

THE NAZARENE THEOLOGICAL STANCE

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In a few weeks many of us will meet for our regional North American Nazarene Theology Conference on the theme, 'Holy God: Holy People'. We will meet in conference as a representative sample, the Church doing theology – pastors, laypeople, superintendents, administrators, students, professors – but *all* of us *theologians*. And we will be thinking afresh about the Nazarene Articles of Faith to which we are all committed.

In preparation for our conference I have been requested to write an essay on theological method. Now clearly I am not expected to write a treatise covering *all* aspects of theological method and *all* the schools of thought in theology today. But to ensure that I am dealing with an aspect of method relevant to this conference, and that I am expressing a view of theological method which is recognizably Nazarene, I want to take the lead from the address given by Dr William M. Greathouse when he was inaugurated as the fourth president of Nazarene Theological Seminary almost thirty-six years ago, in January, 1969.¹ In the first part of that significant address, Dr Greathouse identified three characteristics of the 'Nazarene theological stance', namely that it is *catholic*, *conservative*, and *evangelical*.

Catholic

To say that Nazarene theology is 'catholic', said Dr Greathouse, is to say that it 'stands in the classic tradition of Christian thought.' He pointed out that our Articles of Faith (since then increased to sixteen) draw heavily on the Twenty-five Articles of American Methodism, and that that document in turn was Wesley's abbreviation of the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England. The Church of the Nazarene is therefore not 'sectarian'. We believe in the 'one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church'. Of course Wesley so strongly believed in the unity of the Church that it was only reluctantly at the end of his life that he took steps which recognized that Methodist separation from his beloved Church of England was

¹ William M. Greathouse, *Nazarene Theology in Perspective* (NPH, 1970). In the Introduction, Dean Mendell Taylor records: 'The message was received with enthusiastic response and acclaim. Requests for publication were numerous.' In the second part of the address, Dr Greathouse spoke specifically about our Wesleyan heritage.

a pragmatic necessity in both England and America. The founding generation of the Church of the Nazarene just over a century later was more shaped by an Anabaptist ecclesiology, the 'Free Church' or 'Believers' Church' tradition which in North America (unlike Europe) is the cultural norm. Yet while they did not share Wesley's ideal of one unified national church, they did share his belief in the 'one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.' That is to say, they believed that 'the Church of God is composed of all spiritually regenerate persons, whose names are written in heaven.'²

All this implies that Christian Theology is *Church* Theology. The Articles of Faith declare the doctrines to which we are *corporately* committed. Certainly, the theology of the Church must not be allowed to stagnate into dead stereotypical slogans and clichés which are simply 'indoctrinated' into the young so that they can regurgitate them to prove their orthodoxy. The Church must always have room for its creative thinkers who can deepen our understanding and contextualize our theology for new cultures and classes and for each new generation in new metaphors and new categories. Indeed all thinking Christians live with a certain degree of tension between their own theological opinions and the corporate theology of the Church. If they don't experience that, they are probably brain-dead! To go further, the Church even has cause to be grateful to its heretics. Often in the history of the Church they have been the creative thinkers who have spurred the Church on by the very attraction of their new ideas to respond by deepening and refining orthodoxy. They have helped Church Theology to be an ongoing tradition of *living, developing* orthodoxy instead of a dead antique or fossil.

But Christian Theology does not belong to geniuses and creative thinkers: it does not belong even to the greatest of theologians, who all (we believe) have their flaws. Christian Theology belongs corporately to the Church. Appropriate academic freedom and loyalty to the Church's confessional position have to be held together. And it is essential that theological thinking be done in the context of corporate prayer and worship, and of the evangelism and service of the people of God. We must not fall into the Hellenistic tendency of thinking that theory and practice can be separated. They cannot.

Theology and practice, *theoria* and *praxis*, are and must be deeply intertwined. *Lex orandi lex credendi*.³

² Nazarene *Manual*, par. 24. Their phraseology does have a more individualistic ring, of course, but they are affirming the unity of the Church of Christ. See Quanstrom, *A Century of Holiness Theology*, Beacon Hill, 2004, pp. 1-5 for their optimistic hopes of 'uniting the Holiness people' and 're-christianizing the continent'.

³ 'The law of prayer is the law of belief', that is: the shape of our prayer and worship shapes our doctrine.

To say that Christian Theology belongs to the Church means, of course, that it belongs to the whole Church of Jesus Christ. While we believe in (that is, trust) our denomination, it is really the Church universal, the Church catholic, in which we confess our belief in the creed. Wesley himself had no intention of starting a new theological tradition called ‘Wesleyanism’, and certainly did not claim to be teaching ‘new doctrines’. His doctrines, he declared, were the doctrines of the Reformation Church of England in continuity with the doctrines and practices of the ancient, united, catholic Church of the first Christian centuries. Wesleyan-Holiness theology is historically and necessarily part of what Dr Greathouse called ‘the classic tradition of Christian thought’, namely the classic Christian theology summarized by the Council of Constantinople (381) in the Nicene Creed.

For us, living, it appears, toward the tail-end of the era of ‘modernity’, that classic tradition has acquired a new significance. The Nicene Creed was not at issue in the Reformation since both the Protestant Reformers and the Council of Trent affirmed its doctrines.⁴ But what we have called ‘Modern Theology’, those schools of theology which have appeared in the era of ‘modernity’ since the Renaissance and the Enlightenment – Socinianism, Deism, Unitarianism, the classic so-called ‘Liberalism’ of Harnack,⁵ and so on – have rejected the viability of Nicene Christianity, or radically re-interpreted it. We have to respect the good motives which made many of them do so, for they were moved often by evangelistic and apologetic motives. They wished to commend Christianity (or at least ‘religion’!) to its ‘cultured despisers’,⁶ to make it acceptable and meaningful to the ‘modern’ mind. But while their intentions may have been commendable, and while I have argued for the value of creative thinking which adopts new metaphors and categories, it has become all too evident that the categories they adopted and the plausibility structure they accepted all too often transformed the Christian faith into another religion and ‘another gospel’. They embraced the idea of ‘development’, but the development they proposed was not the

⁴ The Reformers indeed were one with the Council of Trent in affirming the *filioque* clause against Eastern Orthodoxy.

⁵ See Adolf von Harnack, *The Essence of Christianity*, Berlin, 1901, a series of influential lectures rejecting the Incarnation, the Atonement and the Trinity and summing up ‘the gospel of Jesus’ as the Kingdom of God (meaning a movement for social reform), the Fatherhood of God (and we are all equally his children in the same sense that Jesus was), and ‘the infinite value of the human soul’. For a current republication of selections from Harnack, see *Adolf von Harnack: Liberal Theology at its Height*, ed. Martin Rumscheidt (Collins/Harper Row, 1989). Anabaptists of course were also unhappy about creeds and that heritage also affects some contemporary fundamentalist traditions.

⁶ The famous title adopted by the ‘father of modern theology’, F.D.E. Schleiermacher, for his first major book was *Speeches on Religion to its Cultured Despisers* (1799).

unpacking of the implications of Holy Scripture in contemporary categories. Instead, since they swallowed the myth of progress, the categories of ‘modern’ thought were by definition more ‘developed’ and ‘enlightened’, and so became definitive for Christian doctrine. It was no wonder that, in that context, ‘conservatives’ became suspicious of ‘development’ and the fundamentalist mind-set was born. But now, the evident failure of the Enlightenment experiment and the proclaimed end of ‘modernity’ has led George Lindbeck to assert that so-called ‘Liberal’ theology, the ‘experiential-expressive model’ looks very outmoded.⁷ ‘He who marries the spirit of the age will find himself a widower in the next.’⁸

The Church of the first several centuries, therefore, not inhabiting a Christianized culture like the Church of the medieval or Reformation eras, but inhabiting a pagan culture awash with mystery religions, Gnostic fancies and elaborate metaphysical systems, has become relevant to the Church of today in a new, fresh way. We too face not just intra-Christian debates about ‘justification by faith’, or ‘entire sanctification’, or ‘the priesthood of all believers’, but the rejection of those cardinal doctrines of Nicene Christianity – particularly the Incarnation and the Holy Trinity. These cardinal doctrines which distinguish Christian belief from all kinds of Gnostic spirituality and speculative metaphysics are at issue today.

In this situation then our conference is timely, for it is our intention to take into consideration *all* of our sixteen Articles of Faith *together*. Under the heading of ‘Holy God’ we are to consider ‘Holy Trinity’ (Article 1 – note!), ‘Holy Sacrifice’ (Arts 2 and 6), and ‘Holy Spirit’ (Arts 3 and 4), and under the heading ‘Holy People’ we are to consider ‘Holy Church’ (Arts 11, 12, 13 and 14), ‘Holy Persons’ (Arts 5, 7, 8, 9 and 10) and ‘Holy Mission’ (Arts 15 and 16). The fact that we are to consider them *together* is crucial. It is crucial because there is a theological problem with the whole format of ‘Articles of Faith’, namely that the very format encourages compartmentalized thinking. The format emerged at the Reformation, with the confessions of Lutheranism, of the ‘Reformed’ churches coming from the Swiss Reformation, and of the Church of England with its Thirty-nine Articles. But the format tends to encourage us to think of Christian theology as a series of discrete ‘doctrines’, and inhibits holistic thinking. In our own tradition therefore, we

⁷ George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, (Westminster, 1984). Of course this is strongly contested! Lindbeck’s view of the ‘experiential-expressivist’ model was strongly criticized by David Tracy (cf. ‘Lindbeck’s New Program for Theology: A Reflection,’ *The Thomist*, 49 (1985), 460-472), and while Lindbeck’s ‘cultural-linguistic’ alternative has much to commend it, it is in danger of losing hold on theological realism. Cf. Alister E. McGrath, *The Genesis of Doctrine* (OUP, 1990).

⁸ William R. Inge

tend to think of 'the doctrine of holiness' as something discrete and distinct, and we rarely ask such questions as: What has this got to do with the doctrine of God the Holy Trinity? How is Christian holiness the fruit of the atonement? Has holiness got anything to do with the Church, or is it just an individualistic thing? Certainly our forebears in the nineteenth-century holiness movement are to be commended for trying to relate Christian holiness to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. But then they tended to lose Wesley's integration of holiness with the Church and the sacraments.

Our deliberate and ambitious project in this conference therefore is to think holistically, for that is true theological thinking. The ancient Catholic Church was certainly concerned with 'orthodoxy' – that is, to be true to the Christian faith, but the form of confession which they used was not a series of 'Articles of Faith': it was the creed. And while the Nicene Creed came to operate as a guarantee of orthodoxy, the creeds as such were not originated in theological councils and conferences, but in the worship of the Church. *Lex orandi lex credendi*.

The creeds arose in the sacrament of baptism out of the Great Commission of Matthew 28:19.⁹ The new convert, having received Christ through and in the preached gospel, and having been carefully 'discipled' and taught, did not express his or her assent to a series of abstract doctrinal articles but professed a living faith in the Triune God: 'I believe in God the Father Almighty...and in Jesus Christ his Son... and in the Holy Spirit.' (*Credo*, the first word, means 'I believe in', that is, 'I trust in'). So the new Christian was baptized 'into' (*eis*) Father, Son and Holy Spirit – one Name, one 'communion' or 'fellowship' (*koinonia*), one God. Baptism, that is to say, was into 'our fellowship' (I John 1:3), the 'community' of the Church, the 'communion' which we share with the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit.

The 'Nazarene theological stance', therefore, in that it is truly 'classic' Christianity, stands in this Nicene tradition.¹⁰ Like the Nicene theologians, we must be prepared to borrow contemporary metaphors and categories drawn from the thought of our age. But unlike that rhetorician Augustine, dazzled as he was by Greek Neoplatonist philosophy, the Nicene theologians carefully rejected the Hellenistic metaphysical

⁹ See J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds* (Longmans, 1972³).

¹⁰ For a classic exposition of the faith of the Nicene Fathers, see Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, (T. & T. Clark, 1981). For a recent publication affirming this 'classic' Christian faith, see *Nicene Christianity: The Future for a New Ecumenism*, ed. Christopher R. Seitz (Brazos Press, 2001). The contributors include Colin Gunton, Robert Jenson, William Abraham, John Webster, Susan Wood, Carl Braaten and Thomas Smail.

systems whose vocabulary they borrowed. The Nicene doctrines of the Incarnation and the Trinity, formulated by those bishop-theologians, Athanasius and the Cappadocians, embraced biblical antinomies which no self-respecting pagan Hellenistic philosopher would ever have accepted. So like them too, while we must be prepared to use contemporary language and thought, we must guard against allowing any metaphysical system or Gnostic spirituality or ideological commitment (even to nationalism or egalitarian democracy!), or any god other than the Triune God, to shape our faith. We need to be careful to keep ourselves from idols.

Evangelical

I wish to take secondly Dr Greathouse's third adjective, *evangelical*, which, I understand, has become suspect to some of us in this North American region of the denomination. Some apparently feel that this description is now too broad to be useful,¹¹ but actually having a diversity of evangelical theologies is an advantage, provided they all share commitment to the gospel (the 'evangel') as defined by the New Testament. Others may feel that the word has been contaminated by association with some of the wilder TV evangelists and dispensationalist fundamentalists, and may be suspicious of the way some Calvinists in this country have commandeered it in recent decades.¹² But we must refuse to allow the meaning and reference of this word to be determined by recent usage within the narrow theological confines of this continent during the last few decades. It is totally unacceptable to equate the word with dispensationalist fundamentalism.¹³ Taking the denotation of the word 'evangelical' from the wider perspectives of global Christianity today and five hundred years of Church history, there is absolutely no way we can surrender this word without being untrue to our heritage and to what Dr Greathouse characterizes as the 'Nazarene theological stance'.

¹¹ See Donald W. Dayton, 'Some Doubts about the Usefulness of the Category "Evangelical",' in Donald W. Dayton and Robert K. Johnson, eds, *The Variety of American Evangelicalism* (IVP, 1991), 251.

¹² We Wesleyans sometimes say that we do not wish the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition to be submerged in a 'generic evangelicalism', but this should correctly be described as a 'generic *fundamentalism*'. At the level of responsible theology, the great Evangelical traditions have common ground in the heritage from the Reformation and the Evangelical Revival (and this is to be celebrated!), but Presbyterian, Wesleyan, Anglican, Lutheran, and Anabaptist Evangelicalism all have their distinctive features.

¹³ See the excellent critique of dispensationalist fundamentalism in Al Truesdale, 'The Status of Premillennialism?' *The Seminary Tower*, Vol. XLIX, No. 3 (Spring, 1992), pp. 1, 4-5, 8. He dismisses it as 'theologically, metaphysically, and ethically deficient. It introduces errors regarding: (1) the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation; (2) the doctrine of creation; and (3) the ethic of Jesus.'

Dr Greathouse wisely interpreted the word by its primary reference to the Reformation. He said:

Nazarene theology is *evangelical*. We stand solidly with classical Protestantism in asserting that salvation is not only *sola scriptura* but also *sola gratia, sola fide* (by grace alone through faith alone)... From first to last, our salvation is the work of God; hence it is by grace through faith. God is both the Initiator and Perfecter of the faith by which we are saved. With James Arminius we ascribe 'to grace the commencement, the continuance, and the consummation of all good.'¹⁴

It was indeed at the Reformation that the word 'evangelical' was coined,¹⁵ and it expressed the focus of the Protestant Reformers on the 'evangel', the gospel. The Protestant Reformation was a revival of the Augustinian emphasis on 'salvation by grace' over against any kind of Pelagian works-righteousness. But whereas Augustine pictured grace as a kind of medicine infused into us through the sacraments, and thus sanctifying us so that we could subsequently be declared holy or righteous, Luther emphasized that we are *first* declared righteous or holy – that is 'justified' - by grace. Only subsequently (Calvin added more clearly) did we grow in our sanctification. It was Lutheranism and Arminianism which asserted in their different ways against Calvin (and indeed the later Luther) that grace was given freely and preveniently to all, not just to some.

We Wesleyans can never forget that it was this emphasis on the gospel as 'justification by grace through faith' that released John Wesley from his neurotic bondage to sanctification by effort and self-discipline and legalism, and which so warmed his heart at Aldersgate Street with the peace of the assurance of sins forgiven, that he became the outstanding evangelist of his century. The great eighteenth-century 'Evangelical Revival' (or 'Awakening') led by Wesley and his Calvinist allies, Whitefield and Edwards, did have a new emphasis, taken from English Puritanism and German Pietism, on conversion, equated with the 'new birth', which gave a particular shape to English-speaking 'Evangelicalism'. Accordingly it had also a new emphasis on evangelism and world missions.¹⁶ But it came out of a fresh grasp of the Reformation and Pauline gospel of justification by faith, and Wesleyans can never forget that it is only as

¹⁴ *Nazarene Theology in Perspective*, 12f.: quotation from *The Writings of Arminius* (Baker, 1956), I, 253.

¹⁵ It was actually used first by some Italian fore-runners of the Reformation: see Alister McGrath, *Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity*, Hodder, 1988, 11ff.

¹⁶ English-speaking 'Evangelicalism' is today of global significance through the British *diaspora* (USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand) and the even wider spread of English-speaking culture (India, Pakistan, most of Africa, the Caribbean, Malaysia, etc.). It is organized in such bodies as the WEF and in this country, the NAE. The emphasis on instantaneous conversion in this English-speaking 'Evangelicalism' is not found in the same way in the Reformers. The historian David Bebbington famously defined this Evangelical movement as characterized by 'biblicism, crucicentrism, conversionism and activism.' Cf. David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (Baker, 1992). (By the way, I am using the capitalized 'Evangelical' to distinguish this specific, largely Anglo-Saxon, historical movement from the wider sense of 'evangelical' as true to the gospel).

we are ‘gospellers’ or *evangelicals* that we will be evangelists! When we cease to be gospel-centred in our preaching – *evangelicals* – we will cease to be evangelists.¹⁷

All of this brings us to the other Reformation principle – that salvation is not only *sola gratia* and *sola fide*, but ‘*a solo Christo*’ – by Christ alone. That is the real heart of the Reformation! ‘Grace’ is not our Saviour, and neither certainly is our faith: our Saviour is Christ. He is the active agent of our salvation. Evangelical faith, the only truly Protestant faith, is therefore necessarily Christ-centred. Wesley recorded again and again in his journal after preaching in the fields and market places of England, ‘I offered them Christ.’¹⁸ That has to mean, of course, ‘Christ clothed with his gospel’,¹⁹ the Christ who according to the narrative of the New Testament gospel is Christ incarnate, crucified, risen and exalted. We like to emphasize the incarnation of course, and the victorious resurrection and exaltation. But the peculiar focus of Protestant or Evangelical theology is that it does not allow these right and true emphases to turn it into what Luther called a *theologia gloriae*, a theology of glory. True Christian theology, he insisted, is always a *theologia crucis*, a theology of the cross. Is Nazarene preaching and theology today truly Christ-centred? Do we still preach ‘Christ crucified’?

By this point in this essay, some readers may be tempted to ask: is this not supposed to be an essay on theological methodology? Aren’t we getting too much into the *content* of theology here? But that was exactly Luther’s point: that in Christian theology we *cannot separate method and content*. There is no separate *methodology* to be determined in advance from abstract principles.²⁰ The only acceptable *method* for Christian theology is to be a *theologia crucis*. As Luther so pungently put it:

¹⁷ It is true of course that the ‘new perspective’ on Paul associated with the name of E.P. Sanders has corrected Luther’s tendency to read Paul through sixteenth-century eyes and interpret Judaism as a religion of ‘works-righteousness’ rather like the corruptions in some schools of late-medieval Catholic doctrine. Cf. E.P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (1977) and *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* (1983). But Sanders has not denied that Paul’s doctrine was ‘justification by grace through faith’, and it seems as if Roman-Protestant discussions may possibly be leading to the acceptance that Luther was right that being ‘declared righteous’ precedes being ‘made righteous’. But see Anthony N.S. Lane, *Justification by Faith in Catholic-Protestant Dialogue: An Evangelical Assessment* (T. & T. Clark, 2002).

¹⁸ See for example, Wesley’s *Journal* for 17th July, 1739: ‘... I there offered Christ to about a thousand people, for wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.’ The text was obviously I Cor.1:30. Dr Herbert McGonigle tells me that Wesley used a variety of phrases: ‘I there offered Christ’, ‘I offered the redemption that it is Christ Jesus’, ‘I proclaimed the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ’ and so on.

¹⁹ The phrase is Calvin’s (cf. *Inst.* II, ix, 3).

²⁰ One can however (as in any science) examine the methodology *a posteriori*. Cf. T.F. Torrance, *Theological Science* (OUP, 1969 & 1990).

Living, or rather dying and being damned make a theologian, not understanding, reading or speculating.²¹

Christian theology can never be a merely intellectual, abstract pursuit. We can only theologize – that is, ‘articulate our *knowledge* of the Lord God’ if we have come to *know* God experientially, and that cannot be done merely through our own intellectual endeavour, but through kneeling at the foot of the cross. And only as we learn what it means to take up our cross, to *die* with Christ, can we truly *know* him and so express that knowledge in genuinely *Christian* theology. Theology (‘articulating our *knowledge* of the Lord God’) is impossible apart from the life of faith – which is the holy life, the life of holiness.²² That is why the Wesleyan tradition is so ineluctably cross-centred and *evangelical*. In that Wesley embraced the evangelical doctrine of the Reformation, we cannot be truly Wesleyan without being truly *evangelical*.²³

Conservative

That brings us to Dr Greathouse’s third characteristic of ‘the Nazarene theological stance’, that it is *conservative*. In some ways this is an unfortunate word and perhaps the time has come to find another term. The terminology of ‘conservative’ and ‘liberal’ seems to have come into nineteenth-century theology from nineteenth-century politics, perhaps illustrated most clearly from British politics where the two major parties adopted the names ‘Conservative’ and the ‘Liberal’. But these words remain *political* words to this day and therefore confuse the issues and have a polarizing effect, particularly in the current divisive mood of American politics. Can we find other *non-political* words to convey what the word ‘conservative’ was trying to convey? Let me suggest two: *developmental* and *biblical*.

The concept of *development* was central to the philosophy of Sir Robert Peel’s new ‘Conservative’ party in the 1830s. Unlike the old Tory party they were no longer complete reactionaries, totally opposed to any reform of the British constitution. They had abandoned the idea of *static perfection* and adopted the

²¹ Luther, WA 5.163.28-9. See the excellent exposition of Luther’s *theologia crucis* in Alister E. McGrath, *Luther’s Theology of the Cross* (Blackwell, 1985).

²² See the opening chapter of T.F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, for the emphasis of the Nicene theologians on the necessity of godliness (*eusebeia*) for the theologian.

²³ The Evangelical Methodist Henry H. Knight III, in *A Future for Truth: Evangelical Theology in a Postmodern World* (Abingdon, 1997) gives a broad review of the ‘evangelical family’ in his opening chapter, making clear that it is much, much wider than those who hold to strict ‘inerrancy’. He argues that pietistic Evangelicals such as Wesleyans are more likely to reach the post-modern generation through holy, loving, compassionate communities than scholastic Evangelicals in the Reformed school through apologetics.

doctrine that perfection lay in the gradual evolutionary *development* of the constitution. One can see then why the adjective ‘conservative’ was applied to some Protestant theologians. They accepted *development* in theology,²⁴ but they were concerned to ‘conserve’ through all development the *catholic* faith of the Nicene Fathers and the *evangelical* faith of the Reformers. The development had to be true to the internal logic of the faith and true to its past trajectory. They did not want to adapt the Christian faith into another religion in order to commend it to its ‘cultured despisers’.²⁵

To be ‘conservative’ in theology therefore does not mean to embrace right-wing politics (although some of us may wish to do so). It means rather to accept the necessity of this legitimate kind of doctrinal *development*. The world does not stand still and so our presentation of the gospel (including ‘holiness by grace’) must adapt to cultural change through the decades. Historical Theology traces the *development* of Church doctrine through the centuries: the doctrine of the Trinity was not fully elaborated till the end of the fourth century, the doctrine of the Person of Christ till 451, and the doctrine of the atonement was not more fully explored until later. ‘Justification by faith’ was not fully articulated till Luther, and the doctrine of sanctification (we would say) till Wesley, while in the twentieth century there has been a deeper grasp of eschatology. But legitimate development has to be a true unpacking of the implications of the original revelation available to us in and through Holy Scripture.

That brings us to the second word I suggested: *biblical*. In the *conservative* theology of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the challenge from the Enlightenment meant that the debates were about theological epistemology and methodology as never before. It was in this context that the heirs of the Fathers and Reformers found it necessary to devote particular attention to the role of the Bible. In the early catholic Church, the authority of the Scriptures was in the context of the liturgy – the corporate worship of

²⁴ Indeed it was the former leader of that very conservative movement, the Tractarians, John Henry Newman, who enunciated the idea in his work, *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (1878). Cf. also James Orr, *The Progress of Dogma* (Hodder & Stoughton, 1908). To reject all development is not ‘conservative’ at all. It is the blinkered attitude dominant in nineteenth-century Romanism before Newman (*semper eadem*) and shared by twentieth-century fundamentalism that theology is a static body of knowledge.

²⁵ But why should so-called ‘liberal’ theology be regarded as ‘liberal’? The explanation is that ‘liberal’ came to mean ‘forward looking’. ‘Liberal’ thinking in the nineteenth century was therefore tied to that great myth of the era of modernity, the myth of inevitable human progress. That is a good enough reason for dropping this word too in this postmodern era.

the Church. Only those books listed in the rule, the *canon*, were to be read in the worship of the Church, for only in these did the Church corporately recognize the Word of God. At the time of the Reformation, the authority of the Bible was recognized in contrast to the Roman insistence on the definitive authority of Church *tradition*. The traditional doctrines of the Church as defined by the *magisterium* (and according to the later claim, by an infallible pope) were not to close discussion on how the Scriptures were to be interpreted. The Reformers certainly accepted the validity of the Church's credal hermeneutic for the Scriptures, but even the creeds were in principle subject to challenge from the Scriptures. When we come to the Protestant England of Wesley's day, the challenge to the 'sufficiency' of the Holy Scriptures did not come from Roman Church *tradition*, but from the authority given by Enlightenment thinking to the individual's *reason*. Then, by the end of that century, in the context of the Romantic movement, it was the religious *experience* or 'feeling' (*Gefühl*) of God-consciousness common to all individuals which the early Schleiermacher made the essence of religion. Brought up with the Pietist view of *experience* (*Herzensreligion* – 'heart religion'), he turned Pietism on its head by effectively making *Scripture* answerable to *experience*.

Both of these forms of so-called 'liberal' theology (the rationalistic and the experiential) reflected the *individualism* of the era of modernity.²⁶ In rationalistic deism, it was the *reason* of enlightened individuals which determined the criteria which made belief in God 'rational'. In the theology of Schleiermacher (the 'father of modern theology'), it was the religious *experience* said to be common to all individuals which was 'religion' and so the subject matter which doctrine articulates. Both may be seen as forms of a kind of subjectivism, for it was the reasoning or feeling of the individual *subject* which determined what was true about God.²⁷ It was against the background of the earlier form of Enlightenment individualism, the rationalism of deism, that Wesley insisted that he took his doctrines from Scripture:

I want to know one thing – the way to heaven... God himself has condescended to teach the way: for this very purpose he came from heaven. He hath written it in a book. O give me that book! At any price, give me the book of God! I have it: here is knowledge enough for me. Let me be *homo unius libri* [a man of one book]. Here then I am, far from the busy ways of men. I sit down

²⁶ That is not to deny that Evangelicalism was somewhat influenced by its setting in 'modernity', for example in the rationalism of Calvinist scholasticism or the individualism of revivalism.

²⁷ The inadequacy of the old 'liberal' methodology was recognized by Lindbeck in *The Nature of Doctrine* in which he described his 'cultural-linguistic' proposal as 'postliberal'. But see George Hunsinger's recent assessment of that in 'Postliberal Theology', *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Cambridge UP, 2003), 42-57. Hunsinger classifies Hans Frei as 'postliberal', but Lindbeck as more 'neo-liberal'!

alone: only God is here. In his presence I open, I read his book; for this end, to find the way to heaven.²⁸

Of course, Wesley read many, many more books, and he *interpreted* Scripture to arrive at doctrine and ethics – an activity of the fallible, human *reason*, following the *tradition* of the Church, and informed by the *experience* of ‘real’ Christians. Albert Outler famously coined the term ‘the Wesleyan quadrilateral’ for the quartet of *scripture, tradition, reason and experience*, but it is a serious misinterpretation of this Wesleyan hermeneutic to think of these as four equal factors.²⁹ It is even more ridiculously untrue to Wesley to put them in competition with each other, or to think that any doctrinal or ethical position is acceptable because it has a majority of three out of four!³⁰ For Wesley, *tradition, reason and experience* have interpretative or corroborative roles. For him, Scripture alone (as the above quotation makes clear) is the source of Christian doctrine. A better illustration than a ‘quadrilateral’ is the late Timothy L. Smith’s picture of the three-legged stool: Holy Scripture as the floor upon which the stool stands, and tradition, reason, and experience as the legs standing upon the floor and supporting Christian doctrine, which is represented by the seat.³¹

But even that slightly more sophisticated picture of the quadrilateral is inadequate, for it still suggests that the Wesleyan interpretation of Scripture is a uni-directional movement from text to doctrinal interpretation. In fact of course, as we have learned, there is an unavoidable hermeneutical circle, for we all come to the text of Scripture with our doctrinal framework of ideas received from church *tradition*, from the plausibility framework of our culture (*reason*), and from our life-*experience*. But then as we encounter

²⁸ John Wesley, Preface to *Sermons on Several Occasions* (1746), printed in *Works*, Vol. 1 (Abingdon, 1984, 105f.)

²⁹ See Albert Outler, ‘The Wesleyan Quadrilateral – in John Wesley,’ in *Doctrine and Theology in the United Methodist Church*, ed. Thomas A. Langford, (Kingsway, 1991), 75-88.

³⁰ Or worse, that the two ‘contemporary’ factors of reason and experience can outvote Scripture and tradition! See W. Stephen Gunter *et al*, *Wesley and the Quadrilateral: Renewing the Conversation* (Abingdon, 1997) for an excellent discussion of the issues.

³¹ Timothy L. Smith, ‘John Wesley and the Wholeness of Scripture,’ *The Preacher’s Magazine*, 61:4 (1986), 12-15, 55-57. Dr Smith particularly differentiated the Nazarene stance from that of ‘liberal’ or ‘modernist’ Methodists: ‘Methodist modernists have appealed for a century to the myth that Wesley grounded his theology in human experience.’ But on the other hand he maintained that Wesleyans reject the narrow view of Scripture associated with B.B. Warfield and Harold Lindsell. Cf. his letter to *Christianity Today* (March 10, 1978) stating that : ‘...we Wesleyans stand in an older and much broader evangelical tradition than that represented by modern neo-Calvinist scholasticism.’

the text which sits there before us, and if and insofar as we are really open to *metanoia*,³² we adjust, amend, and refine our framework of thought in the light of an honest attempt to exegete it.³³

It is in that light that we must understand what we mean by the ‘infallibility’ of Scripture. Dr Greathouse quotes A.M. Hills, the first Nazarene to write a systematic theology:

What is the infallibility we claim for the Bible? It is infallible as regards the purpose for which it was written. It is infallible as a revelation of God’s saving love in Christ for a wicked, lost world. It infallibly guides all honest and willing and seeking souls to Christ, to holiness, and to heaven.³⁴

That does not commit us to the Calvinistic view of inerrancy in the tradition of the Hodges and Warfield in Old Princeton. And this infallibility is not to be confused with the kind of wooden inerrancy claimed by fundamentalists, and it most certainly does not commit us to the kind of literalistic and legalistic interpretation of scripture resulting in such novel nineteenth-century inventions as dispensationalism or such twentieth century muddled thinking as so-called ‘creation science’.³⁵ It is an infallibility regarding belief and practice for those who want to know ‘the way to heaven’. That is to say, it is a soteriological infallibility.³⁶ All that this infallibility means is that, while it is true that our fallible human interpretation of the Holy Scriptures is unavoidably involved in determining church doctrine, we are not free to set the Scriptures aside. We cannot enunciate as church doctrine anything which is contrary to the canonical Scripture *as a whole*. And we are bound to declare as church doctrine what we believe Scripture as a whole

³² Repentance: but the Greek word carries the idea of ‘change of mind’.

³³ This ‘Wesleyan’ hermeneutic is of course not exclusive to Wesley: it is the theological method of all genuinely Evangelical theology. See my chapter, ‘Scripture and Experience,’ in *A Pathway into the Holy Scripture*, ed. Philip E. Satterthwaite and David F. Wright (Eerdmans, 1994), 277-295, along with the excellent chapters by Anthony Thiselton, Howard Marshall, Gerald Bray and others.

³⁴ Quoted by Dr Greathouse from A.M. Hills, *Fundamental Christian Theology*, Vol. I (Pasadena: C.J. Kinne, 1931), 134.

³⁵ Fundamentalism of this kind is largely an American phenomenon and an early twentieth-century distortion of the Evangelical position. It is a matter of deep concern that on this continent an authoritarian, legalistic and obscurantist fundamentalism of this kind is driving many bright young people to react by falling into the opposite ditch, some kind of ‘liberalism’. Essential reading here is Paul M. Bassett, ‘The Fundamentalist Leavening of the Holiness Movement: 1914-1940,’ *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 13 (1978), 65-91, in which the position of H. Orton Wiley is characterized as ‘a clear attack on both Liberalism and Fundamentalism.’ The Wesleyan tradition rejects *both*. ‘Creation science’ is an intellectual muddle because it confuses two entirely different levels of discourse, on the one hand a doctrine of the faith (creation *ex nihilo* – we *do* believe in that) and on the other a scientific theory. For a good, popular, easy-to-read, Evangelical approach to the issues raised by fundamentalist ‘creationism’, see Ernest Lucas, *Can We Believe Genesis Today? The Bible and the Questions of Science* (IVP, 2001). Dr Lucas holds doctorates in Old Testament and Biochemistry and before studying theology was a research scientist at Oxford.

³⁶ See the article on the Article IV by Dr Roger Hahn in *Holiness Today*, March 2004, 14f.

affirms, when *reasonably* interpreted, according to Christian *tradition*, and the corporate *experience* of the people of God. That is what how we arrive at our sixteen Articles of Faith.³⁷

And that is precisely the role for Scripture required by the Reformation principle of *sola scriptura*, a principle which is so excellently expressed in Article IV:

We believe in the plenary inspiration of the Holy Scriptures, by which we understand the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments, given by divine inspiration, inerrantly revealing the will of God concerning us is all things necessary to our salvation, so that whatever is not contained therein is not to be enjoined as an article of faith.

That last clause particularly expresses the principle of *sola scriptura*, making it clear that although *tradition*, *reason* and *experience* may shape, corroborate, and give us concepts to express our church doctrine, Holy Scripture is its only source.³⁸ Following Wesley, ours is a *biblical* theology. It is this methodological principle of the Reformation (*sola scriptura*) which distinguishes all *evangelical* theology (including ‘Wesleyanism’) from ‘liberal’ theology, which gives the final authority to the *reason* or *experience* of the individual, and from Roman and Eastern Orthodox theology, giving *de facto* final authority to the doctrinal decrees of Church *tradition*.³⁹

Conclusion

An encouraging note as we approach our 2004 Nazarene Theology Conference for this continental region is that Christian theology that is *catholic*, *evangelical* and *biblical* is growing. Over the last sixty or seventy years there has been more creative Trinitarian theology than since the Patristic era. In addition to Barth one thinks of Rahner, Moltmann, Torrance, Jüngel, Pannenberg, Zizioulas, LaCugna, Jenson, Gunton

³⁷ I am very well aware of course that the word ‘reasonably’ begs a whole slew of questions! But to enter into detail here would require another whole paper. Let it be sufficient for the present, first, that in biblical exegesis we reject any fanciful ‘twisting’ of any passage of Scripture beyond the range of possible interpretations in the light of genre, context, etc., and secondly and more generally, that ‘reason’ is not to be understood as the ‘Reason’ of Enlightenment rationalism.

³⁸ See Kevin Vanhoozer’s treatment of the relation of Scripture and tradition in the postmodern context: ‘Scripture and Tradition,’ *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*, ed. Vanhoozer (Cambridge, 2003), 149-169.

³⁹ Although there is no space to develop the point here, it must be borne in mind that Christ and not the Bible is the true source of our knowledge of God. Cf. Bassett, ‘Fundamentalism Leavening’, summarizing the position of H. Orton Wiley on the Bible (p.84): ‘Thus in the construction of *theology*, the Bible is absolutely authoritative. But what makes Scripture *spiritually* authoritative, for Wiley, is not its power to meet human needs, objections or criteria, but its witness to the essential revelation, Jesus Christ. *He* is the direct revelation from God.’ This is true to the Reformation, including Calvin (although not to later Calvinist scholastic ‘orthodoxy’): the formal principle (*sola scriptura*) must not be divorced from the material principle (*a solo Christo*). The Wesleyan position then is that of the Reformation: we accept the authority of the Bible because of the *testimonium internum spiritus sancti*.

and many more.⁴⁰ This genuinely Trinitarian, Nicene *catholic* theology is setting the pace while, with the rumored end of modernity, so-called 'liberal' theology is in decline.⁴¹ Secondly, specifically *evangelical* Christianity is also setting the pace around the globe. The seed sown by the despised Evangelical missionaries of the early nineteenth century and the enthusiastic Student Volunteer Movement of a century ago is now bearing fruit in a completely new demography for global Christianity. The new *Evangelical* churches of the two-thirds world are already larger than the churches of Europe and America.⁴² In Britain, Canada and America *Evangelical* theology is producing theologians such as Donald Bloesch,⁴³ William Abraham, Thomas Oden, Clark Pinnock, Stanley Grenz,⁴⁴ Miroslav Volf, John G. Stackhouse,⁴⁵ John Webster, Roger Olson,⁴⁶ Trevor Hart, Bruce McCormack, Kevin Vanhoozer⁴⁷ and Alister McGrath⁴⁸ and philosophical theologians such as Alvin Plantinga, Nicholas Wolterstorff, William L. Craig, Nancey Murphy, Stephen Williams and Alan Padgett. In Biblical Studies, established scholars such as the late F.F. Bruce, the late G.E. Ladd, the late Donald Guthrie, Earle Ellis and I. Howard Marshall have now been joined by scholars such as N.T. Wright, Anthony Thiselton, Richard Hays, Francis Watson, Richard Bauckham, H.G.M. Williamson, Robert Gordon, R.E. Clements, Gordon Wenham, Ben Witherington and

⁴⁰ See also the publications of Nazarene theologians: Roderick T. Leupp, *Knowing the Name of God: A Trinitarian Tapestry of Grace, Faith, and Community* (IVP, 1996), and Samuel M. Powell, *Participating in God: Creation and Trinity* (Fortress, 2003).

⁴¹ Cf. Thomas C. Reeves, *The Empty Church: The Suicide of Liberal Christianity* (Free Press, 1996).

⁴² At this regional conference we must not fall back into the illusion of thinking that our theology can be done within a merely Western or North American context. See for example the papers published from the 2003 Asia-Pacific Regional Theology Conference, *Scripture's Distinctive and Dynamic: Towards an Asia-Pacific Hermeneutic of Holiness*, ed. David A. Ackerman. On global Christian growth, see Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (OUP, 2002), and the comments in Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Eerdmans, 1998), 11-18. See also Alister McGrath, *Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity* (Hodder, 1994) and *The Future of Christianity* (Blackwell, 2002).

⁴³ See Elmer M. Colyer, ed., *Evangelical Theology in Transition: Theologians in Dialogue with Donald Bloesch*, (IVP, 1999).

⁴⁴ See Stanley J. Grenz, *Renewing the Centre: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era* (Baker, 2000).

⁴⁵ See John G. Stackhouse, Jr., ed., *Evangelical Futures: A Conversation on Theological Method* (Baker, 2000) with chapters by Grenz, Hart, McGrath, Olson, Paker, Vanhoozer, and Williams

⁴⁶ See Olson's interesting attempt in *The Mosaic of Christian Belief: Twenty Centuries of Unity & Diversity* (IVP, 2002) to differentiate between the variety of options within orthodox Christianity and those theologies which fall outside it.

⁴⁷ See Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *First Theology: God, Scripture & Hermeneutics* (IVP, 2002) in which Vanhoozer tries to recover the unity of biblical studies and theology facing the challenges of the post-modern situation, especially deconstructionism.

⁴⁸ McGrath (recently appointed as the Professor of Historical Theology as Oxford) seems to publish a book each month! But see his most recent *magnum opus*, the three-volume *A Scientific Theology* (T. & T. Clark, 2001, 2002 and 2003), building on T.F. Torrance's *Theological Science* (Oxford, 1969 & 1990). An easier summary of this work is published as *The Science of God* (T. & T. Clark, 2004).

Joel Green – to mention only a representative selection from the many. A new interest in Biblical Theology and in interchange between Biblical Studies and Systematic Theology is a very promising development.⁴⁹ All of these trends indicate that many share our ‘theological stance’, and in these circumstances, the outlook for Wesleyan theology in the Nazarene tradition is surely bright. What we have to do now (and this conference is surely a step in this direction) is to demonstrate that the Wesleyan understanding of Christian holiness is not a sectarian addendum, but a capacious, comprehensive and holistic embodiment of *classic, evangelical, biblical* theology.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ For the revived interest in Biblical Theology see, for example, Francis Watson, *Text, Church and World: Biblical Interpretation in Theological Perspective* (T. & T. Clark and Eerdmans, 1994) and *Text and Truth: Redefining Biblical Theology* (T. & T. Clark, 1997). On interchange between Systematics and Biblical Studies, see Stephen E. Fowl (ed), *The Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (Blackwell, 1997) and *Engaging Scripture: A Model for Theological Interpretation* (Blackwell, 1990); Joel B Green and Max Turner (eds), *Between Two Horizons: Spanning New Testament Studies and Systematic Theology* (Eerdmans, 2000); and Christopher Seitz, *Word without End: The Old Testament as Abiding Theological Witness* (Eerdmans, 1998). For two articles by Dr Andy Johnson exemplifying this development, see ‘Ripples of the Resurrection in the Triune Life of God: Reading Luke 24 with Eschatological and Trinitarian Eyes,’ *Horizons in Biblical Theology*, 24 (2002), 87-110, and ‘Resurrection, Ascension and the Developing Portrait of the God of Israel in Acts,’ *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 57 (2004), 146-162.

⁵⁰ I am grateful to Dr Paul M. Bassett, Dr Kent E. Brower, Dr Andy Johnson and Prof. John Allan Knight, Jr, whose comments have helped to refine this paper.