account for the “catholicity” of Ratzinger’s theology which is both traditional and *aggiornata* (updated). In assessing Ratzinger’s Roman-Catholic theology, it is dangerous to contrast traditionalism and progressivism as if they were disrupting and conflicting trends within his work. There may have been different emphases and concerns between various stages of his career,⁵ but the tale of the conversion from radical theologian to the inflexible watchdog of orthodoxy is naïve.

How do we account then for this change of attitudes and concerns? It depends on what kind of paradigm we use to interpret the theological flow of a Church or a theologian. In its theological genius, present-day Roman Catholicism is “catholic” in the sense of embracing both the highest respect for the given heritage of the Church and the strenuous attempt to find new ways of articulating it and living it out. The outcome is a dynamic synthesis which holds different elements together within the all-embracing system. Ratzinger well epitomises this kind of catholicity – strongly rooted in the tradition of the Church and yet also vigorously engaged in accomplishing her mission before the challenges of the modern world.

The motto of the theological journal *Communio* with which he has been associated since 1972 neatly sums up his theological vision: “a program of renewal through the return to the sources of authentic tradition”. In other words, *aggiornamento* is done through *ressourcement* (i.e. the fresh re-reading of biblical and

⁵ For instance, Ratzinger was on the editorial committee of *Concilium*, an international journal founded in 1965 wishing to promote the spirit of Vatican II. Dissatisfied with the liberal and radical tendencies within it, Ratzinger then resigned to support the more traditional journal *Communio*, founded in 1972 by Hans Urs von Balthasar.

patristic sources) since the two belong together. This appears to be the theological profile of pope Benedict XVI.

The Catholic Church and Its Robust Self-Understanding

Even a scant look at Ratzinger's massive bibliography indicates the width of his production and the spectrum of his expertise.⁶ While it is impossible to isolate a single dominant theological theme, it is nonetheless comparatively easy to appreciate its main focus. Throughout his career as University professor and Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, the prominent theological interest of Ratzinger has been the doctrine of the Church. Being a theologian of Vatican II and being the Council an ecclesiological council, Ratzinger himself has worked on the reception of the ecclesiological significance of Vatican II for a reinvigorated Roman-Catholic ecclesiology. Through the prism of ecclesiology, it is therefore possible to sketch out Ratzinger's theology in terms of a robust Roman-Catholic orthodoxy. Although this approach is selective, it is not a distortion.

"The People of God": the Augustinian Heritage

The first aspect to underline for this introductory survey combines methodological and historical elements. As a doctoral student, Ratzinger started his theological career by reflecting on the patristic sources of the doctrine of the Church. His first significant contribution dealt with the self-apprehension of the Roman Church in the history of theology. Well before Vatican II would emphasise the image of the Church as the people of God (e.g. LG 9-17), in the early fifties Ratzinger wrote his doctoral dissertation on Augustine's view of the Church as the people

⁶ Ratzinger's bibliography is extensive (more than 60 books and hundreds of articles) and the number of substantial studies on him is also impressive. For a survey of both primary and secondary sources, cfr. Aidan Nichols, *The Theology of Joseph Ratzinger. An Introductory Study* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988) and Andrea Bellandi, *Fede cristiana come stare e comprendere. La giustificazione dei fondamenti della fede in Joseph Ratzinger* (Rome: PUG 1996).

and the house of God.⁷ Not only did he anticipate the Council as far as ecclesiological themes were concerned, but in this first academic contribution, he also shared and consolidated the trend of *ressourcement* which the Roman Church was experiencing between the two World Wars. The early influence of Augustine strongly marked Ratzinger's successive work to the point that he is considered an "Augustinian theologian".⁸

Ratzinger's study on Augustine's ecclesiology is fascinating. He studied it against the background of Tertullian's and Cyprian's concepts of the Church. He highlighted the importance of the Donatist controversy and the confrontation with Paganism in the shaping of it. He then investigated the dogmatic significance of the *populus Dei* and concluded by establishing connections between Augustine's view and an ecclesiology of the people of God. He pursued similar interests in further studies on the new people of God and the relationship between Israel and the Church.⁹ The self-understanding of the Church as the people of God is spelt out in quasi-ontological terms, even though the metaphor is biblical. The ecclesiological profile is very high and her salvific mission and hierarchical structures are strongly defended.

In reading Ratzinger's work on Augustine, one is reminded of B. B. Warfield's interpretation of the great Latin Father. Warfield argues that there are two Augustines in Augustine, or rather, there are two main Augustinian theologies in Augustine himself. On the one hand, there is the Augustine who argues for a centripetal church which is invested with divine power to administer God's grace. On the other hand, there is the Augus-

⁷ *Volk und Haus Gottes in Augustins Lehre von der Kirche*, München 1954.

⁸ Some observers have noticed the shift between the "Thomist" John Paul II to the "Augustinian" Benedict XVI as a promise of change in the theological orientation of the Roman Church. These evaluations, however, fail to appreciate that Roman Catholicism is a vast synthesis of many different strands that coexist together. Any interpreter of the synthesis may bring his own emphases, but he is not supposed to alter it significantly.

⁹ *Das neue Volk Gottes*, Düsseldorf, 1969.

tine who stresses the doctrine of divine free grace to lost and undeserving sinners. According to Warfield, the ambivalence in Augustine is resolved at the Reformation where his ecclesiology is seen in the context of the doctrine of grace, whereas the Roman-Catholic tradition gives priority to the ecclesiastical administration of grace.¹⁰ Ratzinger's treatment of Augustine is perfectly in line with the traditional Roman-Catholic reading of him.

Timothy George rightly remarks that Ratzinger's theology is "Augustinian in perspective".¹¹ This is true. It must be borne in mind, however, that the kind of Augustinianism that Ratzinger embraces is the ecclesiocentric Augustinianism which strongly underlines the centrality of the Church, rather than the Pauline, grace-oriented Augustinianism which was championed at the Reformation. The great Augustinian heritage is twofold. Ratzinger's interpretation endorses the "catholic" Augustine at the expense of the "protestant" one. His Augustinianism recalls the ecclesiology which was questioned by the Reformation and is still a matter of theological division.

"Catholica": Church, Churches and Ecclesial communities

Another prominent feature of Ratzinger's ecclesiology is his interpretation of the marks of the Church, especially with regard to its catholicity. According to the Apostles Creed, the Church is "catholic" and the significance of this mark of the Church has been subject of intensive debate in the history of theology.¹² Though acknowledging its widely accepted strands of meaning

¹⁰ Benjamin B. Warfield, *Studies in Tertullian and Augustine* (1930; repr. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981). For Warfield's interpretation of Augustine, I am indebted to Luigi Dalla Pozza, "Warfield l'apologeta di Princeton", *Studia Patavina* XLIX (2002/2).

¹¹ T. George, "The Promise of Benedict XVI", *Christianity Today* (June 2005), 49-52.

¹² e.g. Yves Congar, *Sainte Église. Etudes et approches ecclésiologiques* (Paris: Cerf, 1963); Avery Dulles, *The Catholicity of the Church* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985).

(e.g. in the whole world, according to the whole counsel of God, in fellowship with the whole Church), there is an important nuance which is added and which further qualifies this *nota ecclesiae*.

According to Ratzinger, the catholicity of the Church is intertwined with the episcopal structure of the Church.¹³ The former is an expression of the latter in two ways. First, the presence of the bishop is essential to define the Church itself. There is no church if there is no valid bishop presiding over her. The implication is that those Christian groups which do not recognise a properly ordained bishop in their ecclesiastical outlook cannot claim the status of a church, but can be defined “ecclesial communities”, i.e. gatherings of Christians enjoying ecclesiality to some degree but lacking the fullness of the blessings of being a church. Second, the catholicity of the Church means the union of all the bishops whose fellowship is presided over by the bishop of Rome. It is not enough for a church to have an episcopal structure: it must be in fellowship with the See of Rome which exercises the primacy. Unless a church is in fellowship with all other bishops and with Rome, it cannot be fully recognised as being part of the catholic Church. Catholicity then is understood in terms of Roman episcopacy.

More recently, Ratzinger has come back to these important ecclesiological themes issuing the declaration *Dominus Iesus* (August 6, 2000)¹⁴ when he was still Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith. While the document mainly deals with the relationship with other religions and the challenges of inter-religious dialogue, it also contains sections on the true meaning of the marks of the Church (e.g. n. 17). In critically addressing some practices and beliefs in the Roman-Catholic Church, Ratzinger recalls what has been already pointed out in the last pa-

¹³ This connection between catholicity and episcopacy is already argued in Ratzinger’s widely acclaimed *Introduction to Christianity* (London: Burns & Oates, 1969) which is a profound commentary to the Apostles Creed.

¹⁴ See www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000806_dominus-iesus_en.html.

paragraphs. The Church is where there is a valid bishop, but there is also a further ecclesiological qualification. According to *Dominus Iesus*, the Church is where the mystery of the Eucharist is kept in its integrity, i.e. where it is celebrated according to the Roman-Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation and sacramental representation of the sacrifice of the cross.¹⁵ Moreover, as far as the primacy of the Pope is concerned, Ratzinger argues that the papal office is given “objectively” and therefore cannot be changed to the point of losing its objective nature. The papacy has a quasi-ontological status which pertains to the realm of objective, essential things. The implications for non-Catholic Christians are evident. In fact, those Christian groups which do celebrate the Lord’s Supper in other ways and with a different theology are not considered as churches properly defined. They are “ecclesial communities” and the condition for them to become part of the Church as particular churches is to come in full fellowship with Rome. Only a church in communion with Rome is a catholic church. This is Ratzinger’s interpretation of this mark of the Church.¹⁶

In his first speeches after being elected, pope Ratzinger has made it clear that he wants to commit himself to the ecumenical cause, i.e. the full restoration of the unity of the Church. This wish has been received in very positive terms by non-Catholics

¹⁵ On the theology of the Eucharist, see *God is Near Us. The Eucharist, the Heart of Life* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2003). Further reflections on the liturgy are in *The Spirit of the Liturgy* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2000).

¹⁶ This ecclesiological self-understanding as applied to ecumenical issues was recently reinforced by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in “Responses to Some Questions Regarding Certain Aspects of the Doctrine of the Church” (June 29, 2007). The document has stirred hot responses from different Christian bodies and is available at http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20070629_responsa-quaestiones_en.html. For instance, William Taylor, on behalf of World Evangelical Alliance, has written “Evangelical reflections on Pope Benedict XVI’s June 2007 affirmation on the primacy of the Roman-Catholic Church” (August 28, 2007). The useful paper is available at <http://www.worldevangelicals.org/news/view.htm?id=1355>.

and even Evangelicals.¹⁷ There is a problem, however, and it has to do with the meaning of the unity implied by Ratzinger. Given the quasi-ontological self-understanding of the Roman-Catholic Church and the “objectivity” of her structures, what openness is given to Biblical reformation according to the Gospel? If Ratzinger’s ecclesiology reflects and implies the “objectivity” of the Roman-Catholic Church as it stands, unity means adhering to this objective model by submitting to it. This way is not an Evangelical option.

“Salt of the World”: the Church and the World

The relationship between the Church and the world has been a matter of sustained concern for Ratzinger as theologian, Cardinal and then Prefect. His ecclesiological reflection is not only interested in reinforcing the self-understanding and practices of the Roman Church, but also to address critical issues concerning the place and mission of the Church in a global world. This side of his ecclesiological interests has been developed in a series of interviews in which Ratzinger has offered his thoughtful insights in a popular style.¹⁸

Ratzinger’s analysis of the modern world is fascinating. In particular, it underlines the challenges of the progressive erosion of the Christian heritage by the project of modernity. It also warns against the dictatorship of relativism and the danger of alien ideologies such as marxism and liberalism, collectivism and radical individualism, atheism and a vague religious mysticism, agnosticism and syncretism. In critical dialogue with post-secular philosophers like Jürgen Habermas, he calls the Church not to be marginalized by secular trends and to launch afresh a

¹⁷ e.g. Michael S. Horton, “What Can Protestants Expect from the New Pope?”, (April 21, 2005), www.modernreformation.org/popedoc.htm.

¹⁸ There are at least three such books: *The Ratzinger Report. An Exclusive Interview on the State of the Church* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1985); *Salt of the Earth. An Exclusive Interview on the State of the Church at the End of the Millennium* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1996), and the most recent *God and the World. Believing and Living in our Time* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2002).

strong Christian vision and initiative for a decaying world.¹⁹ This is particularly true as far as Europe is concerned.²⁰

Perhaps, an interesting case-study of Ratzinger's convictions on these matters is the attempt to evaluate the first world-wide event in which the Pope took part after his election. This approach may speak better than many essays since Roman Catholicism is a highly symbolised and dramatic religion as well as having a sophisticated theology. It is in terms of a worldview that Ratzinger's thought can be best assessed.

More than one million young people took part at the World Youth Day (WYD) in Cologne (August 16-21, 2005) with pope Benedict XVI. It was an impressive gathering and a highly significant programme. What was its main message? It was the occasion to celebrate the catholicity of the Church of Rome. Every aspect was wisely organised to underline the centrality of the Church, its project and the importance to belong to it. At the heart of Europe, the Church attracted the attention of the whole continent. The pope was treated as past emperors were,²¹ arriving on a boat on the river Rhine with crowds greeting him. The Church played the role of the privileged dialogue partner of Islam, one the most worrying concerns of the West. Whereas other Western agencies find it difficult to come to terms with Islam, Rome apparently does not.²² Thinking of the future, a message was launched that Rome is the "home" of young people. Everybody is welcome in this large home, where you find fun,

¹⁹ Their 2004 dialogue has been published in English in the book *The Dialectics of Secularization. On Reason and Religion* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2007).

²⁰ See his recent book *Europe. Today and Tomorrow* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2007).

²¹ It must be borne in mind that, in his extensive writings on ecclesiology, Ratzinger never questions the foundational institutional ambiguity of the Roman Church in her being a Church and a state (i.e. the Vatican) at the same time. As pope, he is primate and head of state. In this respect, he is a monarch who can be paid tribute as such.

²² Ratzinger deals with the theology of dialogue and its challenges in *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2004).

the Eucharist, music, friendship, devotion to Mary, etc. The Church provides everything. Participants could even benefit from plenary or partial indulgences that were issued by the Pope for the occasion. They took part in an open air Eucharist where the sacrifice of the cross was represented through the offering of the Church. The Church combined Middle Age practises and postmodern habits. Different speeches, homilies, and talks seemed to have Christ at the centre, but at a closer look, it was the Church that received centre stage.

Probably, not all the youth there will live out their faith in the coherent way they were encouraged to do. Many will continue to nurture their pick-and-choose spirituality. This is not the main point, however. The young people went back home with a solid impression of the power of the Church of Rome, a Church that has a youthful profile, which offers spiritual engagement and a cultural sense of belonging. It is not the case that their Christian identity will be strengthened, but their Catholic identity will. Perhaps, they will not consider themselves more Christian, but certainly more Catholic. The Roman Church aimed at giving a powerful boost especially to the European imagination. The message was conveyed in symbols and words. Here it is. The future of the continent (i.e. the youth) is with Rome. What else can be a reference point for them in this terrifying world? Who else can comfort them, give them fun and instruction in a safe environment? Moreover, before the pressing challenges of our day (e.g. Islam, peace and justice), Europe can rely on the Roman Church. She can act as representative of all and do the job better than any other else. Why not trust it? Finally, with the outstanding personalities of the previous pope and the present one, Europe has a loving father who is wise enough to be listened to. With all the uncertainties and bad teachers around, why not trust him? Is not Roman Catholicism the Christian option that better suits the continent? This is the question that was asked in Cologne by Benedict XVI. Did Evangelicals understand the grand theological vision behind WYD?

Is it good news? Is it a promise? Is it a challenge? Is it a problem?

“Faith, Reason and the University”: the Clash with the Reformation

There is yet another important window on Ratzinger’s thought that can be opened in this introductory survey. It has to do with the rather unfortunate speech delivered at the University of Regensburg on September 12, 2006 on the topic “Faith, Reason and the Universities. Memories and Reflections”.²³ This lecture caused widespread turmoil in some countries where Muslims felt offended by the reference made by the Pope to the dialogue between emperor Manuel II Paleologus and an educated Persian man in 1391 on the subject of Christianity and Islam. For some Muslims, the Pope did not distance himself from Manuel’s words concerning the coercive and violent nature of Islamic expansion at the expense of the use of reason. International media immediately mounted a case that turned this reference to an instance of Byzantine history into a political and diplomatic issue. The Pope had to rephrase his speech, reassuring Muslims of his un-offensive intentions as well organising an official event with ambassadors of majority Muslim countries where he underlined his appreciation for Islam and commitment to inter-religious dialogue.²⁴

Unfortunately, much attention has been devoted to this rather secondary aspect of the lecture with the result of obscuring

²³ For more informative details about this issue, the full text is available at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060912_university-regensburg_en.html.

²⁴ As a matter of fact, this amendment event has shown the Vatican ambiguity as far as the relationship between religion and politics is concerned. In order to present his apology, the Pope invited political representatives of national states, instead of Muslim religious leaders. The misleading given impression was that political authorities (i.e. ambassadors) represent religious adherents of one religion and not citizens of a nation in spite of their religion.

and downplaying its real content. What is really at stake in Ratzinger's speech is his view of the relationship between faith and reason as championed by the Biblical faith and Greek reason. For Ratzinger, Christianity stems from the "inner rapprochement between Biblical faith and Greek philosophical enquiry". This "synthesis" is already envisaged in the "I am" saying of Exodus whereby God reveals Himself in a way that overcomes mythology and the Johannine prologue whereby the *logos* is both word and reason.²⁵ The instance of Paul's mission whereby the Macedonian man appears to the apostle to plead with him to go to Macedonia (Acts 16:6-10) is considered a vivid picture of the "intrinsic necessity" of the rapprochement. In Medieval Christianity the "synthesis between the Greek spirit and the Christian spirit" finds its culmination and it is "an encounter between genuine enlightenment and religion". For Ratzinger this "convergence" is quintessential for Christianity, not only in terms of its historical past but also as a matter of its overall theological profile.

In the course of the lecture, Ratzinger singles out the main threats that this synthesis has encountered since Medieval times onto modernity and beyond. There have been attempts to "dehellenize" Christianity which the Pope consider as dangers and fatal mistakes. First, Duns Scotus' voluntarism sunders the synthesis whereby God's transcendence is so exalted to become unattainable and hidden to reason. The analogy of being is therefore broken. Secondly, the XVI century Reformation with the *sola Scriptura* principle. In Ratzinger's words, according to the Reformation "faith no longer appeared as a living historical Word but as one element of an overarching philosophical system". The Pope thinks that Christianity needs such a system in order to be Christianity. *Sola Scriptura* is therefore a dangerous under-

²⁵ The exegetical and canonical feasibility of these readings of the Biblical material is beyond the scope of this paper. However, this "metaphysical" hermeneutics leaning towards Greek categories have been and must be seriously questioned.

cutting of the hellenized version of the Christian faith. The third threat comes from Liberal theology of the XIX and XX centuries. Harnack epitomises another facet of the “programme of dehellénization” whereby Christianity wishes to return simply to the man Jesus and his simple message underneath the accretions of hellenized theology. The final danger for the synthesis between faith and reason is “cultural pluralism” which argues that the hellenization of Christianity was an initial inculturation which is not binding on other cultures. *Il va sans dire* that Ratzinger rejects all these threats in order to safeguard the embrace between the Bible and Greek philosophy.

A critique of Ratzinger’s views on faith and reason as presented in this lecture would require much work which is not possible to do here. Suffice it to mention his negative consideration of the *sola Scriptura* principle which clashes with his profound convictions on the relationship between faith and reason. He is right to say that the Reformation wanted to re-discuss the relationship between Biblical and philosophical presuppositions as far as the Christian faith is concerned. He is right to see the Reformation as a threat to this balance. In this respect, Ratzinger comes very close to Cornelius Van Til, though from the opposite direction. For Van Til, Roman Catholicism is the historical outcome of a process of assimilation of mainly Aristotelian thought-products which have lead to a radical transformation of the Christian faith. In arithmetical terms, traditional Roman Catholicism is “a synthesis of Aristotle plus Christ”.²⁶ In fairness to him, Van Til maintains that “Romanism has in it a large element of true Christianity”. The problem is that this healthy part is nonetheless “counterbalanced and modified by so much taken from non-Christian philosophy”.²⁷

²⁶ C. Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1969), 175. As for modern Catholicism, Van Til argues that “the former Aristotle-Christ synthesis and the former Kant-Christ synthesis have joined hands to form the Aristotle-Kant-Christ synthesis” (Ibid., 185).

²⁷ *A Christian Theory of Knowledge*, 168. More on Van Til’s approach to Roman Catholicism can be found in my book *Evangelical Theological Perspectives on*

What Ratzinger perceives as an essential and inherent part of the Christian faith (i.e. the Greek reason combined to Biblical faith), the Reformed faith considers it the basic problem of Roman Catholicism. What Ratzinger perceives as a dangerous threat to the synthesis (i.e. *sola Scriptura*), the Reformed faith accepts it as the vital principle for the Christian faith. Christianity rejects all idolatry and stands solely on the Word of God. Ratzinger has an all together different view than that of the Reformation.

Dealing with a Robust Roman-Catholic Orthodoxy: Is the Reformation Over?

Joseph Ratzinger represents post-Vatican II Roman-Catholic orthodoxy at its best. It has recovered the importance of Biblical revelation and patristic sources. It has restated its commitment to creedal orthodoxy and opened itself to ecumenical relationships. It is in critical dialogue with secular modernity, and nurtures a strong Christian worldview for a pluralistic world in turmoil. In light of these developments, the focus should be expanded to more general and important issues concerning Roman Catholicism as a whole. The issue is not merely academic, as if we were discussing Ratzinger's theology in isolation from the significance of the Church he now represents at the highest level. The question whether the Reformation is over has been asked and seems to be something that many Evangelicals are asking, either implicitly or explicitly.²⁸ In other words, is there any reason to keep on opposing, questioning, distancing oneself from Roman Catholicism given the many positive things that can be seen in Rome today? To borrow Vittorio Subilia's title, is

post-Vatican II Roman Catholicism (Frankfurt-Bern-Oxford: Peter Lang, 2003), 65-78.

²⁸ Mark Noll and Carolyn Nystrom, *Is the Reformation Over? An Evangelical Assessment of Contemporary Roman Catholicism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005). Cf. my review in *Themelios* 32.1 (2006), 103-104.

the “problem” of Catholicism solved? ²⁹ It is still there or not? If yes, to what degree?

In order to address the issue, the other side of the same post-Vatican II Roman-Catholic orthodoxy should not be neglected. The two belong to one another. Here again, Ratzinger’s theology magnificently epitomises it. For instance, the Bible is always read in light of the authoritative magisterium. Nicene Christology is always intertwined to “objective” Roman-Catholic ecclesiology. The Apostles Creed is confessed as well as the Canons of Trent and Vatican I. The cross of Christ is always related to the representation of the sacrifice of the Eucharist. The Spirit is always linked to the hierarchical structure of the Church. Ecumenism is always thought of in terms of other Christians being defective and the Church of Rome being the “catholic” Church. The mission of the Church is always pursued having in mind the catholic project to embrace the whole world. The ecclesiastical outlook of the Church is inherently combined with its political role. The list could easily be lengthened so as to indicate the way in which the Roman-Catholic theological system is built and works.

The point is that Ratzinger’s orthodoxy is qualified by its being peculiarly Roman-Catholic. Contrary to powerful trends in modern ecumenical thinking, “mere orthodoxy” does not exist in this world. There are different types of orthodoxies. Ratzinger’s is just one of them and it is robust. If Evangelical orthodoxy loses its biblical sharp edges and becomes engulfed in a “mere orthodoxy” type of thinking, Ratzinger’s theology may sound thrilling and appealing. In this sense, the Reformation may be considered as over. If Evangelical orthodoxy keeps its foundational principles of the Reformation and Revivals, the Reformation is not over since the program of continual biblical reform is always a task before everyone of us, Ratzinger and the Roman-Catholic Church included.

²⁹ Vittorio Subilia, *The Problem of Catholicism* (London: SCM 1964).

In conclusion, it may be appropriate to quote a document that was issued in 1999 by the Italian Evangelical Alliance on the relationships between Evangelicals and Catholics. It deals with general trends within Roman Catholicism, but what it says can also be applied to the theologies of John Paul II and Benedict XVI since there are striking similarities. Here it is: "The current flurry of activity within contemporary Catholicism (the return to the Bible, liturgical renewal, the valorisation of the laity, the charismatic movement, etc.) does not indicate, in and of itself, that there is hope for a reformation within the Catholic church in an evangelical sense. It will only be as these developments make changes in the structural elements underlying the nature of Roman Catholicism, not expanding it further but purifying it in the light of God's Word, that they can have a truly reforming function. In today's scenario, these movements, although interesting, seem to promote the project of catholicity rather than that of reformation".³⁰ A robust Evangelical Orthodoxy is still needed and Reformed Christians have a vital and unique role to play in promoting it.

³⁰ The full text can be found in "An Evangelical Approach Towards Understanding Roman Catholicism", *Evangelicals Now* (2000), 12-13, or *European Journal of Theology* 10.1 (2001), 32-35.

Kingdom of God and Postmodern Thought: Friends or Foes?

RONALD T. MICHENER

Evangelische Theologische Faculteit, Leuven

ABSTRACT. The overarching theological motif of *kingdom of God* may seem contrary to postmodern suspicions of oppressive metanarratives and totalizing systems of truth. However, this article submits that the postmodern critique of objectivity and human rationality offers layers of compatibility and commonality with the God's kingdom program of reconciliation and restoration. As with many aspects of postmodern thought, the *kingdom of God* overturns, upsets and challenges our own selfish agendas and conceptual idolatries impeding community in the life and practice of the church.

KEYWORDS: Kingdom, postmodernism, objectivity, knowledge, community

What can the kingdom of God and postmodern thought possibly have in common? For many, postmodernism is the boogeyman of evangelicalism, a threat of doom, something we must avoid and denounce at all costs. View any evangelical publisher's booklist to find such sentiments. Although some concerns are well founded, I contend that others are too hasty in their judgments.¹ This essay will be an effort to act as a counter

¹ As James K. A. Smith notes, perhaps the greatest problem is similar to the problem of modernism, a denial of the grace of God, thus resulting in self-centered notions of radical freedom and the idolatry of individual expression. As with Smith, I am more interested in the ways that postmodernity has broken away from and critically challenged the haughty, self-absorbed, rationalistic arrogance of modernism to create spaces for a more "robust" Christian faith. See James K. A. Smith, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism?: Taking*

balance. From my studies on the postmodern condition in theology, I believe this current intellectual climate presents a prophetic voice of both caution and opportunity to us as evangelicals. I will take the theological motif of kingdom of God as my conversation partner to highlight several key postmodern concerns that we may apply both academically and pastorally. First, however, we need ask two basic questions. What is postmodern thought and, what is the kingdom of God? After making some introductory comments and providing some basic “tenets” of the postmodern intellectual climate, I will summarize what I intend by the theological motif of “kingdom of God.” Next, I will consider each of the mentioned postmodern “tenets” in dialogue with the theme of kingdom of God.

What is Postmodern Thought and Why Is It so Misunderstood?

Perhaps the heart of this misunderstanding, as some have argued, goes back to the philosopher Immanuel Kant.² In Kant’s attempt to reconcile the insights of both the rationalists and empiricists, he re-framed the concept of “knowledge.” Knowledge is limited to the phenomenal world, hence matters of faith must be obtained some other way. Kant’s famous statement was, “I have therefore found it necessary to deny *knowledge*, in order to make room for *faith*.”³ Kant is not denying the reality of the content of faith, but he is saying it cannot come through the vehicle of knowledge. Now of course there is much more that can and should be said about Kant. I admit the risk of oversimplification here; but Kant can be taken either negatively or positively, depending on our perspective. If we are convinced that knowledge in the sense of the phenomenal world is of absolute im-

Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 26-27.

² See Carl Raschke, *The Next Reformation: Why Evangelicals Must Embrace Postmodernity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 37-40.

³ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1929), 29.

portance to our faith, then Kant may seem threatening. After all, he is saying that our Christian faith is not something to be “known.” The reaction in this case would be toward a heavy emphasis on proof, evidences, and objectivity—in an attempt to show that Kant is wrong. But let us remember that Kant is not denying the reality of faith, but he is opposed to grounding it in what we call “knowledge.” If we see this challenge in a positive light, we may note the advantages of seeing our faith beyond simply the phenomenal world. Our faith is not merely based in the rational, the empirical, or the propositional; but it is a faith that is immersed in relationship, in community, in the Spirit-filled narrative of God’s revelation to and through his people. Of course Kant is not going in all these directions, but these are possible paths to which one may venture with this reading.

Nonetheless, Kant was not what we call postmodern. He postulated that human experience is universal, and faith is a result of practical, moral reason. He projected from his personal subjectivity, ironically, an objectivity of human nature. In this sense, Kant’s work was the gateway to the modern world, a world that brought with it an optimistic notion of the possibility of infallible human knowledge and objectivity. Postmoderns radically question such perceived abilities and stress the limits of our human reasoning. Theologically, postmodern thought resonates with a strong doctrine of the Fall. The power of sin has distorted our understandings and limited our ability to truly know and to know truly. Due to both our finiteness and sinfulness, we realize our inabilities. Modernism exalts the inherent goodness of knowledge, seeing knowledge and mastery of human enterprises as progress. Postmoderns challenge such notions. Knowledge is not always good, nor is it always used for the good. In fact it has been used to hurt, and even to kill. Mastery and control through knowledge has been used to create power. Often such power has been used to dominate others and suppress the voices that fail to fit in with the interests of those having the power. Postmoderns realize that “objectivity” often promises much more than can be delivered. What is often clai-

med to be objective is simply objective to those most swayed by popular opinion, whether the venue is politics, business or the church. Hence, the “objective” may simply mean that which the knowledge brokers say the rest of us should believe.

Postmodernism is such a variegated, multi-faceted phenomenon that it would be an injustice to attempt to capture it in a definition. It is a series and matrix of sentiments, ideas, challenges, and impulses. As Bruce Benson puts it: “At best, there is a multitude of postmodernisms linked by family resemblances.”⁴ Whatever attempt is made to describe it must take this into account and must not be reduced to a simple sentence or pithy phrase. I make no presumption to be exhaustive, but for the purposes and scope of this essay I offer the following four characteristics or “family resemblances” of postmodern thought.⁵ Tenets of postmodernism are usually provided in negative terms by way of what they deny, question, or refuse to accept with regard to modernism. I will provide both a negative proposition and a similar positive proposition of the same principle.

- **First Principle.** Unmediated objectivity of knowledge is denied, along with uncertainty about what constitutes knowledge.⁶ Any understanding of reality is always mediated through interpretation.
- **Second Principle.** All-encompassing systems, explanations of reality, and universal rational principles are rejected. Worldviews and reasonability are colored and influenced by one’s personal background and culture.
- **Third Principle.** Impetuous claims to knowledge and progress are not inherently good or responsible. Knowledge

⁴ Bruce Benson, *Graven Ideologies: Nietzsche, Derrida & Marion on Modern Idolatry* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2002), 41.

⁵ These are modified and loosely adapted from Millard J. Erickson, *Postmodernizing the Faith: Evangelical Responses to the Challenge of Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 18-19.

⁶ Also see James K. A. Smith, *Who’s Afraid of Postmodernism?*, 44.

claims are postponed to avoid dominance and allow a multiplicity of perspectives.

- **Fourth Principle.** Community based “understanding” takes priority over the isolated individual. Multiple voices in community provide a broader interpretive framework for understanding reality.

These basic issues should help us see that not all postmodern thought is post-Christian, anti-Christian, or non-Christian. Postmodernism is not about denying reality or simply dismissing everything “out there” as some cosmic dream. On the other hand, it is a mood or condition challenging many of our epistemological comfort zones that stem from modernity. To completely dismiss postmodern thought without reflection on its various intentions and expressions, is premature and wrong-headed. As with modernism, not all postmodern thought is inherently corrupt.

Bruce Benson astutely notes in his insightful book *Graven Ideologies*, that postmodern concerns can awaken us to the conceptual idols we have made of absolute objectivity and the tools of human rationality. In using such tools to justify our faith, we have often replaced our faith with the tools themselves. If we have created a God or a Christianity in our own minds that only fits with our own selfish agendas, then that image of God we have created is an image we must deconstruct.⁷ In this regard, many postmodern concerns actually can help us to pursue the kingdom of God, rather than lead us away from it.

What Is the Kingdom of God?

To attempt a comprehensive definition of the kingdom of God is well beyond the scope and intent of this essay. In fact, the possibility of such a definition should be highly suspect. Jesus did not provide such an inclusive definition, and neither did

⁷ See Bruce Benson, *Graven Ideologies: Nietzsche, Derrida & Marion on Modern Idolatry* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2002), 19-24, 47-48.

the apostles. Nonetheless, I will suggest some key characteristics and important themes pertaining to the kingdom of God as an integrating motif for theological reflection.

What is the kingdom of God? The answer is found in God's works and words throughout redemption history. It is his reign of love—to redeem, to restore a sin alienated creation (including people!) back unto himself, back to the embrace of his loving care. The kingdom of God is about God's reigning and His reigning authority of love, justice, and community. It is both situated and dynamic. While theologians through the years have attempted to express the kingdom of God as primarily political, spiritual, futurist, or realistic; it is important not to force the kingdom motif into any one category.⁸ It is also a variegated, interrelated concept involving each one of these characteristics; it is oriented not only to the present but toward the future; it is present, but it is not fully present; it is revealed, but not fully revealed. The eschatological kingdom goal is complete *shalom* in God's love—a consummated kingdom of God's loving, embracing authority and rule. As Robert H. Stein submits:

The kingdom of God is both now and not yet. Thus the kingdom is "realized" and present in one sense, and yet "consistent" and future in another. This is not a contradiction, but simply the nature of the kingdom. The kingdom has come in fulfillment of the Old Testament promises. A new covenant has been established. But its final manifestation and consummation lie in the future. Until then we are to be good and faithful servants (Luke 19:11-27).⁹

We must guard against dualistic notions of the kingdom. The kingdom of God is not something that has two parts, one for now, one for later. Such a notion stems more from a preconcei-

⁸ For a concise overview see Robert H. Stein, "Kingdom of God," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 451-52.

⁹ Robert H. Stein, "Kingdom of God," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 453.

ved idea of some temporal dominating empire. The kingdom is not a “thing” at all. The kingdom of God has to do with the total sphere of God’s reign, the dynamic ongoing reign and reconciling work of God for and through his people. It is not about human-controlled empire making agendas. It is not about our kingdom, our individual concerns, or our individual life; it is about a redeemed community falling more and more into God’s loving, caring fold. In view of this, we certainly cannot ignore the eschatological dimension of the kingdom. It is now, it will continue, and it will continue to manifest itself more fully in God’s redemption and reconciliation of his creation in the eschaton. This is affirmed in the “already, but not yet” schema of George Eldon Ladd, Robert H. Stein and others.¹⁰

Stanley J. Grenz suggested that we combine the theological notion of kingdom with community in a dialectic. When God’s rule, reign, or kingdom is present, when his will is done, then community emerges. Or, when true Christian community is present, God’s will and reign in kingdom is present. For Grenz, the notion of “eschatological community” is God’s program of bringing about a community of the highest order—reconciled people, restored creation all in the presence of a great Redeemer.¹¹

The kingdom of God turns common understandings of kingdom upside down. The kingdom of God is about peace, justice, and reconciliation in the loving community of God’s all caring embrace. It is a kingdom “not of this world” that reaches out to widows and orphans. It is a kingdom of humility, grace and redemption. It is indeed a kingdom of power, but not a power of arbitrary subjugation and oppression, but a power to serve, love, care, and redeem, not a power of oppression.¹²

¹⁰ See again Stein, “Kingdom of God,” 453; and George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 57-80.

¹¹ Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology For the Community of God* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1994), 28-30.

¹² See Millard J. Erickson, *Truth or Consequences: The Promise and Perils of Post-modernism* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2001), 291.

We have considered briefly basic characteristics of both postmodernism and the kingdom of God. Let us now reconsider each of these suggested postmodern characteristics in dialogue with the theological motif of the kingdom of God. Can we reconcile the two? Are they friends or foes?

Postmodern Thought in Conversation with the Kingdom of God

First Principle

Unmediated objectivity of knowledge is denied, along with uncertainty about what constitutes "knowledge."¹³ Understanding or ascertaining reality is always mediated through interpretation.

Is the kingdom of God "objective"? If we mean by objective, something that we can point to and say "this is it" or "this is that," then the best response certainly seems to be "no." Objectivity is often confused (mistakenly) as that which is real as opposed to the imaginary or fiction. Such a modernist understanding conflates reality with objectivity, and knowledge (however finite and limited) with objective knowledge.¹⁴ This confusion stems from a certain viewpoint on the appropriation of reality, not the nature of reality itself. Simply because one denies confidences in objectivity does not negate truth and reality, nor should it translate into radical skepticism and despair.

Of course the kingdom of God is real, but this does not mean it is something you can point at in some objective manner and say "this is it" or "that is it." Jesus was straightforward about this in Luke 17:20-21 (NIV):

[20] Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, "The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, [21] nor will people say,

¹³ Also see James K.A. Smith, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism?*, 44.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 43ff.

“Here it is,” or “There it is,” because the kingdom of God is within you.”

The kingdom is beyond the “objective” demands of this-worldly affairs. As postmodern theologian, John D. Caputo astutely observes:

To proclaim the coming of the kingdom of God is to deny that the world is all in all, to resist enclosure by the horizon of the world, and to insist that the merciless calculations that obtain in the world are not the last word. For the horizon of the world is set by the calculable, the sensible, the possible, the reasonable, the sound investment.¹⁵

Our understanding of the reality of the kingdom stems from multiple interpretive faculties bestowed on us from God. Perceptions derived from the rational and sensory apparatuses only shed light on part of the picture. We must be careful not to reduce knowledge or truth simply to these faculties without considering avenues such as emotion, imagination, and the work of the Spirit.

Allow me to illustrate this as I draw from the imagination of J. R. R. Tolkien. As creatures created in the image of God, we were given the creative abilities of sub-creation. This term, borrowed from Tolkien, effectively describes our God-endowed interpretive faculties. In Tolkien’s essay, “On Fairy-Stories,” he poetically writes:

Man, Sub-creator, the refracted Light
through whom is splintered from a single White
to many hues, and endlessly combined
in living shapes that move from mind to mind.
(...) ‘twas our right

¹⁵ John D. Caputo, “The Poetics of the Impossible and the Kingdom of God,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Postmodern Theology*, ed. Graham Ward (Oxford: UK: Blackwell, 2001), 472.

(used or misused). That right has not decayed:
we make still by the law in which we're made.¹⁶

Several lines later Tolkien adds: "Fantasy remains a human right: we make in our measure and in our derivative mode, because we are made: and not only made, but made in the image and likeness of our Maker."¹⁷ Fantasy in this context is not simply inane fiction, but is instead a creative pointer to reality. Since God is Creator, we are sub-creators and interpreters of the world in which He has placed us. But the prefix "sub" does not imply something sub-standard or shabby. Instead, we should think of how the prefix is used in subcontractor. A subcontractor is a person that takes on, by a secondary contract, some or all of the work of the original contract. In a similar way, we provide interpretations and sub-creations of the world originally created by God. This fantasy genre of "sub-creation" is masterfully accomplished in the imaginative classics by writers such as J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis.

Now, I am not suggesting from this that the kingdom of God is mere fantasy, nor am I implying that our perceptions of kingdom of God are simply our own created abstractions. Instead, I am pointing to our interpretive nature as human beings who are ever-longing, ever-developing, always learning and becoming more like Christ. Not only is the kingdom "already, but not yet," but we humans are also "already, but not yet." This interpretive nature is not a curse, it is part of how we were created to be. We are creatures who have been given the privilege to "refract the Light," and display it to others. This refraction is mediated through our interpretive God-given lenses, though these lenses are finite. As James K. A. Smith puts it, "interpretation is an inescapable part of being human and experiencing the

¹⁶ J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Tolkien Reader* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1966), 74.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 75.

world.”¹⁸ Pure objectivity and the expectation of unmediated, unbiased reason is an optimism of Enlightenment self-absorption, rather than an optimism that stems from our nature as interpretive beings created in the image of God. The fact that the kingdom of God is not “of this world,” (John 18:36) is a great reminder and lesson to us on this.

Second Principle

All-encompassing systems, explanations of reality, and universal rational principles are rejected. Worldviews and reasonability are colored and influenced by our personal background and culture.

In postmodern thought, overarching systems that attempt to legitimize a perceived reality are called metanarratives or grand stories. These are refuted in postmodern thought.¹⁹ Overarching schemes fail to acknowledge the weaknesses of one’s own worldview bias. Our perspective on the world and what we deem reasonable is often determined by what we have been trained to perceive. If we impose our own legitimizing grand story on others or insist on a particular overarching system, then we commit ideological violence. Hence, postmoderns radically question supposed universal rational principles or umbrella disciplines to which all knowledge or truth claims must be derived. In a strictly modernist paradigm, philosophy and science are the governing systems by which all “legitimate” claims to knowledge must be put to scrutiny. Postmoderns challenge this supposition. Neither science nor philosophy can provide access to unbiased, presuppositionless truth. Science by nature is inductive, hence not exhaustive. Scientists and philo-

¹⁸ Smith, *Who’s Afraid of Postmodernism?*, 38. These ideas are central to Smith’s thesis in James K. A. Smith, *The Fall of Interpretation: Philosophical Foundations For a Creational Hermeneutic* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2000).

¹⁹ The most well-known statement of this refutation is “incredulity toward metanarratives,” in Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), xxiv.

sophers who develop the principles of their disciplines do not have unmediated access to infallible methodological handbooks from the mind of God. Scientists often work in laboratories with limited means. Philosophers are no less human, and simply (or not so simply!) appeal to rational principles that seem to make sense within their particular context of rationality.

Postmoderns see the weaknesses inherent in systems of fallible mankind. The basic foundations upon which modernity was built are not as stable as they once were esteemed. Postmoderns suggest that philosophy and science are simply, in a sense, other genres of literature, other types of narrative—with assumptions, biases, backgrounds and stories—whether for good or bad. Science is not ultimately objective because scientists themselves are not ultimately objective. Scientific hypotheses work from paradigms that are based on presuppositions about the laws of nature. Of course, paradigms can change since they themselves are contingent.²⁰ Merold Westphal astutely states that “the human interpreter will always occupy a finite location and cannot gain absolute knowledge by viewing creation from God’s luxury box.”²¹ Science works in the realm of empirical evidence, the observable, the phenomenal. The honest postmodern thinker will readily acknowledge the strength and value of scientific investigation, yet wisely recognize its weaknesses and limitations.

The kingdom of God is interior (Luke 17:30), not simply exterior. It involves the emotions, will, and Christ reigning in our

²⁰ See Merold Westphal, *Blind Spots: Christianity and Postmodern Philosophy* (June 14, 2003), accessed July 6, 2006; available from http://www.find-articles.com/p/articles/mi_m1058/is_12_120/ai_103996827. Also see Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd edn (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970). Especially note, for example 50-51, 111, 175. Kuhn’s work exposes the “objective” myth of science by pointing out various socially related paradigm shifts in the history of scientific discovery. Kuhn shows how sociological factors influence the acceptance of scientific theories.

²¹ Merold Westphal, *Blind Spots*.

hearts (Colossians 3:15). The kingdom of God is no less real simply because it cannot be put to the test of scrutiny by science or man's limited rationality. In fact, the whole idea of the kingdom of God challenges and overturns man's limited rationality with its presumed outcomes. The kingdom of God turns expected outcomes inside out. It is a kingdom that feeds the poor and gives them hope, exalts humble beggars and widows, and forgives those deserving death for terrible misdeeds. But all of this is only because of God and his work of redemption, not because of the power of man's good will.

We must admit that the kingdom of God motif is indeed a grand story. But it may be debated whether or not it is a grand story or metanarrative that seeks to legitimize all reality. The kingdom of God is proclaimed and simply uttered as reality, it is not proclaimed with the intent to verify or back up all other truth statements. Granted, Christians through the years have certainly appealed to the grand story of the kingdom of God to justify and legitimize various interpretations of reality that have resulted in violent action. Christians should affirm that history is a directed process with expressed goals for all human beings. It is a kingdom of invitation, hospitable to all nations, cultures, peoples, and backgrounds. But the kingdom of God must not be construed as grand story that is inherently violent towards those who are the invited. This is not to say that there is nothing "violent" about the kingdom of God. But it is not an imposed violence from God upon his subjects. Instead, the incarnate God, Jesus Christ, willfully accepted violence upon himself in order to redeem and reconcile the subjects of the kingdom.²² The violence that Christ received upon himself in the atonement actually triumphed over and "disarmed" the powers attempting oppressive violence over us. In their provocative book

²² For a substantial work on this theme in view of postmodern thought see Hans Boersma, *Violence, Hospitality and the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004).

discussing this ironic theme as it pertains to Colossians, Brian J. Walsh and Sylvia C. Keesmaat comment:

Paul is saying both that the legal demands of the philosophy are e-
 ras-ed at the cross and that the imperial rulers and authorities who
 put him on that cross were defeated in the very act that seemed
 like their victory. Turning the empire on its head, the cross beco-
 mes the site of the victory march of the victim.²³

Walsh and Keesmaat continue to say that the poem in Colossi-
 ans 1:15-20 eloquently articulates the non-violent creational
 scope of the biblical metanarrative. Highlighting verse 20, they
 state the following in the context of God reconciling all things
 on earth and heaven unto himself through Christ's atoning
 work:

Here is a vision of radical, creationwide inclusiveness of the king-
 dom, in contrast to the dismissive exclusiveness of the regime. All
 things are reconciled—*even* the thrones, dominions, rulers and au-
 thorities that put Christ on the cross and continue to wreak havoc
 in countless human lives. But redemptive inclusion comes via the
 path of the cross, the embrace of pain.²⁴

So, the kingdom of God presents a different sort of grand story,
 which is why it remains a friendly conversation partner with
 postmodernism. A denial of abusive grand stories should not
 imply the rejection of all grand stories. The kingdom of God is
 not a grand story that oppresses, but invites and welcomes tho-
 se who are oppressed by powers that corrupt.²⁵ It is a kingdom
 of love and care with the offer of good news and grace to all.²⁶

²³ Brian J. Walsh and Sylvia C. Keesmaat, *Colossians Remixed: Subverting the Empire* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2004), 111.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 113.

²⁵ This is not to say that imperialist agendas and oppressive actions have not taken place under the banner of the kingdom of God throughout the history of the church, such as with the Crusades or the oppression of Jews during the Reformation. For further exploration on this topic see Kenneth R. Chase

The grand story of the kingdom of God is not based on man's own authority structures or aspirations of dominance, whether political or ecclesiastical. It is not about building our own empire (however "Christian" or religious it may seem) that justifies all our practices as "kingdom" motivated. Instead, it is a kingdom that challenges us to submit to the loving grace of God's reign first and foremost, being honest about our finite and sinful condition. Instead of telling us that "we have arrived" and we now live in the New Jerusalem, it reminds us that "our practices and the discourses that accompany them stand under a judgment whose norm is that kingdom and that city."²⁷

Third Principle

Impetuous claims to knowledge and progress are not inherently good or responsible. Knowledge claims are postponed to avoid dominance and allow a multiplicity of perspectives.

This postmodern notion has no trouble in dialogue with the doctrine of sin. In fact, "postmodernism's unintended commentary is on the doctrine of the fall."²⁸ As mentioned previously, the pride and sin of mankind to control, dominate, oppress, and ignore others in favor of himself is readily acknowledged. What is esteemed as progress for some, may be a loss for others. Knowledge claims for the use of power plays and intimidation are wrong and contrary to a spirit of humility, hospitality, and generosity that should be characteristic of the kingdom of God.

and Alan Jacobs (eds), *Must Christianity be Violent?: Reflections on History, Practice, and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2003). Even a brief look at the development of the Christian church in the book of Acts sufficiently demonstrates that its origins were not inherently oppressive or imperialistic in any sense. Instead, Christianity started among many who were oppressed and marginalized in order to reach others who were oppressed and marginalized.

²⁶ See Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996). See especially 110.

²⁷ Merold Westphal, *Blind Spots*.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

Accordingly, this postmodern postulate is a friendly conversation partner for Christians as a guard against modern epistemological pride. The kingdom of God is not fully revealed nor completely clear. There are aspects of mystery. The kingdom is not completely “fulfilled” – we don’t control it or have it mastered (in terms of definition or content). We can say God will bring all things to completion and harmony in loving community. We can say some things about what God is doing and will do, but we are limited in our understanding of all the issues. Again, the kingdom is both already and not yet. Walsh and Keesmaat consider this issue the “classic paradox” in Paul. They put it this way:

Christ has *already* defeated the powers, but his reconciling rule has *not yet* been fully established in history. (...) Indeed this already/not-yet that characterizes the unfinished story of Jesus also characterizes the unfinished story of his followers. They have *already* been raised with Christ, they have *already* died to the empire, but their life is hidden with Christ and has *not yet* been revealed.²⁹

This aspect of the kingdom of God should remind us of our limitations—spiritually and epistemologically. Most of us will readily admit that we are finite creatures with incomplete access to truth. But we often struggle with accepting our role as imperfect interpreters of God’s Word. Our imperfections as interpreters does not require us to accept religious relativism. However, we do not simply understand and encounter God through our own logical skills of reasoning that have been exalted in modernism. We do not walk into an abyss of complete darkness, but we often do walk into a mist holding the hand of an all-knowing God who guides us. We confide in Him, not in our own self-perceived skills of perception and rationality. Merold Westphal elucidates this point:

²⁹ Walsh and Keesmaat, *Colossians Remixed*, 155.

We see, to be sure, but “in a mirror, dimly” or “in a riddle” (1 Corinthians 13:12). We have a treasure, indeed the absolute treasure, one worth worth (*sic*) living and dying for, but we have it “in clay jars” (2 Corinthians 4:7) so that it will be clear that we are not the authors of this truth nor the source of its power. That is why the gospel is “foolishness” to the “wisdom of the world” (1 Corinthians 1:18-25). For Paul the bold and universal proclamation of the gospel does not require absolute knowledge as its legitimizing backup. That task can be left to the Holy Spirit.³⁰

Modernism is often said to be about humans congratulating themselves on progress, discovery and knowledge. A postmodern perspective postpones giving such felicitations. With this radical awareness of human limitations brought to the forefront, the stress is placed more on *process* than *progress*. Postmodern thought asks questions in order to surface issues that may be left undone, where certain perspectives or people were ignored or suppressed. It chastens us to be slower to say “I know,” and quicker to say “I think it may be like this—what is your perspective?”

Our notion of the kingdom of God is eschatologically oriented toward ultimate, future fulfillment of God’s loving, reigning work to reconcile, redeem, and restore community. But this is not always comprehensible to us. In fact, it may seem completely contrary to our own “systems” of logic. The kingdom of God is not about the number of people or programs in our churches. Our own agendas are not necessarily the agendas of the kingdom of God. Jesus “kingdom” always involved more than what we see here and now, pointing toward the beyond, toward a world not of this world. Jesus used parables to describe this kingdom and he “deconstructed” common “this worldly” expectations to demonstrate it. In the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15), for example, the father gives his son a requested early inheritance and his son squanders all the money through rebellious living. The son returns home and the fa-

³⁰ Merold Westphal, *Blind Spots*.

ther not only warmly accepts him back into the family, but he throws a party for him! Jesus vividly displays the loving, restoring, reconciling movement of the kingdom of God. This radical humility is impossible and unthinkable in the historical and cultural context.³¹ But it is this kind of radical humility and hospitable action that helps open us up to the other, the lost, the downtrodden, the sinner, and simply those who are different than we are. Along with this radical acceptance of difference is a call for heterogeneous community as we will see in the next point.

Fourth Principle

Community based “understanding” takes priority over the isolated individual. Multiple voices in community provide a broader interpretive framework for understanding reality.

For many postmoderns, the notion of the independent “self” is de-emphasized or even denied as a completely autonomous, thinking, governing subject. The individual is conditioned by his or her community and life context. The self, the individual, is always situated and influenced; it does not operate or express itself in a vacuum. Undeniably, we are affected and influenced by many factors including culture, geography, community, family, and language. In view of this, does it really make sense to speak of an autonomous self?

The late Stanley J. Grenz, drawing upon the research of Charles Taylor, articulated much that is helpful along these lines in his one volume systematic theology, *Theology for the Community of God*.³² Grenz argued that thinkers in many disciplines have made an effort to move beyond the individualism of modernism to form a deeper understanding of the formation of identity. The knowing process and experience of the world is

³¹ For an insightful perspective along these lines see Kenneth E. Bailey, “The Pursuing Father: What we need to know about this often misunderstood Middle Eastern parable,” *Christianity Today*, October 26, 1998.

³² Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1994).

mediated through the social community in which the individual is a part. The way we understand the world is shaped by a matrix of beliefs and backgrounds that color this understanding. This web of beliefs also shapes the categories by which we structure our questions and seek answers to those questions. In short, many interrelated and interweaving factors shape our lives, theology and religious expressions.³³ Now, this is not the dissolution of the *imago dei*, it is rather centering it more in the context of community than in the isolated individual. This dynamic conception of the *imago dei* stems from the relational nature of the triune God. Again, I readily see sympathetic parallels with the kingdom of God. God's reign is centered within his kingdom community of believers more than his image as ruler over isolated pious subjects.

As Christians we are identified and adopted into a community of believers under the care of God. Although the Church should not be rendered synonymous with kingdom of God, it is certainly one of its most visible out-workings in the world today. Both historically and theologically we trace God working out his reigning activity in the context of communities of faith. The emphasis in Scripture on the Church as the "body" of Christ (1 Corinthians 12) and the corporate body of believers as the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19) are pointers to the community centeredness of God's kingdom activity throughout our spiritual history. Perhaps our Protestant individualism stems more from an excessive reaction and exaggeration of Reformation principles and their modernist outworking than it does from a theology of the human person.

John Franke points out that "the full manifestation of God's reign is in the community of Christ's disciples, in the fellowship of the people who by the Spirit have entered into covenant with the God of history and consequently live out their covenantal life through worship of the Triune God, mutual care, and mis-

³³ Ibid., 9. Grenz cites Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 25-40.

sion in and for the world.”³⁴ In this regard, Franke adds, “the church embodies the biblical vision of God’s new community” and “its members reflect the character of God and are the *imago dei*.”³⁵ Community, however, does not necessitate homogeneity. In fact, the community of the people of God under God’s reign is radically diverse! This is the marvel and mystery of the community expression of the kingdom, unity with radical diversity. God’s reign within his people, through the Spirit, transcends all human barriers, includes all nations and cultures, all socio-economic classes, male and female, only reaching fulfillment of complete community in the *shalom* of the new heavens and new earth.

We act in community, understanding we are shaped and developed by that community. It is important not only to admit this, but also cherish it as part of ourselves, forthrightly drawing from this background in doing our theology. If we readily acknowledge our humanness with all of its limitations it should motivate us to explore our theological investigations and convictions in the context of a heterogeneous community, with other believers working in and under the reign of our Lord. Working in and through the community also provides often needed correctives to strong, persuasive, even coercive individuals that attempt to dominate or impose misleading or uncharitable positions that often stem more from personal biases than they do the Bible. This perspective acknowledges our interdependence upon each other for our theological reflections, understandings and practice.

Conclusion

It is not my contention that all postmodern notions are inherently compatible or inextricably connected to the kingdom of God. But I trust these reflections will help us to see several para-

³⁴ John R. Franke, *The Character of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 124.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 124.

digns of postmodern thought as friends of the kingdom of God, rather than foes, as we continue our dialogue with the ethos of our times. The kingdom of God is not about unilateral human power and autonomy, but about a mighty gracious God that helps suffering people, even to the extent of becoming one of us and suffering himself in our place. As Millard Erickson wisely states, "God's power should not be thought of as power against but as power for, power used wisely for the ultimate welfare of the person."³⁶ His power is beyond our power and knowledge, and his power subjugates our self perceived powers of control and knowledge. May this challenge us to humbly consider the basis for many of our self made claims, guide us back into our community of faith, and motivate us reflect again on the triune God of the Bible who reigns in and through us.

³⁶ Erickson, *Truth or Consequences*, 304.

Erasmus and Luther: A Brief Presentation

MAURICE DOWLING

Irish Baptist College, Dublin

ABSTRACT. The article looks at Erasmus and Luther as representatives of, respectively, Renaissance humanism and the Reformation. It compares their beliefs—particularly regarding the doctrines of sin and the freedom of the will—and also their attitudes to the Church. Some contemporaries saw Luther as developing Erasmus’ criticisms of the Church. However, although he was much indebted to humanism Luther’s perception of what was wrong in the Church—and what needed to be done—was very different. Erasmus found himself fitting into neither world: he could not embrace the Reformation and the Catholic Church found the Erasmian ethos increasingly unacceptable.

KEYWORDS: humanism, Reformation, free will, Erasmian, Catholic

Erasmus and Luther represent two different approaches to “reform”. Superficially they had much in common. Martin Bucer once said: “What Erasmus only insinuates, Luther openly teaches”,¹ and many contemporaries believed that “Erasmus laid the egg and Luther hatched it”.² However, they belong to different worlds.

¹ J. Atkinson, *The Great Light*, 47.

² O. Chadwick, *The Reformation*, 39. Reardon comments that this well-known saying was a matter of some embarrassment to Erasmus, and he quotes his retort to it: “I laid a hen’s egg, but what Luther hatched was a bird of a quite different sort”. See B. Reardon, *Religious Thought in the Reformation*, 25.

The “Prince of Humanists”

Erasmus (born c. 1466)³ attended the school of the Brethren of the Common Life in Deventer, and Luther went to their school in Magdeburg⁴. In Erasmus’ case, however, this early training left him with a keener interest in the classics and in humanism than was the case with the young Luther. Both entered the ranks of the Augustinians and were ordained as priests, Erasmus in 1492 and Luther in 1507. However, “Luther entered the monastery to save his soul by good works, Erasmus to enlighten his mind by good books”.⁵ “There was a great contrast between the cultured and tolerant scholar and the emotional German with his passionate conviction of his own and the world’s sin”.⁶

While Luther (born in 1483) was still a youth, Erasmus was acquiring a considerable reputation. By 1514 he had studied or taught in Paris, Oxford, Italy, Louvain and Cambridge. He was well versed in the classics, the Scriptures, the early Fathers, the scholastics, and the humanists. He had an impressive list of publications, e.g., *Adages* (1500)—a collection of Latin and Greek proverbs; *Enchiridion Militis Christiani* (“Handbook of a Christian Soldier”, 1504), on the value of scholarship for Christian piety; *The Praise of Folly* (1511), a bitter satire on the corruptions of the Church.⁷ No one could rival Erasmus when it came to lampooning clerical vices. Many were clamouring for reform, but “Erasmus expressed, and brilliantly, what they were barely articulating; and educated Europe laughed (...). More than any other single man, he lowered the European reputation of popes and clergy, monks and friars, and (above all) of the theology-

³ The uncertainties surrounding the date and place of Erasmus’ birth, and his parentage, are discussed in R. J. Schoeck, *Erasmus of Europe*, vol. 1: The Making of a Humanist, 1467-1500, 260-263.

⁴ G. Rupp, *Luther’s Progress to the Diet of Worms*, 10.

⁵ R. Bainton, *Erasmus of Christendom*, 25f.

⁶ V. H. H. Green, *Renaissance and Reformation* (1st edn), 47.

⁷ *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, art. “Erasmus”.

ans”⁸. While Luther was still a little-known professor in a new university, Erasmus was being read everywhere and was on close terms with innumerable people of importance.

Also important was Erasmus’ edition of Lorenzo Valla’s *Notes on the New Testament*. “In Valla’s timid critical notes Erasmus found the encouragement he would need to embark on his own critical Greek text of the New Testament”.⁹ Erasmus’ own edition of the Greek NT with a fresh Latin translation appeared in 1516 (*Novum Instrumentum*). It underlined the value of critical study of the original languages, and was used by Luther and Tyndale. Erasmus believed in making Scripture available to the common people. In the introduction to his New Testament he wrote: “I would that even the lowliest women read the Gospels and the Pauline Epistles. And I would that they were translated into all languages (...). Would that, as a result, the farmer sing some portion of them at the plough, the weaver hum some parts of them to the movement of his shuttle, the traveller lighten the weariness of the journey with stories of this kind!”¹⁰.

Luther was not anti-academic. He shared the humanist concern for “good letters” and used the latest tools of scholarship. In the Reuchlin controversy Luther was unreservedly on the side of the great Hebraist.¹¹ He also had much respect for Erasmus—even in *De servo arbitrio* he acknowledged his skill and influence: “You are a great man, adorned with many of God’s noblest gifts—wit, learning and an almost miraculous eloquence (...). By your studies you have rendered me also some service, and I confess myself much indebted to you”.¹²

However, Luther came to believe that more was needed than “good letters” and brilliant satire. At first Erasmus wrote letters in support of Luther to Frederick the Wise, Archbishop Albert

⁸ Chadwick, *The Reformation*, 32f.

⁹ Penguin Classics edition of *Praise of Folly*, 96.

¹⁰ A. G. Dickens, *The German Nation and Martin Luther*, 52.

¹¹ G. Rupp, *Luther’s Progress to the Diet of Worms*, 76.

¹² *The Bondage of the Will*, translated by J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston, 319.

of Mainz, Cardinal Wolsey and other distinguished figures.¹³ However, as Luther's language against Rome became more heated, particularly in the three great "Reformation writings" of 1520, Erasmus became more diffident. Erasmus' criticisms of the Church and the papacy were always accompanied by belief in the necessity of these institutions. "The entire spirit of Erasmus was inclusive"¹⁴; he did not see why Luther and the Catholics could not co-exist within the one body. Erasmus admitted that Luther's criticisms were mostly valid, but no doctrines were worth the dividing of Christendom.

Luther in turn felt that Erasmus was not equipped for the battles now being fought. In April 1524 Luther wrote: "Although you might have profited the cause much by your ability, genius and eloquence, yet as you had not the courage it was safer for you to work at home".¹⁵ Luther wrote to Oecolampadius at about the same time: "[Erasmus] has performed the task to which he was called—he has reinstated the ancient languages (...). Perhaps, like Moses, he will die in the land of Moab, for he is powerless to guide men to those higher studies which lead to divine blessedness (...). He has done enough in exposing the evils of the Church, but cannot remedy them, or point the way to the promised land".¹⁶

The Conflict

Differences in outlook eventually became open conflict. Matheson speaks of Erasmus being "caught in the glaring searchlight of publicity as the flak of criticism flew at him from all sides", and of his "struggle for credibility and independence in a rapidly polarising world"¹⁷. Erasmus was under considerable pressure to enter the lists against Luther. He himself was unwilling to become embroiled in bitter controversy; he was not a fighter,

¹³ R. Bainton, *Erasmus of Christendom*, 192ff.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 238.

¹⁵ Rupp and Drewery, *Ibid.*, 127.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 112f.

¹⁷ P. Matheson, *The Rhetoric of the Reformation*, 220.

but a scholar, a man of the Renaissance. He had moved in 1521 from the Low Countries to Basel in order to avoid being caught up in the bitterness of the conflict.¹⁸ But even there he was not free from pressure, and his efforts to play the conciliator were fruitless.

By 1524 it was obvious that Erasmus would have to make a definite stand. His fame was his own undoing as pressure was brought to bear on him from all sides. He was in danger of being outstripped and relegated to a secondary position by the changing times. "He was accustomed to the highest seat, and the little monk of Wittenberg had dethroned the mighty philosopher of Rotterdam. He must then, by some bold step, recover the position he had lost".¹⁹

De Libero Arbitrio

Erasmus chose to argue with Luther over "free will", and in September 1524 his *Diatribes seu collatio de libero arbitrio* appeared. Erasmus could write about this without displaying too much sympathy for Luther's enemies. To have hurled all the traditional dogmas at Luther would have placed Erasmus among the theologians whom he had so often satirised. Erasmus did not attack Luther for his views on the papacy, indulgences, the priesthood, the mass, or even justification. Instead, he chose an issue on which Luther was in almost complete agreement with the Church's great doctor Augustine of Hippo. Léonard quotes the Catholic historian F. X. Kiefl as saying, "Erasmus, with his concept of free, unspoiled human nature was intrinsically much more foreign to the Church than Luther"²⁰. As late as February 1521 Aleander wrote that Erasmus "has written worse things against our faith than has Luther".²¹

¹⁸ R. Bainton, *Erasmus of Christendom*, 208f.

¹⁹ J. Merle D'Aubigné, *History of the Reformation*, Book XI, Chapter IX (one-volume edn, 415).

²⁰ E. G. Léonard, *Ibid.*, 134.

²¹ Rupp and Drewery, *Ibid.*, 55.

Following the “semi-Pelagian” tradition Erasmus took the view that, although sin has weakened man, it has not made him incapable of meritorious action. He echoed the Scholastic distinction between congruent merit and condign merit: the first was that which a man attained by his natural abilities, and it made him fit for the gift of grace. Then, after grace was given, he could use it to do works of a quality of goodness previously out of his reach; the merit which these works secured was meritorious in the strict sense, as God was under obligation to reward them²². In Scripture man is constantly called upon to make a choice, therefore his will must be free to make that choice.

De Servo Arbitrio

In December 1525 Luther’s *De servo arbitrio* appeared. Luther regarded this issue as vital. Towards the end of this book he said (addressing Erasmus): “You alone (...) have attacked the real thing, that is, the essential issue. You have not wearied me with those extraneous issues about the Papacy, purgatory, indulgences and such like (...); you, and you alone, have seen the hinge on which all turns”.²³ Luther’s book is four times the length of Erasmus’ *Diatriba* and throughout shows his passionate concern over this topic. Luther argues that one cannot defend human free will and merit while maintaining the reality of divine sovereignty and grace. The distinction between “congruent” and “condign” merit is a false one, and the original Pelagian doctrine of merit is much more honest than Erasmus’ teaching.²⁴ Scripture teaches the universality of sin and the man’s inability to save himself. Being called upon to make choices does not prove that man is capable of making that choice of his own free will. Luther sets out what he believes to be the biblical teaching that the will is in bondage, that salvation, which is by the grace of Christ through faith alone, has no reference to previous en-

²² Packer and Johnston, *Ibid.*, 48f.

²³ *Ibid.*, 319.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 293.

deavour, and that it is a great comfort to know that salvation does not depend upon one's own will.

De servo arbitrio is a major treatment of what Luther saw as the very heart of the Gospel. He himself said that of all his writings only this one and his *Children's Catechism* were worthy of preservation.²⁵

Conclusion

Erasmus' reply, *Hyperaspistes*, made no impact at all. His two works did not win the victory which his Catholic friends expected from him. Furthermore, Erasmus' own criticisms of the Church still held good, and he continued to make them²⁶. He lived at Basel until 1529, in which year the Reformation was established there and Erasmus felt it prudent to move to Freiburg. Erasmus wrote continually, maintained contact with leading scholars, and kept a close eye on the changing religious scene, hoping that reconciliation of the opposing parties would be possible. But his voice was no longer being heard as before²⁷; he found favour with neither side in the great religious divide. Evangelicals were disappointed by what they saw as his failure to support their cause.²⁸ As for the Catholics, in 1527 the University of Paris censured his teaching. Erasmus died in 1536

²⁵ Ibid., 40; M. Brecht, *Martin Luther: Shaping and Defining the Reformation, 1521-1532*, 235.

²⁶ Bainton, *Erasmus of Christendom*, 257-261.

²⁷ G. R. Potter comments that, following the dispute with Luther, "the remaining ten years of Erasmus' life were those of a former captain now without a team and unable to obtain a post as a manager." See *Zwingli*, 294.

²⁸ The first known use of the term "Nicodemite" occurred before the Erasmus-Luther debate, in 1522, in a letter by a Dutch evangelical commenting sourly on Erasmus' stance: "I am very annoyed that day by day Erasmus is cooling off and, as far as I can judge, is secretly reconsidering what he seems once to have said or written more freely, and I recognise a childish fear, which has more respect for the approbation of men than the glory of God. But such Nicodemites among us are in great number". The text is quoted in Andrew Pettegree, *Marian Protestantism: Six Studies*, 89f. Evangelicals continued to see Erasmus in this light.

and his writings were placed on the Index by Pope Paul IV in 1559, although the Council of Trent somewhat modified this ruling.²⁹

In terms of writings “by” and “about” them, Luther must be declared the winner. Erasmus has not been without influence and devotees. In his prime he was the “prince of humanists” but towards the end of his life he was as “one who outlives his generation”³⁰. The English Elizabethan settlement was, in a sense, Erasmian, and the Pietists found much to their liking in his devotional writings.³¹ It may also be true that Protestantism today has become “more Erasmian than Lutheran”³². But is this identity of spirit actually due to the influence of Erasmus? The significance of Erasmus, other than his being a paradigm of an “attempt to achieve comprehension through minimal doctrinal demands”,³³ lies in the preparatory work which he did. “Erasmus did much to prepare the tools of scholarship which the Reformers were to use to attack the edifice of the old Church”.³⁴ And that is surely no mean legacy. Martin Brecht comments: “[Erasmus] became caught between the fronts. Thus his role was and remains disputed—even today”.³⁵

²⁹ Bainton, *Erasmus of Christendom*, 330; *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, art. “Erasmus”.

³⁰ Bainton, *Erasmus of Christendom*, 303.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 330ff.

³² Packer and Johnston, *Ibid.*, 63.

³³ Bainton, *Erasmus of Christendom*, 332.

³⁴ O. U. “Renaissance and Reformation” Units, 20 & 21, 69.

³⁵ *Martin Luther: His Road to Reformation*, 418.

The Relationships between the Church and the State. The Situation of Neoprotestant Denominations in Bihor County within the Last Years of the Second World War

ANTONIO FAUR

The University of Oradea

ABSTRACT. The author conducted research within the documentary resources—especially those hosted by the Gendarmerie Forces of the Bihor county—which are still filed at the National Archives (the Bihor County Department), and he discovered new documentary proofs concerning the situation of Neoprotestant denominations in Bihor county within the last years of the Second World War. These documents reflect the politics of the Romanian State with view to these denominations and especially the way they were supervised by local Gendarmerie authorities throughout Bihor county. The reconstruction of these realities underlines the forms of resistance found by “religious sects” (as these denominations were called by the State’s clerks) “of all sorts” which—although did not resort to open confrontation (the country was at war)—they were still active under specific types of manifestation as the nurtured the hope that they would regain their religious freedom at the end of the war. The most revealing example is given by the Baptists in Bihor county who reached 4274 members at that time. A case of particular interest is that of the “spiritists” (or “spiritualists”) who were found in some of the villages of Bihor county, such as Călacea and Girișul Negru. The documentary appendixes present a special importance.

KEYWORDS: denominations, Protestants, Baptists, Pentecostals, adherents

Following Romania's engagement in the Second World War in the summer of 1941, the political government issued a series of actions meant to preserve peace and stability—so crucially essential for the support of Romania's war efforts—among which some had a clearly repressive character such as those intended to fight the danger of Communism. These actions were doubled by other repressive measures which were directed against Romania's Jewish minority and the Neoprottestant denominations. Much too little has been written so far about Romanian Neoprottestant denominations; therefore—at least in my opinion—any historiographical enterprise in this respect is both necessary and commendable as it can be based on a wide range of consistent information which can be found in national as well as local archives.

Bearing in mind the necessity of such a historiographical demand, I have performed a series of investigations within the documentary resources of the National Archives (the Bihor County Department), where I discovered some unpublished documents which make reference to the relationships between the Romanian State and the Neoprottestant denominations during the Second World War but also the subsequent period. This aspect of Romania's religious life presents a real interest for historiographical research and also for the systematic as well as the thoroughly documented reconstruction of the history of the Neoprottestant denominations in Romania towards which the Romanian State displayed various attitudes in the twentieth century: from their total interdiction to religious freedom after December 1989.

The legal regulations which outlawed Romania's Neoprottestant Denominations are contained in the *Law Decree no. 3942* (issued on December 8, 1942), published in the government's *Official Gazette* (or *Monitorul Oficial*) no. 305/1942. Thus, Article no. 3 stipulated that all the assets—including the brass bands—of Neoprottestant Denominations should be transferred into the

jurisdiction (and property) of the Romanian State.¹ Following the abolition of the Neoprottestant denominations, the authorities of the Romanian State (the Police and the Gendarmerie Forces) began a careful supervision of these “religious sects” (as they were called in formal documents) in order to counter their attempts to survive or reactivate. This is why the archives contain various reports issued by the institutions which were officially designated to maintain “order within the state”; these reports include references to the reaction of the Neoprottestant denominations concerning the new legally enforced decisions of the Romanian government. One can make reference to some particular cases which occurred in Bihor County between 1944 and 1945.

A document of special importance appears to be the *Circulary Order no. 835*, issued on March 29, 1944 by lieutenant-colonel Ștefan Rusu, the Commandor of Bihor County Gendarmerie Forces, for all the local precincts and stations throughout the county.

The document reads that the Gendarmerie Forces “detain information” regarding “the religious sects of all sorts within its territory”. It was also stated that some of them “are openly active by holding public gatherings and possessing materials of schismatic propaganda”. Other “sects” – like, for instance, the Baptists – “were in a state of expectation although they did not manifest themselves actively”. They did hope nevertheless that they would “regain their once held rights” within a short while. The former members of the Baptist sect “remain in this state and perform a hidden propaganda” in the sense that “nobody must leave the sect”. A relevant proof in this respect was the fact that they refused to baptise their children and they actually forbade their children to attend one of the “churches” which enjoyed the status of legally recognised ecclesiastical institutions.

¹ The National Archives (the Bihor County Department) – A. N. (D. J. BH), *The Documentary Resources of the Bihor County Gendarmerie Forces*, inv. 32, dos. 12/1944, f. 223.

Therefore, the Gendarmerie Forces were commanded to resort to "immediate repression" if "these sectarians" became involved in illegal activities, which meant that they were to be delivered to judges.²

At the beginning of August 1944, the same Gendarmerie commander issued the *Circulary Order no. 2346* for all the local precincts and stations throughout the Bihor County. He acknowledges in the document that religious sects continue to activate intensely throughout the territory of the entire county, among which the most ardent seem to be the Baptists and the Pentecostals. An interesting note is that which states that "since their abolition in December 1942, the religious sects did not return to their old faith" (namely Eastern Orthodoxy or Roman Catholicism) but they nurture the hope that "at the end of the war, they will be given back their lost rights".³ At the same time, the commander points out to the emergence of a new sect called the "spiritists" (or the "spiritualists"), which will be supervised like all the sects even though it appears to be less dangerous.⁴

On April 12, 1944, the Bihor County Gendarmerie Forces sent an official letter to the local Gendarmerie Precinct in the village of Belfir,⁵ whereby information were requested concerning the newly emerged sect. At the same time, a report was to be drafted in order to answer the following questions:

- When did the sect appear?
- Who authorised the prayer house of the new sect?
- How does the sect manifest?

² Ibid., dos. 62/1944, f. 3.

³ Ibid., dos. 62/1944, f. 3.

⁴ Ibid., dos. 62/1944, f. 3.

⁵ Ibid., dos. 45/1944, f. 286.

The official answer was issued on April 18, 1944. We find out that “the new sect was founded within the territory of this precinct” at different dates:

- The sect of the spiritists or the spiritualists was founded in 1926 in the locality of Călacea having been “brought” from the village of Apateu, Arad County, by Ioan Cadar. The sect has 66 members and its present leader is Teodor Maghiar. We also learn that the sect opened a house of prayer without having a legal authorisation in this respect.
- The sect of the spiritists or the spiritualists was founded in 1925 in the locality of Girişu Negru due to the efforts of Gheorghe Iancu who “schooled himself” also in the village of Apateu, Arad County. The sect has 175 “adherents” and its leader is Gheorghe Pantea; they have a house of prayer which was “closed” on April 15, 1943.

Thus, the Spiritists or the Spiritualists were active in the two localities—Călacea and Girişu Negru—at the time when these formal Gendarmerie investigations were conducted. They did not give up the idea that they would be allowed to “function” once again.⁶ The Gendarmerie officers also fostered information about the way “the sect of the Spiritists activated”. We learn that the members of the sect gathered “in a house, around the table (...) where they read the Gospel (the Bible), sing religious hymns, perform the sign of the cross and pray; then, one of them—who is designated as ‘medium’—pretends to enter some sort of a lethargic state, so he begins to talk under the pretext that he is dominated by a spirit while the others listen to him and ask questions which he must answer.”⁷ The Spiritists held their meetings on Sunday evening and did not avoid the churches from which they had separated. On the contrary, they used to attend their religious services which made them appear less

⁶ Ibid., dos. 45/1944, f. 288.

⁷ Ibid., dos. 45/1944, f. 285.

dangerous to State authorities than the members of other outlawed “religious sects”.

The Bihor County Gendarmerie Forces “drafted” – based on available information – a “centralising numerical situation” of all “identified sectarians” throughout the Bihor County during the year 1944. These are some of the statistics:

- Baptists: 4724 (2981 men and 1743 women);
- Pentecostals: 243 (161 men and 82 women);
- Repenters or Nazarenes: 130 (64 men and 66 women);
- Seven Day Adventists: 85 (40 men and 45 women);
- Reformist Adventists: 15 (13 men and 2 women);
- Students of the Bible or Millennialists: 27 (all men).⁸

To conclude, a total number of 5197 members of “illegal religious associations” were identified in Bihor County during the year 1944.⁹ A year later, in 1945, we find out that 10 Baptists “died” or “illegally defected to Hungary”.¹⁰

By the end of 1945, a number of 10307 members of “forbidden sects” were active in the neighbouring county of Arad – almost twice as much as in the county of Bihor – which means that the religious manifestation of Neoprotestant denominations in Bihor during 1944-1945 was relatively limited by comparison to other regions in Western Romania.

⁸ Ibid., dos. 41/1944-1945. To all these we must of course add the Spiritists or the Spiritualists of Călacea and Girișu Negru, who were 241 in total.

⁹ Ibid., dos. 41/1944-1945.

¹⁰ Ibid., dos. 41/1944-1945, f. 21.

The Politics of the Communist State towards Religious Denominations. A Case Study: Bihor County in 1987

ANTONIO FAUR

The University of Oradea

ABSTRACT. Following some considerations regarding the measures taken by the Romanian Socialist State in order to exert a permanent and careful control over religious denominations, the author presents relevant information in this respect based on an unpublished documentary from the year 1987, written down by the Territorial Inspectorate for Cults in the counties of Bihor and Sălaj. The document contains precise data about the religious cults which existed that year (all of them mentioned in full), the number of believers in the county of Bihor (almost 548000), cult buildings (churches and prayer houses), the ministers (priests, pastors, deacons and singers), as well as cemeteries. Therefore, all these issues are presented as in a statistic radiography with special reference—in the second part of the article—to Neoprottestant denominations, notably Baptists and Pentecostals, which—although harshly dealt with by State authorities—were successfully engaged in current activities by resorting to cultural and confessional means of evident receptivity in total contradiction to the legal strictness devised by the Communist Regime.

KEYWORDS: Neoprottestantism, socialism, councils, evangelization, catechization

In the last years of the Socialist government in Romania, the political and administrative authorities of the State—especially the County Committees of the Communist Party and Popular Councils—paid an increasingly manifest attention to religious denominations by means of displaying a “revolutionary” vigi-

lence intended to annihilate them. The atheistic State continued its policy of total control over religious institutions in order to diminish the results of their activities by frequently resorting to persecution as well as other repressive techniques. The political power demanded as well as specifically asked that the authorities of internal affairs and justice should contribute—through their specific capabilities—to the reduction of the influence exerted by religious denominations over regular citizens, who were forced to embrace exclusively the official Communist ideology that irreconcilably opposed Christian convictions.

The State apparatus (popular councils, the militia, the prosecutor's office, law-courts and secret services) was programmed to supervise the activity of religious denominations in such a way that, whenever it was deemed necessary, a brutal intervention by force should be carried out immediately. Thus, the State resorted to any means of preventing or even blocking the activity of some religious institutions, especially those belonging to Neoprottestant denominations (Baptists, Pentecostals, Adventists) which were not approved of by the State but were permanently accused of disseminating a foreign and consequently dangerous influence over the internal affairs of the State as well as its policy concerning the "orientation" of its citizens.

The closer we come to the end of the 1980s, the more obvious the "care"—or maybe the fear—of State authorities towards the religious phenomenon, which offered an alternative to Communist thought and life. The freedom of religious convictions—formally guaranteed by the Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Romania—was nothing but a demagogical slogan. In reality, the so-called religious freedom was heavily controlled by a complex bureaucratic network which was meant to minimise its impact on the "builders of socialism".

Thus, some of Romania's counties had a Department of Cults which hosted the activity of territorial inspectors. These persons were in charge of this particular aspect of local life and their duty was to collect information about legally recognised religious denominations, which were transmitted—mostly in writing—to

the county committees of the Communist Party and the popular councils as hierarchically superior institutions under whose authority they actually functioned.

Such exact information—of evident historiographical value—can be found in a *Documentary* compiled in 1987 by the Territorial Inspectorates of the counties of Bihor and Sălaj.¹ The *Documentary* makes reference to the “situations of the cults (i.e. religious denominations)” which were active throughout the territory of Bihor county but also had connections to other counties in Western Romania. Thus, we find out that, in 1987, the following legally recognised religious denominations were active in the county of Bihor:

Historical denominations:

- Eastern Orthodoxy
- Roman Catholicism
- The Jewish Religion

Protestant denominations:

- The Reformed Church (Calvinistic)
- The Evangelical Church (Lutheran)
- The Unitarian Church

Neoprotestant denominations:

- The Baptists²
- The Pentecostals
- The Seventh Day Adventists
- The Brethren (Christians by the Gospel)

The City of Oradea hosted the main “headquarters” of these denominations, as reflected in the following list:

¹ The documents can be found in my personal library as they were donated by the former territorial inspector for Cults who was in charge of Bihor and Sălaj counties.

² Romania’s Communist authorities wrongly placed the Baptists, who are an early seventeenth-century Protestant denomination/Christian confession, among the so-called Neoprotestant cults/denominations (the Editor’s note).

- The Eastern Orthodox Bishopric of Oradea (with parishes in three counties: Bihor, Sălaj and Satu Mare);
- The Reformed (Calvinist) Bishopric of Oradea (with ecclesial jurisdiction over the counties of Bihor, Sălaj, Satu Mare, Maramureș, Arad, Timiș and Caraș Severin);
- The Roman-Catholic Protopopiate of Oradea (with parishes in the counties of Bihor and Sălaj);
- The Jewish Community (in the county of Bihor);
- The Baptist Community of Oradea (with parishes in the counties of Bihor and Satu Mare);
- The Pentecostal Branch of Oradea (with believers in the counties of Bihor, Satu Mare, Sălaj, Maramureș, Cluj, Mureș and Harghita).

The statistical data concerning these denominations reveal that the county of Bihor hosted 547533 believers, out of which:

- Eastern Orthodox: 310000
- Reformed (Calvinists): 119000
- Roman Catholics: 75000
- Pentecostals: 20344
- Baptists: 20048
- Adventists: 852
- Jews: 791
- Unitarians: 693
- Evangelicals (Lutherans): 673
- Brethren (Christians by the Gospel): 232

The document also presents a list with religious buildings (churches and prayer houses) in Bihor county: 395 Eastern Orthodox, 103 Reformed (Calvinist), 91 Roman-Catholic, 187 Baptist, 95 Pentecostal, 11 Adventist, 3 Brethren (Christians by the Gospel), 3 Jewish, 1 Unitarian and 1 Evangelical (Lutheran). There were 51 religious buildings (churches and prayer houses) in the city of Oradea: 12 Eastern Orthodox, 14 Roman-Catholic, 10 Reformed (Calvinist), 4 Baptist and 3 Pentecostal.

The number of ministers for these religious denominations was the following: 446 priests and pastors, 276 deacons and 63 singers. In the county of Bihor, they had 603 cemeteries: 415 Eastern Orthodox, 107 Reformed (Calvinist), 47 Jewish, 15 Baptist, 11 Roman-Catholic, and 7 Pentecostal. Two small factories (owned by the Eastern Orthodox Bishopric of Oradea and by the Roman-Catholic Protopopiate of Oradea) produced candles for believers.

Neoprotestant denominations also had musical bands (with at least 20 believers) which involved approximately 3500 citizens in Bihor county; it is significant that almost half of them, namely 1700, were “young people and children”. Baptists were the first as they had 71 musical bands—48 choirs, 14 orchestras and 18 brass bands—which caused a lot of “trouble” to the representatives of local State authorities. Thus, those in charge of supervising this particular aspect of church life were worried because these musical bands exerted a real influence over young people who felt attracted by their activities that came very close to their specific preoccupations. There were also some musical bands among Pentecostals—5 choirs, 5 orchestras and 2 brass bands—and Adventists—4 choirs and 3 orchestras—as the record tells us with reference to the county of Bihor in 1987.

The Communist authorities of the State were very careful in supervising the Neoprotestant denominations which were given—with great difficulty based on a postponement policy—the much needed formal authorisation that allowed them to erect new religious buildings. The representatives of the State authorities in the county of Bihor drafted a *Table* with all the localities where Neoprotestant believers organised religious gatherings without having “an authorised religious building”, so they acted in some sort of quasi-legality. This phenomenon was extremely widespread as confirmed by the data of the *Table*:

- Unauthorised Baptist “religious buildings” were identified in 5 localities: Chijic, Săud, Totoreni, Tinca și Meziad;

- Unauthorised Pentecostal “religious buildings” were identified in 36 localities: Aleșd, Apateu, Alparea, Butani, Borumlaca, Bucuroaia, Bogei, Beiuș, Buciumi, Bălnaca, Burda, Ciuhoi, Corbești, Dușești, Dobrești, Fânațe, Forău, Ferice, Gruilung, Goila, Dr. Petru Groza (presently Ștei), Hinchiriș, Lazuri, Munteni, Răcaș, Șuncuiușul de Beiuș, Seghiște, Izbuc, Săud, Sărand, Săcuieni, Tinăud, Țigănești, Pietroasa, Vârciorog și Vărășeni.

It is crucial to notice the fact that the authorities of the Socialist State examined all these data concerning the activity of Neoprottestant denominations in order to establish “the forms and methods” whereby Neoprottestant believers managed to “promote” their religious involvement. The Communist authorities perceived the religious involvement of Neoprottestant believers as an attempt to resist the policy of the state by strengthening and expanding a wide range of specific events pertaining to religious life. Thus, the local representatives of State authorities made a list containing the main activities performed by Neoprottestant denominations in order to promote their religious life:

- The organisation of “evangelisation weeks” in most authorised as well as unauthorised religious buildings, which were attended by guests from other churches but also from abroad; these “evangelisation weeks” often culminated with the “pompous celebration of water baptism”;
- Every “religious service” had a “so-called” evangelisation hour, when believers made various comments on specific texts from the Bible;
- The organisation, especially by young believers, of “Bible studies”;
- “The catechization of children” performed by “trained individuals” who had pedagogical skills so the results were highly successful;

- The adults were encouraged to get involved in musical activities within the previously mentioned musical bands. Thus, they had the opportunity to put their musical and interpretative talents to good use, which exerted a powerful influence on young people;
- The organisation of “charitable activities” which were meant to support especially the members who were “in need” or to recruit new “proselytes”. The Adventists, for instance, had a “group of sisters” (called Tabitha), which was actively involved in such charitable actions;
- The attempt to promote “on a larger scale” some intellectuals who were meant to lead the religious congregations and/or preach;
- The involvement of “missionaries” from abroad who sometimes came with “various choirs and instrumental bands”.

To conclude, Neoprottestant denominations—especially the Baptists and the Pentecostals—found numerous ways to continue their religious activities, sometimes with great effectiveness, despite the endless counter-measures initiated by the local representatives of the Communist political regime. These show their capacity of survival within a very politically hostile environment because their main defence “weapons” were internal discipline as well as the capacity to attract new believers through personal convictions, charitable events and musical activities.

© Copyright 2008 by Editura Universității Emanuel/Emanuel University Press,
Str. Nufărului Nr. 87, 410597 Oradea, Bihor, România/Romania

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, translated, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior written permission of the publisher.

Authorisation to publish items for personal use is granted free of charge by
Editura Universității Emanuel/Emanuel University Press,
provided that the publisher is contacted directly at
Editura Universității Emanuel/Emanuel University Press,
Str. Nufărului Nr. 87, 410597 Oradea, Bihor, România/Romania.

NOTES FOR CONTRIBUTORS

Articles for *Perichoresis* can be submitted on disk and in hardcopy to the Board of Editors. However, we advise all contributors to send their articles by email to the Managing Editor at perichoresis@emanuel.ro. Each submission will be acknowledged in this format.

The average length of articles should be 5.000-8.000 words. We are willing, however, to consider articles in excess of 8.000 words should such a length be absolutely necessary. All articles should be written at a single line spacing with endnotes (not footnotes), which must be typed at a single line spacing and must be justified entirely. For instance, we suggest the following format: Philip E. Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 140-141. Terms like *idem*, *ibidem* (*ibid.*), and *op. cit.* can be used but not exceedingly. Double quotation marks should be used for quotation, and single quotation marks for quotation within a quotation. Greek and Hebrew words need not be transliterated and they should not be used very often. Transliteration is accepted only if performed in accordance with current academic rules. Please note that all articles must be preceded by a brief abstract (up to 200 words).

The Board of Editors and the Editorial Advisors will assess every submission and all contributors will be informed in due course on whether their articles are considered for publication or not.

PERICHORESIS

is published by

Editura Universității Emanuel/Emanuel University Press and
Centrul pentru Cercetarea și Promovarea Valorilor Evanghelice/
The Centre for the Research and Promotion of Evangelical Values
Str. Nufărului Nr. 87, 410597 Oradea, Bihor
România/Romania

and printed for EMANUEL UNIVERSITY PRESS by

S.C. ROPRINT S.R.L.
Str. Horea Nr. 82, 400275 Cluj-Napoca, Cluj
Tel/Fax: +40-264-432384, Email: roprintcluj@xnet.ro
România/Romania

PERICHORESIS

THE THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL OF EMANUEL UNIVERSITY OF ORADEA

Editura Universității Emanuel/
Emanuel University Press

Centrul pentru Cercetarea și Promovarea Valorilor Evanghelice/
The Centre for the Research and Promotion of Evangelical Values

Str. Nufărului Nr. 87
410597 Oradea, Bihor
România/Romania

Email: perichoresis@emanuel.ro
www.emanuel.ro

ISSN 1224-984X