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VOLUME X, NUMBER 2

April, 2000

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Designed and typeset by Avant Books, P. O. Box 2, Taunton, Somerset, TAI 4ZD, England.

Printed by Stuart Dick Printing Co., Kingsdale House, Martinet Road, Old Airfield Industrial Estate, Thornaby, Cleveland TS17 0AS, England.

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Editorial office: *Christianity & Society*, P. O. Box 2, Taunton, Somerset, TAI 4ZD, England.
Tel. (01823) 665909 Fax. (01823) 665721
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Subscriptions: four consecutive issues

UK: £12.00

Europe: £15.00 (airmail). Sterling only drawn on a bank in the UK or Eurocheque

USA: \$30.00 (airmail). US dollars only drawn on a bank in the USA

All other subscriptions: £20.00 (airmail).

Sterling only drawn on a bank in the UK.

Cheques payable to: The Kuyper Foundation.

For credit card payments see p. 32

Subscription offices:

UK and Europe: P. O. Box 2, Taunton, Somerset TAI 4ZD, England

America: P. O. Box 20514, Seattle, Washington 98102, USA

All others & credit card payments:

P. O. Box 2, Taunton, Somerset TAI 4ZD, England

EDITORIAL

THE SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES OF APOSTASY

by Stephen C. Perks

JANUARY 1ST 2000 came and went without the collapse of civilisation predicted by some as God's judgement upon the Western world for its apostasy and idolatry. Does this mean that the West is not under judgement, that God will not condemn and punish our society for its sins? No. But it does mean that the false prophets who predicted the computer calamity have misunderstood the real nature of God's judgement of human wickedness, a mistake they might not have made had they heeded Christ's words in Lk. 13:1–5 concerning the fate of those upon whom the tower of Siloam fell. I believe God does still judge men and nations. But I do not think we should look to catastrophic events, especially natural events, as God's judgement upon man's sins (though sometimes the suffering that natural disasters inflict upon men is the consequence of man's own foolishness—I am reminded of someone who said that God made a world in which there are earthquakes, but men choose to live along the San Andreas fault line—and the computer problem, had it been real, would doubtless have fitted this category nicely).

God did judge the world with a catastrophic event when he flooded the world and saved only Noah and his family. But he made a promise that he would never judge the world in such a way again. Why? Because he commanded Noah and his descendents after him to judge the world instead. The rainbow is often thought of as a symbol of God's promise to man, which indeed it is; but it is as often misunderstood because of the failure to recognise that it is the sign of a covenant between God and man, and along with the promise there came a duty, namely, that man from thenceforth should fulfill God's command to execute murderers. When we see the rainbow, therefore, we should be reminded not only of God's promise not to judge the world in the way he did with the Flood, i.e. a direct judgement from God in the form of a natural catastrophe, but also of the covenant command given to man to execute God's judgement, God's justice, upon those who do evil (Gen. 9:5–6). This was the beginning of the work of the State or civil magistrate. Instead of God's direct judgement on men for their sin *man* was henceforth to execute God's wrath upon the evildoer. Prior to the Flood, neither Cain nor Lamech were punished for their crimes, and it seems that God forbade anyone to punish Cain (Gen. 4:15). This perhaps explains the terrible state of the world prior to the Flood. There was no external restraint on man's sin through the office of the magistrate. So God obliterated the wicked "civilisation" that grew up in those days. If God was never to do this again there must necessarily be some other external means of restraining sin and stopping the state of affairs that existed prior to the Flood from developing again. The means God instituted for this was the magistrate, or State. Man would now have to judge man for his sin according to God's word. This was man's side of the covenant, the covenant duty that God required of man, viz the establishment of the State as a ministry of public justice to execute God's wrath upon the evildoer (Rom. 13:1–7).

But what happens when the State does not do this? What happens when the State, instead of executing God's wrath, i.e. justice according to God's law, upon men for their crimes, seeks

to rule society according to some other principle? In other words, what if the State, instead of serving God, becomes idolatrous? Justice is then aborted in the name of justice. Evil gets called good and good evil. The innocent are condemned and the guilty set free (cf. Is 5:20–24). Is there no judgement of God upon this condition? There certainly is. But I do not believe we should assume such judgement will come by means of natural disaster in an instant. Of course, there are exceptions, such as the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, but I do not believe this is how God's wrath is inflicted upon men and nations as a general rule. No, judgement comes slowly and imperceptibly. It creeps up on us and we fail to notice it. And this is precisely what is happening in our society today. The judgement we face as a society is the very consequences of our failure to serve and obey God. For example, the failure of the State to serve God, to execute the evildoer, means that our society is now stuffed full of evil and we suffer under the tyranny of the evil that our governments have refused to condemn. This is God's judgement: man's failure to love his neighbour by obeying God's law and thus the evil that society must suffer at the hands of the wicked.

When men refuse to obey God they have to suffer the consequences of their sin. The same is true of our society. It has refused to obey God, and now it suffers the inevitable judgement, namely, the evil that unrighteousness brings upon society when it is allowed to flourish unrestricted by the State. God gives men up to their own sin when they refuse to serve him (cf. Rom. 1:24ff.). This is how God's judgement is manifested in our society. And in their idolatrous stupor, men fail to see that their unrestrained sin leads to the death of their culture and of their society. This is the judgement that we now face as a society, the judgement of being given up to our own sin. We are being delivered up by God to man, to man's own messianic pretensions, and we suffer the consequences of society's refusal to serve and obey God. We are already under this judgement, which is a fearful and devastating punishment, but our society, and even many in the church, fail to realise what is happening and thus fail to see that our only deliverance is through repentance. We need not look to natural catastrophe or to the breakdown of the infrastructure of commerce by computer failure as the means of God's judgement upon the sins of our nation. Not that such things are impossible or even unlikely to happen. I question only whether it is correct to anticipate such things, or interpret them when they do come, as God's judgement upon us. Why? Because God has already judged us, and we have been under this judgement for some time. But men fail to see it.

What then is the judgement that we face? It is the daily crime in our society; the broken marriages and divorce; the injustice of the "justice" system; the promotion of permissive sexual mores and the diseases associated with such a lifestyle; the delinquency of a generation that has not learned the need for and thus rejects any form of moral discipline; the idolatrous and messianic politics of our age, which promises the earth and delivers nothing but more of what has caused the disintegration of our community in the first place; and now, the deliverance of our nation into servitude under the godless super-State of the European Union—our very own Babylon! This is the judgement, the consequences of our failure as a nation to obey God and submit to his word, and it continues and will continue until men repent, turn to God for forgiveness and submit themselves to God in Christ.

As part of this submission to God we must seek to understand what God requires of us not only as individuals and as churches, but as a society and a nation also, since the Great Commission that Christ gave to his church was that we should go out and make disciples of the *nations*. We must seek to call our

nation back to God, back to the gospel and back the law of God as man's rule for life, which is, after all, the ideal upon which our nation is established as a Christian nation in covenant with God, as the coronation oath makes so abundantly plain. The terrible apostasy of our nation from this covenant does not mean that the gospel and the law of God should be cast off once and for all by the nation, but rather that we should work for the repentance and restoration of the nation.

This is the purpose for which the Kuyper Foundation works. And in this task we have made Abraham Kuyper's

mission statement our own: "One desire has been the ruling passion of my life. One high motive has acted like a spur upon my mind and soul. And sooner than that I should seek escape from the sacred necessity that is laid upon me, let the breath of life fail me. It is this: That in spite of all worldly opposition, God's holy ordinances shall be established again in the home, in the school and in the State for the good of the people; to carve as it were into the conscience of the nation the ordinances of the Lord, to which Bible and Creation bear witness, until the nation pays homage again to him." *C&S*

THE EURODILEMMA

by *John Peck*

Do you remember voting for your Euro MP? On average, out of every ten people, about eight don't. All our leaders and media spokesmen seem to have been amazed and disappointed about this. All sorts of reasons are offered, mainly connected with lack of communication with the public. That, in spite of the fact that the subject has been a matter of discussion for years! Why is that the English are so insular, so indifferent?

Well, I voted, and I'm still not very sure. I suspect that my difficulties are something of a clue to this question—a reason which doesn't seem to have been explored much anywhere.

Here's my problem; I share our country's instinctive dislike for the way Europeans make and use legislation, but I'm beginning to feel that our social order is in such a mess, that European courts might be the only recourse for its victims.

We often moan about the flood of regulations pouring forth from the bureaucrats in Brussels. This is, I suggest, symptomatic of our basically different attitude to law. Law, on the Continent, is regarded as the result of a social contract. Laws are therefore made by leaders on behalf of their citizens, who are the ultimate authority. One result of this is that lawmaking tends to become a way of establishing one's status as a leader. Regulations are a way of telling Joe public that their leaders and representatives are busy. Another result is that citizenship is, unlike our legal tradition, seen as a matter of rights rather than duties. Yet another is that citizens feel that they can exercise discretion in obeying the law.

But here, we feel that keeping the law is a duty. Breaking it is wrong, needing serious justification. Recently in a Dutch restaurant (they are among the most orderly of Europeans!), I noticed food being handled quite cheerfully and openly without gloves. But here, as soon as the regulations required it, every restaurant took them very seriously. I recall seeing the interaction between citizens and police over smuggling coffee beans up the east coast of Spain as reminiscent of comic opera! Ask our farmers and fishermen what they feel about this continental disregard for the law!

One further effect of this is to give the police absolute discretion in enforcing the law; they can decide whether to

prosecute a particular lawbreaker, or conveniently ignore him. Where the police are poorly paid, what we would call bribery is more like paying for the expenses. In such a situation the police are no longer subject to the law so completely in the way we accept as normal.

There is a historical reason for this, which space forbids me to demonstrate fully. It is, briefly, that our legal tradition is unique in being based on the Bible. The code which is fundamental to our lawmaking was established by a giant now lost in the myths of history—Alfred the Great. It was explicitly an integration of indigenous tribal law with the Law of Moses. The Norman invasion and all subsequent history did not eradicate the special character of that basic legislation. It established an ethos, a mind-set, which still survives, albeit now under threat of erosion. Our instinctive regard for law, our sense of shock at even hints of police corruption, derive from our sense that law is authorised "from above" and all, but all of us are subject to it.

But this instinct drew its strength from a communal conviction about a God to whom all of us, even our Sovereign, were accountable. And that belief is steadily disappearing. Only some 15 per cent of us actually attend an act of worship, let alone go in for serious study of Christian truth. So, of the rest even those who say they believe in God only have the vaguest idea of what he might be like. "Religious" people are seen as increasingly irrelevant. With no tradition which authorises the law, we could become a people who no longer see any binding reason for law keeping at all. In our increasingly violent and fragmented community life, we could become ungovernable—some would say we are virtually in that condition already. Well, faced with that possibility, even European law, pagan and humanistic its origins might be, would be preferable.

But then I hope and pray for an intelligent revival of our Christian faith, and I don't want to take irrevocable steps. But suppose we just won't have it . . . but surely we will, won't we? Won't you? There's my dilemma, which I suspect inhibits many, unable to explain themselves in words, from getting involved. Yours, really, "for God and country"—but especially for God, for without him, the country falls apart under the pressure of human pride and greed. *C&S*

CANNIBALISM AND HUMAN SACRIFICE VINDICATED?[†]

by Thomas Schirrmacher

PART II (concluded)

9. *Human sacrifice vindicated?*

THE phenomenon to which we have already referred, whereby the bias against the Christian religion not only rejects out of hand as incredible innumerable Christian sources—and which sources until the century before last were not in some measure Christian?²—but also in consequence takes under its wing cannibalism as something which is not reprehensible and which can be explained in terms of religion and culture,¹ becomes much more evident in dealing with the example of human sacrifice.

Let us take an example. According to the ethnologist Michelle Zimbalist, among the Ingolots of New Guinea the last beheading in the context of headhunting took place in 1972.² Nigel Davies comments: “The anthropologist declares that the killing was of a purely ritual nature, and not influenced by politics.”³ So a ritual, religious killing is not bad, whereas a political one would be. The ethical system capable of making judgments of this nature is not revealed to us.

Friedrich Schwenn writes similarly concerning the ancient human sacrifices, for which he puts forward many explanations,⁴ “that the human sacrifices were by no means the result of cruelty or anthropophagy.”⁵

Against this view, the folklorist K. Beth objects:

The fact that human sacrifices may be the result of sheer cruelty is adequately witnessed by such incidences of cruel slaughter of human beings as those carried out by Nero. But in general they are so strongly linked to a ritual religious observance that both their origin and their continuance find their psychological explanation in the most diverse forms of heathen religion which share a particular attitude to faith.⁶

[†] Translated from the German by Peter Beale.

1. Explanations of and excuses for cannibalism are discussed by Christian Spiel, *Menschen essen Menschen*, pp. 201–212, 217f.

2. Michelle Zimbalist Ronaldo, “Skulls and Causality,” *Man* (London) 12 (1977) 1, p. 168f.

3. Nigel Davies, *Opfertod und Menschenopfer*, p. 319.

4. Friedrich Schwenn, *Die Menschenopfer bei den Griechen und Römern*, p. 317.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 5, summarizing the convictions of Euaristus Mader.

6. K. Beth, “Menschenopfer,” columns 156–174 in Hanns

The professor of ethnology Hanns J. Prem writes: “Meanwhile the view of life which motivates human sacrifices has been increasingly understood.”⁷

In this “understanding,” naturally the theory of evolution plays an important rôle.⁸

This understanding constantly leads to special treatment of Indian tribes and other groups when it is a question of deeds of violence. This is true of the once very warlike Kaiapos in Brazil. Chief Paulinhi Paiacan, formerly a shining example for the Brazilian Indians and the environmentalists, lost his reputation first through his involvement in multi-million-pound industries in mahogany, gold and chestnut oil, and finally as a result of his rape of an 18-year-old girl.⁹ He refuses to give himself up to the authorities. He said, “I despise the law of the white man,”¹⁰ and because of this he does not consider them to apply to him. His tribe, the Kaiapos, supports him, so that the government is undecided what it should do. Finally, the tribe is known to be very warlike, and in 1981 was responsible for the massacre of twenty farm-workers. Anyone who does not lend his support to Paiacan is regarded as having antiquated ideas. But the fact is constantly overlooked that this is a matter of a violent crime, and protection is enjoyed only by the surviving protagonists, not their victims. And it has long been proved that these victims suffer, fight for their rights, and have need of state protection just as much as in other cultures.¹¹

Bächthold Stäubli (ed.), *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens*, vol. 6 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1987 [reprint from 1935]); this quotation col. 158.

7. Hanns J. Prem, “Geschichte Altamerikas,” *Oldenbourg Grundriss der Geschichte* 23 (Munich: E. Oldenbourg, 1989), p. 172. His principal reference is to M. León-Portilla, “Die Religion,” pp. 236–258 in Hanns J. Prem, U. Dyckerhoff (ed.), *Das Alte Mexiko* (Munich, 1986).

8. Particularly blatant in A.A. Demarest, “Overview: Mesoamerican Human Sacrifice in Evolutionary Perspectives,” pp. 227–243 in E.H. Boone (ed.), *Ritual Human Sacrifice in Mesoamerica* (Washington, 1984).

9. According to *Die Welt* No. 140 (18/6/1992), p. 3.

10. *Ibid.*

11. Cf. especially Derek Freeman, *Liebe ohne Aggression: Margaret Meads Legende von der Friedfertigkeit der Naturvölker*.

10. *The widespread incidence of human sacrifice*

Let us now turn briefly to the distribution of incidences of human sacrifice. Human sacrifices were spread throughout the world.¹² This is especially true of the particular form of the sacrifice of human beings on the occasion of the laying of a foundation stone: “The building sacrifice is a custom to be found throughout the whole world, and among people of every stage of culture . . . Doubtless the original building sacrifices were men who were entombed alive in the foundations of the building. In this case the sacrifice of children is remarkably common.”¹³

Unlike cannibalism, human sacrifice is widespread, and not restricted to particular cultures. “There are only a few races and a few religions with a history which is free of human sacrifices.”¹⁴

At the same time its existence is constantly covered up. “It is an essential feature of religious historical writing that mention of human sacrifices is suppressed. Nonetheless the fact that they frequently took place is undisputed.”¹⁵

The world-wide incidence of human sacrifice can be demonstrated by a number of examples from history.

Greeks and Romans: We may begin our collection of examples with the human sacrifices of the Greeks¹⁶ and Romans:¹⁷ “When we take into account all the works of art of our literature which deal with human sacrifices, together with the sagas of classical antiquity, human sacrifices constitute a relatively not insignificant proportion of our intellectual property.”¹⁸

In the case of the Romans it was only the spread of Christianity which brought an end to human sacrifices: “Cæsar Commodus (180–192 A.D.), for instance, killed human beings in rites which belonged to the cult of Mithras. This had become very popular in Rome, before Christianity became the official religion.”¹⁹

Certain human sacrifices were forbidden for the first time by the Roman Senate in 97 B.C., but it is not clear which human sacrifices these were. Cæsar Augustus forbade Roman citizens to take part in human sacrifices. Not until

Cæsar Claudius was the ban made universal. Then under later emperors it was included in the *corpus iuris*, the imperial legal code.²⁰ “But it was difficult to get rid of something which had once been a living faith.”²¹

America: A well-attested example is that of the “human sacrifices of the Skidi-Pawnees, formerly inhabitants of Nebraska.”²² The last human sacrifice took place in 1838.²³ The sacrifices were well-known, because in 1817 and 1818 a chieftain and his son Petalesharro prevented two human sacrifices.²⁴ In 1827 an Indian agent succeeded in obtaining the freedom of a captured Cheyenne girl.²⁵ In 1838 for the last time men lost their lives in trying to escape from sacrifice at the hands of the Skidi-Pawnees.²⁶

In the case of North America it is, however, essentially true that “Among North American Indian cultures evidence of human sacrifices is less easy to find.”²⁷

Africa: In Africa human sacrifices were specially widespread in connection with the burial of kings. Just to give one example: “The Barundi slaughtered vast numbers of men, so that the spirit of the king should not seek vengeance; even many a leading Barundi was killed in order to calm down the king’s courtiers.”²⁸

China: At the death of many Chinese emperors various servants, wives and concubines, soldiers or members of the royal household had also to die.²⁹

Incas: The sun maidens were chosen throughout the whole kingdom at the age of ten years. They were brought up in their own convents, either to become brides of the sun god, or else to become wives and concubines of the officials. The Inca was the only man allowed to enter the convent at any time, in order to select concubines for his harem. It was also he alone who decided whom they should marry, presenting the sun maidens as a mark of honour to officials, artists and others.³⁰ “Human sacrifices were much more rare among the Incas than among their well-known contemporaries in Mexico, the Aztecs. In Tahuanti-suyu humans were sacrificed above all when the health of the ruler or the success of a military campaign was at stake, or with a view to averting an epidemic and driving it out of the country.”³¹

12. Nigel Davies, *Opfertod und Menschenopfer*; Kay A. Read, “Human Sacrifice,” p. 515f. in Mircea Eliade (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1987) vol. 6; A.E. Crawley et al., “Human Sacrifice,” pp. 840–867 in James Hastings (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, vol. 6 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1937); Karl Bruno Leder, *Todesstrafe* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch-Verlag, 1986), pp. 49–56 (although this includes some disputed Old Testament examples).

13. Stübe, “Bauopfer,” sec. 962–964 in Hanns Bächtold Stäubli (ed.), *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens*, vol. 1 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1987 [reprint from 1927]), this quotation sec. 962 (along with further literature).

14. A.E. Crawley, “Human Sacrifice (Introductory and Primitive),” pp. 840–845 in James Hastings (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, vol. 6 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1937), this quotation p. 840.

15. Patrick Tierney, *Zu Ehren der Götter: Menschenopfer in den Anden* (Munich: Droemer Knaur, 1989), p. 13. (Sadly, by this Tierney means, as we shall see, also the Bible.)

16. Friedrich Schwenn, *Die Menschenopfer bei den Griechen und Römern*, pp. 18–139; A.C. Pearson, “Human Sacrifice (Greek),” pp. 847–849 in James Hastings (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, vol. 6 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1937).

17. Friedrich Schwenn, *Die Menschenopfer bei den Griechen und Römern*, pp. 140–196; R. Wüsch, “Human Sacrifice (Roman),” pp. 858–862 in James Hastings (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, vol. 6 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1937).

18. Friedrich Schwenn, *Die Menschenopfer bei den Griechen und Römern*, p. 2.

19. Nigel Davies, *Opfertod und Menschenopfer*, p. 52.

20. In all cases sources in Nigel Davies, *Opfertod und Menschenopfer*, p. 186f.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 187; examples *ibid.*, pp. 188–193.

22. Sonja Brigitte Ross, *Das Menschenopfer der Skidi-Pawnee, Völkerkundliche Arbeiten 1* (Bonn: Holo, 1989), p. 7. The whole of the book discusses the evidence, sources and background of individual cases.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 8f.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 10f.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

28. K. Beth, “Menschenopfer,” *op. cit.*, col. 160.

29. Nigel Davies, *Opfertod und Menschenopfer*, pp. 37–40; J. Dyer Ball, “Human Sacrifice (Chinese),” pp. 845–847 in James Hastings (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, vol. 6 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1937).

30. Cf. the excellent short brief study by my teacher, Wilfried Westphal, *Unter den Schwingen des Kondor: Das Reich der Inka Gestern und Heute* (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1985), pp. 85–88 (with further literature and sources), and also Miloslav Stingl, *Inka: Ruhm und Untergang der Sonnensöhne* (Leipzig: Urania-Verlag, 1989), pp. 197–199.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 197. Cf. on the human sacrifices of the Maya: Klaus Helfreich, “Menschenopfer und Tötungsrituale im Kult der Maya,” *Monumenta Americana* 9 (Berlin: Gebr. Mann, 1973); Wilfried Westphal, *Die Maya: Volk im Schatten seiner Vater* (Herrsching: Manfred Pawlak, 1986) (reprinted by C. Bertelsmann, Gütersloh [Mayas, see Register p. 398]); Paul deParrie, Mary Pride, *Ancient Empires of the New Age* (Westchester: Crossway Books, 1989), pp. 103–120.

Aztecs:³² The best-known human sacrifices in history are doubtless the human sacrifices of the Aztecs, which we have already referred to in connection with cannibalism.

The scale of human sacrifice is appalling. Some 70–80,000 victims were sacrificed at the dedication of the main pyramid in Tenochtitlan in 1487. Whereas earlier estimates had pointed to an average annual sacrifice of about 15,000 human victims in central Mexico (out of a population of two million), recent population estimates push the total as high as 25 million, and suggest that as many as 250,000, one percent of the total population were sacrificed each year.³³

This involved above all the offering of the heart: “The Mesoamerican human sacrifices were mainly carried out by the excision of the heart.”³⁴

The Latin-Americologist and journalist Patrick Tierney underwent great dangers to unearth contemporary evidence for human sacrifice in the Andes.³⁵ He states that the authorities and judiciary seek to ignore the problem.

Teutons:³⁶ In the case of the Teutons, human sacrifices were the highest sacrifices offered to almost all the important gods: “So the most important and highest sacrifices are human sacrifices: there are numerous testimonies to their being offered to Zeus, Woden, Donar, Odin, Thor, Freyr, Foiste, Thorgerd and Hölga-brud.”³⁷

32. Cf. on human sacrifice in ancient Mexico, especially the Aztecs, the standard work by Y. González Torres, *El sacrificio humano entre los Mexicas* (Mexico, 1985). Intelligible to all is Nigel B. Davies, *Opfertod und Menschenopfer* (Düsseldorf: Econ, 1981); cf. also Hanns J. Prem, “Geschichte Altamerikas,” *Oldenbourg Grundriss der Geschichte* 23 (Munich: E. Oldenbourg, 1989), p. 172f.; Michael Harner, “The Ecological Basis for Aztec Sacrifice,” *op. cit.*; M. Harris, *Kannibalen und Könige: Aufstieg und Niedergang der Menschheitskulturen* (Frankfurt: 1978) (English version *Cannibals and Kings* [New York: Random House, 1977]); David Carrasco, “Human Sacrifice: Aztec Rites,” pp. 516–523 in *Mircea Eliade* (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1987), vol. 6. On cannibalism of the descendants of the Incas, Aztecs, etc., i.e. of the South American Indians, cf. Alfred Métraux, “Warfare, Cannibalism, and Human Trophies,” pp. 383–410 in Julian H. Steward (ed.), *Handbook of South American Indians*, vol. 5: “The Comparative Ethnology of South American Indians,” Smithsonian Institution: Bureau of American Ethnology: *Bulletin* 143 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1949) (with bibliography).

33. Roger M. Keesing, *Cultural Anthropology: A Contemporary Perspective* (New York: CBS Publishing Japan, 1981), p. 153, referring to Michael Harner, “The Ecological Basis for Aztec Sacrifice,” *Ethnology* 4 (1977), pp. 117–135. The older estimate comes from S.F. Cook, “Human sacrifice and warfare as factors in the demography of pre-colonial Mexico,” *Human Biology* 18 (1946), pp. 81–102. The later estimate by Harner refers to Borah. Hanns J. Prem, *Geschichte Altamerikas*, p. 273, refers to a letter from Borah stating that Harner’s interpretation is a mistaken one.

34. Hanns J. Prem, *Geschichte Altamerikas*, p. 173. Cf. the contribution by a heart surgeon, F. Robicsek Hales, “Maya Heart Sacrifice, Cultural Perspective and Surgical Technique,” pp. 49–90 in E.H. Boone (ed.), *Ritual Human Sacrifice in Mesoamerica* (Washington, 1984).

35. Patrick Tierney, *Zu Ehren der Götter*.

36. Cf. Eugen Mogk, “Menschenopfer bei den Germanen, Abhandlungen der Königlich-Sächsischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften,” *Philologisch-historische Klasse* 27 (1909), pp. 601–643 (= No. 17, pp. 1–43); R.L.M. Derolez, *Götter und Mythen der Germanen* (Wiesbaden: VMA, n.d. [reprinted Einsiedeln: Benzinger, 1963]), pp. 103, 105, 149, 193, 226–228, 236–239, 242–243, 249; Wolfgang Golther, *Handbuch der germanischen Mythologie* (Kettwig: Magnus, 1985) [reprint of 1908 edition], pp. 561–565; K. Beth, “Menschenopfer,” *op. cit.* (with further literature); Eugen Mogk, “Human Sacrifice (Teutonic),” pp. 865–867 in James Hastings (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, vol. 6 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1937).

37. Wolfgang Golther, *Handbuch der germanischen Mythologie*, p. 561

First of all by way of evidence we have archaeological discoveries. The well-known marsh corpses may well, for instance, have been closely connected with human sacrifices.³⁸ In addition there are many descriptions by Roman and other authors. Friedrich Schwenn summarises the report of Tacitus, generally regarded as reliable, in his *Germania*:³⁹ “Among the Teutons in springtime the priest of the Nerthus would drive the goddess’s carriage, bedecked with hangings, through the land, and everywhere there were joyful feasts in the amphictyony. After that the carriage was washed in the holy lake, and the servants who had been involved in the ceremony were drowned.”⁴⁰

R. L. M. Derolez outlines Strabo’s reliable account:

For which god the extremely gruesome human sacrifice was intended, which Strabo ascribes to the Cimri, this author does not tell us. But he gives a precise account of the ceremony: “The women who went into battle with the men were led by priestesses who could foretell the future. These priestesses were grey-haired women robed in white garments . . . With sword in hand they marched through the camp towards the prisoners of war, crowned them with wreaths, and led them to a bronze cauldron with a capacity of about twenty bucketsful. By the side of this cauldron there stood a ladder. They climbed up it, cut the throat of each prisoner of war as he was passed up to them. According to the way in which the blood flowed into the cauldron, they prophesied the future. Others cut up the bodies of the prisoners of war, and after examining their entrails declared in a loud voice that their people would win the victory.”⁴¹

Wolfgang Golther mentions another Teutonic custom which lacks none of the cruelty of the Aztecs’ practice of excising the heart: “The cruel Nordic custom of the cutting of the blood eagle, whereby the victor would cleave his opponent’s ribs asunder with his sword the length of the spine, and remove the lungs through the opening thus formed, was a cultic act.”⁴²

Sometimes the victims could be prominent people, even though it was mainly prisoners of war and criminals who were sacrificed by the Teutons: “Thus the Swedes sacrificed Olaf, their king, to Odin in order to obtain a good year.”⁴³

In 743 at the Synod of Liftinae (Belgium), presided over by Boniface, the still performed practice of human sacrifice was forbidden.⁴⁴ But for a long time after that building sacrifices and the walling up of children remained common practice.⁴⁵ In Oldenburg children were offered in building sacrifices as late as the seventeenth century.⁴⁶

(examples for sources, *ibid.*, pp. 561–565). As the oldest compilation of such sacrifices Golther cites P.G. Schütze, *De cruentis Germanorum gentium victimis humanis* (Leipzig, 1743).

38. Cf. especially the famous marsh corpse Tolland (Jutland), depicted e.g. in R.L.M. Derolez, *Götter und Mythen der Germanen*, plate 28 (next to p. 241).

39. Friedrich Schwenn, *Die Menschenopfer bei den Griechen und Römern*, p. 32 (p. 32f. note 2, also Latin text from *Germania* 40).

40. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

41. R.M.L. Derolez, *Götter und Mythen der Germanen*, p. 227f. Derolez considers that the sacrifice was intended for Woden.

42. Wolfgang Golther, *Handbuch der germanischen Mythologie*, p. 562.

43. M. Beth, “Kinderopfer,” col. 1361–1364 in Hanns Bächtold Stäubli (ed.), *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens*, vol. 4 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1987 [reprint of 1932 edition]), this quotation col. 1361. On the saga of the Swedish King Aun, who sacrificed his sons, cf. R.L.M. Derolez, *Götter und Mythen der Germanen*, p. 104f.

44. K. Beth, “Menschenopfer,” *op. cit.*, col. 161.

45. *Ibid.*, col. 166.

46. Eugen Mogk, “Human Sacrifice (Teutonic),” *op. cit.*, p. 867,

It is always the introduction of Christianity which spells the end for human sacrifices. Thus it is stated of the Normans: “The practice of human sacrifice continued unabated among the Normans, until in the tenth century they were converted to Christianity.”⁴⁷

And concerning Iceland we are told: “On the occasion of the introduction of Christianity to Iceland, at the Althing in the year 1000, the heathen offered to their idols two men from each quarter of the country. In contrast the Christians decided to dedicate the same number of men of excellence and ability to the service of the Lord.”⁴⁸

However, this rôle of Christianity is not always appreciated. Thus Nigel Davies writes quite “neutrally”: “Human sacrifice in the conventional sense will doubtless disappear, as forms of Western culture penetrate to every corner of the world.”⁴⁹

In reality the abolition of human sacrifices was mostly the result of the courageous intervention by men wishing to introduce Christian standards or justice and order. Anyone who criticises this once again forgets about the countless innocent victims, only for the sake of not offending some religion and culture. But something which is based on human sacrifices and murder has no right to exist, however religious and respectable the justification for it may be made out to be. This is something which everyone, even down to the researcher, will at last realise when he is himself cast in the rôle of the victim.

From the thirteenth century A.D. at the latest, when for the first time a Sultan had a thousand of them incarcerated in Delhi, the Thugs (“stranglers”) in India offered sacrificial victims to the cruel goddess Kali, whereby they were throttled (strangled) in an extensive ritual involving a noose. The thousands of victims were hunted down in a series of raids. It was not until 1799 that the British became suspicious, but despite this very few “stranglers” were captured before 1830. Eventually Captain William Sleeman was commissioned to put an end to the evil which continued to claim thousands of innocent victims each year. By 1837 Sleeman had captured 8,000 of the about 10,000 “stranglers,” each of whom had killed up to 250 people. When in 1876 the future King Edward VII visited India Thuggery had been destroyed, and all he could do was speak to an old Thug in prison.⁵⁰

The burning of widows (called “suttee,” literally “faithful wife”), i.e. the cremation of wives on the occasion of their husband’s death, in India was also gradually restricted by the English. It is true that they at first tolerated this ritual, which Alexander the Great had discovered in the Punjab in 326 B.C., contenting themselves with official registration of the cases, but they finally made up their minds in 1829 to forbid the burning of widows. But in those regions of India not directly under the control of the English the importance of the prince continued to be measured by the number of wives who were cremated at his burial.⁵¹

In contrast to this there were always those researchers and ethnologists who spoke out against the abolition of human sacrifices, for the sake of maintaining the previously

existing culture. The English explorer Sir Richard Burton was opposed to the abolition of a mass sacrifice which took place in an annual ceremony involving 500 to 1,000 victims in order to produce a medicine in Dahomey (West Africa), because this would amount to destroying the land.⁵² Is the maintenance of the culture more important than the protection of human life? Ought one equally to have maintained at any price the National Socialist culture, which similarly cast its spell over millions of people?

11. Christian human sacrifices?

The main Old Testament report concerns the heathen human and child sacrifices to Moloch, if one leaves out of account the fact that the king of the Moabites sacrificed his son before the eyes of the Israelites, at which the Israelites were so infuriated and shocked that they immediately departed from the battlefield (2 Kings 3:27).

The word Moloch (or Melech, Melek, Malik) meaning *king*, is a misvocalization of the name of a pagan, the consonants of *king* being retained and the vowels of *shame* used. Human sacrifices were made to this god, who is identified with the god of Ammon in 1 Kings 11:7, 33. There are references to Moloch in Jeremiah 49:1, 3; Amos 1:13–15; Zephaniah 1:5; Leviticus 18:21; 20:2–5; II Kings 23:10; Jeremiah 32:35, etc., and the location of Moloch worship in Israel was the Valley of Hinnom (Jer. 32:35; II Kings 23:10). Moloch worship was not limited to Ammon.

Moloch is “the king” or “kingship.” The name of Moloch is also given as Milcom (I Kings 11:5, 7, 33) and Malcam (Jer. 49:1, 3, RV; Zeph. 1:5). Moloch was an aspect of Baal (Jer. 32:35), *Baal* meaning *lord*. Under the name of Melcarth, king of Tyre, Baal was worshipped with human sacrifices at Tyre.⁵³

Children passed through the fire,⁵⁴ which resulted in their death (2 Kings 16:3; 21:6; Ezk. 16:20f). This happened especially in the Valley of Ben Hinnom (Jer. 7:31; 19:5) near Jerusalem, which consequently became a name for hell (Heb. “*gehenna*”). Named as the gods which received these child sacrifices were Moloch (Lev. 18:32; 20:2; 2 Kings 23:10; Jer. 32:35; 1 Kings 11:7; Zeph. 1:5), “*Baal*” (Jer. 19:5; 32:35), and “*idols*” in general (Ezk. 23:37; 16:20f). To make children pass through the fire counted as a particularly reprehensible combination of murder and idolatry, which was therefore subject to the death penalty (Dt. 18:10; Lev. 20:2–5).

It has long become the practice to “discover” numerous human sacrifices by the Israelites themselves, with the obvious purpose of undermining the idea that the biblical faith has contributed throughout the world to the stemming of the practice of human sacrifice.⁵⁵ In connection with the human sacrifices in the Andes Patrick Tierney refers to alleged parallels to be found in the Old Testament and in Christendom.⁵⁶ Moloch, the offering of Isaac, various prophecies and not least the Supper instituted by Jesus are made to serve as evidence of the suppressed desire for human sacrifice. Moloch? Yes, Moloch, however unlikely that sounds. Tierney writes: “It is true that Moloch has been

referring to L. Strackerjan.

47. Nigel Davies, *Opfertod und Menschenopfer*, p. 44.

48. Wolfgang Golther, *Handbuch der germanischen Mythologie*, p. 563.

49. Nigel Davies, *Opfertod und Menschenopfer*, p. 312.

50. All *ibid.*, pp. 104–15, 91, 93, 96, 159, 134.

51. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 133–141.

52. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 173–178, esp. p. 176.

53. Rousas J. Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law* (Philipsburg: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1973), p. 32.

54. Cf. Paul Volz, *Die Biblischen Altertümer* (Wiesbaden: Fourier, 1989 [reprint of 1914 edition]), p. 180f.

55. Z. B. Reay Tannahill, *Fleisch und Blut*, pp. 31–41.

56. Patrick Tierney, *Zur Ehren der Götter*, pp. 360–445.

stylized as one of the greatest demons of Judaeo-Christian literature, but there are conclusive proofs that this Moloch was in fact far from being a demon, but simply the name for child sacrifices to Yahweh.⁵⁷

It is biblical criticism which makes this possible! Moloch, the embodiment of all that is evil, whose place of sacrifice near Jerusalem became the source of the biblical concept of “hell,” was allegedly none other than the Creator God Yahweh himself. Sometimes one has the feeling that historical-critical research means nothing other than that everything was exactly the opposite of what it appears to be. In reality, Tierney’s observation constitutes nothing less than the worst of blasphemies, uttered in the name of science.

Paul Volz⁵⁸ includes under the heading of human sacrifices in the Old Testament the redemption of the first-born in Ex. 34:19; 13:12f; etc.; the offering of Isaac in Gen. 22; the offering of Jephthah’s daughter in Judg. 11:34f; as well as 2 Sam. 21:9; 1 Kings 16:34; Ps. 106:37; Mic. 6:7; and mixes these up together with the human sacrifices to Baal and other heathen gods in Jer. 3:24; Ps. 106:38; 2 Kings 3:27.

Undoubtedly the favourite parallels are those of the redemption of the first-born⁵⁹ and the offering of Isaac, which from the viewpoint of the biblical critics allegedly naturally had its origin in an actual human sacrifice.⁶⁰

Friedrich Schwenn even understands the crucifixion as a human sacrifice: “This is how a practice of heathenism or of unenlightened Jewish religion was spiritualized.”⁶¹ But he has to go on: “Since then there has been no more offering of animal, or indeed human, sacrifices anywhere where faith in Christ really influenced the whole of a nation. But the spiritual powers which it sought to suppress all too often remained clandestinely alive, and often enough Christianity was only outwardly the victor.”⁶²

There has been a long tradition of anti-Semitism, according to which the Jews were allegedly “committed to ritual murder”⁶³ on the basis of the law. Even the Romans accused both Jews⁶⁴ and Christians⁶⁵ of offering human sacrifices, which in fact they themselves practised.

But let us now turn to the particular texts and accounts which are put forward in support of human sacrifices in the Old Testament.

In 1 Kings 16:34 it is merely stated that, in fulfilment of Joshua’s curse in Jos. 6:26, that anyone who rebuilt Jerusalem would lose his oldest and youngest son, and in fact two sons of Hiel did die. There is no question of human sacrifices, even if it had involved a Canaanite sacrifice. For Hiel to lose his sons through human sacrifice would probably not have

57. *Ibid.*, p. 391.

58. Paul Volz, *Die Biblischen Altertümer*, pp. 177–181.

59. M. Beth, “Kinderopfer,” *op. cit.*, col. 1363.

60. Thus Patrick Tierney, *Zu Ehren der Götter*, p. 368, referring to Rabbi Hyam Maccoby.

61. Friedrich Schwenn, *Die Menschenopfer bei den Griechen und Römern*, p. 1.

62. *Ibid.* Cf. the rejection of such accusations in Hermann L. Strack, “Der Blutaberglaube in der Menschheit, Blutmorde und Blutritus,” *Schriften des Institutum Judaicum in Berlin* 14 (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1892).

63. Friedrich Schwenn, *Die Menschenopfer bei den Griechen und Römern*, p. 3. Schwenn rejects this viewpoint, but names proponents from the nineteenth and twentieth century (*ibid.*, p. 3, note 3) and opponents (*ibid.*, p. 4, note 1).

64. This accusation was known to Josephus, *Contra Apion*, II, 8, 95; cf. Friedrich Schwenn, *Die Menschenopfer bei den Griechen und Römern*, p. 193.

65. *Ibid.*, pp. 193–195.

been understood as a curse, whereas the undesired loss of his children was.

In Mic. 6:7f. God replies to the question whether human sacrifice would be acceptable (Mic. 6:7), that man knows what is good and is required, i.e. to practise justice, mercy and humility (Mic. 6:8). Jer. 7:31; 19:5 *state expressly that God has never commanded that the first-born should be actually sacrificed.*

In Ps. 106:37 it is reported that the Israelites sacrificed their children “to demons,” because they worshipped the idols of the heathen. Here the divine criticism of human sacrifices is clearly spelt out. In 2 Sam. 21:9 we have only the report of the carrying out of the death penalty. It is only by importing a mysterious background that any human sacrifice can be suspected here.

It is often questioned whether the judge Jephthah in Judg. 11:31–39 is described as actually having sacrificed and killed his daughter. In Judg. 11:31 Jephthah makes a vow that if victory is obtained the first person who then meets him “shall surely be the Lord’s, and I will offer it up as a burnt offering.” In the event the first to meet him after the victory is his only child, his daughter (Judg. 11:34), and he says to her: “You have brought me very low. You are among those who trouble me!” (Judg. 11:35). The result was that his family had to become extinct. The daughter keeps the vow made by her father, and consequently a lament is sung for her each year (Judg. 11:39f). But she asks for “two months” to “bewail [her] virginity” (Judg. 11:37, repeated in Judg. 11:38). Judg. 11:39 goes on to report the fulfilment of the vow: “and he carried out his vow with her which he had vowed. She knew no man.” Does this mean that he offered his daughter as a “burnt offering”? That this was not the case is indicated⁶⁶ by the fact that the text speaks of a burnt offering before the Lord, which would have been a sacrifice on the altar of the Tabernacle. In addition the Tabernacle was in Shiloh, in the territory of the Ephraimites, with whom Jephthah was in dispute, so he would have been unable to go to Shiloh. But above all, the fulfilment of the vow excludes its being understood as a sacrifice of the daughter on the altar of Yahweh. How would the vow then be fulfilled? The text states: “and he carried out his vow with her which he had vowed. She knew no man” (Judg. 11:39). Thus the vow involved the daughter not knowing a man throughout her lifetime, thus remaining celibate and being entirely consecrated to the Lord (“shall surely be the Lord’s”). That makes sense of the daughter wanting to bewail her “virginity.” You don’t bewail your virginity because you are to die as a virgin, but because you have to live as a virgin. In addition, Jephthah was a God-fearing man (Judg. 11:11), who knew the books of Moses (Judg. 11:15–18). For this military campaign and this vow “the Spirit of the Lord came upon” him (Judg. 11:29). All this makes it unlikely that here he commits one of the greatest crimes of Israelite history, which is what the sacrifice of a child to the Lord would have been. James Jordan makes the assumption that Jephthah wanted to set

66. Thus especially Carl Friedrich Keil, *Biblischer Commentaar über die Prophetischen Geschichtsbücher des Alten Testaments*, vol. 1: Josua, Richter und Ruth (Biblischer Commentaar über das Alte Testament, Leipzig: Dörffling und Franke, 1863), pp. 293–301; Robert Jamieson, “Judges,” pp. 70–127 in Robert Jamieson, A.R. Fausset, David Brown, *A Commentary, Critical, Experimental, and Practical, on the Old and New Testament*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids (MI): Wm B. Eerdmans, 1990), vol. 1, part 2, this reference pp. 103–105; James B. Jordan, *Judges: God’s War Against Humanism* (Tyler, Texas: Geneva Ministries, 1985), pp. 199–204, 190–192.

up a hereditary royal dynasty in opposition to the will of God, and this God prevented through the vow, whereby his daughter did not marry and therefore could not bear an heir to the throne.⁶⁷

In the case of the *offering of Isaac*, which was commanded by God (Gen. 22:1–19), it must be very clearly emphasised that it did not in fact take place, which is evidenced by the fact that the historical figure of Isaac continued the history of Israel. The “offering of Isaac” was indeed a foreshadowing of the sacrifice of Jesus, the only Son of God. Isaac could not have taken away the guilt of mankind, which only the later descendant (“seed”) of Abraham, Jesus Christ, was able to do.

67. James B. Jordan, *Judges*, op. cit., pp. 199–204, 190–192, 329–334.

*The only actual sacrifice of a human being according to the will of God is the death of Jesus.*⁶⁸ And this does not apply to the Lord’s Supper, which is not a repetition of the sacrifice, but a remembrance of it. In the first place it must certainly be established that Jesus was killed by those who opposed him, who on that account rendered themselves liable to punishment. No human being is, or ever will be, called upon to offer human sacrifice. God used the death of his Son at the hands of his enemies in a way which cannot be explained to provide atonement for sin. By human sacrifice we normally understand something quite different, i.e. that human beings sacrifice a human being to God. Even in the case of the crucifixion, there can be no question of that. C&S

68. Thus also Rousas J. Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law*, pp. 49, 79.

ALPHA AND THE OMEGAS?

by Peter Burden-Teh

PART I

I. “ALPHA IS . . .”

WHAT IS ALPHA? Alpha is “God changing lives,” according to the brochure¹ published by Alpha Head Office at Holy Trinity, Brompton (HTB). This brochure explains that “Alpha is a 15-session practical introduction to the Christian faith designed primarily for non-churchgoers and new Christians. The syllabus for the course is contained in the book *Questions of Life*.”² This book, *Questions of Life*,³ is written by Rev. Nicky Gumbel, of HTB.

Other major resources written by Gumbel, who features in both series of Alpha videos, include *Searching Issues*, *Challenging Lifestyle* and *Why Jesus?* When reading these books and watching the videos, it needs to be realised that he has read law at Cambridge University, practised as a barrister and read theology at Oxford University. As an ordained member of staff at HTB he has, since 1990, had responsibility for the Alpha course at HTB. In 1992 there were five Alpha courses, but by 1993 this had multiplied to two hundred. This further increased to 740 by 1994—the year of the “Toronto Blessing.” How many of these were run only at HTB is not stated.

But Alpha is neither a parochial nor a national event. Rather, it is an international organisation for the 10,500 courses, in 1998, with 435,980 participants⁴ across the globe overseen by national Alpha offices in Germany, Kenya, New Zealand, Russia, Switzerland, USA/Canada and Zim-

babwe. The hub of the Alpha organisation is a purpose-built office block at HTB with a staff of 30. In all the countries where Alpha courses are being run there are regional advisors “who have been appointed to help other leaders in their areas with resources, speakers and general support.”⁵

Alongside Alpha as an international organisation there is the commercial grouping, which is becoming “big business.” Although the percentage of turnover regarding Alpha material published by Kingsway Publications is not known, HTB has increased its income from £2.3 million to £4.7 million.⁶ During 1998 HTB had a budget deficit of £56,000, having spent much of its budget on conferences and advertising. Alongside this commercial expansion, the ITV television network “has commissioned an independent film company to make ten one-hour programmes about the Alpha course to be broadcast at the end of 2000 or the beginning of 2001.”⁷ This will further not only the Alpha message but also the commerce.

However, even with the international and commercial organisation of Alpha, is Alpha more than a “practical introduction to the Christian faith . . . for non-churchgoers and new Christians”? Although Alpha is said to span the denominations through this “course for all the church,” its aim is

. . . to present the core truths of the Christian faith around which Christians of every denomination can unite (emphasis added)—and this is borne out by the huge variety of churches using it as an ongoing programme of evangelism. It is currently running in churches of

1. *Alpha: God Changing Lives . . .* (Alpha Head Office, Holy Trinity, Brompton). No date.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

3. Nicky Gumbel, *Questions of Life* (Kingsway Publications, 1995).

4. *Alpha News*, UK edition, No. 20. Nov. 1999–Jan. 2000, p. 1.

5. *Alpha: God Changing Lives*, p. 17.

6. *Daily Telegraph*, 27.1.1999.

7. *Alpha News*, op. cit., p. 1.

all major denominations—Anglican, Baptist, Elim, Episcopal, Free Church, Lutheran, Methodist, Pentecostal, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, Salvation Army and United Reformed—as well as a large number of house churches and new churches.⁸

What is not generally understood by most of the participating churches, but is clear from the above statement, is that “Alpha evangelism” is subordinate to the overall aim of “Alpha ecumenicalism”: evangelism is the means and unity is the goal. But this is a reversal of the biblical position, which proceeds “from unity to evangelism.” No high-level meetings between Alpha denominational church leaders have been reported. It can be assumed that Alpha ecumenicalism is achieving its aim through the lower-level of individual denominational churches.

At this lower-level, from my observations, people are enamoured with the inter-denominational approach of Alpha. They would agree with Sandy Millar—The Revd. Prebendary of HTB—when he realised what the Spirit of God was doing: “It (was) not now any longer just an Anglican church or a Methodist church or a Salvation Army church or a Roman Catholic church, it (was) an Alpha church.”⁹ So now it is acknowledged that it is not a denominational church that is undertaking Alpha evangelism; rather, the Spirit of God is making ecumenical Alpha churches. I would pose the question as to whether this is the Spirit of God at work, for would the Spirit of God create Alpha churches for ecumenical unity based on an Alpha gospel (which I will show to be unbiblical)? I believe not.

I have also found that people are impressed by the increasing number of participants doing an Alpha course and hearing about the “Christian faith.” But are numbers of participants an indicator of truth and orthodoxy? Are sects and cults to be regarded as orthodox with their increasing “participants”? I believe not. I am told that in order to reach today’s “person-on-the-street” a cringe-free message is needed. Alpha is said to be cringe-free because “laughter and fun are a key part of the course.”¹⁰ But is truth and success also being measured against an approach that “works”? Are the hard sayings of Jesus Christ and Paul excluded on the grounds of incompatibility with a key part of the course? The Bible does not appear to be read, or if it is, then selectively.

Just as the Bible does not appear to be read, so it appears that few people have read *Questions of Life*, written by Gumbel. It is one of those paradoxes that a book which is a best-seller and voted Book of the Year in 1994–95 does not, from my observations, seem to have been widely read. And I am not alone in this criticism. Although I am making this observation from a Protestant/Reformed position, the same is also observed from within a critical Roman Catholic situation. Gillian van der Lande is a Roman Catholic who has participated in an Alpha course in her Roman Catholic parish and read the Alpha material. She comments that “not one of the leaders or helpers of ALPHA in this parish had read the book prior to the start of the Course, some appeared to have no knowledge of it, and this included the parish priest.”¹¹

Such a lack of reading and understanding of *Questions of Life*, when the Alpha Copyright states that “Alpha is a series

of about 15 talks . . . with teaching based on all the material in *Questions of Life*,”¹² is an indicator of the dependence on the medium of the video. This is a parable of the Alpha church where “McLuhan rules OK,” where image takes precedence over the written word and entertainment over content. And, generally there is either scorn or condescension heaped on the illiterate parishioners of the mediaeval church for their stained glass imagery. Perhaps they will stand in judgement on this literate generation in the church with its Alpha videoed imagery.

But is Alpha just a videoed image of the book in 15 sessions? No. Alpha is: *Questions of Life*; a Copyright Statement for the “essential character of the course”; Rev. Nicky Gumbel with Rev. Sandy Millar; a practical introduction to the “Christian faith”; ecumenicalism around core truths; a networked international organisation; commercial retailing of Alpha Resources; the “Spirit of God” creating mainstream Alpha churches; and opposition to “Christian extremes.”

2. “PEOPLE WHO CRITICISE ALPHA . . .”

The last point about what Alpha is, its being opposed to “Christian extremes,” I want to develop separately as it moves into an area requiring further examination. Having read so far, I am sure that you are aware of the critical position that I am taking against Alpha. And I know that any criticism I make of Alpha runs counter to the support from academics such as Gordon Fee, Wayne Grudem and Michael Green, who has written a book titled *After Alpha*.¹³ So, where does that put me in the eyes of Gumbel? According to Gumbel,¹⁴ “people who criticise Alpha . . . (are) from the fringes; from extreme fundamentalism, extreme liberalism, extreme catholics [*sic*].” He continues by saying that mainstream church leaders have been increasingly supportive of Alpha.

But how is Gumbel defining mainstream churches? Here we have a problem because Gumbel does not explain any of these terms. Perhaps mainstream churches are being equated with those who have accepted Alpha, as with Rev. Millar’s view of “Alpha churches.” If so, then this is a circular argument: Alpha is accepted by mainstream churches and mainstream churches are supportive of Alpha. Or, there is a direct equation—ecumenical mainstream churches are Alpha.

Neither has Gumbel defined how he is using the adjective “extreme” with relation to fundamentalism, liberalism and Catholicism. What is “extreme”? What are they criticising? Who has Gumbel read or heard from these three critical perspectives? Whereas I have found two Roman Catholic writers and a few evangelical writers who are opposed to Alpha, no critical liberal writers have been found. Although there are elements of *Questions of Life* with which liberal writers would disagree, the credence that Gumbel gives to some people would warm the heart of a liberal. Credibility is given by Gumbel to: the deity and Resurrection denying Tolstoy; Tillich, whose theology, along with that of Bonhoeffer and Bultmann, formed the basis of *Honest to God* by

8. *Alpha: God Changing Lives*, p. 8.

9. *Focus*, 12.7.1998, p. 8.

10. *Alpha News*, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

11. Gillian van der Lande, “Should ALPHA be used in a Catholic Context?” *ACW Review*, March 1999, p. 5.

12. *Alpha News*, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

13. Michael Green, *After Alpha* (Kingsway Publications, 1998).

14. Nicky Gumbel, *The Church of England Newspaper*, 6.3.1998, p. 5.

Bishop Robinson; and the “atheistic” theologian Moltmann.

Of the two critical Roman Catholic writers whom I have discovered, one is van der Lande, who has written a series of critical articles on Alpha in the *ACW* (Association of Catholic Women) *Review*¹⁵ and the other is Bess Twiston Davies. Twiston Davies has written an article in the *Catholic Herald*¹⁶ titled “Is Catholic Alpha simply Protestantism with optional extras?” and has drawn from the work of van der Lande. She writes that Alpha is “unsurprisingly, Protestant: the Bible is cited throughout as a [*sic*] sole source of divine revelation, and only two of the sacraments are mentioned: the Eucharist and Baptism.” In referring to van der Lande, Twiston Davies mentions the deficiency of Alpha’s description of the church. This article caused a flood of letters to the *Catholic Herald* and nearly without exception the correspondents were supportive of Alpha. One of the correspondents was Rev. Sandy Millar who wrote that “the [Alpha] teaching on the Church is not at all as suggested in [Twiston Davies’] article, but presents the Church . . . (as described) in the Catechism of the Catholic church (see para 781 onwards).”¹⁷ He continues: “Father Raniero Cantalamessa, Preacher to the Papal Household, describes the (Alpha) course as ‘a return to the fundamental things of the Christian faith’.”¹⁸ In corresponding with a Roman Catholic opponent of Alpha, I put the case that rather than Catholic Alpha (according to the Copyright Statement there is only Alpha, being Protestantism with optional extras), Alpha is Roman Catholicism, or empathetic with Roman Catholicism, with liberal extras: it is not Calvinistic Protestantism, as Twiston Davies quotes Father Crieghton-Jobe of Brompton Oratory as claiming.¹⁹ This is the position that I am taking in this series of articles. I will show how Alpha draws not from the Reformation but from the Counter-Reformation.

But what of “extreme fundamentalism”? What is fundamentalism and how is it different from extreme fundamentalism? Why would fundamentalism accept Alpha but not extreme fundamentalism? Is Gumbel referring to fundamentalism as a historical or contemporary concept? Historically “‘fundamentalist’ was an acceptable synonym for ‘evangelical’,” according to John Stott,²⁰ who continues his summary of contemporary fundamentalism by including the following: distrust of scholarship and scientific disciplines; literalism; mechanical inspiration; no contextualism; no ecumenicalism; and separatism in church, world and race.²¹ Then Stott lists six different forms of evangelicalism (based on the work of Prof. Peter Beyerhaus): new evangelicals; strict fundamentalists, confessing evangelicals; charismatics; radical evangelicals; and ecumenical evangelicals. But this definition of evangelicalism has become inclusive, ranging from fundamentalists to ecumenicalists, and has no distinct meaning. He proceeds to define three key tenets of evangelicalism, which, presumably, all six forms of evangelicalism would have as priorities. However, in a review of this book the Rev. Peter Forster, Bishop of Chester, writes that

15. Gillian van der Lande, *ACW Review*, March, June, September and December 1999 (c/o 22 Surbiton Hill Park, Surbiton, Surrey KT5 8ET).

16. Bess Twiston Davies, *Catholic Herald*, 1.11.1999, p. 5.

17. Rev. Sandy Millar, *Catholic Herald*, 15.11.1999, p. 7.

18. *Ibid.* 19. Twiston Davies, *op. cit.*

20. John Stott, *Evangelical Truth* (Inter-Varsity Press, 1999), p. 20.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 21–24.

22. Peter Forster, *Church Times*, 17.12.1999, p. 17.

For all its elegance and warmth, this book left me wondering anew just what Evangelicalism is in today’s, let alone in the coming, Church. The three Evangelical distinctives put forward by Stott can easily be found in the new *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Is the Pope an Evangelical, too? Are we all Evangelicals now?²²

If the Pope can be considered an evangelical then the term has lost all meaning. And if the term “evangelical,” which is said to include strict fundamentalists, has become meaningless, then so has Gumbel’s criticism of “extreme fundamentalists,” for it has no reference.

In passing, Rev. Forster raises a further point, that as Stott now accepts historical criticism of the Scriptures, then recognition “that the Gospel writers had the freedom to recast their material in this way (adjusting the chronology of Jesus’ ministry in order to reinforce their theological concerns), a host of questions arise which are not addressed here.”²³ And, if the Pope could be an evangelical, then Stott could be a liberal. Perhaps Stott, and Gumbel, would accept the definition of “Open Evangelical,” which according to Oliver Barclay is the term given to the new liberal evangelicalism.²⁴

But even though Gumbel’s criticism has no reference, criticism of Alpha has come from Reformed Protestantism. Much of this criticism that I have read, which centres on the Toronto Blessing and lifestyle Christianity, has given credence to Alpha’s doctrines of Scripture, salvation and Christ as being evangelical. But these are the very areas that need judgement. A step in the right direction is Chris Hand’s book *Falling Short?—The Alpha Course Examined*.²⁵ The book begins with an uncritical presentation of Alpha, from which Hand asks, in the next chapter, “What is the message of the Gospel?” But Hand only deals with the issue of Justification. For when he asks how the message is applied he does not refer to sanctification, which is mentioned in the quotations of Helms and Chantry used by him. For example, Hand quotes Chantry’s reference to the “Practical acknowledgment of Jesus’ Lordship,”²⁶ but he does not use this as a benchmark against which to assess Alpha; nor does he develop it himself with regard to “More Gospel Truth.” With all respect to Hand, this is a particular failure in an analysis of Alpha because Alpha is “a practical introduction to the Christian Faith.” Moreover, Hand develops his examination of Alpha without reference to the Reformed beliefs of the doctrine of Scripture, Creation, the nature of man and the place of the law.

3. “IN MOCKAGE CALL US CONFESSIONISTS”

The Reformers were not fazed by their submission to the Scriptures in all areas of life, nor dazed by the stature and wiles of Roman Catholicism; neither were they in a haze about Anabaptism and Arminianism, which were seen as being closer to Roman Catholicism than to themselves. Typical of the attack on Arminianism by seventeenth-century Reformers is that of Christopher Ness: “And they

23. *Ibid.*

24. Oliver Barclay, *Evangelicalism in Britain 1935–1995* (Inter-Varsity Press, 1997), p. 122.

25. Chris Hand, *Falling Short?—The Alpha Course Examined* (Day One Publications, 1998).

26. Chris Hand, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

(Arminius' school) do not only with the Socinians gratify the pride of man's reason, but also the pride of man's will, in extenuating and lessening both the guilt and filth of original sin; even as Popery, their elder sister, doth gratify the pride of outward sense."²⁷

Anabaptism "stressed the importance of the inner word rather than the external word of the Scriptures. Denying such doctrines of the total depravity of man, original sin, election and eternal damnation, they held that man possesses freedom of will and is capable of a direct and mystic communication with God."²⁸ Similarly, Arminianism held, and holds, that "God's decrees are based on his foreknowledge . . . Pollution is inherited from Adam, but his guilt is not imputed to any of his descendants. Man's depravity as a result of the Fall should not be described as total . . . (and) There is no imputation of Christ's righteousness to the believer."²⁹

Most of these beliefs are not only evident in today's "anabaptistic/Arminian evangelicalism," but also, either implicitly or by consequence, within Alpha. And thus Alpha is, through its denial of biblical truths, closer to Roman Catholicism than to the Reformed community.

But, in contrast to the Reformers, the Reformed community today appears to be fazed by the necessity of submitting to the Scriptures in all areas of life; dazed by the stature and wiles of Roman Catholicism; and in a haze about "anabaptistic/Arminian evangelicalism" being seen as its own relation rather than as a relation of Roman Catholicism. But this shows how much of Roman Catholicism's Counter-Reformation has taken root and come to fruition within Protestantism. In the face of being dazed by the stature and wiles of Roman Catholicism, it needs to be said and heard again today

how shamelessly and outrageously (the Jesuits have) carried against us (the Reformed Churches of France and Belgium) and the truth . . . They (Jesuits) cry aloud that we are heretics, schismatics, and sectaries, and they oftentimes in mockage call us Confessionists; and moreover they lay in our dish, that we neither agree with ourselves, nor with others who detest the Bishop of Rome; but that there are as many religions among us, as there are Confessions of Faith . . . But let them so think, that the fault of heresy is not laid upon those, whose faith altogether relieth on most sure grounds of scripture: that they are no schismatics, who entirely cleave to God's Church, such as the prophets and apostles do describe unto us . . .

And what do they mean, I pray you, by the name of Confessionists, so often repeated? . . . they will say, there ought to be one Confession of Faith, and no more: as though, forsooth, a Confession of Faith were to be valued rather by the words than by the thing itself. What, therefore, will they say to our ancestors, who when they had the Apostles' Creed, yet, for all that, set out the Nicene, Chalcedonian, and many more such like Creeds? Those Creeds, say you, were general. Yea, surely; but so general, that a great part of the world in those older times followed the frantic heresies of the Arians, whom our godly forefathers, by setting forth those Creeds, desired to bring into the Church again."³⁰

27. Christopher Ness, *An Antidote Against Arminianism* (OnLine Bible v7. 708) (4 Topics).

28. E. Harrison (Ed-in-chief), *Baker's Dictionary of Theology* (USA: Baker Book House, 1994), p. 40.

29. E. Harrison, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

30. P. Hall (Ed), *The Harmony of Protestant Confessions* (Canada: Still Waters Revival Books, 1992), p. xxix-xxx.

So said the ministers of the national Synod of the Reformed Churches of France and Belgium, in 1578. And the passion and the truth of these words are as important, perhaps more important, today as they were then. What has changed that can warrant either their dismissal or disapproval? The issues that the Reformers were confronting are alive and well today. The crying aloud is still there; not in the direct language of sixteenth-century Roman Catholicism, but in the double language of twentieth-century Roman Catholicism. And now there is also the crying aloud with the same double language within the Reformed community. Is not a great part of the world following frantic heresies, both old and related new ones? To hold to Confessionalism, is it not still to be ridiculed for allegedly holding to the value of the Confession rather than to the encapsulated beliefs? Is not the fault of heresy, but now in the form of obscurantism, still laid on Confessionals? Is there still not the charge that there are as many religions amongst Confessionals as there are confessions?

Such wily obfuscation belies the notion of Roman Catholicism having unity and a common creed of belief. Of what benefit are general creeds if they are, to paraphrase the above mentioned Reformers, so general that Romanism can affirm them whilst still affirming unbiblical truths and being divided. For it is a divided church. The Church of Rome has as many "denominational" orders as it accuses Protestants of having with its "Protestant heresy." Further, some differences of belief between her "denominational" orders have not been resolved, for example, between Jesuits and Dominicans on freewill. A Congregatio de Auxiliis was established by Clement VIII, but the final decision of this Congregatio came from Paul V who said that "the Dominican position was far from Calvinistic, and that the Jesuits in their views were not Pelagians. Both Orders were allowed to defend their own teachings . . . (but) no decision on the matter has yet been made."³¹ Philip Schaff³² has pointedly commented that Roman Catholicism has benefited from the Reformation, in the sense that there is no wicked pope such as Alexander VI, nor a pope like Julius II, who took a sword rather than a staff, and neither are there three rival popes who curse and excommunicate each other. But divisions continue nonetheless. Just like the divisions that occurred at the First Vatican Council, resulting in the excommunication of the "Old Catholics," so there is still debate and disagreement on whether "The documents of the Second Vatican Council do meet the requirements for infallible Catholic teaching."³³

However, the disagreements do not stand still. As a result of not being able to embrace the Vatican's opposition to the ordination of women, along with others, Father John Wijngaards left the priesthood and, amongst other things, set up a website to examine the Roman Catholic Church's documents on the issue.³⁴ Then there is the Jesuit Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini, who has made a call for a Third Vatican Council. He said that "doctrinal and disciplinary knots which reappear periodically as sore points in the church"³⁵ need to be loosened. Such loosening included "the

31. *New Catholic Encyclopaedia* (McGraw-Hill), vol. 4, p. 470.

32. Philip Schaff, <http://www.debar.org/Religion/RED/R-Words/Redromance.htm>.

33. <http://www.cathinsight.com>.

34. <http://www.womenpriests.org>.

35. *The Catholic Herald*, 15.11.1999, p. 2.

36. *Ibid.*

role of women and lay people in the church . . . and the relationship between moral values and democracy.”³⁶ And the half has not been told regarding this divided church over interfaith initiatives and diverse political alliances.

To refute the charge of heresy and schism, even between the Reformers, the first suggestion for a compilation of Reformed Confessions, so as to present a *Harmony of Protestant Confessions*, came from the people of Zurich and Geneva in the 1570s. The French and Belgium ministers, mentioned above, continued their pronouncements by saying

we bethought ourselves by what means it might best be done, this especially for the present time seemed a meet way unto us, which would give offence to man, and might satisfy all that would yield reason: namely, to publish this HARMONY OF CONFESSIONS, whereby it might sufficiently be understood, how falsely we are charged, as though we, that have rejected Popish errors, agreed not at all among ourselves . . .³⁷

Even though Reformed churches have continued, with varying commitment and interpretation, to be confessional churches, it would be wrong to assume that consensual creeds and confessions cause division in the Christian church. As the Holy Scriptures are profitable for doctrine, then the Reformed churches are correct in setting forth doctrine in their confessions. Confessions, then, instead of being seen as the cause of division should be seen as the cause of unity.

However, with consensual creeds and confessions unity is based on the primary truths of the faith, leaving aside secondary matters. This separation of primary and secondary truths continues to be problematical. To give an example, Dr Lloyd-Jones, in his address to the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students, in 1971, entitled “What is an Evangelical?”³⁸ gave the following separation of primary and secondary truths. Under primary truths he included Scripture, Creation, the Fall, Justification and ecclesiology (no State church). Election/predestination, baptism, eschatology, sanctification and charismata were given as secondary truths. Of the various problems that this causes, including the impasse with Anglican evangelicals, it allows the issue of Lordship salvation to be by-passed and no reference is made to the person and offices of Jesus Christ.

If we are to accept the plea of Lloyd-Jones for *semper reformanda*, the primary truths of the Reformed Faith need to be based on the Five Pillars of the Reformation—Scripture Alone, Grace Alone, Faith Alone, Christ alone and Glory to God Alone. This will include sanctification as a primary issue; it will necessarily include the person and offices of Jesus Christ, keep Creationism and have ecclesiology and eschatology as secondary truths. The Five Pillars of the Reformation will be the basis against which I will be examining Alpha.

In 1552, Cranmer invited Bucer, Calvin, Melancthon and Bullinger (irrespective of their ecclesiology) to England for the purpose of defining a consensus confession. But political events frustrated the desire and hope. Calvin said that he would cross ten seas for the cause of Christian union. With this in view, I ask that the Chalcedon National Conference (November 1999) on “The defence of Historic Christian Orthodoxy” will be fully reported for interactive

feedback. Because of the omegas of Alpha I pray that Reformed leaders and theologians, from the East and the West, will cross “ten seas” for a consensus confession on the biblical interpretation of the Five Pillars of the Reformation by 2002—the 450th anniversary of Cranmer’s invitation.

4. “ARE THEREFORE AUTHENTICAL ”

In all the magisterial Reformers’ work in building their faith across all of life and in demolishing the arguments of Roman Catholics and Anabaptists, their trust in the certainty and reliability of the biblical texts was of an unwavering magnitude. Here we arrive at the issue that confronted the Reformers, and the theologians of the Counter-Reformation, as it continues to confront the Reformed community, “anabaptistic” evangelicalism and Roman Catholicism, namely, the “status of the Sacred *Apographa*.”³⁹ By *apographa* is not meant the original manuscripts (*autographa*), but the transcripts made from the original manuscripts.

Roman Catholicism declared at the Council of Trent that “all the Latin editions of the sacred books now in circulation is [*sic*] to be regarded as authentic” and it continued by stating that the Council “ordains and declares that the old Latin Vulgate Edition . . . be . . . held as authentic, and that no one dare or presume under any pretext whatsoever to reject it.”⁴⁰ Concerning the view of the Reformers on this pronouncement, Letis states that “there can be little doubt that the Protestant dogmaticians understood the post-Tridentine theologian’s interpretation of *authentica* as referring to the Vulgate as superior to extant Greek and Hebrew texts when these sources differed . . . (and) that the *Vulgata Latina* alone preserved the original content of the autographic texts.”⁴¹

To show the Reformers’ response to this, Letis documents the work of different “Protestant dogmaticians.” The first to make a response was Martin Chemnitz, in the sixteenth century, who expended much time and effort in disputing and invalidating the statements of the Council of Trent. In the seventeenth century, the Confession of Faith “agreed upon by the Assembly of Divines at Westminster . . . and ratified and established by Act of Parliament, ann. 1649 . . .” stated that both Testaments “being immediately inspired by God, and by his singular care and providence kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentical; so as, in all controversies of religion, the Church is finally to appeal unto them.”⁴² Letis comments that “by using the word *authentical*, the Westminster Divines were sanctioning the Greek Church’s recension of the New Testament and the common Jewish, Masoretic text in response to Trent which referred to the *Vulgata Latina* as *authentica*.”⁴³

This is the crux of the issue: the status of the sacred *apographa* was determined to be authentical as derived from the *Textus Receptus*. The “*Textus Receptus*” is a generic term used to include “numerous editions of the Greek New

39. I am indebted to the work of Theodore Letis and in particular his *The Ecclesiastical Text* (USA: The Institute for Renaissance and Biblical Studies, 1997).

40. Mark Noll (Ed), *Confessions and Catechisms of the Reformation* (Apollos/Baker Book House Company [British edition] 1991), p. 171.

41. Theodore Letis, *op. cit.*, p. 35 and 39.

42. Peter Hall, *op. cit.*, p. 577.

43. Theodore Letis, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

37. P. Hall, *op. cit.*, p. xxxi–xxxii, xxxiii

38. Martin Lloyd-Jones, *What is an Evangelical?* (Banner of Truth, 1992).

Testament which come from the same Byzantine textual family representing the majority of the handwritten Greek manuscripts before the 16th century.”⁴⁴ As for the Reformers, so for us: “we can have the confident assurance that the Word of God as it is found in the Textus Receptus New Testament is trustworthy of the text as originally given.”⁴⁵ But it needs to be stated what the consequences are of denying the providential preservation of the Scriptures.

If we ignore the providential preservation of the Scriptures and defend the New Testament text in the same way that we defend the texts of other ancient books, then we are following the logic of unbelief. For the special, providential preservation of the holy Scriptures is a fact and an important fact. Hence when we ignore this fact and deal with the text of the New Testament as we would with the text of the other books, we are behaving as unbelievers behave. We are either denying that the providential preservation of the Scriptures is a fact, or else we are saying that it is not an important fact, not important enough to be considered when dealing with the New Testament text. But if the providential preservation of the Scriptures is not important, why is the infallible inspiration of the original Scriptures important? If God has not preserved the Scriptures by His special providence, why would He have infallibly inspired them in the first place? And if the Scriptures are not infallibly inspired, how do we know that the Gospel message is true? And if the Gospel message is not true, how do we know that Jesus is the Son of God?⁴⁶

It is for such reasons as these that Letis states that “the true test for determining if one is an heir of the Reformed scholastics is found in the role the Westminster Confession plays in locating the final Scriptural authority . . . They (Alexander, Hodge, Dabney) focused authority in present, extant copies of the biblical texts (*apographa*), with all the accompanying textual phenomena, as the ‘providentially preserved’ and sanctioned edition (Westminster Confession of Faith, 1:8).”⁴⁷

As an heir of the Reformed scholastics, Rousas Rushdoony writes that the

doctrine of God is thus very important in the doctrine of Scripture. God cannot lie. He is immutable, unchangeable. He is the same, yesterday, today and forever . . . The God who speaks in and through the Bible speaks a necessarily infallible word. God is internally and eternally God, all wise and all perfect in all his being . . . Unless a religion arises after Christianity and is imitative of it, it has no doctrine of inerrancy nor infallibility because the question is essentially alien to it. On the other hand, in Christianity, the doctrine of infallibility is an inescapable implication of its doctrines of God and revelation . . . Where men reject God’s sovereignty, they accept and exalt man’s sovereignty, and man’s reason then prevails over faith and God’s sovereignty. Rationalism then too prevails over presuppositionalism, and theology is supplanted with humanistic calculations. We have then the world of the contemporary church, with God locked out by supposedly sovereign man.”⁴⁸

And this too is the house of Alpha, with God excluded by rationalism and humanistic calculations.

44. G. W. and D. E. Anderson, “The Received Text,” *Quarterly Record* (Trinitarian Bible Society) no. 547, January to March 1999.

45. *Ibid.*

46. Edward F Hills, as quoted in David W Cloud, *For Love Of The Bible* (Canada: Way of Life Literature, 1995), p. 49.

47. Theodore Letis, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

48. Rousas Rushdoony, “The Doctrine of God and Infallibility,” *Chalcedon Report*, December 1998, p. 2.

5. “THE HOUSE BUILT UPON . . .”

What are the rationalism and humanistic calculations of the house of Alpha? Alpha is more than a series of copyrighted talks based on *Questions of Life* with the aim of building ecumenical Alpha churches. To achieve ecumenical development it is necessary for churches to have the same, or similar, foundations; in the same way that two cannot walk together unless they agree. If it is to provide such a common foundation Alpha needs, and appears to have, an empathy towards Roman Catholicism. To demonstrate this empathy I will show, in the next two parts of this series, the empathy and favourableness of Alpha towards Roman Catholicism, at the same time showing Alpha’s individualistic “anabaptism/Arminianism.”

On the basis that a statement cannot be both true and false, but, that a true statement contains an implicit declaration of what is not true (e.g. It is hot—therefore it is not cold), then the Five Pillars of the Reformation contain an implicit declaration of what is opposed to their teaching and false. These Pillars declare Scripture Alone, Grace Alone, Faith Alone, Christ Alone and Glory to God Alone. To further demonstrate the separation of Alpha and HTB from Reformed beliefs, I will be using the corresponding Articles of the Thirty-Nine Articles and the Westminster Confession as a means of expounding the Five Pillars.

Through Alpha’s implicit and explicit rejection and denial of the Five Pillars of the Reformation (FPR), it is possible to give the Creed of Alpha in the Five Pillars of Alpha (FPA). But, through double language FPA would still espouse Scripture Alone, Grace Alone, Faith Alone, Christ Alone and Glory to God Alone. Because of the double language, Roman Catholicism can give its acceptance to Alpha, although it leaves itself open to Roman Catholic accusations that it is being Protestant. And as can be seen from the brief summary below (a fuller analysis will be provided in the next two parts of this series), it is not that Roman Catholicism is becoming Protestant, but that Alpha, and thus Protestantism, is becoming Roman Catholic. As I do not accept double language and believe that a statement cannot be both A and not A at the same time, I will refer to the FPA creed as Scripture Not Alone, Grace Not Alone, Faith Not Alone, Christ Not Alone and Glory To God Not Alone. As to Scripture Not Alone, Gumbel accepts the Vatican II Council’s statements on the Scriptures being “without error.” But, to be consistent, one cannot accept *those* statements unless one also accepts the statements on the twin and equal wellspring of Divine Revelation regarding Tradition and Scripture.

Regarding Grace Not Alone, this arises because Gumbel accepts evolutionism. One of the logical consequences of accepting evolutionism is the denial of original sin. This is ably demonstrated in a book that Gumbel recommends, “Reason and Faith” by Forster and Marston,⁴⁹ which openly advocates theistic evolution and acknowledges that a consequence of this is the denial of original sin. In this respect, Alpha is not out of accord with Roman Catholic teaching, as “*Humani Generis*” accepts evolutionism. However, I have yet to read of the theological consequences of Roman Catholicism’s acceptance of evolution. Implicit in Alpha’s

49. Roger Forster and Marston, *Reason and Faith* (Monarch Publications, 1989).

acceptance of evolution is the denial of original sin and a concept of freewill that denies the “Bondage of the Will,” and this implies a denial of the need for Grace. As Roman Catholicism accepts that freewill is not extinguished, it comes into its own with the idea of grace through the sacraments.

A similar situation occurs with Faith Not Alone. The logic of Alpha theology denies (more implicitly than explicitly, through consequentialism, lifestyle Christianity and the sanctifying charismatic experience) the Calvinistic position of Faith Alone as expressed in the Thirty-Nine Articles. Consequentially, Alpha’s position on sanctification does not preclude Roman Catholicism’s belief in increased justification through good works, as drawn from the Apocrypha and stated by the Council of Trent.

When I speak of Christ Not Alone, this does not imply that Gumbel denies the ecumenical creeds concerning Christ, but rather his indifference to the claim of the Scriptures concerning other people’s sincerely held beliefs about unscriptural “chests and salvations.” With the acceptance of Alpha, this indifference will be come widespread. I have already mentioned Gumbel’s reference to the unscriptural chests of Tolstoy, Tillich and Moltmann. It may appear that Roman Catholicism’s “Christ” is in accord with the ecumenical creeds, but the truth is that with the Immaculate Conception, Assumption and Coronation of “The Virgin Mary” there is a grave detraction from the Saviourhood and Lordship of Jesus Christ. This is more so when names are given to her which are proper only to God Himself. It has been announced that there will be an International Symposium on Marian CoRedemption.⁵⁰ An article accompanying this announcement states that “She (Mary, Mother of God) and She alone can co-operate with Him in the accomplishment of our redemption. That work in its every moment is a joint work of Son and Mother.”⁵¹ This is not Christ Alone. Thus the Roman Catholic “Christ” is not the Christ of the Scriptures and Gumbel’s indifference to this sadly allows for the Roman Catholic “Christ” and Queen of Heaven with the resulting unscriptural salvation.

With Scripture Not Alone, Grace Not Alone, Faith Not Alone and Christ Not Alone there cannot be Glory to God. The glory is not to God but to man: “gratifying the pride of man’s reason and will.” Thus the house of Alpha is a house where God is excluded and man is exalted by “rationalism and humanistic calculations.”

This international house of Alpha will add to the increasing acceptability of Roman Catholicism within Protestantism. The problems that this causes are on three levels. On the level of the individual there is the issue not of questions of life but of questions of eternity. This relates to Protestants who are indifferent to the claim of the Scriptures concerning other people’s sincerely held beliefs about unscriptural “chests and salvations,” and, to other people who hear of an unscriptural “christ” and “salvation.” Another level is that of churches and ecumenicalism. This has not been documented, but from the evidence to hand there does not appear to be anything that would prevent Protestant adherents of Alpha from entering into an “Evangelicals and

Catholics Together” agreement. In fact, Protestant Alpha could instigate an agreement that overshadows that of “Evangelicals and Catholics Together,” such is the apparent impact of Alpha within Protestantism.

Although these two levels of the individual and churches may be readily discerned, the third level, because of its alleged “worldly” aspect, is either disdained or denied. I refer to the level of politics. It is one of those ironies that the very disdaining or denying of the relationship between the forms of Christianity and politics has its own effect on politics. But just as the effect that Alpha can have, and is having, within Protestantism is of an ecumenical nature, so there is a political effect regarding Roman Catholicism. It was different, in some ways, 150 years ago in England. For on 29 September 1850, a hierarchy of Roman Catholic bishops with the division of England into dioceses was established by a papal brief. With a general opposition to ritualism within the country, this papal brief was seen as an aggressive move by the Vatican, especially when little respect was given to the government on the issue. Although the public mood was one of “No Popery,” there was no censuring response from the Church of England hierarchy. The Vatican probably calculated on there being no response due to the spiritual climate of the Church of England, the rise of Anglo-Catholicism and the defections of Newman and Manning.

With the Government preparing a proposal to remove the discrimination from the Act of Settlement, I do not foresee there being any censuring response from Protestantism generally, which in no small way is due to Alpha. What is not generally accepted, but will become more obvious, is that with a spiritual ecumenicalism there is a political ecumenicalism. This myth of political neutrality or pluralism has been ably revealed by Stephen Perks in his book *A Defence of the Christian State*.⁵²

So, the omegas of Alpha must be considered on these three levels. And how far the house of Alpha, built upon the sandstone pillars of rationalism and human calculations, will achieve or effect all three levels is an issue of grave concern. C&S

52. Stephen C. Perks, *A Defence of the Christian State* (The Kuyper Foundation, 1998).

Articles coming soon in *Christianity & Society*

“THE JOINT DECLARATION ON THE DOCTRINE OF
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“THE ROLE OF THE FAMILY IN CHRISTIANITY”

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“TIME OF THE SIGNS: A POSTMODERN APOCALYPSE”

by *Crawford Gribben and Simon Wheeler*

Plus: “Alpha and the Omegas?” parts 2–4; editorials,
books reviews, an more.

50. Ratcliffe College, England, 21–26 February 2000, <http://www.marymediatrix.com>

51. Peter Maria Fehlner, “The case for Mary the redeemer,” *Catholic Herald*, 28.1.2000.

THE CHRISTIAN PASSOVER: AGAPE FEAST OR RITUAL ABUSE?

by Stephen C. Perks

MORNING worship at the Anglican church I attend has recently been subject to some changes. In particular we have been asked to treat the ten minutes or so before the service starts as a time of preparation for worship, and in order to achieve this state of preparedness we have been asked to desist from talking and join in chorus singing or quiet meditation instead. More recently still, this ten minute spiritual warm up has ceased to be optional. We are now directed from the front by the singsong maestro to join in with the chorus singing.

The obvious implication here is that talking prior to the start of the service is not appropriate to worship and hinders the creation of the right mood for morning worship. By way of justification for these changes we have been asked to consider that we must constantly examine what we do in church to ensure that it helps us to focus on the transcendence of God.

This kind of attitude to worship is not an idiosyncrasy of the church I attend. It is common across the spectrum of church life in the UK; among the Reformed churches no less than the charismatic, in low churches as well as high churches. The creation of the right mood or state of mind is deemed essential to “spiritual” worship. It would not be going too far to say that in many churches this mood is equated with being led by the Holy Spirit; i.e. that this mood is a state of being “in the Spirit.” Such a mood is deemed especially appropriate if we are to partake of the divine mystery of the Eucharist (the Lord’s Supper), which is, as befits such an understanding of being in the presence of God, a most solemn, indeed almost morbid, event celebrated with the utmost gravitas.

Now, it is true that we must understand the transcendence of God and that our worship must express our recognition of this attribute of the divine nature. But Christianity teaches also the immanence of God. To down play either side of this theological equation will result in an unbalanced practice of the faith, both in personal life *and* in corporate worship. It is my belief that the church’s understanding of this truth is, on the whole, unbalanced and that this imbalance works itself out in practice in the way we worship together.

Of course, I heartily agree that we should constantly examine what we do in church carefully. *Ecclesia reformata*

semper reformanda—“The church reformed must be ever reforming”—was a shibboleth of the Reformation that has too often been forgotten by the heirs of the Reformation. Reform according to the word of God is a biblical ideal. However, the argument that we should desist from talking in church, that church is for “spiritual” services and activities, makes a number of assumptions that I believe cannot be justified from Scripture. It is true that we should examine what we do in church, and it is because this is true that I want to discuss this issue in more detail, try to expose some of these assumptions, and see what the Bible has to say about how we worship together.

Perhaps I ought to make it clear at the outset, however, that I fundamentally disagree with the idea that worship requires the creation of a mood that is only consistent with quiet meditation or chorus singing. Speaking personally, I find that the singing of choruses and the kind of mood that is supposed to be created by them does not direct my mind or body to the worship that God requires of us as I understand this biblically. Furthermore, this perspective assumes that talking to each other is somehow inherently unspiritual and inappropriate in church. This also I fundamentally disagree with. I object as much to the imposition of this erroneous idea of “spirituality” on the church as those who object to the talk they deem inappropriate before the church service starts because they believe this time should be used for getting into the right mood. So how are we to arrive at a common mind on this issue? Well, the only way, i.e. the only Christian way, is to search the Scriptures in an attempt to ascertain what it is that God’s word requires of us in worship. If we are truly seeking God’s will, we should then be able to unite on the way forward. Theoretically! In this article I will attempt to point the way to what I believe the Bible really says about how we should worship, particularly in the context of the Christian Passover, i.e. the Eucharist service.

Spirituality and fellowship

First, let us consider the notion of spirituality. What is spirituality? Is it a mood? Is it an appreciation of “the mystery and wonder of the transcendent God”? Many ideas of spirituality abound today. Unfortunately, very few are

biblical. Spirituality, if we must use the term, is summed up in the phrase “Trust and obey.” That’s it. To be spiritual is not to have some mystical feeling, nor is it a mood of contemplation or piety. It is simply trusting and obeying God. If our worship is to be spiritual therefore, we must seek to obey the Bible in the way we worship. Only then will our worship be “in spirit and in truth.”

How is it, therefore, that chorus singing, or any other form of “preparation” or “spiritual” exercise for that matter, prepares us for this worship whereas talking to each other does not? Before I can accept this I need to see some explanation, biblical explanation, of this assumption. I need to understand why it is that the cessation of talk, the singing of choruses or the creation of a quiet contemplative mood equips me for the service better than talking to other believers does. And I need to be shown that this is what the Bible says is what equips us for worship, and indeed whether in fact the Bible requires this mood worship of us at all. Because if it does not, this whole notion of spirituality is blow clean out of the water and we had better start thinking again about what spirituality is.

The implication is that talking in church is not spiritual, that communication between believers—i.e. fellowship—prior to the service starting is a hindrance to worship and true spirituality. But I object to this attempt to curtail Christian fellowship in the church, which usually amounts to no more than an attempt by the chief “spiritual” persons in the church to inflict their own mediocre musical tastes and their own ideas of spirituality on everyone else, with the implication that unless one follows suit one is insensitive to the Spirit. And I object because I do not think it can be defended biblically, indeed makes assumptions that are not defensible biblically; in short, is *unbiblical* because it undermines the biblical concept of both spirituality and fellowship.

The idea that worship is a matter of mood, of setting aside the mundane world in which we live in an attempt to attain a higher or more “spiritual” mood or state of mind is inherently dualistic and assumes a sacred/secular dichotomy that is not found in the Christian Scriptures. This concept of spirituality combines elements of mysticism and paganism, but essentially is a notion derived from Greek dualistic thinking, which has afflicted the Christian church from the beginning (and our society at large as well). It is the Greek dualistic heritage that is the source of pietism, which mood worship is a good example of. Spirituality, biblically speaking, is not an attempt to escape this mundane world in any sense, but rather the proper dedication of this mundane world to the service of God.

Second, I also disagree with the notion that the singing of choruses (or hymns) is somehow essential to the creation of the right attitude in worship, and if singing choruses and hymns does not in itself create the right kind of attitude why should we sing so many choruses and hymns in church? Most churches already sing an inordinate amount of choruses and hymns in their service. There is a significant imbalance between this and the fellowship we get together in church. I can only call the kind of worship we get today in most churches the tyranny of hymns and choruses. Someone commented to me recently that if the words for *Roll out the Barrel* were put up at the front of the church the congregation would probably sing it without realising what it is. (I know of experiments in churches where such things

have been tried and the congregations have simply gone along with it unwittingly.) What real value “spiritually” does this obsession with choruses and hymns have? I suggest that for the most part singing choruses, before, during or after the service has no real affect on our spiritual state of mind or on the spiritual character of our actions. This is not to say that singing choruses is *necessarily* wrong—I do not think it is. But chorus singing has become a substitute for worship in most evangelical churches today, not an aid to it. Far from preparing us for true worship, I believe it numbs our minds to what we should be doing in church.

Third, in the services of most churches I have attended there has been no time for fellowship with others. Fellowship is not seen as central to what we do in church. This is unbiblical, because fellowship is central to the biblical concept of corporate worship. Of course, there is often coffee *after* the service, to which all are cordially invited. But this is just the point. Fellowship is an afterthought, an extra for those who want it, or who are prepared to create it. Fellowship is not central to what we do in church. We don’t get fellowship as part of what we do in church so we tag it on at the end. What we do in church is meetings that are inherently fellowshipless. And the truth is that coffee after the service does not provide fellowship for everyone. And even if it does for some, they have to go to church and endure up to ninety minutes of ritual to get ten minutes of fellowship. But don’t expect to discuss the faith over your coffee, or anything relevant to it, especially anything challenging—the weather will suffice nicely for pre-Sunday lunch chit-chat! (I am not criticising ritual *per se* or coffee after church, only the balance between ritual and fellowship, the priorities that we have set for what we do in church). Coffee time after church, while in itself entirely laudable, is a poor alternative for the fellowship that the Bible shows us should be at the heart of church life.

Fellowship is not sitting bolt upright facing the front, or singing choruses together, or even kneeling in prayer individually and listening to what is being said at the front, nor is it saying the liturgy together (again, please remember I am not criticising these things *per se*, only the balance between these things and fellowship in the church). Nor is it listening to homilies and sermons or attending organised prayer meetings. Some years ago the Church of England tried to remedy this with a user friendly “Peace” slot in the middle of the communion service. But this does not make up for what is so obviously missing in the church; in fact, because fellowship is missing in so much of what we do in church, the user friendly peace slot is actually embarrassing and awkward for many, especially newcomers, because it only makes sense if there really is fellowship. Again, I am not arguing that we should not do these things, merely that on their own or even together they do not constitute fellowship, and when they take place in a context other than fellowship they lose much of their meaning. Without fellowship there is something missing from church life on Sundays, something that house groups on their own do not rectify.

My point, therefore, is that Sunday service in most churches is unbalanced by the near total lack of fellowship, since fellowship is the interaction of people with each other and this is impossible without communication, without talking to each other, something that is virtually impossible to reconcile with the ritual that passes for “service” in most churches.

The biblical pattern v. institutionalised moronism

How, then, are we to rectify this? How do we best get this fellowship? Well, the best, most congenial, the most efficient and most enjoyable way of having fellowship is at a shared meal. Eating together is the best way to have fellowship. Just on a practical level, it is interesting to observe that it is virtually impossible for anyone to monopolise a conversation at a table and eat a meal at the same time. At a meal all have opportunity to contribute to the fellowship, the discussion, and all have to shut up at some point while they service their stomachs. A meal, therefore, creates the ideal, the perfect conditions for the natural participation of all in fellowship.

Not surprisingly, therefore, a shared meal is the context of one of the most important Christian rituals in the life of the church: communion. This surely says something about what is really important to the life of the church from a biblical perspective. The first Christian Passover was not even remotely like the Eucharists and communions we celebrate in church today; neither was the Jewish Passover (if you are not C. of E. just substitute “Lord’s Supper” or “communion” for “Eucharist”—whatever your church happens to call it). The Passover was a shared meal, a fellowship meal. The ritual and the worship and the fellowship were not distinguishable practically. Analytically we can distinguish the various parts, but to separate them out in practice would have been to wreck the whole event. All are part of what should characterise our Eucharist services in church. Why did God make this important and oft repeated ritual a meal? Because, obviously, an essential part of this important ritual is fellowship, and fellowship is best had round the table at a shared meal.

There is something extremely practical and well-suited to our constitution as human beings in the way that God has structured our worship, or at least what our worship should be. Contrary to long established opinion, God does not delight in worship that causes the worshipper pain and suffering, whether of the physical or mental character. I personally judge chorus singing a form of mental torture, though this does not mean it should not be enjoyable to others. And I find hymn and Psalm singing just as moronic as chorus signing (in fact many choruses are Psalms or based on Psalms)—again, not because there is anything wrong with singing Psalms *per se*, but because we have stylised such forms of worship into rituals that are almost devoid of meaningful context and therefore fail to inspire any genuine heartfelt response (I speak for myself, perhaps you are different).

This is only exacerbated by the lack of any aesthetic qualities that I can appreciate. Granted, these things on their own do not constitute the whole of the service, but it is not much better when we come to the other parts. Preaching is virtually devoid of any content, any real explanation of God’s word that applies to the reality of life or challenges the idolatry of our culture. Church services have become to me a mirage. They promise so much but deliver nothing; they are like deserts, without cultural, aesthetic and intellectual nourishment, or even any real fellowship with other Christians. The result is that I am simply bored silly. And this is not a flippant attitude; rather, it is the result of 25 years exposure to such torture, a period in which I have genuinely tried to engage with what goes on in church. My use of the word “moronic” here is not meant to be pejorative by any

means. I use the word technically. The *Concise Oxford Dictionary* defines a “moron” as “an adult with a mental age of about 8–12” (Eight Edition, p. 771*a*). The adjective “moronic” sums up nicely what passes for “praise” in many churches today. We are directed from the front to “do the actions” that accompany the choruses like little children at a Christmas party, and in one sense this is appropriate because in many churches the rest of the service, including (especially!) the sermon, often takes place at an utterly infantile level. This is the level of praise and worship today in most evangelical churches. One chorus I have heard being sung in church services includes the words: “Bop bop showaddy-waddy, bop bop showaddy-waddy.” Utter drivel! But it is not merely utter drivel. It has a seriously debilitating effect upon the life of the church because it trivialises the faith and demeans it. These comments are not directly only at the Anglican Church; they are the result of my experience of the whole spectrum of evangelical church life in the UK (including every major Protestant denomination).

But God has not instituted chorus singing as what should be at the heart of one of the most important Christian rituals, much less the kind of infantile choruses that are often sung in many evangelical churches; rather he has put fellowship at the heart of this ritual by making it a meal. Why? Because without this important element of fellowship our Christian lives are impoverished, and no amount of chorus singing or attempting to create the right mood will ameliorate that deficiency. It is a deficiency that can only be remedied by fellowship.

Fellowship as an optional extra

But churches have house groups and the like, someone will say. Well, I do not think there is anything wrong with house groups. In fact I think they can be very good and often are. But they cannot take the place of what we should be doing on Sundays in church but in fact do not do. Not only are we impoverished by our lack of fellowship on Sundays. As a result we offer God less than he demands of us in terms of worship. Fellowship is not optional in the biblical scheme of worship; it is at the heart of worship. If we cannot square worship and fellowship as taking place at the same time, the problem is our dualistic thinking not the biblical requirement for worship that is fellowship based. In this respect it has often stuck me as odd that so many Christians will make such a fuss about how Christians should attend church every Sunday because we are required to meet together (i.e. have fellowship with each other) frequently in Scripture (Heb. 10:25); yet what happens when we get to church can hardly be described as fellowship at all much of the time. We are encouraged to meet together frequently in Scripture precisely so that we can encourage each other—something it is impossible to do if we are not permitted to talk, i.e. communicate with each other. Talk about straining at a gnat and swallowing a camel!

Fellowship in the biblical scheme of things is not an optional extra thrown on at the end of the church service. It should be as much at the heart of the life of the church worship services as anything else that takes place in the service. Otherwise why would such a central ritual as communion be a shared meal? If there is no real community, no fellowship, there is no church, no matter how good the sermon is, or the hymns and choruses, or the liturgy and

“sacraments.” Fellowshipless worship is *not* the kind of worship that God requires of us.

Yet, if I want fellowship in the church I must create it outside the church’s official church services on a Sunday. Why? Because in reality there is no fellowship in the Eucharist as practised today (and this is as true of the communions celebrated by nonconformist churches as it is of the Anglican Eucharist). It has become a mere rite, devoid of the context that originally gave it meaning. Everyone remains isolated from each other and maintains a solemn silence. And I suspect there would be a good deal of disapprobation from most church leaders if people were to start having fellowship during the Eucharist service—despite the fact that biblically the communion has been instituted precisely in the context of such fellowship—because such fellowship would spoil the “spiritual” mood that is deemed so important. But what is left of the shared meal, the fellowship round the Lord’s table, at the Eucharist or communion service in our “Bible believing” church? Nothing!

I think this is wrong. I believe it is a perversion of what the Lord Jesus instituted at the first Christian Passover. Fellowshipless services, and especially fellowshipless communions, are an abuse; a form of ritual abuse of God’s ordinance, the Christian Passover, which was never instituted to be celebrated in the way that it is celebrated in church today. Rather, the communion was a fellowship event as much as anything else. To strip it of its fellowship context is to strip it of meaning as a covenant sign celebrated by the body of Christ, i.e. the Christian *community*. Today the Eucharist bears almost no resemblance to the Christian Passover meal that it was originally. Does anyone think there was silence at the celebration of the Passover, that everyone sat silently minding his own business? Celebrations are not usually like that. Funerals are though. Unfortunately, the Eucharist is more akin to a funeral than a celebration of our deliverance from sin.

The refusal to take seriously the context of the communion service, i.e. the Christian Passover, a *feast* celebrating our deliverance from sin, is a serious failure of the church’s duty to God and to her members. Doubtless there are all sorts of reasons why the church should not follow the Bible in this matter but follow the inventions of men instead—God forbid! we might even have to include our children in a shared meal. How dreadful!

Communion is no longer a fellowship meal around the Lord’s table. It is a solemn rite, a mere ritual. Instead of having fellowship we sing choruses or sit quietly communicating with no one while we are subjected to the ubiquitous chorus on the assumption that Graham Kendrick’s musical tastes are somehow more spiritual than the fellowship that the Lord Jesus himself instituted as central to the life of his church. I believe that such mood creation is no more spiritual than talking with each other in church because the stripping of talk, communication, fellowship, from our activities in church impoverishes our life as a church; it does not enhance it.

It is as if fellowship together in church were not really central to our church life, but an optional extra after the real business of meeting as a church has been accomplished. I disagree entirely. I see nothing inherently spiritual in working oneself into an emotional or mystical mood by the use of music or any other form of “spiritual” exercise. Is this not really a Christianised version of the chants that pagan

religions use anyway? Certainly the effect seems to be similar, namely, a largely *mindless* time of emotional or mystical self-indulgence.

The real thing: a Christian feast

The first Christian Passover gives us, in fact, a very different example of what should happen at the communion service, indeed radically different from anything I have experienced at the Eucharist or communion services of most churches. In the original Christian Passover service (i.e. communion service) we have a *meal*—the archetypal fellowship situation. People are talking, discussing their situation and the meaning of the events of which they are a part. Jesus is speaking to them about the same events. They ask him questions and he teaches them. They eat a meal together. When Jesus breaks the bread and says “This is my body” he does it in this context. The Jewish Passover, on which the Christian Passover is based, is a shared meal, not a service of the type we are accustomed to in the church today. The Eucharistic practice of the church today is a ritual designed by clergymen for clergymen, not a fellowship meal designed to equip the saints for service (Eph. 4:12).

The church has signally failed to appreciate the importance of the shared meal in Scripture. As a result the quality of church life has suffered significantly. This emphasis on the mundane act of eating shows how, in Scripture, there is no sacred/secular dichotomy. All of life is religious. Eating a meal together should be just as much a spiritual activity as praising God by singing a hymn. Many, however, cannot conceive how such a mundane activity as eating can be spiritual. But it is. Not only can eating be a supremely spiritual activity when thanks are given to God, it is part of one of the most important rituals in the life of the institutional church. Man cannot do anything more spiritual than eating when his attitude is right. But when did your church last eat together as a church? I don’t mean when did you last ingest a five millimetre cube of bread and a sip of wine, nor do I mean when did your church last have a social occasion that some members of the church attended. I mean when did the church last have a meal in the context of a service, or rather, a worship service in the context of a meal, which is what the Christian Passover is? The importance of communal eating, fellowship around the Lord’s table, has been missed by the church. This is because Christians spend too much time in church doing things that the Bible does not stress and too little doing those things it does stress.

We need to take seriously the importance of fellowship and eating together in the Bible. Eating together is inherently fellowship oriented. That’s why people go out for a meal together, or have people round for a meal. And that is why Christ has made eating together the context of one of the most important rituals in the life of his church. Because the church has failed to listen to the Bible at this point she has seriously underestimated the importance of fellowship, and has substituted chorus singing, ritual and the spiritual mood for true fellowship. This failure has blighted the life of the church.

In the first Christian Passover, as with the Jewish Passover, fellowship together in the context of a meal was a vitally important element. It is in the context of fellowship that the Lord’s Supper finds its meaning, and this is why the meal is so important. To strip away the fellowship is to strip away

at least half the meaning of the rite. Yet this is precisely what the church has done by instituting clergy-designed communions instead of communions based on Christ's design. Some reassertion of balance is called for in our services. The first Christian Passover (communion) gives us much food for thought:

First, as mentioned already, the context of the communion should be fellowship over a meal, not a clergy-oriented performance. Fellowship is not an afterthought; it is at the heart of the rite; indeed it is the entire context. This means that talking, discussion, interaction, communication is essential, just as teaching is essential. This is why a meal is so important in Scripture, and should be to us. Breaking bread together does not mean "having a communion service" in the modern sense, where everyone remains quiet and isolated from each other, maintaining their own personal piety or spiritual mood. It means, on the contrary, having fellowship, having a meal together. This is so important to the practice of the Christian faith that Christ made the remembrance and celebration of the salvation he purchased for us part of a shared fellowship meal. We celebrate our deliverance from sin around his table at a *feast*. This is what Scripture teaches about communion.

Second, singing hymns and choruses is not stressed in the Bible as a highly important part of the communion service (though music and singing are stressed in other contexts). In fact at the first Christian Passover it is singing that has the place of an afterthought at the end of the Passover. "And when they had sung *an* hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives" (Mt. 26:30; Mk. 14:26). Please observe the word in italics. They sang *a* hymn at the end. No mention of getting into the right mood and all that. They sang *a* hymn at the end. In other words, at the first Christian Passover, singing had the place that coffee after the service has in many of our churches today. It seems the clergy-designed communion service with its emphasis on "spirituality" has got a number of its priorities upside down here.

Third, in the early church this emphasis, i.e. the biblical emphasis on the context of communion, continued after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus. The Lord's Supper of the early church was the agape feast (cf. Jude 12). This was the antithesis of what happens in the church today. Communion is a feast at the Lord's table, a celebration of his victory over sin and death and of our deliverance from the same. Without this feast around the Lord's table communion loses much of its significance and resembles a funeral more than a feast of celebration.

Fourth, at Corinth, the New Testament's archetype of what can go wrong in the life of the church, the agape feasts were being abused—i.e. the members of the church, the body of Christ, were abusing each other. They turned the agape feast into drunken revelry and disregarded each other, thinking only of themselves (1 Cor. 11:20 ff. The pagan religious background of the Corinthian culture may have had an influence in this. The cult of Dionysus—the Roman Bacchus—was celebrated at wild riotous festivals in ancient Greece). In doing this they failed to discern the body, i.e. they failed to appreciate that in treating each other in this way they were abusing Christ himself (Mt. 25:40, 45). Paul dealt with this by applying some discipline to their gatherings. He tells them to eat at home, thereby separating the agape feast from the covenant sign of bread and wine. Why? Because of the abuse. He did this in order to restore order

and compassion in their meetings, which had become a disgrace and abusive. He did not do it to establish a new paradigm for the church universal to follow, and there is no hint of such in 1 Cor. 11:20–34. This was a disciplinary measure. The New Testament does not institute this disciplinary measure as a new practice to be followed by the whole church. If we read the New Testament in context we should see this more clearly. Paul does not lay down a disciplinary measure intended for one church as a paradigm to be followed in churches where such abuse was not present. If such an interpretation were valid we should have to conclude logically that excommunication, a disciplinary measure for those who have apostatised, should also be practised as a matter of course in all churches regardless of whether there is apostasy. Such reasoning would be absurd. And it is just as absurd to apply Paul's disciplinary measure aimed at an abusive situation in Corinth to all churches regardless of whether there is any abuse. Excommunication is not part of the normal life of the church, it is a remedy used in extreme cases of apostasy. Likewise, the separation of the agape feast from the covenant sign of bread and wine was an extreme disciplinary measure aimed at a church that had abused the agape feast.

The church has now almost universally normalised an extreme disciplinary measure as an ongoing practice for the celebration of the Lord's Supper. This means that the Christian Passover has become for many primarily a means of discipline; indeed some churches and clergymen will argue that the Eucharist is primarily a means of discipline, i.e. a means of maintaining their own power and authority. And of course we have the problem of restriction, i.e. who can come to communion since despite the fact that all who love the Lord are invited to the "table" in most churches children are usually forbidden to partake (i.e. they are automatically excommunicated for being children). We observe the communion in a disciplinary form, i.e. a form designed for a disobedient church that cannot be trusted to practise the faith properly.

Now, if our churches are disobedient and abusive when we celebrate the Lord's Supper we need to repent. If not, we need to rehabilitate the normal biblical procedure for the celebration of our deliverance from sin at the Eucharist—the Christian Passover feast. The feast, and therefore the fellowship, should be part of the celebration of our deliverance together around the Lord's table, not an added extra tagged on at the end or after the service has finished. The Eucharist should be the feast. Until we restore this biblical emphasis I suspect that many of our churches will continue to fall short of being a Christian *community* and remain a collection of individuals who attend some of the same church rituals.

Conclusion

In conclusion I want to reiterate that the form of our communion service today is itself a form of abuse of Christ's ordinance. My comments about this are not directed only at the Church of England. Communion has become many different things to different churches. The Lord's Supper is the Christian Passover, a celebration of our deliverance in Christ. In some churches, however, communion has become a form of discipline (e.g. Presbyterianism). To others it has become a magical rite and a substitute for adherence

to the covenant (e.g. Episcopalianism). In other churches it is like a funeral where people beat their chests to atone for their own sin (e.g. Brethren and assorted Free Churches). All these practices are abuses of the original institution. There is no wonder people are deserting the church in droves. What they get when they go to church is often a perversion of the biblical message and the biblical emphasis to which the church should aspire.

The church is not an attractive community to many non-believers; it is not an attractive community to many believers. And this is because often it is not a *community* at all, but rather a venue for a series of ritual acts that people do at the same time in the same place. In other words, in church so often what we have is not corporate worship but individuals worshipping together. The church often does not function as a community at all. Now, it would be odd indeed if the members of a family never talked to each other when they sat down together for a meal. Such a family would be considered dysfunctional. And a church, which is part of the *family* of God, that acts in the same way is also dysfunctional. Yet this is precisely the case every time we celebrate the Lord's Supper. And it is no good hiding behind the church's rules, procedures and traditions. When churches *want* to change things, even on a local basis, they usually have no problems doing so. Yet so often when we wish to follow the Bible, tradition and church rules are cited as the reason for not doing such things, or we are told such things are not practical. These are excuses for the preservation of "services" that amount to little more than ritual abuse.

How can I expect non-believers to give a hearing to what I myself find to be a perversion of what the Bible sets forth (and many in the Church of England have tacitly acknowledged this deficiency by their endorsement of the shared meal setting of the Alpha course). And if we don't like the ritual abuse that goes on in church we are deemed unspiritual (I refer here not merely to Church of England ritual, but to the rituals of most denominations, which in substance vary very little from each other). Until the church is prepared to address this issue I fear she will merely continue to manage her own decline nicely, oblivious of the remedy that is set forth in the Bible. I suggest that the first thing we need to do is to stop numbing our minds with more of those choruses and start thinking seriously in church, in the service, about what it means to be the church and about what it means to celebrate the Lord's Supper together.

Postscript

The more I read and study the Bible the more I find the context of evangelical church life, and especially the Sunday "service," alien to what I read in the Bible. I find it increasingly hard to reconcile the Scriptures with the context of church life. The church seems to live on a different planet, a planet where God does not speak the message of the gospel in the way that he spoke it in the Bible. On the church planet there is no relevant relationship between what goes on in church and what goes on in the world God has put us in or the nation we are commissioned to disciple. When we go into church we enter a different world, a world a seclusion from the world that God made and that he addresses so uncompromisingly in the Scriptures. And yet, when we get round to discussing anything that is not directly related to the church's activities it turns out that precisely the same

range of opinions and attitudes that characterises the thought of unbelievers is to be found among believers. The sacred/secular dichotomy has come home to roost! So, we are supposed to get ourselves psyched up into a "spiritual" mood for Sunday worship so that we can appreciate the "mystery and wonder of the transcendent God" but this has no relation to the real world in which we live, does not affect how we think about the issues that face us as members of society, sent out into that society by Christ with a commission to bring it into subjection to Christ. We continue as before with the same set of opinions about education, politics, welfare, crime, etc., all of which remain largely untouched by our encounter with the transcendent God. This just does not make sense biblically.

The problem discussed above regarding the Christian Passover is merely one aspect of this dichotomy between the practice of the church and the message of the Bible. However, because the meeting of Christians together for purposes specified in Scripture is so important, including their equipment for service in the world, it is necessary that we think seriously about reforming what we do as the assembled community of faith in accordance with Scripture if we are to be effective missionaries in our daily lives, thereby serving and bearing witness to God in our vocations. I am not saying that reformation of the worship service and restoration of the Christian Passover is all we need to do. Far from it. But it is essential because I believe that without it the body of Christ as a whole will continue to fall short of being the *community of faith* that the Bible shows she should be and therefore devoid of the spiritual renewal, moral strength, and religious vision she needs to go out into the world and bring it into subjection to the Lordship of Christ. C&S

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GOD AND GENDER

by Paul Wells[†]

IF nothing is new under the sun, history is characterised by change and one of the major movements of our time has been the feminisation of society, or to be more exact, the arrival of egalitarianism. The French government is considering legislation to make parliamentary representation egalitarian. The USA has women on armed fronts and in space.

Increasing urbanisation, the financial independence of women through work (encouraged by massive female labour during the Second War), the loosening of the link between sexual activity and procreation, mixed schooling and the breakdown of family units, has made this change inevitable. The sociological steamroller of modernism, materialism and secularisation has marginalised the Christian vision of society and male-female relations in the West.

Egalitarianism has not passed the Church by. This is only to be expected, as one of the dominant features of theological liberalism has been to make Christianity relevant and acceptable to its culture's despisers. The Methodist Church in England has introduced into its liturgy the possibility of addressing God as "Our Father and/or mother in heaven . . ." We now have gender inclusive translations of the Bible replacing "man" by "person," etc., since non-inclusive language is considered discriminatory.¹ Even in evangelical circles we feel as though we are treading on eggs when we preach on Ephesians chapter five!

French sociologist Evelyne Sullerot claims that society has become matri-centred and the church has followed this trend, particularly in Latin countries where masculine religious non-observance is standard practice. In France, where millions died in the Great War, women's ministry was introduced as early as 1928. Most main-line churches now fully accept ministerial equality. It is claimed that the masculine image of God as Father is a tributary of patriar-

chy or, when masculine language for God is used in our enlightened era, of chauvinism. Masculine images of God in the Bible are considered to be expressions of cultural conditioning or, at best, of divine accommodation. Nor is it any good to appeal to the creation-order, saying that it reveals a structure of male functional priority, as the creation narrative itself is considered to be an expression of masculine predominance in ancient civilisations.

So what can be said about questions of gender in relation to the nature of God? Is the moderate approach of some feminists who seek to balance things up by emphasising feminine metaphors for God in Scripture a viable option? God is said to love like a mother as well as a Father. The tenderness of God toward his people is expressed by the term *rahamim*, the plural for the maternal womb in Hebrew. Such language confers upon God a character of feeling which is almost physical. Isaiah in particular compares the God of Israel to a woman who bears, gives birth, nourishes and consoles her child (1:2; 42:14; 46:3; 49:14,15; 66:11,13).

1. *Metaphorical language?*

One line of approach is to affirm that the God who is wholly other in being transcends human conceptuality. Since all human language about God is considered to be metaphorical or symbolic and not a direct description of the reality of divine nature, masculine or feminine language cannot be of very great significance. To modify our way of speaking about God, using "she" or "her" is not necessarily heretical, and has the advantage of achieving freedom from out-of-date linguistic male hegemony.

Other approaches go further than simple gender-inclusiveness or swapping of personal pronouns. Rosemary Reuther, Mary Daly and others have suggested that other substitute words for the masculine might be not only mother, but also "goddess, God-she, redeemess or sophia." Feminine God-talk attempts to remove the stigma of a patriarchal God based on an idolatrous androcentric culture. Similar echoes also find expression, in a much less radical sense, in the writings of J. Moltmann.

Mary Hater, moderate in her approach to these questions, makes several interesting criticisms of radical feminism:

— one cannot claim that feminine metaphors have signifi-

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1. D. A. Carson, *The inclusive language debate: a plea for realism* (Baker/Leicester: IVP, 1998).

cance in a theological sense, and not masculine ones. They are as much a reflexion of culture as the masculine ones; the argument of cultural conditioning is a two-edged sword!

— more generally, the female metaphors used in the Bible do not sustain detailed theological development as does the word “Father” and tend to be secondary and marginal in biblical revelation.

Furthermore, it can be observed that the God of the Bible, who is depicted by means of masculine language is not himself characterised by gender, as sexual politics belong to the creation and created reality in the same way as time and space do. The transcendent God insists—I am not a man . . . to whom would you liken me?

But does this exhaust the question? Can we simply say that all biblical language is metaphorical? The proposition which will be argued here is that if all biblical language is anthropomorphic in nature, this does not mean that it is purely symbolic or metaphoric. To affirm that Scripture is in human form does not necessarily say anything about the linguistic categories of the text, even though this confusion is frequently made.

A metaphor is a linguistic symbol in which the proper meaning of a word is transposed into a different but meaningful sense by virtue of an implicit comparison which the transposition accomplishes. For instance, we speak of the light of a lamp, but also of the light of truth. Truth in itself is not light, nor is light truth, but *one aspect* of the truth is referred to in this metaphor, and one in particular, that is the *enlightening* character of the truth. In other words, a metaphor compares one aspect of a specific reality with an aspect of another reality—in this case the brightness of light and an aspect of truth. However, the metaphor does not have reference to the nature of truth in an all inclusive sense. Thus, the symbolical value of metaphors as of all symbols, to use Ricoeur’s expression, is that they provoke thought (*le symbole donne à penser*). But the metaphor itself is limited, as it does not tell us many things which could be said about the truth. Likewise, the biblical metaphor “God is a rock,” says nothing about God’s eternity, his omnipresence or many other divine attributes. What we are saying is that God is like a rock in his solidity and his firmness. To paraphrase—God is faithful.

It is evident that metaphors are more dramatic, lively, and captivating for the attention than direct propositions. “God is a rock” is much more evocative, at least in the first instance than “God is faithful.” Metaphorical language is parabolic, and this is one reason Jesus spoke about the house built on the rock in the famous parable.

All biblical language is anthropomorphic, as H. Bavinck said. But not all biblical language is metaphorical or symbolic. To call God “Father” is an anthropomorphism, an accommodation relating to the human nature of fathers, but it is not a metaphor like those which portray God as giving birth to Israel, nourishing his people, and consoling his people. Such metaphors are parabolic and refer to God’s activity in one particular sense, but not to the whole of the divine nature in a global and personal sense.

So where does the difference between metaphoric language and anthropomorphic language lie? Apart from the fact that the so-called “feminine” usages which are quoted in favour of “God the mother” seem to be more *anthropopathic* than simply anthropomorphic, it seems to be possible to

affirm that not all anthropomorphic language is metaphoric or symbolic, but all metaphoric language in Scripture is anthropomorphic.

What is the significance of this distinction for the question of talk about God?

2. *The Bible and masculine God-talk*

Obviously, the Bible uses masculine metaphors for God, just as it uses feminine ones. These function in the same way and refer to one aspect of the divine nature and not to God’s whole being, disposition and acts. For instance, the Lord is a shepherd, referring to God’s leading of his flock; Jesus is the husband of the church, his bride, referring to his lordship; God is king, head or master of creation, the nations and his people, referring to his control. Such masculine metaphors are current biblical stock and have the same function as the feminine ones. The metaphor “judge” could be taken in an almost exclusively masculine sense, but since a female judge was not unknown in Israel, if exceptional, it cannot be interpreted in the sense of a masculine function, but has judicial import, that of “doing right.”

However, it has little weight to say that we prefer the masculine metaphors for God because they are more numerous in the Bible. The question is to ask, why are they more numerous, is there any implicit reason? We think there is, for two reasons.

3. *The incarnational revelation*

If the expressions shepherd, king, judge, husband and head are all used to describe Jesus Christ in a metaphorical way and are concentrated in the person of the incarnated Christ, the language concerning Father and Son falls outside the bounds of metaphor. It is anthropomorphic language which might have a metaphoric meaning on one level, but is characterised by polysemy, and on another level, when referred to God and Jesus, is non-metaphoric and referential in its literal meaning.

To illustrate, we say “God is a rock” meaning God *is like* a rock, but we would not say “God is like a father” or “Jesus is like a son.” We say “God *is* Father” and “Jesus *is* Son.” God *is* the Father of Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ *is* the Son of the Father. Even if these expressions are metaphorically *andromorphic* as well as anthropomorphic, in this case metaphor is transcended as we are dealing with a revealed proposition. In fact, we can go further and say that God is our Father and Jesus is the Son of God and we are sons because of him. When we say this, we have given a résumé of what we can say about God, because everything is included, in the theological sense, in these expressions, not only on the level of the immanent Trinity, but also on that of the economic Trinity and of the soteriological Trinity.

This is implied in Galatians 4:4ff: “God sent his Son, born of a woman . . . to redeem those under the law . . . Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out ‘Abba Father’.” Considering this, Tertullian referred to God as “My trinity.” As Father, God is eternal in Fatherhood. God is *arche*, the unoriginated origin, begetter of the eternal Son, the Father of creation and humanity. God is Father of the Son in the incarnational engendering and commissioning and Father of his children adopted in Christ. As Father, he is the king of all, and the

apostle does not hesitate to say that in the end “God (the Father) will be all in all.”

Jesus, on the other hand is Son, and this identifies the nature of his person and work. As the Logos of John’s prologue he is the eternal Son with the Father, but also the Son who accepts self-humbling, not “despising the virgin’s womb.” He accomplishes the divine image in perfect obedience as prophet, priest and king, the only offices being carried through on the cross, not out of obligation, but freely as an act of a loving will. But he is also the exonerated and justified Son in the resurrection, the exalted Son in the ascension, the reigning Son at the right hand of the Father and the coming Son into whose hand all power in heaven and on earth has been given.

Augustine saw the Holy Spirit as being the Spirit of communion between the Father and the Son, in whom they have communication, and perhaps for this reason, some theologians, trifling over-much with speculation, have seen the Spirit as “the feminine presence” in the Trinity. However, the real issue in trinitarian language is not the gender issue. The Father is not envisaged in a masculine rôle, but as source of all things, visible and invisible. Fatherhood is a function of conferral. Sonship bespeaks inheritance and the heritage of the Father’s glory, and the Spirit (neuter in Greek, but masculine in the personal pronouns used—incorrectly in a grammatical sense—to describe him in some passages) conveys the language of power, communion and participation.

The relation between the Father and the Son is transcendent and absolute, and therefore mysterious and unfathomable. However, because Jesus reveals himself as being one with the Father—“I and my Father are one,” “if you had known me you would have known the Father”—we can know that a similar personal relationship and order of being pertains in eternity as is revealed in the incarnation. Father and Son are not andromorphic symbols projected by man into eternity, but anthropomorphisms selected in the divine wisdom as appropriate to God’s historical self-revelation because they correspond in a certain way to realities, to certain functions and orders, existing in the immanent Trinity.

We may not know, and we do not know, what this exactly means in terms of the divine nature. God is not only transcendent, but also incomprehensible, in all the attributes which evoke his being and acts, even those most accessible to us such as his love. However, we do not conclude, with dialectical theology, that incomprehensibility equals the unknown, precisely because this is a truth of divinely inspired revelation.

Nor does this mean that these masculine anthropomorphisms refer to some kind of metaphysics or sexual politics existing in God, as God is neither masculine nor feminine. These are appropriate categories only for creaturehood. However, the fatherhood of God and the sonship of Christ may be thought of as foundational for human and creaturely sexual politics. The gender distinction between man and woman portrays the delicate balance of covenantal response of God in three respects;

- recognition of God himself as Creator of male and female humanity;
- the priority (headship—*kephale*) of the man and the submission of the woman;
- submission of men and women one to another in Christ.

4. *God’s self-revelation*

The most obvious reason for the non-modification of the traditional way of speaking of God in masculine language is simply that this is the way God has chosen to reveal himself in Scripture, and there is really no warrant for change, particularly if we believe in inspiration. Surely the minimal respect we can afford God is to speak of him as he speaks of himself.

The problem in the debate about gender equality lies in the fact that paternity has been identified with masculinity. Yet as we have seen, divine paternity does not primarily have a gender-related connotation. Gender differentiation was introduced in the creation by God, but God himself is not gender conditioned. It is noteworthy that the God of the Bible identifies himself as Father and Logos, but to be Father or Logos does not mean to be masculine. If the incarnate Son was masculine it was no doubt for *creational reasons*, concerning the federal headship of Adam and Christ. It is not by chance that the first sin was Eve’s, that the devil solicited Eve, who disobeyed before Adam, reversing the authority structure of the creation as in the order of the biblical narrative, the command not to eat of the tree was given directly to Adam not to Eve.

However, biblically and theologically the parallel is established between Adam and Christ, and traditionally we speak about original sin as Adamic. Likewise, if Jesus Christ, as man, did not marry, even though the first Adam was created one flesh with Eve, it is for *redemptional reasons*. Christ did not come to replace the creation by another, nor to recapitulate the creation and all it purports, but to redeem creation. His work was to redeem marriage from sin, but as in the case of every demise from created integrity, that was done at the cross, without the contraction of a male-female relation being necessary. Perhaps it is for this reason that Mary has been elevated in Romanism and sometimes likened to Eve. Contrary to the economy of redemption, which requires Christ’s celibacy, Mary has become a co-redemptrix, perfectly conceived herself and honoured as sinless by the assumption.

God’s self-revelation, in which the paternity of God is proclaimed, but not his masculinity, goes beyond the feminine or the neutral metaphors used to describe God, in that God reveals himself not only in masculine anthropomorphisms, but above all in personal propositions.

The impersonal metaphors used of God—rock, fire, water, etc., or for Christ, way, truth, light, life etc., do not necessarily imply a personal relationship with the Creator. By way of contrast, the personal anthropomorphisms, Father and Son (and the divine name “I am”), have precedence over the impersonal metaphors used to portray the deity. The content of the impersonal images and metaphors is defined and delimited by the predominant personal reality of God. As Van Til has pointed out, if God is three persons, he is also paradoxically (for us) one Person and he addresses his people as Lord in the first person singular. The personal nature of God is implied in the fact that God is a God of love and salvation.

So now we come to a crux of the matter. Feminine as well as masculine metaphors are personal in character and demand a response of love. Why are these not used other than in a metaphorical sense to describe God, or by God to speak of his own nature as an entirety? Why, in his revelation, does God use the words Father and Son, which, in a

human sense, have only a masculine connotation, to describe his intra-personal relations or his relations with his creatures?

In passing we can note, before attempting to answer this question, that feminine anthropomorphisms as connotations for God, are absent not only in Christian usage, but also in other monotheistic religions, whether near-eastern or African. Indian, Egyptian, Babylonian, Greek, Roman and Polynesian religions, as well as the nature-religions prevalent in the ancient near East, are polytheistic in nature and goddesses feature prominently in the divine pantheons.

Feminism may affirm that masculine God-talk is a product of patriarchy, but did patriarchy exist any less where the religious expression of the society was polytheistic? This is an interesting point for debate.

5. *Paternity and separation*

If the thrust of the expressions Father and Son is not primarily masculine, what is their significance on the level of gender? Why is God not referred to as mother or goddess in the biblical revelation? This question seems impertinent in the light of the biblical texts, but it is necessary to confront it in order to grasp the specificity of biblical revelation. What is the difference between the masculine functions of engendering and begetting and child-bearing and giving birth?

The *Athanasian Creed*, which Richard Baxter called the “best explication of the Trinity” states that the Trinity is uncreated, incomprehensible and almighty, one in three and three in one. Of Christ it is said: “The Son is of the Father alone: not made, nor created: but begotten.” As uncreated and begotten, Christ is of the same nature as God himself. This can be said only of the Logos. Concerning the Spirit the creed states: “The Holy Ghost is of the Father and of the Son: neither made nor created but proceeding.” Thus the Spirit is God on equal terms with the Father and Son.

The language ought to retain our attention. The antithetical nature of “uncreated, not made, begotten and proceeding” and “created and made” is striking. The first set of terms implies sameness of nature, whereas the second indicates that which is different in nature. In creation God makes something which is ontologically different from himself, which does not partake in his being and which is distinct from him. This is why the first chapters of Genesis insist on the notion of separation. It is at this point that pantheism and modern pantheisms such as that of Tillich’s “ground of being” are heretical, implying that material reality in some way partakes in the divine nature.²

Divine fatherhood implies separation and the ultimate qualitative distinction between God and the world. Paternity has theological connotations biblically as it underlines the transcendence of God and his personal nature in a way which impersonal monism or pantheism cannot do. Religions are either theistic, monistic or pantheistic. Only the trinitarian language of Fatherhood and Sonship is adequate to portray anthropomorphically the fact that God is transcendent, but also personal.³ This is the wonder of revelation

2. It is not without interest that we now know that in human begetting and engendering it is the father not the mother who determines the sex of the progeny!

3. As Francis Schaeffer was wont to say. Cf. *He is there and he is not silent*.

and an expression of the adequacy of the biblical words to convey divine truths.

What can be said about maternity and motherhood? Goddess-talk in relation to material reality would affirm that it is formed and born in the womb of the divinity, given birth by it, nurtured and supported by it. The theological consequence of this is that the world is formed out of the same substance and nature as the divinity as a partaker in the divine spirit. In this case, we are in the realm of the “bearing,” “conceiving” “forming” or “bringing forth.”⁴ A child is conceived in the mother’s womb, but the world is not conceived *in* God. It is a totally different concept in that the distinction established by the separation of divine begetting and creation is abolished. The world is a product of divine fecundity. A feminine goddess who gives birth to the world from her womb infuses material reality with the substance and life of divinity. Here we are in the realm of fusion and participation. The divine is in and flows through, all that exists; therefore all is divine. All exists in one and one exists in all. This implies natural religion without recourse to divine revelation as man can find God in himself.

This could well be the key to why God is not called “mother-divine” in the Scriptures. When Paul refers to birth pangs in Romans 8, he does not speak of God, but of the travail of creation, labouring to produce a new creation! Therefore it was not out of anti-feminism or patriarchy that in Israel the idolatry of goddess worship was proscribed. God’s people were to understand that God is not comparable to the goddesses of the fertility cults which give birth to a natural cycle of productivity. God alone is creator and his election establishes his people through his will expressed in the calling of Abraham and the realisation of his promise in the exodus. God is the “God of the *fathers*, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.” In complete contrast to its context, Israel’s faith was founded in the eternal will of God.

6. *The difference between biblical revelation and goddess-talk*

Biblical creation takes place outside God, not as a result of divine fecundity. Ultimately the distinction between God as Father and a mother-god comes down to the difference between biblical theism and paganism⁵ on the objective level and between faith and sight on the subjective level. Surely this is also why image-making is so serious a sin.

The model of divine *sophia*, so close to New Age thought, is opposed to the biblical view of history. To unmoor oneself from the biblical doctrine of God’s fatherhood is to open the door to forms of pantheistic monism in which everything partakes of the divinity and in which ultimate meaning is found within us. This is the opposite to the biblical message in which man is God’s creature “created in his image and likeness” in an ethical sense, but not of one nature with him. Reformed theology has consistently maintained, against Thomism, that the fall of man is ethical not ontological.

Paul on Mars hill explained “in him we live and move and have our being” by the fact that “he is not far from any of us” and we can reach out and seek him as he is not an unknown god. This is not the same as saying “in her we live and move and have our being”!

4. The Hebrew word for *create* (*barah*) is used exclusively of the divine action in Scripture.

5. Latin, *paganus*, of the earth.

It is hardly surprising that certain radical feminists have penned liturgies for women in this perspective, in which the seasons, the cycles of nature, menstruation and menopause are celebrated. To affirm, as was proposed recently in a liturgical text: “You have engendered us in the womb of your being” is not only heretical but also a confusion of language!

The biblical world-view presents a different God, who is not linked to the nature of creation, which is passing away, is not caught up in the cyclical movement of myth and who is “God the Father almighty-creator of heaven and earth,” directing history in a linear way to its consummation.

It is difficult to avoid the impression that what feminists do not really like is the idea of God the Father as sovereign Lord. Dorothy Sölle says that we are not dependent on God, but that God enables us by maintaining his love in us through mystical communion, so that we do not serve God, but manifest that God is our companion.⁶

6. Process theology speaks in much the same way, concerning the relation between God and man.

Conclusion

The difference between Judaism and Christianity is that, in the older testament, the fatherhood of God which is referred to in several places, is not central as in the New Testament. God is fully revealed in his only Son who alone can say “I am going to my Father.” To replace God the Father and Son with divine-mother or goddess-talk is not to have the Father and not to have the Son. Ultimately, in the debate about whether God can be called mother or not, what is at stake is not only the Lordship of God the Father but the divinity of the Son.

To say “She is Lord” is as ridiculous as putting “Baa baa green sheep” in the nursery rhyme. It also denies the historical reality of who Jesus is. It is theology-fiction. Gender equality applied to biblical revelation is a temptation to depart from historic Christianity’s doctrine of God and also from the one way of salvation.⁷ C&S

7. Since published: J. W. Cooper, *Our Father in Heaven: Christian Faith and Inclusive Language for God* (Baker, 1988); not consulted.

THE WITCH CRAZE: POSITIVELY MEDIAEVAL?

by Nick Needham

SOMETIMES it seems that the charismatic movement is going to overwhelm us with an increasingly bizarre and paranoid demonology. We now have demonically infested Christians, demonically possessed televisions and other objects, demons flowing down the family tree bloodline, demons in personal control of houses, streets, financial institutions, and who knows what else, demons entwined around particular parts of our bodies causing sins and disorders, demons popping into our souls if we suffer a trauma (e.g. being involved in a car crash)—and so it goes does on, until one is almost afraid to open a tin of baked beans in case it was canned by someone whose great-grandfather was a Freemason. Those who have retained their sanity are sometimes heard to criticise this demonic paranoia as “positively mediaeval,” or some such phrase derogatory of the Middle Ages. My purpose

in this article is to demonstrate that such comments do a serious injustice to the Middle Ages. They demean mediaeval theology most unfairly to put it in parallel with today’s charismatic excesses. I will seek to indicate the relative sanity of our mediaeval ancestors by pointing to just one historical fact: the origins of the “witch craze”—that movement within European history in which hysteria about demonic infiltration into human activities was at its height.

It may seem strange, but facts are facts. When we think of the Renaissance in Western Europe, it probably conjures up an image of proto-Enlightenment reason, the liberation of people’s minds from mediaeval superstition, humanists mocking relics, Erasmus mocking the papacy. In some ways this image is not incorrect. But it is gravely inadequate. The same Renaissance era also saw the birth

of a wild irrational mania that was to sweep across Western society for the next two or three hundred years: the witch craze. Fear and panic about the existence and activities of witches gripped almost every level of European society, including the educated. Governments put to death untold thousands of men and women who were accused of practising black magic.

As I have already hinted, people today often think that the Middle Ages were the great era of the witch craze. This is far from the case. Heresy, not witchcraft, was the great dread of the mediaeval period. When the Inquisition was founded in 1215, it made no mention of witches; heretics were its target. It was only in the fifteenth century that witchcraft replaced heresy as the supreme enemy in the eyes of Church and State. Of course, mediaeval thinkers had considered the subject of witchcraft. In the twelfth century Gratian, the “father of canon law,” dealt with various aspects of black magic in his writings; but Gratian regarded most of the stories about witches (e.g. that they flew through the air) as a sad delusion. So did the other Church authorities.

There was growing concern about witches in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, reflected in the works of Thomas Aquinas, but it was not until the fifteenth century—the age of the Renaissance—that the Western Church began to view witchcraft as a distinct cult requiring special treatment. Whole new areas of theological study sprang up: the varieties of witchcraft, the correct ways of detecting it, the proper punishments it merited. At the very dawn of the Renaissance, during the last years of the pioneer humanist Francesco Petrarca, in 1370–80, the Inquisition decreed in a series of tracts that witchcraft must now be dealt with as seriously as heresy. This was the first trickle; a hundred years later, in 1484, Pope Innocent VIII (1484–92) published one of the most famous papal bulls, *Summis desiderantes*, which made the burning of witches into the official Catholic policy. The trickle had become a flood.

In 1486 the most influential book ever written about witchcraft appeared—*The Witches’ Hammer*, constantly reprinted throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The authors were two high-ranking inquisitors from Cologne university, the Dominican friars Heinrich Kramer and Jacob Sprenger. Here was everything anyone could ever wish to know about witches and how to deal with them (and not only witches—vampires too). Stories about occultic powers and activities that a previous generation of theologians had dismissed as delusions were now embraced as horrific fact and described in lurid detail. Modern readers will need a strong stomach to read *The Witches’ Hammer*! Kramer and Sprenger were particularly harsh towards women: there were ten female witches for every male one, they declared. Not surprisingly, women were the main victims of the witch craze. In the days of the early Roman Empire, people had blamed Christians for everything that went wrong in society—“no rain, because of the Christians.” Now the tables were turned—Christians blamed the witches. Bad weather, crop failure, famines, droughts, infant mortality, sterility among humans and farm animals: witches were, it was

said, probably the cause of all these. Society had to destroy them for its own safety.

The witch craze was just as fierce in countries which accepted the Protestant faith as it was in Roman Catholic lands. Since most of the readers of this magazine are Protestants, let us take our examples from Protestant countries—not because our forefathers were worse than the Papists, but just to show the universal nature of the preoccupation. In Calvin’s Geneva, for instance, two or three women were executed each year for witchcraft; in the bumper year 1545, 34 women were put to death. One estimate puts the total number executed throughout Protestant Germany in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries at 100,000, and in Calvinist Scotland between 1560 and 1600, some 8,000.

However, the most notorious Protestant episodes of witch-killing took pace in Puritan England and Puritan America. In England, during the Civil War and Commonwealth period, the activities of Matthew Hopkins as “Witch Finder General” provided lurid material for twentieth-century film-makers. In fact, Hopkins was active only from 1644 to 1647 (when he died of consumption), but along with his assistants John Sterne and Goody (!) Phillips, he excelled all other Commonwealth Witch Finders in uncovering Satan’s agents—mostly in Puritan Essex, his native county. For example, at the Essex Summer Session of 1645, 29 women were cited for witchcraft by Hopkins, of whom 19 were executed (by hanging, the normal English method of killing witches: witch-burning is largely a myth as far as English practice goes). Puritan America, of course, supplies the still more egregious episode at the village of Salem in Massachusetts, where 20 people were put to death in 1692 (19 by hanging, one by being crushed between two slabs of stone). Fortunately some Puritan leaders kept their cool and outspoken criticism of the proceedings by Increase Mather helped to bring them to a swift end. Five years later one of the judges, Samuel Sewall, a sincere Christian man, publicly confessed to his church how deluded he had been to take part in such an outburst of public hysteria.

Lest the reader misunderstand, I am not here trying to recommend some form of rationalist scepticism about the occult. I do not doubt its reality. However, I am suggesting that our own history should teach us lessons of caution and sanity. When beliefs arise about the occult and how to deal with it, and those beliefs have no foundation in Scripture (which is meant to equip us thoroughly for every good work, 2 Tim. 3:17), we can very easily be led into a paranoia which can itself be a more harmful work of Satan than the sensational physical manifestations of the demonic that we so fear. Present-day charismatic paranoia indicates that the “evangelical” world probably is slipping back into an unhealthy mental attitude we thought we had grown out of. But my historian’s training prompts me to say that it is not the mental attitude of the Middle Ages, but of something more modern. So the next time charismatic demonology tempts you to utter the words “Positively mediaeval!—pause and be fair to the Middle Ages. Try “Positively Renaissance!” instead. C&S

Book Reviews

THE ECCLESIASTICAL TEXT:
TEXT CRITICISM, BIBLICAL AUTHORITY AND
THE POPULAR MIND
BY THEODORE P. LETIS

Philadelphia: Institute for Renaissance and
Reformation Biblical Studies, 1997
232 pages, paperback, £13.95,
ISBN 0-9658607-0-1

REVIEWED BY COLIN WRIGHT

THE subject of text criticism raises a number of sometimes painful problems for the thoughtful Christian. It is a highly technical discipline; requires superior knowledge of and skill in a number of languages; demands an almost encyclopaedic grasp of history, theology, philosophy and philology. In light of this, how can the average Christian be expected to defend a particular text of Scripture against the onslaughts of both infidel scholars and, increasingly, the market strategies of giant corporates pursuing nothing but financial gain?

There have been a number of solutions proposed. Some, seeing the magnitude, nay impossibility, of the task have quite simply abandoned it, caring neither what versions they read nor worrying about the theological problems they raise. Others get a smattering of knowledge, often misconceived, from those who do know, learn a few fancy phrases, a few Latin or (transliterated) Greek terms, and pass themselves off as knowledgeable apologetes. Their clear-cut, black-and-white, fixes convince no-one outside their own tiny circle of devotees. A few decide to take the bull by the horns and get down to some serious long-term study and after a decade or two emerge with something worthwhile to say to the Christian church.

There is no doubt in my mind that Dr Letis is one of those few scholars who are currently doing significant scholarly work along Christian lines in this field. A major work from him is yet to appear, but this selection of some of his best essays is an excellent introduction to the subject. These essays rarely venture into the more arcane technical topics that would be as far beyond most of us as Einstein's Theory of General Relativity. Nevertheless, they exhibit the marks of a genuine and extensive scholarship, and they discuss areas of concern that certainly are within the grasp of the average "educated layman."

Letis has subtitled this volume: *Text Criticism, Biblical Authority and the Popular Mind*. It encapsulates many of the

concerns that are central to the message he is seeking to convey. For as the reader will discover, far more is at stake than simply determining what the Greek text of the New Testament should actually contain. Nowhere is this more clearly seen than in his first essay: *B. B. Warfield, Common-Sense Philosophy and Biblical Criticism*. Warfield thought he could use modern scientific text criticism to kill two birds with one stone. On the one hand, he believed that text criticism would enable him to defend the Reformed confession of the Scriptures as the very Word of God. On the other, he believed that text criticism would enable him to recover the original text which alone he believed was fully inspired and therefore inerrant.

In this he goofed, as Letis has ably shown. First because he miserably failed to understand that his doctrine of inerrancy was both against the Reformed confessions and second because the project was to backfire dramatically. The abandonment of the *infallibility* of the manuscripts we do have, in favour of the *inerrancy* of the autographs—the actual manuscripts written by the apostles—leaves us with no trustworthy Bible at all. We have to wait on text critical experts to do their work before we can trust Scripture. The expert's decision is as far off as Microsoft's bug-free version of Windows.

Implicit in Warfield's position is the fact that the books of Scripture have come down through history just as any other books. He never questioned this, though such a stance undermines the Christian view of God and history from the word go. It is also problematic: How can we be sure that Paul's amanuenses (secretaries) were as infallible as he himself was when writing down his dictated letters? Unless we have the original manuscripts how could we ever be certain that our "scientific" method had recovered the true original?

Even more importantly, what is it about Scripture that is inspired? Modern consensus is that it was the writers. Yet the only mention of inspiration (2 Timothy 3:16) refers it to the writings themselves, not their authors. What's more, that passage has clear reference to the actual manuscripts of the Old Testament that Timothy was then using—hardly originals and probably Greek translations!

Letis draws attention to one of the most devastating effects of the Warfieldian approach to Scripture: its study and preservation has now become the domain of the academy rather than the Church. The Church, claims Letis, with evident justification, has lost sight of Scripture as a "Sacred Text."

He has powerfully and rightly preached that we must return the Scripture to its rightful place at the centre of the

Church's life. It is not a lifeless cadaver, fit only for cool analytic dissection by those who have no interest in its life-giving power. It is the breath of life that created and maintains the Church. It is both sad and oppressive to see the casual way it is used in the Church. In most churches it seems to be read for no other purpose than to give a brief context for the sermon, what modern evangelicals regard as the *real* Word of God. Readings are never prepared beforehand (contrary to Paul's injunction—1 Timothy 4:13), and are often hurried, cursory and extremely short. This is in stark contrast to the pattern we find in Scripture itself, particularly the incident recorded in Nehemiah chapter 8 of a really long public reading. This passage is often misunderstood as referring to a week of sermons but in fact it was nothing of the sort. When the King James Version speaks of "giving the sense" it means they were *translating*. For a whole week this congregation of 50,000 men, women and children stood up to hear the Pentateuch read aloud in a language they did not understand, with interspersed, and seemingly off-the-cuff, translations by the Levites. I have often heard this passage used to justify sermons and wooden pulpits but never for what it represents: the public reading of Scripture in the original languages even when they cannot be understood. If the revival of the practice itself could not be justified, the spirit in which Scripture was regarded by them is something that is badly needed in our midst. It is what Letis is on about so much in these pages. When the Church lost that attitude, it abandoned Scripture to the unbelieving academy and lost the life-giving force in its midst.

A corollary of this is Letis' preference for preservation over against restoration. This quest for the historical text is, according to Letis, a programme that began with Erasmus and that culminated in the nineteenth century's quest for the historical Jesus. Both quests abandon the reality of what they claim to seek. Letis opposes his "catholic preservationist" principle to what he calls a "primitivist restorationist" principle. He claims that the "majority text" was so precisely because it was "the text used in catholic ecclesiastical practice" (p. 81) The subtle nuance may be lost on many. Indeed it has been. But it has significant theological fallout. Restorationist agendas are always romanticist and Utopian. They want to get back to a golden age, to a better state of things. Such agendas are embarked upon by a plethora of constituencies, ranging from Pentecostals eager to restore the miraculous element of apostolic Christianity to Calvinists eager to restore a seventeenth-century Puritanism. Whatever following they might initially attain they all ultimately end in failure because they do not deal with the real issue: heeding Holy Scripture as a sacred text and applying it to our own lives and culture. In addition, the academic high-jacking of Scripture for restorationist purposes in the last two centuries has created a wholly new approach to Scripture. "For many," claims Letis, "the dirty business of examining the text of Scripture in such a clinical way desensitizes them from ever again being able to appreciate the Bible as a living, *Sacred Text*" (p. 83). He continues: "This is because they never move into the final phase where one steps back and rediscovers the Bible's true function within the ecclesiastical community, both historically and in the contemporary situation. What is needed is the critical awareness of the human circumstances involved in the compila-

tion and transmission of Holy Scripture (it is the legitimate work of the Academy to provide this), and an equal awareness of its divine purpose and function (the Church alone, the only authentic matrix for the proper use of the Sacred Text, can provide this)."

Letis reserves his ultimate criticism for the current state of affairs not to the inadequacies of the Academy but for the failure of the Church: "If the Bible is not rediscovered as a Sacred Text, it will not be the fault of the Academy's Biblical criticism; it will be the failure of the confessing Church, into whose hands it was placed" (p. 85).

This thoughtful and penetrating volume ought to be studied by every Christian concerned about the state of the modern Church in general and the parlous state of the Scriptures in the Church in particular. *C&S*

FUNDAMENTALISM AND EVANGELICALS

BY HARRIET A. HARRIS

Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998, 380pp.

REVIEWED BY JOHN PECK

"FUNDAMENTALIST" has become a term of abuse in many contexts; a synonym for "extremist," "irrational literalist," a typical "religious terrorist." It was natural, therefore, that evangelicals reacted fairly violently to James Barr's critique of conservative evangelicals as having a "fundamentalist mentality." This book is a painstaking investigation of that critique and an assessment of how much truth there might be in it. In the process, we are taken through much of theological history since the Reformation, of philosophy and theologies of revelation and Scripture in the church especially during the last two centuries, and many variations of present-day Protestant thought. So the title gives a deceptively limited idea of the kind of education you get by reading this book. The documentation is staggeringly wide, from the giants like Stott, Bavinck, Orr, Marsden and Barr, down to the smallest minnows, like, er!, me. Arguments and theories are largely presented in the words of their exponents, and often commented on with refreshing lucidity, revealing a masterly freedom of acquaintance.

The reader must not be tempted to bypass the Introduction. The subject is a tangled jungle of ideas, people and arguments, and in the Introduction Dr Harris gives important indications of some of its pathways and perils. "Fundamentalist," for example, is itself a very slippery word; and we learn that Dr Harris is going to use the term "in three main ways" with the hope that her usage will be clear from the context. (There's also an appendix called "Comparative Fundamentalism"!)

But I hope I have understood her correctly by saying that for her the characteristics common to all are a belief in verbal inerrancy and a commitment to rational demonstration of that belief. There is also a valuable summary of the contents, mostly chapter by chapter.

Using the 1920's as a crucial period in which fundamentalism became self-conscious, the book begins with a historical survey of its antecedents and developments. One thing emerges decisively, namely that evangelicalism predates

fundamentalism (and therefore may well outlive it). Of course, the fact that fundamentalism is relatively new does not *ipso facto* condemn it. Since the profound techno-cultural changes wrought by the Industrial Revolution, making it impossible to transfer the agrarian-trading categories of Scripture directly to modern cultural life, the appearance of theories of Scripture as a hermeneutical basis was inevitable.

Inevitably, James Barr's *Fundamentalism* stalks the entire book; at this point he is expounded, quoted, and discussed in some depth, and equally inevitably this leads to an examination of the philosophical roots of the movement and the characteristics of the subsequent leading schools of thought. So far so good. But then comes the heart of the jungle: the various ramifications of the interactions among different kinds of evangelicals, differences between the British and American scenes, and various dialogues between them and Barr and others, ranging over issues of difference like: fallibility, inerrancy, historical and form-criticism, authority, revelation, apologetics, separatism, spirituality, and hermeneutics. Ah, hermeneutics! This leads on to another can of worms: the relation between exegesis and interpretation, and between interpretation and application, and things like relevance and presuppositional criticism. There's a fairly comprehensive coverage of the various influences on the debate, often with some valuably concise descriptions—such as the summary of Clouser's "deconstruction of the myth of religious neutrality" (the myth, not the book as you might think from the text on p. 272!), or the three-page introduction to Dooyeweerd. Then after a survey of the tensions within the fundamentalist approach, there are some tentative conclusions, and finally, refreshingly, she poses a "set of questions that lies behind all my querying."

This is an uncomfortable book for us conservative evangelicals. I'm sure others would share in many of my emotional reactions—sometimes feeling my weaknesses exposed, sometimes complaining that "it's not really like that!"; sometimes warming to the fairness and balance of the treatment, sometimes feeling out of one's depth at some point in the argument, but for me, never feeling that she is in the least bit ignorant of her subject.

Her closing questions cry out for my personal response. First, we are asked, "Do evangelicals recognise the mentality to which I have given the name "fundamentalist? If so how would they respond? My personal reaction is to say "Yes, I do recognise it. I share many of its convictions, but I hold them differently. I cannot use any fundamental beliefs as the criterion of a person being a Christian. I have lived too long not see that our hearts are never the same shape as our heads, let alone our mouths; and I am impressed by the intimacy of the love for Christ which some have, whose language of conviction is almost totally opposed to mine. If I believe that Jesus is Lord, then only he can be the criterion, and nothing, but nothing else. In that respect, I hear the word, "he that is not against me is for me." Thus I often see the fundamentalist mentality as a kind of idolatry. (If I have any sense of dissatisfaction, it is the weakness of reference in the debate to Christ—not merely the Spirit—as the authority in and for Scripture, and a possible clue to its nature in the twofold nature of Christ). Insofar as I hold the convictions of fundamentalism it is because of our obligation to look for as true an understanding of the gospel as is possible, and to go on doing that as disciples, for ever learning about him whom we know. The next question posed is: "Do evangelicals wish

to discuss their identity in ways that have nothing to do with this mentality? If so, how do they wish to portray themselves?" To this my answer must be, "I want nothing to do with the mentality, but I am happy to be identified by the conviction."

But when we talk of rationalism and apologetics, there is more to be said. It seems to me that in the matter of apologetics, it is a fundamentalist weakness to hope for rational proofs. Scripture is the only account of Christ which has any claim to reliability of any kind. This puts it very close to claiming our ultimate commitment; and at that point, "proofs" of the usual kind are impossible, or at best circular. You'll notice I speak of "reliability," not "inerrancy." That's because I just want to be able to trust that Book. Maybe one day someone will show me how I can trust my soul's understanding to a literature which has mistakes in it. That would make for a certain kind of comfort. But we all have to face the fact that the Book is fraught with difficulties. My complaint about, for example, some "critical" theories is that they remove difficulties too easily. I'm not interested in just removing the Bible's difficulties, as Barr, with some justification, suspects many fundamentalists of being. I want solutions that are revelatory. Some years ago I set about reconstructing my own unified account of the Resurrection stories, not trying to play with the words or dismiss any of the accounts as illusory (though I admit to being tempted!). The result was a vision of that event which has gripped and excited my imagination ever since. Which is why I treasure the difficulties in Scripture; I save them up, visit them from time to time, even try to sharpen their awkwardness, knowing that (oddly, like the natural scientist!) it is the problems which are growing points of discovery.

But in our relation to others in disagreement, it seems to me that Christ offers two strategies: of salt and light. Of salt, in which we meet the world on its own terms, and light, in which we offer an alternative world. Rational(ist) apologetics can demonstrate that belief in a reliable Scripture is at least worthy of some intellectual respect. To refuse to do that would open us to the charge of being necessarily obscurantist. (Such arguments, after all, are no different in principle from the Thomist "proofs" of the existence of God). But it is surely not enough; insofar as such an apologetic may undermine the self-confidence of opponents, inevitably it has to meet the cry, "So what is your alternative?" Which is why we also need to be light shining from outside, and why, with some reservations, I'm a Dooyeweerdian. His philosophical framework enables me to develop a way of thinking to "unpack" the Bible as an alternative cultural vision of life which confronts my own cultural thinking and its presuppositions.

It seems to me that Barr is so suspicious of the good faith of fundamentalists that he overlooks an important point: our obligation to learn from opponents. Even if we were to regard them as the children of this world, they can still, as Jesus says, be wiser than the children of light. Hence my investigation of the various forms of criticism. Put at its extreme, I expect to learn from heretics—who tend, anyway, to live off neglected truth. We live in a "wysiwyg" age, preoccupied with life as we know it from sense experience. So this is an age when we most easily see the humanity of Jesus—and also the humanity of the Book about Him. (Paradoxically, the more clearly I see the humanity of Christ in the Bible, the more certain I become of His deity.)

Dr. Harris' book not only unpacks the tortuous relation-

ship between evangelicals and fundamentalism, but in the process shows its history; the ongoing process of adaptation and modification. I am personally grateful, because she clarified for me my own history since that first week in April 1942, when the New Testament for the first time came to life, and I believed in its miracle stories because such an enormous miracle had happened in me. Looking back, I recall times when I shared in the general retreat from scholarship as a threat to faith (“dying by degrees” we called it), and then later the realisation that if the “assured results of modern scholarship” could be so precarious, even wrongheaded, I could enter the field without any fear at all. Then came the excitement of the Kuyperian time, and subsequent awareness of problems it did not address. And they’re all there, told out, in this book. It is a valuable ministry, holding a mirror up to others.

The density of information in this book is inevitably reflected in its layout, and it is a relief to be able to consult footnotes *en passant* rather than have to turn to endnotes. There is a list of over 350 authors referred to, and a handy glossary of acronyms of institutions connected with the subject, and a fairly useful index. I only found a couple of misprints, the worst making grammatical nonsense of Newton’s Latin dictum on p. 118; otherwise the printing conforms to Clarendon’s usual high standards for this one of their series called, too modestly, “Theological Monographs.”

Definitely not for the fainthearted; but to the persistent, enormously rewarding. *C&S*

MEDIEVAL WOMEN

BY EILEEN POWER

Cambridge University Press (Canto), 1995
xxviii + 104 pages including indices

REVIEWED BY STEPHEN J. HAYHOW

ORIGINALLY published in 1975 under the auspices of the late author’s husband, M. M. Postan, these essays were, in their original form compiled in the 1930s. Maxine Berg, in the Foreword, tells us that Eileen Power was a blue stocking feminist. The feminist slant of the author often shows through, but does not substantially mar the usefulness of the book. In fact, *Medieval Women* is the fascinating story of the lot of women in that period. Illustrated with black and white prints throughout, Power gives a gripping account from original sources and authoresses of the period.

Against the derogatory valuation of women sometimes found, the mediaeval view took a profoundly positive one. As in most ages, women were downtrodden by some and elevated by others. Power delineates these threads in mediaeval thought, carefully drawing upon mediaeval sources and female authors of the period. She supposes (p. 2) that a “grass roots” view of the place and status of women may have been much higher than that proposed by the elite and clergy of the period. But as the opinions of the lower classes have not been preserved for us directly, it is impossible to support that statement factually. However, we do gain a different perspective from the aristocratic female authors of the period, and it is to such that Power turns for her sources.

Women held an important and vital position in the mediaeval period—just as they have in all periods both before and since. The undeniable fact is that women worked alongside men, in the fields and in the workshop. Women were found in nearly all professions, but of course this is to be expected in a society where labour was rooted within the family circle, the era of big business and large-scale industrialism was still centuries away. Non-feminists, of course, do not dispute that women worked, nor do they deny that women ought to work. This has never been the issue. The feminists of the turn of the century were usually rebelling against the “lazy” culture of the upper middle class—the kind depicted in Jane Austen novels. The pressure of necessity and want saw women working alongside their men. The argument between feminists and anti-feminists is not over work as such, but the structure of authority in family, marriage and society. It was this change in authority that had consequences for the work patterns of married and single women.

In many ways women were idealised in mediaeval society—the whole ritual and extravagances of courtly love indicated a secularised adoration of Mary (see p. 12 where Power makes this interesting connection). A married woman would be “adored” from a far by a distant entourage. Power argues that this compensated for love-less marriages that were pre-arranged around property and land rights.

Documents such as wills show the confidence that husbands placed in their capable wives. Power’s description of such women so closely parallels the virtuous wife of Proverbs 31. She is capable, industrious, efficient, the manager of the household under her husband, as well as a business woman.

Mediaeval culture had imbibed Christianity, a faith that is ever present, no matter who reports it! Power’s picture of the lot of women is therefore useful in broadening our understanding. But there is a methodological criticism to be made. To discuss mediaeval women is itself to isolate women, as if they were a “category” to be examined. This is the problem with this analytical approach. A far more realistic assessment would have been to have discussed the role of women with the roles of men, family, children, interwoven into the “cloth” of the mediaeval age. That, of course, is how it really was. The modern tendency to isolate “groups,” genders and classes and thus to atomise them and abstract them from their true context. We do not exist as “women,” “men”—isolated and unconnected categories. That is modern idea, and we must resist it. We must also resist its being read back into an age that would scarcely have recognised or understood it. *C&S*

GODS THAT FAIL: MODERN IDOLATRY AND CHRISTIAN MISSION

BY VINOTH RAMACHANDRA

Paternoster Press, 1996, 226 pages including index
ISBN 0-85364-755-0,

REVIEWED BY STEPHEN J. HAYHOW

Gods that Fail is a book about modernity. Books about modernity are legion at the moment, from David Well’s *God*

in the *Wasteland* to the superior studies by Catholic cultural critic E. Michael Jones. *Gods That Fail*, while containing some useful and insightful moments, is a basically flawed assessment of modernity. Ramachandra, like so many of his neo-evangelicals compatriots, concedes the field on important matters like evolution/creation and the literal, historical record found in the first 11 chapters of Genesis. To attack modernity by undermining the historicity and integrity of Gen. 1–11 is counter productive.

Of course there are edifying moments (e.g. pp. 12ff, 16ff), and Ramachandra reiterates points that have been made elsewhere by Colin Gunton (see *The One, the Three and the Many* [CUP]) and Eastern European thinker, politician Verclav Havel, but the general stance is not helpful. Some of Mr Ramachandra’s insights are worthwhile, but the book is marred too heavily by his concessions to modernity, rather than his attempted critique.

First, Ramachandra makes a big deal about what he calls social inequality. On p. 38f. he resorts to the land distribution laws of the Old Testament, and to Samuel’s warning about Kingship in 1 Samuel 8, to support his assertion that a more equitable distribution of resources is required in the world. However, 1 Samuel does not warn against social inequalities, but about state tyranny under worldly kingship. Ramachandra imports the modern notions of social equality and makes it synonymous with “distributive justice” (p. 118). On p. 45 he even proposed that the poor have a “right” to steal from those who possess what they need. Yes we are to be concerned for the genuine poor, but redistribution is not the way out, and neither is theft. On p. 37 Ramachandra asks the astounding question, whether Marx and Freud were closer to the Christian notion of the kingdom than the other religions. No comment.

Secondly, in dealing with the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, it is plain that Ramachandra does not treat the Genesis record as historical, but symbolic. Now without doubt, there is symbolism in these chapters, but this does not call for an abandonment of the historical reality described. Genesis is about ontology (p. 77), not science, he says. It’s amazing how these theistic-evolutionists still want to talk about creation *ex nihilo* whilst embracing evolutionary theory! They want the world-view and the meaning and purposefulness of the Creation doctrine without the frown of the world for embracing “unscientific creationism.” Again there are useful points made about the structure of Gen. 1–2, which, to my mind, are not inconsistent with a literal interpretation (i.e. that things happened the way it says they did). Ramachandra never tells us where the symbolism ends and the history begins, nor does he justify a transition point.

Here’s the problem with the “ontological” v. “literal” argument: on his account does there need to be a transition point? Let’s extend the point: if Creation did not need to happen as described in Genesis 1–11 in order for it to be “true,” then why does Matthew or John need to describe “how it happened” for it to be “true”? Why does Jesus need to be “real”; maybe the Gospels just teach ontology without requiring the inconvenience of explaining all those miracles etc. Now I am not saying that the author believes this, but like so many he has opened the flood gates, but can he close them at the right moment?

There are, of course, more problems: Ramachandra does not explain how sin and death enter the world through the first Adam, if the first Adam did not exist. Ramachandra

makes his exegesis sound so reasonable, but carefully avoids the myriad problems it creates. The same thing happens in his use of the Flood and the Tower of Babel.

In conclusion, one last niggly point. Ramachandra (or maybe it was his editor?) has adopted the modern CE (Common Era) for the Christian AD (p. 213), something increasingly reaching acceptance in academic circles. In a Christian book from an “evangelical” Christian publisher, this just shows who is following who. Enough said. *C&S*

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