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N. T. Wright on *Prolegomena*

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Introduction

In the current debates involving the old and new perspectives on Paul there has been disagreement on what the apostle Paul means by key biblical terms such as righteousness, justification, and works of the law. Critics of the new perspective on Paul (NPP) have interacted with the corpus of literature at various levels seeking to define these key terms through exegesis and interaction with primary sources such as the literature of Second Temple Judaism.¹ Some of those who have critiqued the NPP have traced the development of key ideas through the history of New Testament (NT) studies to give a historical background to the nature of the debate.² It is certainly important to contextualize historically the nature of any debate, as it gives the investigator an important frame of reference regarding the issues, key ideas, figures, and current trajectory of the discussion. Yet, one area that remains relatively untouched, if at all, is the area of theological presuppositions. In other words, what theological commitments do proponents of the NPP bring to the debate and how do they colour and affect the whole of their thought? Addressing the subject of theological *prolegomena*, then, is of the utmost importance.

¹ See, e.g., D. A. Carson, ed., et al., *Justification and Variegated Nomism*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001); A. Andrew Das, *Paul, the Law, and the Covenant* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2001); Simon J. Gathercole, *Where Is Boasting?: Early Jewish Soteriology and Paul's Response in Romans 1–5* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002); Seyoon Kim, *Paul and the New Perspective on Paul: Second Thoughts on the Origins of Paul's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002); Guy Prentiss Waters, *Justification and the New Perspectives on Paul: A Review and Response* (Philipsburg: P & R, 2004); Stephen Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The 'Lutheran' Paul and His Critics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004).

² E. g., Waters, *Justification*, 1–34; Westerholm, *Perspectives*, 101–16.

Establishing the presuppositions of a person's thought will enable the investigator to understand more fully why and how he comes to his conclusions.

While we cannot explore the presuppositions of every proponent of the NPP, we can narrow the scope of our investigation to one individual and trace the impact of his theological *prolegomena* throughout the whole of his thought. Certainly one of the most prolific and perhaps best-known proponents of the primary concerns of the NPP is N. T. Wright. Moreover, given that he has set forth his epistemology and therefore implicitly his understanding of Scripture in the first volume of his projected six volume series on Christian origins and the question of God, we have ample information to investigate and establish his views.³ This essay will, therefore, explore the subjects of Wright's theological epistemology and understanding of Scripture. The thesis of this essay is that though Wright is heralded as a conservative reformed theologian, his presuppositions place him in the traditional liberal historical-critical school of thought. The essay will proceed along the following lines to substantiate this thesis:

- (1) survey Wright's *prolegomena*, theological epistemology and understanding of Scripture;
- (2) critique his views and demonstrate what effect his presuppositions have upon the whole of his thought; and
- (3) conclude with some general observations.

We may therefore proceed to examine Wright's *prolegomena*.

Wright's *prolegomena*

Wright makes the important observation that presuppositions must be explored before one begins the study of the NT otherwise the 'study of Jesus, Paul and the gospels will remain largely the projection of an undiscussed metaphysic'.⁴ Wright therefore begins with a study of epistemology.

³ Wright is not alone in addressing matters of *prolegomena*, as James Dunn has also treated these issues, though his work is more narrowly focused on the theology of Paul (see James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998], 1-26).

⁴ N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God, Christian Origins and the*

Epistemology

Wright argues that one must have an understanding of worldviews before one can begin to assess data. He contends that worldviews 'form the grid through which humans, both individually and in social groupings, perceive all of reality. One of the key features of all world views is the element of story.'⁵ It is through an understanding of story, argues Wright, that one can articulate what he calls 'a critical-realist epistemology'. Wright explains that the post-enlightenment epistemologies of positivism and phenomenism fall short of providing a firm basis of knowledge. The positivist believes that there are some things about which we can have definite objective knowledge. This data is collected through empirical testing in the physical world, through measuring and observing.⁶ There are, of course, certain types of knowledge that do not fit the positivist category and must be classified as 'belief', not knowledge. Wright explains, for example, that aesthetics and ethics are reduced to functions of experience. On the other side of the spectrum lies phenomenism, the knowledge that one gathers through experience with the external world.⁷ The only information of which one can be sure is the sense-data that one collects from the external world. Wright illustrates the two types of epistemologies with the following diagrams:⁸

Question of God, vol. 1 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 31.

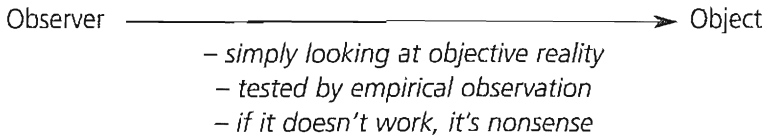
5 Wright, *People of God*, 32.

6 On positivism see, Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. Brian McGuinness and David Francis Pears (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2001); A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic* (St. Mineola: Dover Publications, 1977); Thomas Ricketts, 'Logical Positivism', in Jaegwon Kim and Ernest Sosa, eds., *A Companion to Metaphysics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 281–86. Cf. Michael W. Nicholson, 'Abusing Wittgenstein: The Misuse of the Concept of Language Games in Contemporary Theology', *JETS* 39/4 (1996), 617–29, esp. 625–28.

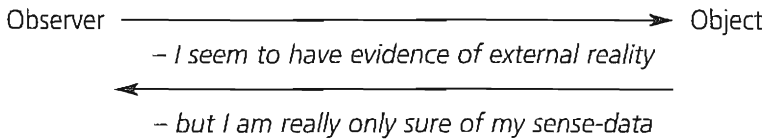
7 On phenomenism see C. I. Lewis, *An Analysis of Knowledge and Valuation* (La Salle: Open Court, 1946); Richard Fumerton, 'Phenomenalism', in Kim and Sosa, *Metaphysics*, 385–90.

8 Wright, *People of God*, 35.

Positivism



Phenomenalism



Wright illustrates the problems between positivism and phenomenism when he states:

If knowing something is like looking through a telescope, a simplistic positivist might imagine that he is simply looking at the object, forgetting for the moment the fact that he is looking *through* lenses, while a phenomenalist might suspect that she is looking at a mirror, in which she is seeing the reflection of her own eye.⁹

In contrast to positivism and phenomenism, Wright offers an alternative, critical realism:

This is a way of describing the process of 'knowing' that acknowledges the *reality of the thing known, as something other than the knower* (hence 'realism'), while also fully acknowledging that the only access we have to this reality lies along the spiralling path of *appropriate dialogue or conversation between the knower and the thing known* (hence 'critical'). This path leads to critical reflection on the products of our enquiry into 'reality,' so that our assertions about 'reality' acknowledge their own provisionality. Knowledge, in other words,

⁹ Wright, *People of God*, 35, also 32–34.

although in principle concerning realities independent of the knower, is never itself independent of the knower.¹⁰

Wright takes this method of gathering data and weds it to his presupposition of the importance of worldviews. He states that no one has a God's-eye view of reality but that everyone interprets information through a worldview, a community of interpretation. This means that, according to Wright, critical realism 'sees knowledge of particulars as taking place within the larger framework of the story or worldview which forms the basis of the observer's way of being in relation to the world'.¹¹ Wright further spells out the relationship between worldview and epistemology through the following diagram:¹²

Story-telling humans —————> Story-laden world

initial observation (already within a story)

←—————

is challenged by critical reflection on ourselves as story-tellers (i.e., recognizing that our claims about reality might be mistaken)

—————>

but can, through further narrative, find alternative ways of speaking truly about the world, with the use of new or modified stories

What this means is that one must constantly subject data to testing and verification so he can spiral-in on the truth. How does this epistemology work as it is applied to the study of the NT, or especially to one's theological epistemology?

¹⁰ Wright, *People of God*, 35. Cf. Ben F. Meyer, *Critical Realism and the New Testament*, Princeton Theological Monograph Series, vol. 17 (Allison Park: Pickwick Publications, 1989).

¹¹ Wright, *People of God*, 37.

¹² Wright, *People of God*, 44.

Wright applies his epistemology to the study of the NT by determining the stories that first century Judaism told. The only way to understand their stories is to do so from within their own culture, historical setting, and worldview. The investigator must, therefore, reconstruct the first-century Jewish worldview in order to understand the nature of the conflicts between Judaism and Christianity. It is not possible, argues Wright, to boil-off propositional truth from the stories because this process falsifies the worldview.¹³ One might say that Wright would argue that abstracting propositions from the stories is much like taking the paint off a painting – doing this destroys the painting and hence the intended message. For this reason Wright states that his task ‘throughout this entire project, will involve the discernment and analysis, at one level or another, of first-century stories and their implications’.¹⁴ What this means for Wright’s methodology is that he wants to discuss the historical origins of Christianity.

In the study of the NT, argues Wright, one must neither dismiss out of hand the possibility of miracles, nor the historicity of the events recorded therein. Rather, with Wright’s critical-realist epistemology the investigator can challenge his own story, a consequence of his own culture, historical setting, and community of interpretation, with the stories of the NT. The challenge and interaction between the worldview of the interpreter and that presented in the text then enters the spiral of hypothesis and verification:

History, then, is real knowledge, of a particular sort. It is arrived at, like all knowledge, by the spiral of epistemology, in which the story-telling human community launches enquiries, forms provisional judgments about which stories are likely to be successful in answering those enquiries, and then tests these judgments by further interaction with data.¹⁵

Through the hypothesis-verification investigative method, the reader can determine the validity of the stories he finds in the NT. What this means for Wright is that the study of the NT is essentially a study of first-

¹³ Wright, *People of God*, 77.

¹⁴ Wright, *People of God*, 79.

¹⁵ Wright, *People of God*, 109.

century religious movements. One must study, for example, the stories of the various competing groups in the first century: the Essenes, who believed they were participating in a secret new covenant; Josephus, who believed that Israel's god was going over to the Romans; Jesus, who told a story about a vineyard; and the early Christians, who told the story of the kingdom of God and its inauguration through Jesus.¹⁶ Wright states that, 'We are therefore studying human history, in the recognition that the actors in the drama, and hence in a sense the drama itself, can only fully be understood when we learn to see the world through their eyes.'¹⁷ Now, at this point one might conclude that Wright is exploring the NT simply as a historical phenomenon to the exclusion of any theological significance. This, however, is not the case.

The authority of Scripture

Wright argues that 'theology asks questions, as to whether there is a god, what relation this god has to the world in which we live, and what if anything this god is doing, or will do, about putting it to rights.'¹⁸ Theology is, therefore, an important element of Wright's investigative process because it highlights 'the god-dimension of a worldview'. For this reason, if one is to understand the language of the NT, he needs to understand the specific nature of early Christian and Jewish first-century theology.¹⁹ The implication of the union between the study of stories, or worldviews, as well as their theology, is that Christian theology tells a story and articulates its own worldview. It tells the story that humans are made in the image of their creator, placed in a good and beautiful, though transient, world but that humanity has rebelled against its creator. The solution to this problem is that the creator has acted and is acting to deal with the evil and bring the world to its intended goal through Jesus and the 'spirit' of the creator.²⁰ Wright takes these elements and applies them to his understanding of how the stories of the NT exercise their authority over other stories.

¹⁶ Wright, *People of God*, 41.

¹⁷ Wright, *People of God*, 118.

¹⁸ Wright, *People of God*, 127.

¹⁹ Wright, *People of God*, 130–31.

²⁰ Wright, *People of God*, 132–33.

Wright argues that only a theological analysis of contemporary culture can make the investigator aware of his own questions, presuppositions, aims, and intentions. The investigator brings his own stories and has them challenged by the stories of the Bible. But how is the story of the Bible authoritative? Wright offers the analogy of an incomplete play of William Shakespeare. Imagine that a group finds an unfinished play of Shakespeare and sets about to finish it. The group would have to finish the play in a manner that was befitting and harmonious with the previously written acts. Wright contends that there are five major acts of Scripture: creation, fall, Israel, Jesus, and the final act. In the final act, the first scene consists of the writing of the NT, in which there are hints of the end.²¹ The intervening scenes, that is between scene one and the conclusion of the final act, are performed by the church under the aegis of the previous four acts, at which point the final act concludes. The church, therefore, faithfully improvises the final scenes of the play based upon what has been written before. Wright contends that:

I am proposing a notion of 'authority' which is not simply vested in the New Testament, or in 'New Testament theology', nor simply in 'early Christian history' and the like, conceived positivistically, but in the creator god himself, and this god's story with the world, seen as focused on the story of Israel and thence on the story of Jesus, as told and retold in the Old and New Testaments, and as still requiring completion. This is a far more complex notion of authority than those usually tossed around in theological discourse.

Wright argues for this type of authority of Scripture for two reasons:

- (1) to show that though Christ has come in act four and ascended in act five, scene one (Acts 1–3), these events demand the necessity for further work; and
- (2) that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus does have a climactic sense to it but the need for further work is evident by Paul, who couples the work of Christ in the past to the work of the 'spirit' in the present.

²¹ Rom. 8; 1 Cor. 15; Rev.

This construction, according to Wright, fends off an anti-historical tendency in some branches of modern scholarship.²²

Summary

One may summarize Wright's *prolegomena* in the following manner: through a hypothesis and verification method one challenges the stories offered by various worldviews to spiral-in on the validity of a worldview. This means that one must place the stories of the NT within their historical setting to understand what they mean. One must also account for the theology, or god-dimension, of the stories of the NT. As it is theology and history, or the combined elements of the story, that challenge the stories of the investigator. The church takes the stories that have been written and faithfully improvises upon them in the present, which is an extension of the authority of the story of Scripture. We may now proceed to a critical analysis of Wright's *prolegomena*.

Critical analysis of Wright's *prolegomena*

When we consider the various features of Wright's *prolegomena*, there are both strengths and weaknesses. The strengths of Wright's *prolegomena* begin with his consideration of epistemology. First, seldom do theologians, but especially NT scholars consider presuppositional matters such as one's theory of knowledge. This is a commendable aspect of Wright's overall project, as recognizing one's presuppositions in the interpretive process is necessary, otherwise, as Wright correctly states, one will simply project an undiscussed metaphysic upon the Scriptures. Karl Barth's (1886–1968) Kierkegaardian existentialism comes to mind.²³ Second, Wright notes the important interpretive principle of reading the NT within its historical-cultural context. The de-historicizing methodology of Rudolf Bultmann (1884–1976) comes to mind.²⁴ Third, Wright highlights the importance of accepting the claims of the Scriptures and not prejudicially dismissing the miraculous because of an anti-supernatural bias. The history of religions

²² Wright, *People of God*, 143.

²³ See Cornelius Van Til, *Christianity and Barthianism* (Phillipsburg: P & R, 1962), 307–315.

²⁴ Rudolf Bultmann, 'New Testament and Mythology: The Problem of Demythologizing the New Testament Proclamation,' in *New Testament &*

school, F. C. Baur (1792–1860) and D. F. Strauss (1808–74), comes to mind.²⁵ Fourth, and finally, Wright emphasizes the importance of the authority of Scripture. For many throughout the history of the interpretation of Scripture, the Bible has represented merely a history or source book rather than an instrument of God's authority. So, these four characteristics of Wright's *prolegomena* are commendable. There are, however, weaknesses present in his theological presuppositions. We may begin, first, with his epistemology.

Theological epistemology

Wright offers his critical-realism in contrast to positivism and phenomenalism. He admits the need to recognize the reality of the subject under investigation, something outside the knower, the importance of critical reflection, and challenging one's own presuppositions. At the same time, he fails to account for the noetic effects of sin, which bears especially upon one's theological epistemology. Herman Bavinck (1854–1921) notes that:

If Christianity is a religion of redemption in the full and true sense of the word and hence seeks to redeem human beings from all sin, from the errors of the mind as well as the impurity of the heart, as much from the death of the soul as from that of the body, [Scripture] in the nature of the case cannot subject itself to the criticism of human beings but must subject them to its criticism.²⁶

Therefore, how can fallen man, apart from the assistance of the Holy Spirit obtain correct knowledge about the Scriptures? Wright, at least as he has outlined his epistemology in his *New Testament and the People of God*, has no place for the noetic effects of sin or the need for the

Mythology and Other Basic Writings, ed. Schubert M. Ogden (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1984), 1–45.

²⁵ F. C. Baur, *Paul the Apostle of Jesus Christ: His Life and Works, His Epistles and Teachings*, Two Volumes in One (1845; Peabody: Hendrickson, 2003); D. F. Strauss, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, trans. Eliot George (New York: Continuum, 1998).

²⁶ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 1, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 505.

illumination of the Holy Spirit for a correct understanding of the Scriptures.²⁷ Any one who undertakes the subject of theological epistemology must deal with Paul's statement: 'The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned' (1 Cor. 2:14; cf. 2 Cor. 3:14–16).²⁸

For the reason that Paul explains, namely that the natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, the Reformed church, in contrast to the more rationalistic wing of the church at large (Socinian, Arminian, and Cartesian) has emphasized the need for the work of the Holy Spirit in the comprehension of, and trust in the Scriptures. God's external source of religious knowledge (*principium cognoscendi externum*) is the objective revelation of Christ in Scripture and the Holy Spirit is the internal source of knowledge (*principium cognoscendi internum*).²⁹ Because Wright fails to account for the noetic effects of sin and the need of the illumination of the Holy Spirit in epistemology, but especially in theology, his offered solution of critical-realism is not all that different from the rationalism of René Descartes (1596–1650). The starting point of Descartes' epistemology was autonomous reason, which is the same basis for Wright's critical-realism.³⁰ Wright would reject this conclusion, as he states:

It is impossible to find solid ('objective') ground to stand on: such a thing does not exist. All epistemologies have to be, themselves, argued as hypothesis: they are tested not by their coherence with a

²⁷ There is one place where Wright acknowledges the need for the work of the Holy Spirit in one's theological epistemology: 'The Spirit broods over us as we read this book, to straighten out our bent thinking; the world-views that have got twisted so that they are like the world's world-views' (N. T. Wright, 'How Can the Bible Be Authoritative?' The Laing Lecture 1989 and the Griffith Thomas Lecture 1989, 18; *idem*, 'How can the Bible be Authoritative?' *Vox Evangelica* 21 [1991], 7–32).

There are two points to make regarding this quote: (1) Wright makes no mention of this important theological point in his *prolegomena* in *New Testament and the People of God*, so whether it is an oversight or a change in his view is not known; and (2) if Wright still holds this view it does not materially manifest itself in his *prolegomena*.

²⁸ All Scripture quotations are taken from the ESV unless otherwise noted.

²⁹ Bavinck, *Dogmatics*, 497.

³⁰ René Descartes, *Discourse on the Method*, ed. & trans. George Heffernan (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994).

fixed point agreed in advance, but (like other hypotheses, in fact) by their simplicity and their ability to make sense of a wide scope of experiences and events.³¹

Wright would most likely contend that because he denies the possibility of objective ground on which to stand, he is not committed to rationalist autonomy. Yet, one must ask the question, if all epistemologies have to be argued as hypotheses, who decides their validity or truthfulness but the individual? Like Descartes' foundation of doubt, in Wright's epistemology it is the individual who admits what is true. So, Wright's admission that there is no objective ground on which to stand only means that he is humble in his rational autonomy.

In contrast to Wright's autonomist epistemology, the church has historically argued that there is indeed objective ground on which to stand, namely the revealed Word of God.³² Wright and others might object to this on the basis that it is circular argumentation: one cannot appeal to the Word of God to prove its inspired character. While it may appear circular at first, this line of argumentation is not circular but linear. Again, Bavinck notes:

While revelation may be made credible by proofs, it is and remains a truth of faith, a gift of grace. Only the Spirit of God can make a person inwardly certain of the truth of divine revelation. God's revelation can be believed only in a religious sense, on God's own authority. The ground for faith is the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit. This position, however, seems circular: We believe Scripture is God's revelation because the Bible tells us so. Such circularity can be broken only by the inner conviction that God has spoken. This witness of God is the final ground of faith; our will to believe is, by God's grace, the final cause of our faith.³³

For the reasons outlined by Bavinck, the Reformed church has historically affirmed that the Scriptures are self-authenticating (*autopistos*).

³¹ Wright, *People of God*, 45–46.

³² See Cornelius Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Philipsburg: P & R, 1974), 21–30.

³³ Bavinck, *Dogmatics*, 562.

The doctrine of the testimony of the Holy Spirit, therefore, was incorporated in the French, Belgic, and Westminster Confessions.³⁴ The Belgic Confession, for example, states that the church accepts the books of the Protestant canon 'especially because the Holy Ghost witnesses in our hearts that they are from God' (§ 5), and the Westminster Confession states, 'Our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth, and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the word in our hearts' (1.5).³⁵ Wright's error in his theological epistemology naturally leads to subsequent errors in his doctrine of Scripture.

Understanding of Scripture

Wright's understanding of Scripture contains problems that originate with his epistemology. At the outset of his epistemology Wright makes no room for the objective ground of Scripture as a starting point and the needed illumination of the Holy Spirit. This, therefore means that with his critical-realism, he approaches the text of Scripture merely as a historical phenomenon. Wright states that the task of his investigation 'will involve the discernment and analysis, at one level or another, of first-century stories and their implications'. He goes on to write that, 'Our overall task is to discuss the historical origin of Christianity.'³⁶ Wright certainly does argue that one must investigate the theological aspects of the various first-century stories, what he defines as the 'god-dimension of a worldview'.³⁷ So, he might counter that, no, in the end, his analysis of Scripture is not solely historical. Rather, over and against those who have imposed a philosophical or theological grid over the Scriptures, he wants to take seriously the historicity of the events. While Wright's method is certainly an improvement over Bultmann, as he takes seriously the historicity of the

³⁴ Bavinck, *Dogmatics*, 583–84;

³⁵ For the Belgic and Westminster Confession see *The Creeds of Christendom*, ed. Philip Schaff, vol. 3 (1931; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 383–436, 600–73. The need of the testimony of the Holy Spirit in understanding of Scripture, is of course, classically stated in John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Library of Christian Classics, vols. 20–21, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 1.7.1–5, 74–81.

³⁶ Wright, *People of God*, 79.

³⁷ Wright, *People of God*, 130.

events of Scripture, Wright none-the-less fails to account for the redemptive-historical character of the Scriptures.

The Scriptures are not simply a historical occurrence like that of any other event, but instead represent the redemptive-historical activity of God in Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit. In other words, just as Wright fails to account for the work of the Holy Spirit in his theological epistemology, which pertains to the *ordo salutis* [order of salvation] he fails to account for the work of the Holy Spirit in his understanding of Scripture, as it pertains to the *historia salutis* [history of salvation]. Throughout Wright's corpus he does much to emphasize the eschatological nature of Christ's ministry and Paul's soteriology.³⁸ This is important and should be commended, as too many theologians treat eschatology as if it only entered the *loci* of systematic theology at the end. Wright fails, though, to account for the eschatological nature of the Scriptures, an eschatological manifestation of the person and work of the Holy Spirit.

When formulating one's doctrine of Scripture one must account for the two-stages of history of which Scripture speaks: the present evil age (Gal. 1:4) and the age to come.³⁹ It is Christ, as the second Adam, who inaugurates the eschatological age, or the age to come. Nowhere is this more evident than when Paul writes: 'Thus it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being; the last Adam became a life-giving Spirit"' (1 Cor. 15:45).⁴⁰ What is important to note here is that Paul closely identifies the eschatological age not only with Christ as the second Adam, but also the Holy Spirit. As Vos notes, 'Being thus closely and subjectively identified with the Risen Christ, the Spirit imparts to Christ the life-giving power which is peculiarly the Spirit's own: the Second Adam became not only [*Pneuma*] but [*pneuma Zoopoion*]'.⁴¹ The eschatological age, therefore, is not simply the age of the second Adam, but especially the age of the Holy Spirit, as the author of Hebrews states, the Spirit is the power

³⁸ E.g., N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God, Christian Origins and the Question of God*, vol. 2 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 576–91; *idem*, *What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 36, 96–99.

³⁹ Matt. 12:32; Mark 10:30; Luke 18:30; Eph. 1:21; Heb. 6:5. See Geerhardus Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology* (1930; Philipsburg: P & R, 1994), 1–41.

⁴⁰ Modified ESV.

⁴¹ Vos, *Pauline Eschatology*, 168–69.

of the age to come (Heb. 6:5).⁴² For this reason, Vos notes that, 'the Spirit is not only the author of the resurrection-act, but likewise the permanent substratum of the resurrection-life, to which He supplies the inner, basic element and other outer atmosphere.'⁴³ If one accounts for the two-age structure of redemptive history, and that the eschatological age is marked by the work of the Holy Spirit, then this must colour one's understanding of Scripture.

Scripture, or more specifically, the NT cannot be merely one historical document among the other literature of the first-century. Rather, the NT is the extension of the work of Christ into the eschatological age by the work of the Holy Spirit. Paul gives a scriptural redemptive-historical connection between the old Adamic and eschatological ages when he writes that the mystery of the gospel of Jesus Christ has been revealed to the nations through the prophetic writings. This was the OT (Rom. 16:25-26), which Peter elsewhere identifies as the result of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (2 Pet. 1:21). Paul also explains that the Holy Spirit has revealed the same mysteries 'to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit' (Eph. 3:5), which we now have in the NT. This connection between Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the apostles is the promised means by which Christ would communicate to the church (John 14:26) as the Spirit had communicated with OT Israel. Hence, as Herman Ridderbos notes, 'Christ not only provides salvation, He also provides trustworthy communication about that salvation.'⁴⁴ The way by which Christ communicates to the church about salvation is through the person and work of the Holy Spirit. The eschatological work of the Spirit as it pertains to Scripture is that for which Wright fails to account.

One cannot approach the Scriptures as merely a historical document. This type of methodology is no more of an improvement over the quest for the historical Jesus. The quest for the historical Jesus had no interest in any claims of Christ's deity, it only wanted to know of what Christ did in history. Along these lines Ridderbos notes that:

⁴² See, Geerhardus Vos, 'The Eschatological Aspect of the Pauline Conception of the Spirit', in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*, ed., Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. (Philipsburg: P & R, 1980), 91-125.

⁴³ Vos, *Pauline Eschatology*, 165.

⁴⁴ Herman N. Ridderbos, *Redemptive History and the New Testament Scriptures*, trans. Richard B. Gaffin (1963; Philipsburg: P & R, 1988), 43.

The objection to the historical-critical method is not that it is historical. In that respect it has brought to light many things that formerly were either unknown or too often neglected. The objection is that the origin of the historical method is secular, not revelation. The historical-critical method thus misunderstands the absolutely unique character not only of the content of the New Testament message but also of *the manner in which it has come to us*.⁴⁵

Wright's failure, therefore, to recognize the work of the Holy Spirit on the level of theological epistemology, the work of the Spirit applied to the individual in the *ordo salutis*, and at the level of redemptive history, namely the work of the Spirit as the agent of revelation in the eschatological age, produces implications for the whole of his thought.

Systemic impact

The systemic impact of Wright's *prolegomena*, his epistemology and understanding of Scripture, surfaces most prominently in the interpretive role he assigns to the literature of second-temple Judaism, his exegetical conclusions, and the role of narrative in theology.

Relationship of Second Temple literature to Scripture

Wright sees his study of the NT primarily as a historical investigation, a historical investigation of first-century stories and their implications.⁴⁶ He states that, 'We are therefore studying human history, in the recognition that the actors in the drama, and hence in a sense the drama itself, can only be fully understood when we learn to see the world through their eyes.'⁴⁷ One must understand the worldview of the first century in order to understand properly the events that the Scriptures record, whether the ministry of Christ or the teaching of Paul. Wright argues that:

we cannot escape the constant task, important in the study of second-temple Judaism as much as anywhere else, of reconstructing

⁴⁵ Ridderbos, *Redemptive History*, 49.

⁴⁶ Wright, *People of God*, 79.

⁴⁷ Wright, *People of God*, 118.

the worldview which informed and underlay not only this or that particular writing but the society as a whole. We need to plot, and understand, the stories that Jews of the period were telling themselves and one another about who they were, about what their god was up to, about what the meaning of it all might be.⁴⁸

Now, while one must certainly establish the historical-cultural context of any document to interpret it properly, Wright seems to locate the interpretive centre of gravity in the first century apart from two important factors: the inspired nature of the NT; and the methodology of the authors of the NT.

First, as noted above, the NT is the work not only of human authors in the first century but also the Holy Spirit. Placing interpretive priority in the first century and its worldview gives too much weight to uninspired documents and fails to give interpretive priority to the OT. This is evident, for example, when Wright states, 'There is a sense in which the Old Testament is not the book of the church in the same way that the New Testament is the book of the church.'⁴⁹ Again, if the OT is the product of the Holy Spirit (2 Pet. 1:21), then one must go beyond the first century and explore the views dating back at least to the 15th century BC and the composition of the Pentateuch. The interpretive relationship, therefore, between the OT and NT must take priority over the worldview of the first century. This does not mean that one must ignore the first century context, but rather note that there is the necessity of consciously connecting the revelation of the NT with the preceding history of revelation, the OT.⁵⁰ This interpretive connection is clearly evident in the way the authors of the NT use the OT.

Second, when we examine the methodology of the authors of the NT, there is quite a different picture from what Wright would have us think. Wright argues for the need to understand the first century, apart from which we will have no understanding of the message of the NT. Yet, when the authors wrote the NT they rejected the first-century understanding of things as authoritative, they looked, not to the literature of second-temple Judaism, but to the OT. As Ridderbos notes, 'The traditions of the Jewish

⁴⁸ Wright, *People of God*, 119.

⁴⁹ Wright, 'How Can the Bible Be Authoritative?' 12.

⁵⁰ Ridderbos, *Redemptive History*, 72.

elders were rejected by Jesus and Paul as obfuscations of God's commandments and as misunderstandings of the redemption Christ brought (Mark 7:8; Matt. 5:21ff; Col. 2:8, 16ff).⁵¹ Moreover, nowhere does Paul cite or quote the literature of second-temple Judaism. J. Gresham Machen (1881–1936) observed that,

It is significant that when, after the conversion, Paul seeks testimonies to the universal sinfulness of man, he looks not to contemporary Judaism, but to the Old Testament. At this point, as elsewhere, Paulinism is based not upon later developments but upon the religion of the Prophets and the Psalms.⁵²

Paul uses the OT exclusively.⁵³ and this was not something that was peculiar to Paul.

Many first-century Jews recognized that the prophets, men inspired by the Spirit of God, were no longer in their midst (1 Macc. 4:46; 14:41). This is what accounted for the great interest in John the Baptist, one who dressed and spoke as a prophet, even Elijah himself; a prophet was once again in the midst of Israel (Matt. 3:1ff). Other first century Jews such as Josephus (ca. 37–100 AD) recognized the closed and inspired nature of the OT canon. Josephus writes:

For we have not an innumerable multitude of books among us, disagreeing from and contradicting one another but only twenty-two books, which contain the records of all the past times; which are justly believed to be divine; and of them five belong to Moses, which contain his laws and the traditions of the origin of mankind till his death. This interval of time was little short of three thousand years; but as to the time from the death of Moses till the reign of Artaxerxes, king of Persia, who reigned after Xerxes, the prophets, who were after Moses, wrote down what was done in their times in thirteen books. The remaining four books contain hymns to God,

⁵¹ Ridderbos, *Redemptive History*, 17.

⁵² J. Gresham Machen, *The Origin of Paul's Religion* (1925; Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2002), 180.

⁵³ E. Earle Ellis, *Paul's Use of the Old Testament* (1957; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 10–37.

and precepts for the conduct of human life. It is true, our history has been written since Artaxerxes very particularly, but has not been esteemed of the like authority with the former by our forefathers, because there has not been an exact succession of prophets since that time; and how firmly we have given credit to those books of our own nation, is evident by what we do; for during so many ages as have already passed, no one has been so bold as either to add anything to them, to take anything from them, or to make any change in them.⁵⁴

Here we see a clear difference between the books of the OT, essentially the division of the OT canon that we now possess, and the literature of second-temple Judaism, specifically the Apocrypha.⁵⁵

What distinguished Jew from Christian, was not one's view of the OT canon, as the Jews held the OT canon to be inspired and closed. What distinguished Jew from Christian was their interpretation of the OT canon. Ellis notes that:

Not without significance for the question is the fact that no explicit quotations from the Septuagintal apocrypha appears in the New Testament, in Philo or in the literature of Qumran. In its conception of the Old Testament the messianic community of Jesus differed from the mainstream of Judaism not in the content of its Bible but in the interpretive key that it used to open the Bible.⁵⁶

The interpretive key, of course, was Jesus Christ. Moreover, the interpretive key of Christ could only be comprehended with the illumination of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 3:14–16). Additionally, whereas the Jews had hesitation adding to, or changing the content of the OT canon and recognized the inferior quality of their own recent literature, the authors of the NT had no such reluctance.

When Jesus explained the significance of his own ministry, he did so, not with the literature of second-temple Judaism, but with OT, the law and

⁵⁴ Josephus, 'Against Apion', in *The Works of Josephus*, trans. William Whiston (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987), 1.8 (38), 776.

⁵⁵ See E. Earle Ellis, *The Old Testament in Early Christianity: Canon and Interpretation in the Light of Modern Research* (1991; Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2003), 3–10.

⁵⁶ Ellis, *Old Testament*, 36.

prophets (Luke 24:44). One should also recall that Peter thought Paul's writings were equal with those of the OT (2 Pet. 3:15–16), unthinkable for a first-century Jew. Paul also saw his own writings as the product of the Holy Spirit.⁵⁷ For these reasons Ellis writes that:

The apostle's OT exegesis was not just an adoption of current traditions but reveals a vitality and understanding totally foreign to rabbinical literature. If Paul used Jewish interpretations, he culled and molded them to a Christological understanding of the OT; if he was a 'child of his times,' they were for Paul the times of the Messiah, His Cross, and resurrection, and His revelation of the true meaning of Scripture. Paul was a disciple of Christ not of Gamaliel.⁵⁸

Therefore, for these two reasons, the inspired nature of the NT and the methodology of the NT writers, Wright's emphasis upon the interpretive significance of the literature of the second-temple is misplaced. The interpretive significance of the second temple is not the only error produced by Wright's *prolegomena*. His view of scriptural authority produces questionable results and undoubtedly influences the way he uses Scripture in his theological project.

Scriptural authority and exegesis

In Wright's view of scriptural authority, the church completes the story of Scripture by improvising the unfinished scenes of the play. Christ has risen in act five, scene one, and the church must now write the end of the story, based upon the previous four acts. Wright argues that this view of scriptural authority:

... is not simply vested in the New Testament, or in 'New Testament theology,' nor simply in 'early Christian history' and the like, conceived positivistically, but in the creator god himself, and this god's story with the world, seen as focused on the story of Israel and thence on the story of Jesus, as told and retold in the Old and New Testaments, and as still requiring completion.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ 1 Cor. 2.4; 7.40; 2 Cor. 3.1–18.

⁵⁸ Ellis, *Paul's Use of the OT*, 83.

⁵⁹ Wright, *People of God*, 132–33; also *idem*, 'How can the Bible be Authoritative?' 7–32.

This view conceives of Scripture as the product of the church rather than the other way around. In Wright's view it is the church who writes the intervening scenes between act five, scene one, and the conclusion of the play. This seems to fall closer to the Roman Catholic view of scriptural authority – the Scriptures are authoritative because the church has declared them so and its own tradition is equal to that of Scripture. By contrast, Ridderbos notes that, 'In its redemptive-historical sense, the canon is not the product of the church; rather the church is to be the product of the canon.'⁶⁰ Moreover, far beyond any positivistic view of Scripture, the Reformed tradition has never viewed the Bible as a storehouse of facts out of which one constructs an empirical authority.⁶¹

Historically, the Reformed church has recognized the pneumatological character of Scripture. This has important implications for one's view of scriptural authority. For example, though the Westminster divines recognize the importance of the testimony of the church, the heavenliness of its contents, the efficacy of its doctrine, the majesty of the style, consent of all the parts, and many other incomparable excellencies of Scripture, their 'full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth, and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the word' (WCF 1.5). How does this pneumatological principle impact their understanding of the authority of Scripture? The divines base the authority, not ultimately on empirical grounds, but on the work of the Holy Spirit. What makes Scripture authoritative is 'no other

⁶⁰ Ridderbos, *Redemptive History*, 25.

⁶¹ There is, of course, the famous saying of Charles Hodge (1797–1878), 'The Bible is to the theologian what nature is to the man of science. It is his store-house of facts; and his method of ascertaining what the Bible teaches, is the same as that which the natural philosopher adopts to ascertain what nature teaches' (Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 [rep.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993], 10). This quote can certainly be construed as positivistic, yet read within the greater context of Hodge's theology, especially in consideration of his treatment of the work of the Holy Spirit, as well as his exegetical commentaries, it does not fall into the category of positivism (Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 527–32). Additionally, the connection Hodge draws between the Bible and the facts of nature is a powerful demonstration of the exegetical nature of his theology (D. G. Hart, 'Systematic Theology at Old Princeton: Unoriginal Calvinism,' in *The Pattern of Sound Doctrine: Systematic Theology at the Westminster Seminaries: Essays in Honor of Robert B. Strimple*, ed. David VanDrunen [Philipsburg: P & R, 2004], 11).

but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture' (WCF 1.10).⁶² The absence of the recognition of the Holy Spirit in Wright's view of the authority of Scripture leads to a problem concerning theological method.

The absence of the recognition of the work of the Holy Spirit in Wright's view of the authority of Scripture causes Wright to produce questionable exegetical conclusions. This is evident, for example, in his explanation of Paul's doctrine of justification. In his *What St. Paul Really Said*, he restricts his treatment of Paul to the undisputed Pauline epistles: Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, and Philippians.⁶³ Moreover, when Wright treats important subjects such as the interpretation of the phrase, 'the works of the law', he relies upon and agrees with the conclusions of James D. G. Dunn.⁶⁴ Yet, Dunn bases his interpretation for the contested phrase upon the undisputed Pauline epistles apart from Ephesians and the Pastorals, which Dunn believes to be post-Pauline.⁶⁵ Yet, there are a number of important passages in Ephesians and Pastorals that deal with the subject of works.⁶⁶ Wright's conclusions are therefore questionable because he fails to consider all of the evidence. Even if he did affirm the Pauline authorship of all of the epistles that bear the apostle's name, to restrict investigation to the undisputed epistles allows the unchecked presuppositions of the historical-critical school into the equation and fails to account for the testimony and authority of the Holy Spirit in these matters. Once again, the autonomous individual sits in judgment over the Scriptures and exercises authority over it, rather than submit to the authority of the Holy Spirit speaking therein. What about the role Wright assigns to narrative in theology?

The role of narrative in theology

One element connected to Wright's epistemology is the role that he gives to narrative in theology. As previously stated, Wright believes that any

⁶² Cf. Ridderbos, *Redemptive History*, 32–33.

⁶³ Wright, *St. Paul*, 8.

⁶⁴ N. T. Wright, *Romans*, NIB, vol. 10 (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 461, n. 97; cf. James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, WBC, vol. 38a (Dallas: Word, 1988), 153–60.

⁶⁵ Dunn, *Theology of Paul*, 13, n. 39. One should note, though, that Wright does affirm the Pauline authorship of Ephesians (see N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection and the Son of God*, *Christian Origins and the Question of God*, vol. 3 [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003], 236).

⁶⁶ E.g., Eph. 2:1–9; 2 Tim. 1:9; Tit. 3:5.

attempt 'to "boil off" an abstract set of propositions as though one were thereby getting to a more foundational statement would actually be to falsify this worldview at a basic point.' Wright argues that the only proper way, therefore, to speak of Israel's god is through narration.⁶⁷ Wright's antipathy to proposition and support for narrative is evident in other statements he has written: 'Much of what we call the Bible – the Old and New Testaments – is not a rule book; it is narrative.'⁶⁸ Wright's antipathy is essentially towards evangelical attempts to systematize the Scriptures into a coherent theology. Wright argues that narrative theology does not distort the message of Scripture like systematic theology. He bases this conclusion, not only on his epistemology, but also on Christ's use of parables: 'That, actually, is what the parables are all about. They offer, as all genuine Christian story-telling does, a world-view which, as someone comes into it and finds how compelling it is, quietly shatters the world-view that they were in already.'⁶⁹ Wright's point is that Christ tells a story to challenge the existing stories around him; he does not rattle off doctrinal propositions.

Perhaps Wright's antipathy to doctrinal proposition or systematic theology can be understood, especially in the wake of Bultmann. His rejection, however, of proposition is unfounded and contrary to Scripture. This is evident, for example, in Christ's use of parables. Christ told parables for various reasons, sometimes to obscure and sometimes to illuminate the truth. Christ, however, did not stop with the parable. Millard Erickson notes that 'Jesus accompanied his parables with an interpretation, which, we should note, was not in parabolic form.'⁷⁰ Hence, narrative and proposition always go hand in hand. Erickson winsomely illustrates this point:

A former colleague tells a story that illustrates this requirement. It involves a French soldier in Napoleon's army, who had lost an arm in battle. When Napoleon toured the hospital where the soldier was being treated, he stopped at this man's bed, asked his story, and

⁶⁷ Wright, *People of God*, 77.

⁶⁸ Wright, 'How Can the Bible Be Authoritative?' 4.

⁶⁹ Wright, 'How Can the Bible Be Authoritative?' 15.

⁷⁰ Millard J. Erickson, *Truth or Consequences: The Promise and Perils of Postmodernism* (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 2001), 282.

praised him for his sacrifice. Upon hearing this, the soldier stood to his feet, saluted, and replied, 'For you and for France, my Emperor, I would gladly give my other arm as well,' then took his sword and cut off his other arm.

As Erickson notes, the account is a powerful narrative of the man's dedication and passion but propositional truth quickly raises its ugly head, How does a one-armed man cut off his arm?⁷¹

While one must never abstract the propositional truths of Scripture from the context of its narratives, one may certainly distinguish its propositions. The two, however, should never be separated. Separate the narrative from the propositional truth and one merely has a story that might be true, but open to inconsistency and contradiction. Separate propositional truth from narrative and all one has is an abstract system of thought, not necessarily rooted in reality or history. As Vos notes, 'Biblical theology', or narrative, 'is of the greatest importance and value for the study of Systematic Theology'. Vos explains that the constructive principle of systematic theology is system and logic whereas that of biblical theology is purely historical: 'In other words, Systematic Theology endeavors to construct a circle, Biblical Theology seeks to reproduce a line.'⁷² Because the Holy Spirit is the author of Scripture it is not only one narrative from Genesis to Revelation but it is internally and logically consistent. Hence, biblical and systematic theology, or narrative and proposition, are not antithetical to one another. Vos, speaking of the earthly and heavenly spheres, or the historical and theological, and the similarities between Greek philosophical dualism and Christian theology, writes:

Notwithstanding a certain formal resemblance in the two-sidedness of the Christian life, it stands at a far remove from Greek philosophical dualism. Its very genesis forbids identification with this even to the slightest degree. Its mother-soil lies in eschatological revelation, not in metaphysical speculation. For this reason it is

⁷¹ Erickson, *Truth*, 281–82.

⁷² Geerhardus Vos, 'The Idea of Biblical Theology as a Science and as a Theological Discipline,' in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*, ed., Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. (Philipsburg: P & R, 1980), 23.

important to be able to show that the horizontal line of perspective is the older one, out of which only through an eminently-historical event the parallel structure of the two spheres was begotten. The historical was first, then the theological. And because the latter came from the former every possibility of conflict was from the outset excluded, neither of the two could interfere with the other.⁷³

We may now proceed to conclude our study.

Conclusion

In our study we have examined Wright's *prolegomena*, his epistemology and doctrine of Scripture. Throughout we have noted the deafening absence of any recognition for the need of the work of the Holy Spirit in both the *ordo* and *historia salutis*. By failing to account for the need for the work of the Holy Spirit to counter the noetic effects of sin, Wright's theological epistemology is flawed. By failing to account for the eschatological work of the Holy Spirit, especially as it concerns the revelation of the NT Scriptures, Wright allows the literature of the second-temple too great an interpretive role. This produces problems with his christology, eschatology, and ecclesiology. It affects his christology because he fails to recognize that Christ has sent the Spirit to reveal the truth of Christ's ministry to the church. It affects his eschatology because he does not recognize the eschatological work of the Spirit especially as it pertains to Scripture. It affects his ecclesiology because in his view the church writes the concluding scenes of the great drama of redemption apart from recognizing its need to submit to the Holy Spirit speaking in Scripture. Wright also fails to make his case that narrative and proposition are antithetical.

Wright's *prolegomena*, consequently, places him squarely in the historical-critical school of liberal thought. He is certainly on the right wing of the historical-critical camp, but nonetheless in their midst. Those who argue that Wright's views are compatible with the historic reformed faith need to take a second look at Wright's *prolegomena* and ask whether presuppositions that are at odds with Scripture can produce coherent results let alone results harmonious with the Scriptures. Some might

⁷³ Vos, *Pauline Eschatology*, 41.

respond that Wright will affirm conservative and reformed teachings regarding the theology of Paul, as his volume on the apostle's theology has not yet been published. On the other hand, Wright cannot correct foundational errors without destroying the foundation. It seems unlikely, therefore, that any major change will come from his volume on Paul's theology. While it may prove helpful in points, Wright's explanation of Paul's theology is still firmly in the historical-critical camp.

Reformational Thought and the Social Covenant

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One of the most marked features of modernity in the West has been the rise of individualism and its correlate – the relationship between the individual and the community. In terms of political structures, the radical separation between the individual and the state has been seen either as: the way of guaranteeing the liberty of the individual, in the best possible worlds or; a way of remodelling humanity by programmes of social engineering, in which the state acts as omniscient and omnipresent benefactor of the people.

In both instances, the sovereignty of the reified state, either in a democratic sense or a totalitarian one, is thought to act for the good of the people. In the first case, because power has been invested in the political institution by the people and acts for them; or in the second, because those who are in power know what is best anyway. Both versions are a tributary of the thought of Jean Bodin (1529–1596), a contemporary of Calvin, who in his *Six livres de la république* advocated the principle of indivisible sovereignty, which became the foundation of the modern state system.

At the end of the modern era, we can recognize that this principle has had both a positive and a negative influence. On the one hand, it has been a motor for the rise of centralized government and the development of coherent policy, organization and the structuring of modern societies, while contributing to the development of individual freedom within the bounds of law, implying political choice and representation. On the other hand, the indivisible sovereignty of the state has fostered increasingly

monolithic units with tentacular bureaucracies, impersonal policies and 'might is right' attitudes, along with colonialism, warmongering and control as their inevitable consequences.

At the end of the modern period it is generally recognized today that if a return to premodernity is as unthinkable as it is undesirable, the problems of state sovereignty raised by reified indivisible state power cannot be avoided. This is not only because of its historical outcomes, but also because of cultural developments. Theoretically, the big loser in the modern developments was the theory of federalism. Practically, the losers were the intermediate institutions between the state and the individual: all forms of non-governmental associate life, including the family and the church. These mediating expressions of cultural life, standing between the state and the naked individual gradually diminished in influence. Today, in the context of the emerging Europe, the question of federalism can hardly be avoided. Even where the principle of state sovereignty is not questioned, it is increasingly obvious that the exercise of absolute sovereignty is problematic. Information techniques, the corporate power of multinational industries, ethnic identity, population movements and militant groups, all pose serious and diverse challenges to centralization and control. The time may be ripe for another look at federalism as a form of non-pyramidal exercise of authority in society and the importance of associations and consensus for cultural activities.

For this reason, we have chosen to look at the contribution of reformational thought to the development of a consensual and covenantal view of politico-social relationships.¹ As well as providing some insights to the past, this might also stimulate reflection as to the development of a balanced exercise of authority in society in terms of consensualism and the development of mediating institutions between the state and the individual. Our remarks will focus in on the theory of John Calvin and Johannes Althusius as being representative of the origins and development of reformational polity.

¹ The Reformer inherited a whole tradition from feudal Europe, in which the notions of covenants and oaths had played an important part, handed down in the traditions of Augustinian theology. On the covenant idea in later medieval society and theology see P. A. Lillback, *The Binding of God. Calvin's Role in the Development of Covenant Theology*, Grand Rapids, Baker, 2001, ch. 2.

John Calvin and good government

'Calvin was the patron of modern human rights. In his thought he anticipated the modern republican form of government ... Calvin stood against the abuses of power in his time and wrestled with the problem of the right to revolt.'² Such an opinion will come as a shock to anyone who has simply associated the name of Calvin with 'Genevan theocracy' or the case of Servetus. However, Geneva was not a theocracy in any sense of the term, as A. Biéler has demonstrated.³ He was not even a citizen of the town until a few years before his death and he fought all his life for the division of the power of church and state.⁴ On the contrary, everywhere Calvinism went, freedom was the eventual result for 'in Calvinism lies the origin and guarantee of our constitutional liberties'.⁵

What are the features of Calvin's thought that justify these surprising opinions? The questions are complex, but perhaps two focal points can be indicated. First, where does authority lie and how is it expressed? Second, what is good government for Calvin and how is authority exercised?

In reply to the first question, the traditional discussions had centred around the relation of the church and the state. Already in the later Middle Ages conciliarism had called into question the power of the church and in particular that of the Pope. Marsilius of Padua had produced the most radical answers, contesting the authority of the Pope and the traditional Augustinianism that set the church over the state. Every Pope should be resisted and deposed, as divine right resides in the people not the papacy.⁶

Martin Luther was one of the inheritors of this radical questioning. Fundamental to his view of God's governance of the world was the distinction between the two kingdoms, to which he returned repeatedly. Luther thought that it was an error to mix the two, a situation inherited from Constantine, in which the church sought to dominate the world and

² R. D. Knudsen, 'Calvinism as a Cultural Force' in W. S. Reid, ed., *John Calvin. His Influence in the Modern World*, Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1982, 13. See generally H. Höpfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, Cambridge University Press, 1982.

³ A. Biéler, *La pensée économique et sociale de Calvin*, Genève, Georg, 1959, 128, 300.

⁴ See W. G. Naphy, *Calvin and the Consolidation of the Genevan Reformation*, Manchester University Press, 1994.

⁵ G. van Prinsterer, quoted in A. Kuyper, 'Calvinism and Politics', in *Lectures on Calvinism*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1961, 78.

⁶ Lillback, 34.

the world tried to govern the church. 'The devil, he said, never stops cooking and brewing these two kingdoms into each other.'⁷ The spiritual kingdom of the church is totally different in its politics from the world and a wedge must be driven between the two. Even though the two kingdoms are under the authority of Christ, the rules governing them are different. Luther could even call on the authority of the German princes to limit the power of the Pope. He had a high view of the responsibilities of civil rulers; since in their domain they are representatives of God, to resist the prince is to resist God.

Luther, however, was under no illusions. He could say: 'a wise prince is a mighty rare bird, and an upright prince even rarer. They are generally the biggest fools or the worst scoundrels on earth; therefore one must constantly expect the worst from them and look for little good, especially in divine matters.'⁸ One may go to war for the Prince, but not against him: 'rebellion is not just simple murder; it is like a great fire, which attacks and devastates a land.'⁹ His only remedy for tyranny seems to be prayer for justice. Luther had an almost pathological fear of rebellion. Perhaps the fact that he lived all his life in small states which were absolutist regimes with little legal tradition played a role in his thinking, beyond theological considerations.

Not so with Calvin. 'Shakespeare loves a king, but Calvin rarely mentions one with admiration.'¹⁰ Calvin counted with the political use of religion, but deplored what Machiavelli recommended. He adopted Luther's distinction of the two kingdoms, without their law and gospel hermeneutic and took it to more consequent lengths, on a different basis.¹¹

Two factors were capital in Calvin's approach. First, his understanding of man's situation was one that emphasized the discontinuity and heterogeneity of the divine and the human.¹² This means that there can never be an identity between human words, acts or institutions and divine

7 M. Luther on Psalm 101, *Luther's Works*, 13, 194.

8 M. Luther, *Temporal Authority*, *Luther's Works*, 45, 113.

9 M. Luther, *Against the Robbing and Murdering Hordes of Peasants*, *Luther's Works*, 46, 50.

10 J.T. Mc Neill, 'Calvin and Civil Government', in D. McKim, ed., *Readings in Calvin's Theology*, Grand Rapids, Baker, 1984, 261.

11 Cf. D. Vandrunen, 'The Context of Natural Law: John Calvin's Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms', *Journal of Church and State*, June 2004.

12 Biéler, 516.

authority. The Word of God, the living, dynamic and ever relevant divine revelation, stands over against all instances of human authority, whether social, ecclesiastical or cultural, which are in constant mutation. On every issue man is brought back to the Lord and his justice in new situations. Calvin's thought on the relation of the Word of God to human situations was Chalcedonian. The divine word is ever distinct from all that is human and can never be confused with it. It is never to be separated from it, but ever speaking to it in all its areas. Calvin's thought is non-dualistic, since the dynamic and prophetic word rules over the whole realm of nature and history.¹³

The divine sovereignty of God's Word rules over church and state alike. These are to be distinguished, but not separated, since they are placed under the one divine authority. If Calvin's practice tended to be conservative his theory was potentially revolutionary. It meant that ultimate authority could be vested in no human institution or human person. For Calvin, there are two different worlds in man, one that is internal and the other external, regulating external behaviour. Different, though not contradictory spiritual principles, reign in both areas. The state is to leave the church alone, and inversely, the church is to exercise no civil authority.¹⁴

The second non-dualistic element of Calvin's model of divine sovereignty concerns his notion of the covenant. All of creation and its relations are tied to God and exist in covenant with him. Both the ruler and the citizen exist under God, in covenant with him and with each other. Calvin considered that the Christian nations of his time had recognized that covenant through baptism.¹⁵ This is debatable, particularly in respect to how Calvin used this to criticize the Roman church for not respecting the fulfilment of the levitical covenant. However, the main issue is that under God all human relations are covenantal. Man is called to serve the Lord as creature and as all men are placed in a common relation to God, they are also called to serve each other in mutual relations. Human bonds and relationships are but a horizontal expression of the vertical relation existing between all men and God. In this way, Calvin saw social

¹³ Knudsen, 16.

¹⁴ W.J. Bouwsma, *John Calvin. A Sixteenth Century Portrait*, Oxford University Press, 1988, ch. 13.

¹⁵ Cf. Lillback, 37.

conventions as being a way of fulfilling the great commandment. 'Every nation is left free to make such laws as it foresees to be profitable for itself', subject only to 'the perpetual rule of love'.¹⁶

For this reason Calvin had a more positive way of approaching civil government than Luther, but also because of his ideas about covenant, a more critical approach to abuses. The ruler is seen as 'a minister of God in governing his kingdom'. As such he exercises 'a calling, not only holy and lawful before God, but also the most sacred and by far the most honourable of all callings in the whole life of mortal men'.¹⁷ The ruler is 'God's tribunal on earth'. In maintaining law and order, a ruler indirectly defends God's kingdom, partly by establishing social uprightness and partly by creating a bulwark against anarchy and heresy. In his discussion of social relationships Calvin divides the subject into three parts 'the *magistrate* (ruler), who is the protector and guardian of the laws; the *laws*, according to which he governs; the *people*, who are governed by the laws and obey the magistrate'.¹⁸ The covenantal nature of this structure can be seen in the fact that the laws are the mediating bond between the ruler and the ruled, and consent to be ruled is placed in a legal framework.

Calvin was under no illusions either about the docility of those to be ruled, or about the innate temptations of rulers and he ridiculed lack of realism with regard to human nature. Because of the difficulty of the task and the temptations of power, authority in the political sense is best in the hands of many rather than of one. If 'equity' is the aim of the law, the end can best be achieved by power sharing.¹⁹ In the 1559 edition of the *Institutes* Calvin qualifies the flat assertion that 'aristocracy tempered by democracy excels other forms' (of government) by the following consideration:

The vice or inadequacy of men renders it wiser and more tolerable that many hold the sway, so that they may mutually be helpers of each other, teach and admonish one another, and if one asserts himself unfairly, the many may be censors and masters, repressing his wilfulness.²⁰

¹⁶ J. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, IV.20.14-15.

¹⁷ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, IV.20.4.

¹⁸ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, IV.20.3.

¹⁹ For Calvin's views on the law, see Mc Neill, 266ff.

²⁰ McNeill, 272.

The preference for a multiplicity of rulers, combined with his suggestion that they be elected worthies, reveal the extent of Calvin's republicanism.

The best condition of the people is when they can choose, by common consent, their own shepherds: for when any by force usurps the supreme power, it is tyranny; and when men become kings by hereditary right, it seems not consistent with liberty.²¹

This might well seem banal to modern ears, but for its day, when absolutism, hereditary rights and fixed social stations were the norm, it is progressive thinking. Reformational thought from the time of Calvin onwards was fixed in the direction of republicanism, power sharing, the separation of spheres of authority and covenantal consensualism. Calvin himself, was certainly timid and placed in a precarious situation in Geneva. It is for this reason that his political practice was conservative and not always as daring as his theoretical ideas.

There was always an ambiguity in Calvin's thought. In part this was probably related to the tension between his ideas of sovereignty and authority and the fact that rulers are instituted by God, and his ideas concerning liberty. Although rulers are the indispensable 'ministers of divine justice', Calvin was outraged by their excesses of injustice.

When tyranny has lost its concern for justice, there are no limits to its wickedness; and lamentations do not soften it but aggravate its cruelty ... Tyrants therefore do not rest from their injuries and errors until the wretched people have altogether given up.²²

From the subjects' point of view, tyranny is a violation of human dignity and since humanity implies dignity, this essential character is lost under the lash of tyranny.

For Calvin, the Pope was a prime example of tyranny, but he also detested world empires and feared the accumulation of political power. He drew from Augustine the idea that large kingdoms are 'great robberies'.²³ So what can be done in the way of resistance? Calvin affirmed that 'we

²¹ J. Calvin, Commentary on Micah 5.5.

²² Calvin, Commentary on Exodus 5.9.

²³ Calvin, Commentary on Isaiah 47.10.

must obey princes and others who are in authority, but only insofar as they do not deny to God, the supreme king, father and lord, what is due to him.²⁴ Passive disobedience is legitimate in the case of tyranny. Calvin quoted as an example the refusal of the Hebrew midwives to obey Pharaoh's command to kill male infants. However, Calvin went a little further. When a sovereign exceeds the limits of his office then he can be brought to order. This cannot be done in an anarchic way by citizens in open revolt. It is the responsibility of the secondary magistrates to make opposition. He introduces a note that is absent in Luther's thought. Sometimes God raises up avengers from his servants 'and arms them with His command to punish the wicked government and deliver his people, oppressed in unjust ways, from the miserable calamity.'²⁵ Let princes hear and be afraid! Toward the end of his *Institutes*, Calvin penned a phrase that was to bear fruit in a way he probably did not anticipate. With regard to the function of the 'magistrates of the people' he says:

I am so far from bidding them to withstand, in accordance with their duty, the fierce licentiousness of kings, that if they wink at kings who violently fall upon and assault the lowly common folk, I declare that their dissimulation involves nefarious perfidy, because they dishonestly betray the freedom of the people, of which they know that they have been appointed protectors by God's ordinance.²⁶

Calvin suggests that perverse rulers are not above the law and that they can be brought to justice by appointed representatives of the people when the need arises. This became the basis upon which the edifice of constitutional democracy was later to be raised. Commenting on Matthew 22:21 Calvin affirms that if 'leaders usurp the rights of God they are to be denied obedience as far as possible short of offence to God.'²⁷

If Calvin's thought was not original, because of precedents in his predecessors, it contrasts with that of Luther in that he proposes the ideal of a well-ordered commonwealth with checks and balances to power. Within this order, resistance and reform can be envisaged. An orderly

²⁴ Calvin, *Commentary on Acts* 4.19.

²⁵ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, IV.20.30.

²⁶ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, IV.20.31.

²⁷ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, IV.20.32.

commonwealth (*statum reipublicae bene constitutum*) is one in which those in positions of authority cooperate and use their skill to promote the general welfare of the people. 'This model suggests that in practice a ruler presides over a complex network of associations and is responsible for far more than punishing the wicked. The administration of "justice" means, in addition to punishment, protecting the weak and helpless and ensuring that all receive their due.'²⁸ In this respect the model of the covenant of people under God, where each has a proper place and where God alone is Lord, is the foundation of liberty in social association. It also allows for orderly resistance in the case of abuse of office. Reformational thought developed in lands that adopted it as a form of opposition to tyranny and the establishment of order in government, in a situation where each individual has a freedom of conscience to serve God. For Calvin, good government is briefly summed up in the following: 'no kind of government is more happy than this, where liberty is regulated with becoming moderation and properly established on a durable basis.'²⁹ 'Calvinism was a creed tailor made for the transformation of the reigning social order.'³⁰

The Limits of Resistance

The magisterial reformation was placed in the awkward position of avoiding the charges of sedition and anarchy while at the same time often being in opposition to the powers themselves. It was only natural that the question of the limits of resistance to injustice particularly in the realm of the freedom of conscience should become an issue.

Calvin's ideal of elected representatives and authority exercised collectively and not from the apex of a pyramid down led to conflict, particularly with the theory of the divine rights of monarchy propounded by Richard Hooker, the great Elizabethan apologist of Anglicanism. This theory was succinctly expressed by James I who believed he was ordained to serve 'the weal of the people' but not 'the will of the people'.

Theodore de Bèze, Calvin's successor in Geneva took Calvin's thought

²⁸ Bouwsma, 210. Cf. Biéler, 326ff.

²⁹ *Institutes*, IV.20.8.

³⁰ Cf. D. H. Compier, *John Calvin's Rhetorical Doctrine of Sin*, Lewiston, NY, Edwin Mellen Press, 2001, 9.

further in his *Du droit des Magistrats* (1574). A jurist like Calvin, he argued the right of the inferior magistrates to revolt against the government but was more explicit, proposing in his final chapter that arms may be taken in good conscience in order to defend freedom of conscience.³¹ This line was taken even further by his Scottish contemporaries, John Knox, George Buchanan and later by Samuel Rutherford in his *Lex, Rex*, (1644), written to refute a treatise on the divine right of kings by John Maxwell. The magistrate owes submission to the law of God and this is confirmed by means of the ordination or inauguration oath. If the covenant is broken with the people, it is no longer binding on them in their relation to the sovereign. Knox had argued that the right of rebellion against tyrannical and idolatrous rulers was not only that of the magistrates, or the nobility, but also of the elect. Rutherford followed suit by affirming that 'the fountain of power remains most eminently in the people ... therefore it is unlimited in the people and bounded and limited in the king, and so less in the king than in the people'. The king is not above the people, because his power is received from the people and is communicated to him 'in the manner and the measure that they think good'.³² The power of a monarch is only relative to an end, that of 'the safety and good of his people'. They do not 'break covenant when they put in action that natural power to conserve themselves.'³³ In fact the power of the ruler is not his, it is only delegated and remains the power of the people.

Rutherford proposed that the divine power of leadership is vested in the people of God, and under his rule, for the good of his people. This power is never divested from the people, but only vested in a leader by their nomination and consent. The ruler is therefore vested with governing authority from God as he is sworn in by the people and he rules, under God, by their consent. Should he prove unfaithful, the mutual contract is broken and appropriate steps for destitution can be taken. This is but a short step from the social contract theory proposed by John Locke and followed in the American Declaration of Independence and Constitution in which the 'just power of government (is) in the consent of the governed'. In England, the Revolution settlement of 1690 embodied the

³¹ T. de Bèze, *Du droit des Magistrats*, Genève, Droz, 1970, 67.

³² S. Rutherford, *Lex, Rex*, Harrisonburg, Sprinkle Publications, 1982, 82.

³³ Rutherford, 84.

principles of *Lex, Rex*. The notions of the choice of the people, that power lies with the people in that choice, of consent to be governed and the right to change the government in the interest of freedom as proposed by Rutherford are significant contributions to the rise of Western democracy. They are, however, a world away from the secularized social contract of Rousseau in which obedience to God is removed both from the rulers and the ruled.

Johannes Althusius, Federalism and consent

Althusius, a German who spent much of his life in Emden, is largely unknown today, but it is not without reason that he has been called the 'father of modern federalism'.³⁴ He took the seeds provided by Calvin and Beza and planted them in the field of politics. His major work *Politica Methodice Digesta*, written in 1603 and then enlarged in 1610 and 1614. Following the methods of Ramist rhetoric, it was influential in his time as a systematic republican politics, but was only translated into English and published in 1995.³⁵

Althusius was more systematic than his predecessors and also far more radical. A tyrant is one who violates 'word and oath'. Half a century before the execution of Charles I of England he affirmed that 'absolute power is tyrannical' and a dictator can be justly killed when his tyranny is incurable.³⁶ However, what is more interesting than this case in point is his systematic overview, which is the most complete expression of reformational politics ever to have been formulated. Standing at the dawn of the modern era his system is thought provoking for those who are in another period of similar change today, even if his thought as a whole was eclipsed by the rise of national state sovereignty with its structures of

³⁴ See H. Woldring, 'The Constitutional State in the Political Philosophy of Johannes Althusius', *European Journal of Law and Economics* 5 (1998:2) 123-32 and J. Coffey, 'Johannes Althusius' on the web site of the Jubilee Centre.

³⁵ J. Althusius, *Politica*, Indianapolis, Liberty Fund, 1995, edited and translated by F. S. Carney with an introduction by D. J. Elazar. The best available discussion about Althusius in general is by Daniel J. Elazar, 'The multi-faceted covenant. The Biblical approach to the problem of organizations, constitutions, and liberty as reflected in the thought of Johannes Althusius.' It is accessible as a paper of the Jerusalem Centre for Public Affairs on the internet. Martin Buber was also influenced by Althusius, particularly in his *Kingship of God*, New York, Harper and Row, 1967.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 191, 199.

pyramidal centralized power.

Daniel Elazar affirms that 'the road to modern democracy began with the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century, particularly among those exponents of Reformed Protestantism who developed a theology and politics that set the Western world back on the road to popular self government, emphasizing liberty and equality.'³⁷ Althusius' importance is that he synthesizes the political experience of the Holy Roman Empire and the political ideas of covenant theology. In his treatise, he presents 'a comprehensive theory of federal republicanism rooted in a covenantal view of human society ... It presents a theory of polity building based on a compound political association established by the citizens through their primary associations on the basis of consent rather than a reified state imposed by a rule or an elite.'³⁸

For Althusius politics is above all symbiosis, or lives running together. Here is the definition from the opening lines of his work.

Politics is the art of associating (*consociandi*) men for the purpose of establishing, cultivating, and conserving social life among them. Whence it is called 'symbiotics'. The subject matter of politics is association (*consociatio*) in which those who live together pledge themselves each to the other, by explicit or tacit agreement, to mutual communication of whatever is useful and necessary for the harmonious exercise of social life. The end of political man is holy, just, comfortable, and happy symbiosis, a life lacking nothing either necessary or useful.³⁹

At the end of the modern era with its abuses of power, oppression and victims without end, and at a time when politicians' politics are a subject of scepticism or indifference, this declaration of intent comes as a breath of fresh air. It is to be noted that political life is not primarily the exercise of power, but the art of living together. As a means to develop living together, it has at heart association or bonding. This is accomplished by a pledge, an oath of agreement, in which men function in such a way as to give themselves to each other, according to their differing functions. This

37 *Ibid*, xxxv.

38 *Ibidem*.

39 *Ibid*, 17

is the basis for 'communication', not just verbal exchange, but of all that is useful to build a common social life in harmony. Communication is the sharing of life. Living together by means of mutual agreement and consent; for the common good that is experienced in a shared life has as its end justice, peace and happiness. Behind Althusius' definition we can hear not only echoes of the second table of the Decalogue but also of Jesus' summary of the law, which takes in its scope loving one's neighbour as oneself. Apart from this we find the reformational notions of covenant, mutual agreement, freedom and the sharing of benefits which fuel the democratic ideal.

At the heart of Althusius' republic, *res publica*, stands the notion of justice, which is to be achieved by equity in agreement and balanced social relationships. Liberty is safeguarded by a series of checks and balances in the private and public spheres. Althusius suggests that the body politic should be organized around five sorts of associative life, two private and three public. These permanent structures allow individuals to have access to social life, to be represented and to preserve fundamental freedoms. In the realm of private associations Althusius indicates the centrality of the family and the *collegium*. Because man is created in the image of God, he stands in relation to others because of his genetic heritage and his basic human gifts. Because they are related to the creation, these forms of association are more permanent and supportive of human life than public associations which may come and go. Humans, therefore, do not stand as naked apes in the jungle of life with no *vis-à-vis* other than the monolithic political state. Man shares first of all with his next of kin in a narrow or broader sense within a social tissue structured by common heritage, culture and story. By his vocation in the *collegium*, man forms associations to fulfil his calling in the use of his gifts. These may include guilds, academic institutions, churches, trades unions and all kind of private associations based on a common interest.⁴⁰ These 'clubs' have rites of initiation and rules of membership based on mutual interest and consent to engage in activity together. 'Communication among colleagues is the activity by which an individual helps a colleague, and so upholds the plan of social life set forth in covenant agreements.' For Althusius, unlike Bodin, these are not activities of citizenship, but of brotherhood. Althusius gives many biblical examples.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 28ff.

The public realm is comprised of three arenas, the city, the province and the commonwealth. These are based not on ties of human relations or consent to a common interest, but on representation, delimited by geographic locality. Public associations are to be constituted and structured like building blocks by a process of direct representation. Thus families and *collegia* are represented in cities, cities in provinces and provinces in the commonwealth. Cities and provinces are particular federations, differing from the *res publica* which is a universal association. Sovereignty is vested in the people in such a way that popular sovereignty determines what is universal. A senate or similar governing body represents the people through delegates from the private associations which provide the basis for representation in the public associations. Thus there is a separation of the private and the public spheres with different kinds of executive powers, but there is also a continuity established through representation in the common good.

By contrast with Spinoza who took the OT to apply only to Israel in its land, Althusius sees the Biblical commonwealth constituted a federation of tribes founded on a covenant, under a common constitution of law, as being the prime model for federalism.⁴¹ The constitution is best established by the common consent of the people expressed by a Senate, which has the right of legislating for public associations. A chief executive may preside over the communication of things, services and rights. Thus 'administration and government of a commonwealth is nothing other than the execution of law. Therefore this law alone prescribes not only the order of administering for the magistrate but also the rule of living for all subjects.'⁴² Althusius considers the foundation of the law to be common to all human beings, a law of nature, which has specific expression in the Decalogue, and which is applied in proper law (*lex propria*), drawn up by the magistrate on this basis.⁴³

This is a comprehensive view of federal republicanism with its basis in a covenantal view of human society in which participation, consent and communication are capital. The emphasis on association is essentially a rejection of statism with a concentration of power in a particular instance. Sovereignty is vested in the people. As D. Elazar has commented: 'Althusius has provided a proper application of the biblical model. For the

41 *Ibid*, xxxvi.

42 *Ibid*, 134

43 *Ibid*, 139.

Bible, only God is ultimately sovereign. Politically, however, sovereignty is vested with the people who possess operational sovereignty within the framework of God's constitution ... The constitutional document and the network of associations, symbiotic relations and communications of things, services and right/law are in a sense the best protection against tyranny and for what we would today call human rights.⁴⁴

Conclusion

What can be learned for today from the heritage of reformational thinking? In the complexity of the modern world, if it is impossible, undesirable even, to attempt to transfer the past into the present, some principles may serve to stimulate reflection on political themes. For the sake of debate we should try and imagine a few of Calvin or Althusius' reactions if they turned up today. They may go something like this:

Life is more than politics.

It is a rich tissue of sharing relationships based on a multitude of agreements that allow individuals to aspire to freedom in the exercise of their activities whether familial, cultural, religious, economic or ludic. All of life is politics, but governmental meddling in areas where it has no place can only lead to a stultifying lack of social diversity, which ironically is reinforced by modern individualism.

Politics is more than power.

Proper politics involves sharing. Communication of information and transparency is the *bête noire* of modern democracies, with their secret services, decisions taken for 'reasons of state' while the truth is too often hidden from the public by a media smoke-screen.

Our 'tyranny' became your dictatorial totalitarianisms or your statist myths.

The reformational view of the exercise of sovereignty is the best answer to absolutism. Better than the popular sovereignty of the French revolution or

⁴⁴ Elazar, 'The multi-faceted covenant', art. cit.

the state sovereignty of the post-Hegelians, is the view of sovereignty exercised in different spheres in which 'different developments of social life have nothing above themselves but God ... the State has nothing to command in their domain.'⁴⁵ Concentrations of power in anonymous centralized state institutions are dangerous. 'Responsibility and authority are not channelled through one institution.' True leaders with authority in different areas of social life exist in the interests of servanthood.⁴⁶

Beware of the European Union!

It is potentially dangerous, if it leads to concentrations of power in a presidium or in the hands of anonymous bureaucrats. However, it can be a great blessing as a *res publica*, an association of associations (*consociatio consociationum*) in which the people as a whole find meaning. A new principal and structured federalism is necessary to legitimize the European project.

Concern must be expressed

This should be for mediating forms of association with autonomous life between the State and the individual – families, cultural associations, labour unions and ecclesiastical institutions – in which liberty of association and conscience are the basis of consent.

The religious question.

Economics is not everything, no more than politics. The present religious vacuum has serious implications, as nature abhors a vacuum. A new transcendence is the need of the hour, one that can provide a foundation for law and justice. 'God's Word must rule, but in the sphere of the State only through the conscience of the persons invested with authority.'⁴⁷ The separation of church and state is the NT model as both have, under God, a different calling. Where did the Christian church in the West lose the way?

45 Abraham Kuyper's view of 'sphere sovereignty' in his *Lectures on Calvinism*, 91.

46 P. Marshall, *Thine is the Kingdom. A Biblical Perspective on the Nature of Government and Politics Today*, London, Marshalls 1984, 50,57, 59.

47 Kuyper, 104.

Blinder Than You Think: A Response to Neil Broom's *How Blind is the Watchmaker?*

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By asking us *How Blind is the Watchmaker?*,¹ and by answering it with the assertion that a watchmaker could never be blind, Neil Broom raises a direct challenge to Richard Dawkins's proposal on the subject,² which originates ultimately, of course, with William Paley.³ In taking on Dawkins, Broom raises the stakes in the evolution/creation debate; unfortunately, he appears to have overbid his hand. Whilst Dawkins hardly needs anyone to come to his defence, a robust evaluation of Broom's proposal is essential.

There are four basic problems with Broom's book, each of which will be considered in turn:

- (1) that he focuses on the gaps left in contemporary science and declares that only God's intervention could have bridged them;
- (2) that his arguments against neo-Darwinism are unconvincing;
- (3) that he misrepresents Dawkins and so is left fighting shadows;
- (4) that the image of scientists he creates is unbalanced and misleading.

¹ Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press (2001).

² Dawkins, R., *The Blind Watchmaker* (London: Penguin, 1986)

³ Paley, W., *Natural Theology*, (1802) opening pages, as cited by Dawkins, *Watchmaker*, 4–5.

God of the gaps

The first issue is that Broom advocates a 'God of the gaps'. Not that he ever uses the phrase, but this old idea is, nevertheless, the correct one to use to describe his interpretation. In its old incarnation, the basic idea was that science has not yet discovered all of the answers, and the gaps are the areas where God was miraculously active. What is new is that Broom targets his discussion primarily at the molecular or cellular level of biology, rather than at the visible macro level. In other words, he is more interested in what happens in the cells of a leaf to capture sunlight and convert it into food and energy,⁴ rather than the intricacies of an organ such as the eye. The latter is not absent, but the focus is consistently on the former.

This gives the unfortunate impression that he hopes to convince theologians better of the accuracy of his analysis by talking about areas of science about which they are less likely to be familiar. Trusting that this would in fact be an unfair criticism, the general point about the scientific gaps still remains: since scientists are continually making inroads into the traditional areas for which a 'God of the gaps' was evoked, new areas of scientific difficulty must be identified and discussed. To the contrary, however, I would suggest that this argument should not have been resurrected.

Broom indicates, for example, that science cannot identify how evolution might have made the leap from basic chemicals in the primeval soup to self-replicating DNA and proteins.⁵ It is important to recognize that this is a correct statement of current scientific knowledge. Certainly it has been proved that basic amino acids (the building blocks of proteins) can be generated from the constituent gases of the so-called primeval atmosphere – methane, ammonia, hydrogen and water – when lightning-like electrical charges are passed through them. However, nucleic acids – the chemicals needed for DNA – are another matter, since they are *not* possible of generation by this method, as Broom correctly emphasizes. Though Dawkins claims they have,⁶ this is only under conditions that most

4 Broom, *Blind*, 35–39

5 Broom, *Blind*, 72–83

6 Dawkins, R., *The Selfish Gene* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989 second edition), 14

scientists are not convinced represent the primeval conditions.⁷ There is currently a gap in scientific knowledge for which no scenarios or experiments have been provided.

A similar example is provided in his discussion of the way that proteins are replicated in the living cell.⁸ The cell's method of generating the instructions for protein manufacture is dependent on proteins themselves (and the process for DNA replication likewise). So a circular argument develops, where specialized, fully functioning proteins must exist for *any* functioning proteins to be generated. Furthermore, these instructions are encoded in the DNA, and to create that you need other highly specialized proteins. Science currently has no workable schemes for how the whole integrated package might have developed.⁹

The result, then, is that there are significant, identifiable gaps in the process; gaps, furthermore, that yawn with the magnitude of the Grand Canyon in terms of progressing from one point to another. The theory of how more complex creatures developed from the first single-cell organisms is pretty well complete, if still largely theoretical; the connection from free amino acids to the single cell is much more hazy. Broom's point is that this gap is/was unbridgeable, and that it was only the helping hand of God that could have got us from one side to the other (though I am sure his preferred scenario is special creation, not guided evolution).

This is simply saying that there is a gap, and God must be the one who filled it in. Perhaps that is his intention. However, it seems to be very dangerous to promote the God of gaps as your explanation. If science were to present explanations and experimental evidence for this – explanations that might not be above question in the eyes of Broom, but beyond reasonable doubt for the majority of pro-evolutionists – then the classic situation where God's non-existence is proved by squeezing him out of the gaps will once more result.

⁷ See Pappelis, A., 'Prebiotic Chemistry' at http://www.mccoyleib.siu.edu/projects/bio315/_section2.htm and Evard, R. and Schrodetzki, D., 'Chemical Evolution' at http://www.grisda.org/_origins/03009.htm

⁸ Broom, *Blind*, 91–104

⁹ That is not to say that there are no proposals. One would be the so-called 'RNA World', which proposes a replication scheme that has its focus on RNA rather than DNA. For details and evaluation see Klyce, B., 'The RNA World' at <http://www.panspermia.org/maworld.htm#whatsnew>, and Gibson, L.J., 'Did Life Begin in a "RNA World"?' at <http://www.grisda.org/origins/20045.htm>. Another would be the clay crystals proposal, discussed by Dawkins, *Watchmaker*, 150–57.

Trying to express that in a more positive sense, the point is that the 'God of the gaps' solution appears to be long discredited. Perhaps all that has been discredited is simply the fact that previously we had the wrong gaps, and Broom has now identified the correct gaps for which we only have God as a possible solution. To the atheistic scientist however, the response is even more simply expressed by saying that they are still working on those gaps and it is only a matter of time before they develop experimental results of a naturalistic explanation.

Though Broom regards such an attitude as misplaced arrogance, it may not be unreasonable. Given that most of you are probably reading this within reach of a computer that has more RAM space than the storage capacity of your first computer's hard disc (and I pass over the period when there was no such thing as a hard disc and everything was stored on floppies), and that there is still no sign that computer ability and specifications will ever plateau, such confidence might not be arrogance, but just a recognition of how things are. The scientific age has hardly begun and its pace of development continues to increase. The idea that a 'God of the gaps' should be invoked for any current gaps is not a credible argument to be raising at the start of the third millennium.

In summary, the idea that gaps in scientific knowledge indicate that evolution is discredited is insufficient. Not only will it be totally discredited if (?when) the gap is filled in, but it fails to be scientific in its methodology. To be credible, it must be backed up by reference to theoretical discussion and actual experimentation that aims to demonstrate the impossibility of ever bridging the gap by unguided means. No matter how amazing and intricate the system might seem at the moment, even discussion of the minutiae of protein manufacture and interaction will not suffice to prove special creation.

Ineffective Arguments

The second major problem with Broom's presentation is that he does not actually raise any effective arguments against neo-Darwinism. Though he initiates a discussion about both the content and the method of Dawkins's scientific evidence, he is convincing on neither count. In the main, this is because he appears to misunderstand Dawkins, and at time even argues the evidence in such a way that it supports Dawkins's case, not his own!

A suitable example of Broom's interaction with the scientific content of Dawkins's work would be the discussion of the development of the eye.¹⁰ He focuses on Dawkins's claim that a 5% eye is better than no eye at all.¹¹ Dawkins's intention is to demonstrate that an eye does not have to have *perfect* vision, however that is to be defined, for it to be of use to its owner. Indeed, anyone with severe myopia can appreciate the point from their own experience: without their glasses the myopic person might not be able to discern the fine details of their spouse's expression when they enter the room, but they know full well that they have done so. Likewise, ever improving vision makes it easier for the predator to stalk the prey, and for the prey to avoid the predator. Dawkins's point, then, is that no matter how poor the level of vision, any sense of vision will be a bonus, and better vision, a greater bonus.

There are places where Broom makes some sensible observations on this point (in this instance by shifting the discussion to the question of flight).¹² To get a picture of what a 5% eye might look like, we can compare the Wright brother's first biplane to a contemporary plane. Broom is correct, though, to insist that it was also a 100% fully functioning plane! If it had lacked any essential aspect of the aerodynamics then it could not have flown.

Despite this, Broom needs to concede (or realize) that he is actually building Dawkins's case for him. Moving to the field of flight in nature, Dawkins argues that the first creature with just that bit extra area of skin flap to enable it to glide from one tree to another will have survived the jump. It was a 5% wing when compared to an eagle, 100% from the point of view of the animal that survived the jump. Dawkins would agree with all the evidence that Broom assembles. He would even agree that the Wright brothers' biplane was 100% plane in the sense that it flew, but still declare that the conclusion Broom draws is completely the wrong one, since it comes about as a misunderstanding of the point Dawkins is making.

¹⁰ Broom, *Blind*, 152–58.

¹¹ Dawkins, *Watchmaker*, 81. For the full version, see Dawkins *Watchmaker*, 77–109, further developed in Dawkins, R., *Climbing Mount Improbable* (London: Penguin, 1997) 126–79.

¹² See Dawkins, *Improbable*, 97–125.

On the subject of method, Broom argues that Dawkins has created a reductionist argument by an anthropomorphization of the gene.¹³ Here Broom is on much more secure ground than has been identified previously. Dawkins gives the impression, ironically, that it is the gene that has a conscious sense of intentionality and self preservation that powers evolution. Ultimately Dawkins seems to have chosen his imagery in order to communicate better to his non-specialist audience, but he may well have gone too far on that level.

The question that needs to be asked, though, is if this anthropomorphization has somehow undermined or altered the science that lies behind it. On this point, I am not so sure that Dawkins is in error. The science itself is not affected in the slightest by the way Dawkins discusses it. Broom's main point here is that Dawkins is somehow shifting interpretation of the science in favour of evolution by this reductionism, that he is subjectively predisposed to see evolution where it does not exist. This is a point to which we will turn in more detail later. For the moment, it suffices to insist that scientists are rarely blind to the evidence in front of them.

At this point it may be necessary simply to part company with Broom. One of the most amazing things about the theory of evolution is that it has been around for so long and has barely been altered by the major scientific discoveries of a century and a half. Genetics was unknown at the time Darwin published: its discovery provided explanations of how inheritance worked; how it maintained characteristics across the generations; and how chemical alterations in the code result in alterations in the biochemistry of the offspring. It would be foolish to rule out the possibility of a revolution in thinking comparable to the shift from Newtonian to Einsteinian physics. At the same time, it is probably much more intellectually consistent to accept with Ward, 'a theory of evolution as one of the major insights of modern scientific understanding', one that 'enriches traditional religious belief in God considerably'.¹⁴

The real complaint against Dawkins may be unspoken, however, which is that he undermines faith by presenting evolution as a consistently godless universe. This is the true reductionism to which Broom objects, though he is nowhere near as clear on this as Keith Ward (for example).¹⁵

¹³ Broom, *Blind*, 147–51

¹⁴ Ward, K., *God, Chance and Necessity* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1996), 13

¹⁵ Ward, *God*, *passim*.

I would suggest that what we need to do is to focus our efforts on a more effective response to the questions Dawkins raises, rather than object that he poses them.

In summary, Broom has no effective arguments against neo-Darwinianism. Incredulously, he actually uses the classic explanation of evolution as a supposed proof that it does not occur. Though Dawkins is indeed guilty of excessive anthropomorphisation of the gene, this is not a significant argument against his work, which is ultimately popular in tone and intent. We must be much more willing to trust that most readers will recognize that this is metaphor and imagery, not a description of reality.

Misrepresenting Dawkins

Beyond these ineffective arguments against neo-Darwinism is the third problem, that Broom not only misunderstands Dawkins, but misrepresents him.

The most obvious misrepresentation comes in the idea of intentionality in evolution. Broom continually asserts that the evolutionists are covering up the fact that there must have been assisted, directed development. He particularly challenges Dawkins on this by declaring that the image of Climbing Mount Improbable is an unacknowledged admission of this.¹⁶

[Dawkins's] metaphor of climbing the mountain is loaded with intentionality. No climber ever reached the summit of a high and difficult mountain without a powerful sense of wanting to get there. The very fact that Dawkins admits to aiming for the summit, or in his own words "only accepting mutations that improve optical performance," is surely the most blatant admission that his version of neo-Darwinism is, despite claims to the contrary, profoundly goal-centered and purposeful.¹⁷

When I first read Broom's work I had not at that time read Dawkins's *Mount Improbable*, and was surprised by this 'admission'. My knowledge of other parts of Dawkins's output suggested that this would *not* actually be his intention, but something that Broom has read into Dawkins. This proved to be the case.

¹⁶ See Dawkins, *Climbing*, 64

¹⁷ Broom, *Blind*, 167

It cannot be stressed enough that Dawkins does *not* make the admission attributed to him, neither explicitly nor implicitly. To the contrary, Dawkins is very clear on the purpose of the metaphor. Broom's claim is a classic example of misreading a metaphor and drawing conclusions from the parts of the image that are an essential part of that image, but not the part that forms the metaphor. The significant point of Dawkins's metaphor is that there is more than one way of climbing a mountain. His fictitious mountain has a sheer craggy side – virtually bereft of any sort of handhold, let alone ledges, to help the climber – whilst the other side is a gentle slope suitable for a Sunday afternoon stroll. The point Dawkins wants to make is that such a mountain can be climbed in one of two ways, and evolution did it by the gentle slope. The idea that the fully functioning mammalian eye (or avian for that matter) might have sprung from nothing is as absurd as climbing a sheer cliff in a few steps; Dawkins's argument is that it developed by a very long string of small developments.

In reality, no such mountain exists at all (and I do not mean in the physical, geographical sense), which is why there is no possibility of intentionality needed to climb it. Broom is trying to say that it is only by first identifying the mountain that one can hope to climb it. If quizzed on the matter, Dawkins would probably say that it is only in the sense of a trace of the path left behind by evolving organisms that we can see a mountain, a progression upwards. Evolution does not sense the mountain's presence and set about climbing it; the metaphor of a mountain has been introduced to discuss the idea of climbing one in different ways. The creature (or the gene) does not have any sense of its target at all. A random mutation improves the individual creature's ability to relate to its environment, and so be more likely to survive to reproductive age, to pass that mutation on to its offspring. As these variations accumulate, the nature of the organ shifts and something that can barely be recognized as the development of the starting point emerges. In retrospect, we can say that a mountain has been climbed; in anticipation, *no such mountain can be seen*. There is no sense of intentionality in this.

So Broom is utterly mistaken to claim that this is an admission that neo-Darwinism is goal orientated; it is an admission that at the very least he has misunderstood the metaphor. In effect it has become a misrepresentation of Dawkins's work, and so misleads the reader.

A very similar misrepresentation is presented by another of his

examples,¹⁸ though it may be a case of completely misunderstanding the argument rather than an actual misrepresentation. Whichever it is, the result is that Broom uses the standard evolutionists' argument of how evolution works as a proof that it could not occur.

Without quoting at length, the basic idea in his example is that if most of us, untrained in car maintenance, were to decide to 'tinker with the carburettor or the ignition system of our car', then it is almost certain that we will actually *decrease* the performance of our car, not increase it. Bizarrely, though, whilst he views this as an argument in favour of the presence of a guiding hand in evolution/creation, it is exactly the argument put forward by the evolutionists to demonstrate the *lack* of a guiding hand. To adapt Dawkins's image, this is a case of 'the blind mechanic'! How incompetent was the mechanic? Utterly, Dawkins responds. It matters not that a hundred, a thousand or even a million of us may adversely affect our car's performance if just one in ten million actually increases it by random tinkering. The one in ten million now driving around like James Bond is exactly what the evolutionists argue happened. This car is better fitted to perform, and with *this* secondary sexual characteristic the male driver will certainly attract all the girls! The other ten million minus one are nowhere, on that Broom and Dawkins agree. That Broom cannot see that his argument is exactly the evolutionists' argument is deeply concerning.

Note, though, that this is not a case of the evolutionists getting it wrong and Broom bringing clarity to their misperceptions. Broom acknowledges that 'there is a small probability that your tinkering does improve the running of the engine'.¹⁹ He claims that you need to make a 'personal judgment as to whether the engine begins to run more roughly or smoothly'. No you do not; or at least, you do not need to be a car mechanic to tell that the car runs (more) smoothly, since it proves itself without the need for expert evaluation. It makes the journey in less time, and with less petrol consumption; there does not need to be much value judgement here. Reapplying this image to biology, the genetics means that all cars created thereafter will copy the settings of the improved car, the millions of failed settings will be unsuccessful in propagating their own kind, and a new population of Aston Martins will rule the world.

In summary, Broom has misrepresented Dawkins, at least on the

¹⁸ Broom, *Blind*, 163–64

¹⁹ Broom, *Blind*, 163–64

imagery of climbing Mount Improbable. It is not an admission of intentionality. In addition to this, he seems unaware that one of his main arguments against evolution is actually the very explanation used by the evolutionists to describe evolution. If he is aware of this, then he should have made it much clearer; as it stands, it misleads the reader since it misrepresents the case for evolution.

Inappropriate parallels

Fourthly, the way Broom portrays the mindset of scientists is both unconvincing and misrepresentative. His argument on this point is far from easy to follow, but its essence is to say that since an intelligent mind is needed to form a scientific experiment, so an intelligent mind must lie behind the world that is being experimented on. Scientists should acknowledge the presence of the creative mind behind the universe. In other words, he sets up a parallel between the scientist as creator of experiments and God as creator of the world to experiment on. It is only because of the Christian tradition that science would have come, so readily, to the conclusion that the world is worth experimenting on, since there was an intelligent mind at the root of the world and its scientific systems, as Christianity has always taught.

The importance of this question for Broom is demonstrated by the prominence he gives it in the book. As far as he is concerned, scientists are being perverse by not acknowledging that only a creator God could be the explanation for the ordered universe. However, whether we agree with these scientists or not, most see no need for such an admission since they do not have a vacuum in the place where a statement of meaningfulness resides. To the contrary, they have an explanation: the meaningfulness of the scientific universe lies in such things as the properties of the atom and of electro-magnetic forces. The way atoms react with one another is largely explicable in terms of their electrons. Once combined into molecules, their properties remain explicable in these terms. There are no sudden anomalies in the patterns, but an overall coherence codified through the Periodic Table of elements.

Broom demands the acknowledgement that only a Creator might have set this up. By disagreeing with this, however, the atheistic scientist is, not being inconsistent. The problem is, therefore, not a lack of belief in a non-scientific base but the belief that the scientific basis is its own coherent

explanation. Yet even this is not perverse, for there is no real need to bring God into the equation when trying to understand science.²⁰

Moving from this initial objection, Broom asserts that scientists forget that science is conducted in a subjective situation, not an objective one. They are subjectively predisposed to see the results that they want, and to influence their experiments to obtain them. Yet to accuse scientists of failing to remember this is a little like accusing theologians of failing to remember that all talk about God comprises metaphor and imagery. We theologians are well aware that this is the case, but would treat the idea that we have to consider it every alternate sentence as somewhat absurd. Does the lack of a statement from a theologian acknowledging the metaphorical nature of talk about God prove that he or she is unaware of it? We would dismiss out of hand any such criticism of our own work on these grounds as absurd and irrelevant. So for the scientist, the problem is not that they fail to remember the element of subjectivity but that they do not feel the need to keep it pressed up to their eyeballs all the time they work, any more than theologians keep big cards on their desks with the word 'all talk about God is metaphor' written on them. Every now and again it becomes a key issue, but it rarely needs to take centre stage.

Broom, unfortunately, never presents evidence from specific scholars with an explanation of why they fall into the mistake he claims. So, for example, scientists in general are said to be unaware of their own role within the experiment. In the absence, however, of any examples or references we can neither agree with this statement nor challenge it. Whilst the authority of Polyani is used as the basis for the accusation, the proof that this is actually true of specific scientists is not provided.

So why does Broom raise the point? It is probably because he wants to imply that scientists see evolution where it does not really exist, because they are subjectively predisposed so to do. However, this seems to be a totally unjustified charge to raise.

In searching the Internet, something that became very apparent is that the scientists who advocate evolution can be far more devastating in their criticism of theories than Broom ever implies they could be capable of. The discussion over the so-called 'RNA world' (see footnote 9) is one that clearly emphasizes the weaknesses of the theory. There are advocates and there are detractors; the discussion proceeds on theoretical grounds and

²⁰ Ward, *God*, 103

on the results of experiments alike. The point for us is not the potential of this theory to be the proven method whereby evolution developed from inorganic to organic stage, but as proof that scientists are far from biased in their acceptance of any theory that proves evolution and 'disproves' creation. Scientists do not simply jump on any theory, no matter how flimsy, that is proposed. Broom is grossly unfair to scientists in suggesting that their subjectivity blinds them to the results and implications.

Of course, this raises the question of Broom's own subjectivity (and mine, whilst we are on the subject). Many non-Christian scientists reading Broom's book may be forgiven for accusing him of having his own non-scientifically predetermined subjectivity firmly in place. They would suggest that no matter what evidence might be presented in support of evolution he has already decided what he believes. Certainly every theologian needs to ask themselves how many hominid skeletons will have to be discovered before he or she might have to concede that the so called 'missing link' has now been filled in. It profits the argument nothing to charge others with subjectivity and not acknowledge your own.

This is not to say that there is no merit in this argument. It is indeed all too easy for scientists to fail to recognize the degree of involvement they have with their experiment. It is also all too easy, however, to over emphasize the degree of the subjective in science. Broom implies that Dawkins would be the prime example of a scientist who would believe in evolution no matter how much evidence to the contrary were presented; Dawkins is undoubtedly very confident of the validity and veracity of his subject, but can still acknowledge that on some matters 'we may never know for certain'.²¹

In summary, the parallel Broom raises between the creative scientific mind and the creative activity of God is not convincing. Scientists are not lacking an appreciation of the big issue within science, but only those with a faith see the basis for including a deity within it. This is not perverse but consistent; Christians simply disagree with it. Broom declares that scientists are not mindful of the influence of their subjectivity in their experimentation, whilst not providing a single concrete example. To the contrary, his own subjectivity seems very much to the fore.

²¹ Dawkins, R., *River Out of Eden*, (London: Widenfeld & Nicolson, 1995), 151

Conclusion

Neil Broom's qualifications lie in science, thereby giving the impression that he should know what he is writing about. However, what is apparent is that he has not employed a scientific style in his interaction with Dawkins. He has both misunderstood and misrepresented Dawkins, and by peppering the book with a series of his own cartoons introduces a mocking undercurrent to the ideas of neo-Darwinians. His arguments fail to convince, either as a challenge to the science or as an affirmation of faith. He is also somewhat outdated on the current scientific thinking; concerning matters on which he implies or states that nothing could possibly happen, scientists are in fact developing new schemes and ideas and implementing experiments to (dis)prove their validity. Furthermore, to make not the slightest mention of Stephen Jay Gould and his distinctive brand of neo-Darwinism is incredible. This is a very disappointing book.

Given my obvious scepticism about the value of Broom's contribution though, I want to close by stressing that the theory of evolution faces some momentous challenges to its validity and credibility, many of them recognized by its proponents.

The whole biochemical system, with the interrelationship between proteins and DNA, is so incredibly complex that it does strain credibility that it arose through a series of random chemical interactions. Even Dawkins writes that 'you can scarcely imagine it arising by luck, without some other self-replicating system as a forerunner'.²² The need for a code to develop that would be written in DNA – or its forerunner – is only one of many hurdles that have to be cleared before scientists can claim to have a coherent case for the random development of life from inorganic matter. In addition, the reason for the complete absence of dextro-rotary forms in living matter must be explained.

Yet at the same time, the proponents of special creation must reckon with the wastefulness and lack of meaning in so much of the human genome. Not only do we share 99% of our DNA with the chimpanzee, but vast swathes of it are virtually junk. I doubt that a neat, ordered genome could have been claimed as proof of special creation, but it would undoubtedly have helped. The genome is too much like the data on a computer hard disc that has been in use for a few years: areas of

²² Dawkins, R., *River*, 151

important information shredded up into a myriad of locations, with debris left over from old files and stuff that looks like sheer gobble-de-gook. The genome looks exactly as if it has grown over a long period of time, like barnacles encrusting the hull of a ship, or with old information never cleared out. Maybe the only response to this is the claim that (at best) life developed by guided evolution. Whatever, the discussion needs to proceed by discussion of the science itself, not of a popular presentation of it.

A valid criticism of Dawkins is that he has only a popular, reductionist picture of faith in mind whenever he attacks religious belief. It does not add credibility to the response, though, if only a reductionist picture of the scientific evidence is discussed.

A New Testament Perspective on Homosexuality¹

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Old Testament and Jewish Context

A New Testament perspective on homosexuality is anchored in the Old Testament and Jewish tradition. The indispensable framework for interpreting the NT teaching on homosexuality is Genesis 1–2, the creation narrative. We read in Genesis 1:26–27 that God made man in his own image, but the image of God is reflected in two distinct genders, male and female. The distinction between man and woman is underlined in the fuller account of their creation in Genesis 2:18–25. The physical differentiation of the man and the woman, and yet the amazing complementarity of such for bearing children indicates that marriage consists of the union of one woman and one man. The creation narrative, then, functions as the paradigm for males and females, and how they are to relate to one another sexually.² The two different genders signify that marriage and sexual relations are restricted to the opposite sex, and that same sex relations are contrary to the created order.³

1 This essay was originally presented at the Evangelical Theological Society Annual Meeting in Valley Forge, near Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on November 17, 2005.

2 Gordon J. Wenham suggests that the OT aversion to homosexuality grew out of the creation account ('The Old Testament Attitude to Homosexuality', *ExpT* 102 [1991]: 362). Cf. also Robert A. J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001), 56–62. Gagnon's work represents a *tour de force* on the whole issue, and is the work that must be reckoned with by those advancing pro-homosexual interpretations. For his response to his critics and continuing study on homosexuality, see <http://www.robagnon.net/> accessed on November 12, 2005.

3 Choon-Leong Seow sees space in the creation account for homosexuality as well

As we read the rest of the OT, we see that the OT consistently proscribes homosexual behaviour.⁴ In Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 same sex relations are banned in general.⁵ The severity of the sin is such that the death penalty is mandated for homosexual activity. Some claim that the text only speaks against cult prostitution here, but in these two verses in Leviticus there is no reference to cultic activity,⁶ and homosexual relations are banned in broad terms.⁷ We see no hint that only certain kinds of homosexual activity are prohibited. The OT, of course, also indicts cultic prostitution that is homosexual in nature,⁸ but such commands do not suggest that there are same sex relationships that are permissible or even laudable. Rather, the negative view of homosexuality relative to cultic

(‘Textual Orientation’, in *Biblical Ethics and Homosexuality: Listening to Scripture*, ed. Robert L. Brawley [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996], 26–27). Cf. also the view of Phyllis A. Bird who argues that we should not accept the creation narrative as the final definitive word and that wisdom theology opens the door for accepting modern scientific views of homosexuality (‘The Bible in Christian Ethical Deliberation concerning Homosexuality: Old Testament Contributions’, in *Homosexuality, Science, and the “Plain Sense” of Scripture*, ed. David L. Balch [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000] 165–69). I would argue, however, that Rom. 1:26–27 rules out the notion that there is space in the creation narrative for same sex relationships, since Romans 1 functions as a commentary on the creation account.

- 4 Wenham argues that the OT stance on homosexuality stands in contrast to the evidence we see from other ancient Near Eastern cultures in which homosexuality was apparently accepted as legitimate, even though those who played the passive and feminine role were disparaged (*ibid.*, 359–61). Gagnon is more restrained in his survey and interpretation of the evidence from the ancient Near East, though he agrees that the criticism of, and sanctions against homosexuality in Israelite culture are distinctive (*Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 44–56).
- 5 Rightly Wenham in ‘Old Testament Homosexuality’, 361, observes that the passive partner is put to death as well, so that there is no notion here of homosexual rape or compulsion but of two consenting partners, and both are held to be equally guilty.
- 6 Bird argues against the notion that Canaanite cultic activity is proscribed here. She contends instead, that the purity boundaries are established; and concludes that such boundaries are no longer normative for Christians today (‘The Bible in Christian Ethical Deliberation’, 149–65).
- 7 A common objection is that Christians do not follow all the Levitical laws and hence to elevate to normative status the proscription against homosexuality in the Levitical law is arbitrary. So, Seow, ‘Textual Orientation’, 18–19. For one perspective on how to handle such questions, see Thomas R. Schreiner, *The Law and Its Fulfillment: A Pauline Theology of Law* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), esp. 123–78.
- 8 Deut. 23:17–18; 1 Kgs 14:24; 15:12; 22:46; 2 Kgs 23:7; Job 36:14.

prostitution fits with the claim that homosexuality in general is contrary to God's created order.

The story of Sodom and Gomorrah blends nicely into this same pattern. It will not do to say that the sin in view is not homosexuality since the visitors were angels, for the angels appeared on earth as men.⁹ Others claim that the sin is not homosexuality *per se*, but homosexual rape, and hence the text does not speak to loving monogamous homosexual relationships. It is probably the case that on its own this text cannot be pressed to yield a comprehensive indictment of homosexuality. Given the fabric of OT revelation as a whole, however, the homosexual dimension of the sin, and not exclusively the attempted homosexual rape, testifies to the egregiousness of the evil in view.¹⁰ Indeed, Jude 7 confirms this interpretation, for Sodom and Gomorrah are described as 'departing after other flesh'. Jude does not concentrate on the attempted homosexual rape but the desire to engage in sexual relations with those of the same sex,¹¹ and the letter identifies such as an evil deserving God's judgement.

We should also note that second temple Jewish literature consistently and unanimously speaks against homosexual practices.¹² We read in the Testament of Naphtali, 'But you, my children, shall not be like that: discern the Lord who made all things, so that you do not become like Sodom, which departed from the order of nature' (T. Naph. 3.4).¹³ We read in *Pseudo-Phocylides*, 'Do not transgress with unlawful sex the limits set by nature. For even animals are not pleased by intercourse of male with male.

⁹ Gen. 18:2, 16, 22; 19:5, 8, 10, 12, 16.

¹⁰ Wenham remarks that the fundamental sin here was not homosexuality, yet 'undoubtedly the homosexual intentions of the inhabitants of Sodom adds a special piquancy to their crime' ('Old Testament Homosexuality', 361). Again, see the thorough discussion in Gagnon, *Homosexual Practice*, 71–78.

¹¹ Richard J. Bauckham argues against the view proposed here since angels were the object of their desire (*Jude, 2 Peter* [Waco: Word, 1983], 54), but this objection fails to convince since the inhabitants of Sodom did not know they were angels but thought they were men (rightly Douglas J. Moo, *2 Peter, Jude* [NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997], 242).

¹² Wis. 14:23–27; T. Levi 17:11; Sib.Or. 3.596–600; for a survey of such literature, see Gagnon, *Homosexual Practice*, 159–83; Robin Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality: Contextual Background for Contemporary Debate* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 66–98; James B. De Young, 'A Critique of Prohomosexual Interpretations of the Old Testament Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha', *Bibliotheca Sacra* 147 (1990): 437–54.

¹³ Cited from *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1, *Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Garden City: Doubleday, 1983), 812.

And let women not imitate the sexual role of men' (*Pseudo-Phocylides* 190–92; cf. 3, 210–14).¹⁴ Both Josephus and Philo condemned homosexuality, and they contended that it was contrary to nature.¹⁵

Jesus Tradition

Those who advocate homosexuality frequently say that the NT rarely proscribes homosexuality and that Jesus himself never speaks on the issue. But it is vital in reading the NT to recall that Jesus and all the writers of the NT are heirs of the Jewish tradition, and the Jewish interpretive tradition regularly, and without exception, indicted homosexuality. Hence, the real question is whether NT writers departed from the tradition they inherited. When we consult the NT evidence, it is clear that NT writers occupy the same stream carved out for them by the Jewish tradition that preceded them.

Jesus himself, of course, never addresses the matter of homosexuality directly, but his reading of the creation account indicates that he assumed marriage did not include same sex couples (Matt. 19:3–12; Mark 10:2–12). He defines marriage as the union of one man and one woman for life. The words of Jesus Christ demonstrate that God's created intention, relative to marriage (i.e., the union of one man and one woman), is still normative for the church of Jesus Christ. Jesus did not liberalize the OT view of marriage so as to embrace polygamy or divorce, nor did he open the door to homosexual relationships. On the contrary, he taught that the creation account clarified the divine intention, explaining that divorce is only permissible because of the hardness of human hearts.

Romans 1:26–27

The most important text regarding homosexuality in the NT is Romans 1:26–27. We learn from this text and the surrounding context that all sin, including homosexuality, is a consequence of idolatry. The fundamental

¹⁴ Cited from *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2, *Expansions of the "Old Testament" and Legends, Wisdom and Philosophical Literature, Prayers, Psalms, and Odes, Fragments of Lost Judeo-Hellenistic Works*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Garden City: Doubleday, 1985), 581.

¹⁵ Josephus, *Antiq.* 1.200–201; *Ag. Ap.* 2.199; Philo, *Spec. Laws* 1.325; 2.50; 3.37–42; *Abr.* 135–37; *Cont. Life* 59–62.

and root sin, therefore, is not homosexuality or any other erroneous behaviour. The sin that provokes God's wrath and leads to all other sin is the worship of the creature rather than the creator (Rom. 1:25). It is the failure to give thanks and praise to the one true and living God (Rom. 1:21). It is important to emphasize here that homosexual sin is not singled out because homosexuals are particularly egregious sinners. Sin is an equal opportunity and democratic employer! All human beings have failed to glorify and thank God the way they should. Paul probably focuses on homosexuality at this point because it mirrors idolatry.¹⁶ In other words, both idolatry and same sex relations distort what human beings were made to do. That is, all human beings turn the world upside down by worshipping self rather than God. And same sex relations invert what God has intended, so that human beings opt for same sex intercourse instead of engaging in sexual intercourse with the opposite sex.

The reason homosexuality is proscribed here is that it is contrary to nature (*para physin*). The reference to 'nature' indicates that Paul refers back to the creation account, to what God intended when he created men and women.¹⁷ Paul's use of the relatively unusual words *thelys* for females and *arsen* for males suggests that he draws on the creation account of Genesis (Gen. 1:27, LXX) where the same two words are used. The terms call attention to the sexual distinctiveness of males and females, suggesting that same sex relations violate God's creational intent. Further, the phrase 'contrary to nature' echoes Stoic and Hellenistic Jewish traditions, which saw homosexual relations as a violation of the created order.¹⁸

¹⁶ So Adolf Schlatter, *Romans: The Righteousness of God*, trans. S. S. Schatzmann (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1995), 43.

¹⁷ So H. Koester, 'Physis', TDNT, 9:273; Richard B. Hays, 'Relations Natural and Unnatural: A Response to John Boswell's Exegesis of Romans 1', *Journal of Religious Ethics* 14 (1986), 196-99. William R. Schoedel concurs with this understanding of nature proposed here, even though he would not accept the Pauline word as normative. 'Same-Sex Eros: Paul and the Greco-Roman Tradition', in *Homosexuality, Science, and the "Plain Sense" of Scripture*, ed. David L. Balch (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 67-68.

¹⁸ For a useful survey of these traditions, see Scroggs, *New Testament and Homosexuality*, 17-98. Contrary to David E. Fredrickson who identifies the problem in Rom. 1:26-27 with passion that is inordinate rather than homosexuality *per se* ('Natural and Unnatural Use in Romans 1:24-27: Paul and the Philosophical

Modern controversy over homosexuality has provoked a re-evaluation of this text.¹⁹ John Boswell, for instance, argues that Paul does not condemn all forms of homosexuality but only homosexual acts practised by people who are 'naturally' heterosexual.²⁰ Such a view fails because it introduces a flawed concept of nature into the text. When he uses the term 'nature', Paul does not mean one's individual and psychological predispositions. The word 'nature' refers to what God intended when he created men and women, and does not focus on the inherent character and disposition of human beings.²¹

Robin Scroggs minimizes Paul's critique of homosexuality by claiming that Paul draws on Hellenistic Jewish tradition.²² Further, he thinks that pederasty is condemned here rather than homosexuality in general. The first argument presented by Scroggs reveals the weakness of his case, for there is no evidence that Paul departs from the unanimous Jewish conviction that homosexuality was sinful. Since Paul cites the tradition, he evidently passes on and concurs with the tradition. Nor does it work to restrict Paul's comments to pederasty, for the text contains a general proscription of homosexual acts, and does not specify relationships between men and boys. Indeed, the text rules out Scroggs's interpretation, for Paul does not refer to homosexual relations between men and boys. Instead, he specifically speaks of 'males with males' in verse 27. Furthermore, verse 26 demonstrates the implausibility of Scroggs's thesis. There, same sex relations between females is proscribed, but there is no evidence that women and young girls engaged in same sex relations in the

Critique of Eros', in *Homosexuality, Science, and the "Plain Sense" of Scripture*, ed. David L. Balch (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 197–222).

- ¹⁹ William Countryman, e.g., maintains that homosexuality is not sinful but unclean or impure (*Dirt, Greed, and Sex: Sexual Ethics in the New Testament and Their Implications for Today* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988], 110–17). Thomas E. Schmidt demonstrates conclusively, however, that Countryman's argument does not succeed (*Straight and Narrow? Compassion and Clarity in the Homosexuality Debate* [Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1995], 64–84).
- ²⁰ John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 109–12; so also Dan O. Via 'The Bible, the Church, and Homosexuality', in *Homosexuality and the Bible: Two Views* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 15.
- ²¹ Cf. Rom. 11:21, 24; 1 Cor. 11:14; Gal. 2:15; 4:8; Eph. 2:3; rightly Hays, 'Relations Natural and Unnatural', 192–94.
- ²² Scroggs, *New Testament and Homosexuality*, 109–18.

Hellenistic world.²³ It follows, therefore, that in both verses 26 and 27 Paul speaks against homosexual relations in general, and the attempt to limit his words to pederasty fails.²⁴

Gerald Sheppard argues that Paul's words on homosexuality should be relativized in light of the canon as a whole since we gain understanding of God's Word as we perceive in our own era the true nature of homosexuality.²⁵ Such a reading, however, does not truly rely on canonical Scripture but introduces an extra-biblical norm in interpreting Scripture.²⁶ Our cultural view of homosexuality effectively trumps the biblical witness for Sheppard. Victor Furnish and Margaret Davies are more straightforward in claiming that we can no longer accept the Pauline view on homosexuality since we know more about homosexual relations than Paul.²⁷ This view at least has the virtue of honesty, but at the same time it

23 Rightly Brendan Byrne, *Romans* (Sacra Pagina; Collegeville: Glazier Liturgical Press, 1996), 76. Via thinks that the Scriptures do not ultimately proscribe homosexuality, and yet he agrees that the argument from pederasty is unsuccessful (*Homosexuality*, 11).

24 James E. Miller argues that verse 26 refers to unnatural heterosexual practices rather than same sex practices ('The Practices of Romans 1:26: Homosexual or Heterosexual?' *Novum Testamentum* 37 [1996]: 1–11). Such an interpretation falters, however, because it separates verses 26 and 27 too rigidly from one another. Upon reading verse 27 it is clear that Paul has same sex intercourse in view, and hence it is quite likely that he has the same sin among females in view in verse 26. To claim that a different kind of sexual sin is criticized in verse 26, as Miller alleges, should be rejected since no evidence exists in these two verses that Paul addresses sexual sins among women that can be differentiated from the same sex practices indicted in verse 27. Robert Jewett maintains that the parallels adduced from ancient literature also suggest that Miller's interpretation is mistaken ('The Social Context and Implications of Homoerotic References in Romans 1:24–27', in *Homosexuality, Science, and the "Plain Sense" of Scripture*, ed. David L. Balch [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000], 233).

25 Gerald T. Sheppard, 'The Use of Scripture within the Christian Ethical Debate concerning Same-Sex Oriented Persons', *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 40 (1985): 13–35.

26 Against the view proposed by Sheppard, see the pointed criticisms of Hays, 'Natural and Unnatural', 213–14, n. 14. For a canonical reading that moves in a different orbit from Sheppard, see Christopher Seitz, 'Sexuality and Scripture's Plain Sense: The Christian Community and the Law of God', in *Homosexuality, Science, and the "Plain Sense" of Scripture*, ed. David L. Balch (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 177–96.

27 Victor P. Furnish, *The Moral Teaching of Paul: Selected Issues* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1985), 79–80; Margaret Davies, 'New Testament Ethics and Ours: Homosexuality

removes itself from the realm of biblical and Christian ethics by surrendering to the tides of our culture.

We can contrast the view of Sheppard and Furnish with William Webb and his hermeneutical trajectory that emphasizes the redemptive movement in Scripture, a redemptive movement that may even transcend what the biblical text teaches.²⁸ Webb argues that such a view does not open the door to homosexuality, for there is no movement in the biblical text towards endorsing homosexuality. We can be grateful that Webb sees no room in the Scriptures for same sex relations, but, in my judgement, Webb's argument against homosexuality is not as strong as it should be. He downplays Paul's argument from creation in Romans 1:26–27, and hence the fundamental argument against homosexuality in the Scriptures

and Sexuality in Romans 1:26–27', *Biblical Interpretation* 3 (1995): 315–31. Cf. also Herman C. Waetjen, 'Same-Sex Sexual Relations in Antiquity and Sexuality and Sexual Identity in Contemporary American Society', in *Biblical Ethics and Homosexuality: Listening to Scripture*, ed. Robert L. Brawley (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 112–13.

- ²⁸ William J. Webb, *Slaves, Women & Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001). For instance, Walter Wink relativizes the Levitical prohibition of homosexuality by saying, 'Such an act was considered as an 'abomination' for several reasons. The Hebrew prescientific understanding was that male semen contained the whole of nascent life. With no knowledge of eggs and ovulation, it was assumed that the woman provided only the incubating space. Hence the spilling of semen for any procreative purpose – *in coitus interruptus* (Gen. 38:1–11), male homosexual acts or male masturbation – was considered tantamount to abortion or murder. (Female homosexual acts and masturbation were consequently not so seriously regarded.) One can appreciate how a tribe struggling to populate a country in which its people were outnumbered would value procreation highly, but such values are rendered questionable in a world facing total annihilation through overpopulation.' (November 7, 1979 *Christian Century* 1082). The nature of the argument is remarkably similar to some of Webb's explanations regarding the pre-scientific conception of the role of women in the NT. Webb, for instance, argues that Paul believed women were merely 'reproductive gardens', contributing only a fertile environment for children, whereas today we have a better understanding of biology. Hence, according to Webb, our scientific understanding today transcends the Pauline words about women in 1 Cor. 11. See here my review of Webb, Thomas R. Schreiner, 'William J. Webb's *Slaves, Women & Homosexuals*: A Review Article', *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 6 (2002): 46–64. Interestingly, Via's argument favouring homosexuality also uses similar language to Webb's scheme, when he says, '*Biblical revelation is not static but opens into a future of new implications*' (italics his, 'Homosexuality', 38).

receives short shrift. Indeed, Webb's own method could be employed by others to justify homosexuality, and given the trajectory of our culture and the evangelical movement, such an approach will probably not be long in coming.

1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10

Paul also speaks against homosexuality in 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10. In both texts he used the term *arsenokoitai* to designate the sin of homosexuality. Paul's use of the term represents its first occurrence in Greek literature. David Wright is likely correct in suggesting that Paul derived the term from Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13.²⁹ When we look at both of these texts in the LXX, we can see the argument: *kai meta arsenos ou koimēthēse koitēn gynaikos bdelygma gar estin* (Lev. 18:22); *kai hos an koimēthē meta arsenos koitēn gynaikos bdelygma epoiēsan amphoteroi thanatousthōsan enochoi eisin* (Lev. 20:13). What Wright argues, and other scholars have followed him here, is that the Pauline term *arsenokoitai* is a Pauline innovation deriving from the phrase, *arsenos koitēn* in the two texts from Leviticus. The term refers, then, to those who bed other males. In other words, it is a vivid way of denoting same sex intercourse between males. The other word used to designate same sex relations in 1 Corinthians 6:9 is *malakoi*. This word refers to the passive partner sexually, an effeminate male who plays the role of a female.

Both 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10, also proscribe homosexuality in general. Dale Martin suggests that the term *arsenokoitai* refers to those who exploit others sexually, but cannot be limited to same sex relations.³⁰ Such a broadening of the term, however, does not fit with either the background of the term in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 or the basic meaning of the word: bedding a male. Furthermore, the pairing of *arsenokoitai* with *malakoi* in 1 Corinthians 6:9 indicates that homosexual

²⁹ David F. Wright, 'Homosexuals or Prostitutes? The Meaning of *Arsenokoitai* (1 Cor. 6:9 1 Tim. 1:10)', *Vigiliae Christianae* 38 (1984): 125-53. Dale B. Martin criticizes the interpretation supported by Wright in 'Arsenokoites and Malakos. Meaning and Consequences', in *Biblical Ethics and Homosexuality: Listening to Scripture*, ed. Robert L. Brawley (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 119-23. In turn Gagnon defends Wright's view and exposes the weaknesses in Martin's interpretation (*Homosexual Practice*, 312-36).

³⁰ Martin, 'Arsenokoites and Malakos', 119-23

relations are in view. Paul could have used the more technical term *paidērastēs* (a pederast) if he had intended to restrict his comments to exploitative sex. Furthermore, if the only problem in view were sex that exploits others, there would be no need for Paul to mention the passive partner as well since he is the one being oppressed, and not the oppressor.

Robin Scroggs suggests another interpretation. He argues that the word *andrapodistais* (slave-dealers) in 1 Timothy 1:10 intimates that *arsenokoitai* refers to the slave dealers who sell boys and girls as slaves for brothel houses.³¹ Scroggs's view is scarcely persuasive, it is hard to believe that kidnappers were exclusively involved in the sex-trade business. Moreover, the term for slave-dealers is lacking in the 1 Corinthians 6:9 context, and it can scarcely be imported there to explain the term *arsenokoitai*. Finally, there is no reason to think that the term slave-dealers casts any light on the meaning of *arsenokoitai* in the vice list in 1 Timothy 1:9–10. The sins listed represent particularly egregious violations of the ten commandments.

Alternative explanations are provided for *malakoi* as well. Scroggs thinks the reference is to effeminate callboys and prostitution.³² In reply we can say that Paul's indictment would include such activities, but there is insufficient evidence to limit what Paul says here to male prostitution. Dale Martin argues that effeminacy broadly conceived is in view, so that the *malakoi* adorn themselves with soft and expensive clothes, consume gourmet foods, are pre-occupied with their hair-style, wear perfume, engage in heterosexual sex excessively, masturbate, are gluttons, lazy, and cowards, and also accept phallic penetration by another male.³³ Martin thinks such a view is misogynist and should not be endorsed in our day. The Pauline evidence, however, does not verify Martin's view. In 1 Corinthians 6:9 the word *malakoi* is paired with *arsenokoitai*, and the combination of the two terms indicates that same sex relations are in view, not heterosexual sex or effeminate behaviour in general. Paul, of course, in the very same verse says that those who live sexually immoral lives as heterosexuals will be excluded from the kingdom as well, but he does not have such a notion in mind when he uses the terms *arsenokoitai* and *malakoi*.

³¹ Scroggs, *New Testament and Homosexuality*, 118-21.

³² Scroggs, *New Testament and Homosexuality*, 106-109.

³³ Martin, 'Arsenokoites and Malakos', 124-28.

Sons and Daughters of Adam

As noted earlier, the biblical prohibition on homosexuality is questioned, because we allegedly have knowledge about homosexuality that was not available to biblical writers. For instance, it is sometimes said that homosexuality is genetic, and biblical writers were not cognizant of this truth. It is not my purpose here to delve into the question of the genetic character of homosexuality. The scientific evidence supporting such a conclusion, however, is not compelling. Most studies yield the rather common sense conclusion that homosexuality is the result of both nature and nurture, and cannot be wholly explained by genetic factors.³⁴

However, I do want to look at the perspective of the Scriptures, relative to so-called genetic characteristics. Even if some sins could be traced to our genetics, it would not exempt us from responsibility for such sins. The Scriptures teach that all human beings are born into this world as sons and daughters of Adam, and hence they are by nature children of wrath (Eph. 2:3). They are dead in trespasses in sins (Eph. 2:1, 5), and have no inclination to seek God or to do what is good (Rom. 3:10–11). We come into the world as those who are spiritually dead (Rom. 5:12, 15), so that death reigns over the whole human race (Rom. 5:17). Indeed, human beings are condemned by virtue of Adam's sin (Rom. 5:16, 18). Such a radical view of sin in which we inherit a sinful nature from Adam means that sinful predispositions are part of our personalities from our inception. Hence, even if it were discovered that we are genetically predisposed to certain sinful behaviours like alcoholism or homosexuality, such discoveries would not eliminate our responsibility for our actions, nor would it suggest that such actions are no longer sinful. The Scriptures teach that we are born as sinners in Adam, while at the same time they insist we should not sin and are responsible for the sin we commit. We enter into the world as slaves of sin (Rom. 6:6, 17), but we are still morally blameworthy for capitulating to the sin that serves as our master.

³⁴ See, e.g., Stanton L. Jones & Mark A. Yarhouse, *Homosexuality: The Use of Scientific Research in the Church's Moral Debate* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000); Jeffrey Satinover, *Homosexuality and the Politics of Truth* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996); Schmidt, *Straight and Narrow?*, 131–59; Gagnon, *Homosexual Practice*, 396–432.

New Persons in Christ

When we think of a NT perspective on homosexuality, we must remember the proclamation of the gospel, the truth that those who are in Christ are new persons. In other words, we have substantial evidence that those who struggle with the sin of homosexuality can live a new life by God's grace. We are enabled to live new lives because of who we are in Christ. Those who put their trust in Christ are justified by faith (Rom. 5:1). They have peace with God and are reconciled to him through the cross of Christ (Rom. 5:1, 10). They are adopted as God's children (Rom. 8:14–17). They are redeemed and liberated from the power of sin, so that they may be zealous for good works (Tit. 2:14). They are now saved by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8). They have been born again through the Holy Spirit.³⁵ They are a new creation (Gal. 6:16; 2 Cor. 5:17). All people enter the world as sons and daughters of Adam and so are under the dominion of 'the old man'. But now, by virtue of union with Christ, they are clothed with the 'new man'.³⁶ They have put the old man off and have been endowed with the new man. Those who are in Christ are sanctified (1 Cor. 1:30; 6:11), so that they stand before God as those who are holy and clean in his sight. Their sins are truly forgiven, so that they do not live under the shackles of the past (Eph. 1:14; Col. 2:11–14).

The Continuing Struggle with Sin and the Promise of Moral Perfection

We face two dangers here. We may under-emphasize our newness in Christ, so that the redemption accomplished for us is negated or trivialized. On the other hand, we may fall prey to an over-realized eschatology that underestimates the continuing presence of sin in the lives of believers. The already, but not yet dimension of Christian teaching is immensely practical when it comes to understanding sanctification. First John 3:1–3 makes it clear that believers are not all that we will be. We will be conformed fully to the likeness of Jesus only when he returns. Hence, in the meantime, believers continue to struggle with sin. We stand in the right before God by virtue of the work of Christ, but we are not perfected.

³⁵ John 1:12, 3:3, 5, 8.

³⁶ Rom. 6:6; Col. 3:9–10; Eph. 2:15; cf. Eph. 4:24.

The emblem of the continuing presence of sin in our lives is our mortal body. The NT regularly teaches that we will experience moral perfection when our corruptible bodies become incorruptible, when this mortal puts on immortality.³⁷ In the meantime, we continue the struggle against sin as long as we are in our bodies until the day of resurrection (Phil. 3:20–21). The resurrection of our bodies testifies that the bodies are not inherently sinful, but as sons and daughters of Adam we are born into the world with sin reigning over us as whole persons (Rom 5:12–19).

The tension of Christian experience surfaces here. We are new creations in Christ and liberated from the power of sin, but at the same time we await the fullness of our redemption. The newness of our redemption in Christ does not mean that we are completely free of sin. Rather, as believers we continue to battle against, and struggle with sin every day. First Peter 2:11 says, 'Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.' Notice that the passions and desires from the flesh are still powerful in all believers. They are so strong that they war against us.

We might think that we will not have any desires to do evil as believers in Jesus Christ, but as long as we are in the body, desires for sin, sometimes incredibly powerful desires, will be ours. Such desires do not mean that we are failures, or that we are not truly believers. They are a normal part of the Christian life before the day of resurrection. We ought not to think, therefore, that the newness we have in Christ means that believers will have no desire to return to a homosexual lifestyle. The newness we have in Christ does not mean that we are freed from old temptations. There is a progressive and even sometimes slow growth in holiness in our Christian lives. Indeed, we can sin dramatically as believers, even if we have been Christians for a long time. Even when we sin in such a way, there is no excuse for sinning, and we are called to a deep sorrow and repentance for the evil in our lives.

This explains why we must fight the fight of faith afresh every day. Peter does not upbraid his readers for having desires to do wrong, but he does exhort them to abstain from these fleshly desires that war against our souls. In Romans 8:13, the apostle Paul says that believers are to put to death by the Spirit the desires of the body. Again, from this verse we see that Christians still face sin since they live in corruptible bodies, and the

³⁷ Rom. 8:10-11, 23; 1 Cor. 15:52-54; Eph. 1:14.

battle against sin is so fierce that the deeds of the body must be slain. They must be put to death. This fits with Colossians 3:5 where we are exhorted to put to death our members that are on earth. The metaphor of putting these desires and actions to death demonstrates that we are not talking about something easy and simple here.

The NT, of course, does not simply leave us with the message: 'Just say "no"'. It trumpets the grace of God in Jesus Christ that liberates us from the mastery and tyranny of sin. Those who have died and risen with Christ are no longer slaves to sin (Rom. 6). The power and dominion of sin has been broken decisively, so that we are now free from the tentacles of sin and are enabled to live in a way that pleases God. Romans 8:13 exhorts us to conquer sinful actions by the power of the Holy Spirit. We realize that we cannot triumph over sin in our own strength. We call on the Spirit to help us in our hour of need, and we realize that we will not be full of the Spirit (Eph. 5:18) unless the Word of Christ dwells in us richly (Col. 3:16). We remember the truth of the gospel that we are loved because Christ Jesus died for us. We are adopted, justified, reconciled, redeemed, and holy in Christ. The exhortation to live a new live comes from a Father who has loved us and delivered us from final condemnation. It is from a Father who promises to complete what he has started on the last day (Phil. 1:6). We have the promise that we will be fully, and finally sanctified (1 Thess. 5:23–24). Hence, we trust his promises to strengthen and free us from the allure of sin. We are not yet perfected, but we are changing by his Spirit. And we are changing because we have been changed and will be changed from one degree of glory to another, just as from the Lord who is the Spirit of freedom (2 Cor. 3:17–18).

The Last Word: Surprise, the Essential Nature of Grace

Robbie F. Castleman

One rather delightful consequence of writing this column for each issue of *Themelios* is that I get mail. By 'snail mail' or 'e-mail', it is not unusual for me to hear from readers of our journal about something I have contributed that they want to respond to, know more about or just appreciate. I have made a commitment to steward this interest as best as I can and reply personally to each writer.

I had started 'The Last Word' for this issue when I received an e-mail from a fellow professor at another institution in the States who asked me a question I had to think about and ponder prayerfully for several days before I sent my response. It was one of those questions that make you not just think, but wonder about. The question was prompted by my column titled 'Joy, the Gigantic Secret' (30.3) where I commented on the humour and life and writings of G. K. Chesterton. The reader asked, 'How do you come to that place of experiencing joy in the Christian life like that?' I just sat there and my first thought was, I have no idea. I thought this, not because my life lacks a measure of joy, but because I had never thought about how I have arrived at the place where I really do. So, I took some time to think about this, and what I learned surprised me.

I tried to recall the most joy-filled people I have known. I first thought of 'The Hamiltons'. This older couple had served with my husband's mother as missionaries in China and my husband and I would go out of our way during any trip near Atlanta, Georgia to spend even 30 minutes with Ham and Estelle. Two things about them always challenged and encouraged us. They were absolutely still in love with each other after 50 plus years of married life; and they were just full of gratitude for everything. Shared love and thankfulness marked their lives deeply. We

would leave their home after a short, or lingering, visit and there would be embedded in our own hearts and between us what the Scripture must mean by the 'Joy of the Lord'. The effect of the Hamiltons on us is still too ineffable to fully describe – which, of course, is a tell-tale sign of grace. When we suspected that a certain visit might be our last, due to their advancing years, we asked if we could begin to use the salutation they used in letters for our own correspondence with friends. They always ended personal notes or multiple-recipient prayer-letters with the salutation 'In His Glad Service'. And that was it. The Hamiltons considered a life-time of Kingdom service as gladsome.

What surprised me in recalling their friendship so vividly was also remembering that this 'glad service' was also full of heartbreak, sorrow and suffering in a lifetime on the mission field. In thinking this through for the colleague who had written about the column, I realized this was also true of G. K. Chesterton's life. He wrote love poems to his wife throughout their married life, but various biographers have suspected that their marriage was never consummated due to some physical, and possibly emotional, problem connected with Frances' health. I thought about the most 'joyful' people I've known and not one of them lived the 'easy life'. But they loved extravagantly and expressed gratitude with ease.

I wonder if it's because people like this have a capacity for joy because they take themselves less seriously and laugh and love well because they take the gospel that bears the suffering of life so seriously. Chesterton hints at this when he muses, 'It is absolutely useless and absurd to tell a man that he must not joke about sacred subjects. It is useless and absurd for a simple reason: because there are no subjects that are not sacred' (*Lunacy and Letters*). In recognizing the overarching reality of Divine Lordship, one can begin to see that everything, no matter its darkness or light, its burden or ease, has the potential for the surprise of Grace which is Joy.

C. S. Lewis betrays this understanding in the title of his autobiography, *Surprised by Joy*. Joy must be a surprise if it is a manifestation of Grace. If it's not surprising, then how can it be Gift? If one aims for joy, plans for joy, expects joy, we're bound to miss it or be disappointed. Joy must be the grace of aiming at something else. I think Joy is the grace that comes from suffering with Christ in 'His Glad Service'. It's one more way to understand the sobering invitation of the Lord Jesus that gives way to a life marked with fullness, found-ness, joyfulness. 'Those who love their life, lose it, and

those who hate their life in this world will keep it ... whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also' (John 12:25-26). Indeed sprinkled through the Upper Room Discourse is the promise of Joy's fullness through suffering and obedience.

It is interesting that Paul's epistle to Philippians reminds us to 'Rejoice in the Lord and again I say rejoice' and it is the same epistle that asks us to have the 'same mind in ourselves that was in Christ Jesus' that leads to the self-emptying life. Paul mentions joy several times in Philippians, because he is not altogether happy in the marginalization of imprisonment imposed upon him. No person who says I don't know if I want to live or die – even for the Lord – is 'happy'. But there is joy. This is the same epistle that says Epaphroditus was spared lest Paul 'have sorrow upon sorrow'. I suppose it should come as no big surprise that when we share Christ's suffering, we indeed share his life. Joy must be grace-given because surely it must be a gift for such a journey, for such obedience, for such hope. For Jesus, for Paul, and for you and me.

So, instead of aiming for joy in the journey, it is the hardship, burdens and disappointments of life that may be the very thing to lean into. And, in that hard place, like Paul, we will find Christ Jesus. And, by God's grace, in that place, we will truly be surprised by Joy. May the salutation of our lives reflect the Joy **knowing** what it means to be 'In his glad service'.