

AN ENGLISHMAN, AN IRISHMAN AND A SCOTSMAN . . .

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THIS essay could have been entitled, 'A Methodist, A Presbyterian and a Congregationalist'; 'An Arminian, A Calvinist and a Liberal'; or 'A Systematiser, An Apologist and a Prophet'. For the men who concern us are William Burt Pope (1822-1903), Robert Watts (1820-95) and Andrew Martin Fairbairn (1838-1912).¹ They were all highly respected by their denominations in their day, and each was entrusted with the task of ministerial training. Watts was Professor of Theology at the Presbyterian College, Belfast from 1866-95; Pope was Theological Tutor at Didsbury Methodist College from 1867-86, when ill-health forced his resignation; and Fairbairn, who left Scotland and the Evangelical Union in 1877 to become Principal of Airedale Independent College was in 1886 installed as the first Principal of Mansfield College, Oxford. All but forgotten by their own, an investigation of their work will nevertheless reward us with a fascinating glimpse of the influences at work upon nineteenth-century theology; it will throw into relief their diverse and temperamentally different reactions which are the more interesting because of their relative *closeness* as nonconformists; and it may serve to remind us that some of the philosophico-theological issues which beset contemporary theology have their roots, if not their final solutions, in the period represented by our triumvirate.

That the nineteenth century was a time of theological reappraisal is well known. The question of the starting point of theological enquiry; the challenge from evolutionary thought and biblical criticism; matters historiographical and ecclesiological — all of these were under

¹ For Watts see *DNB*, and Robert Allen, *The Presbyterian College Belfast, 1853-1953* (Belfast, 1954), *passim*. For Pope see *DNB* 1901-11; R. Waddy Moss, *W. B. Pope, D.D., Theologian and Saint* (London: Robert Culley, [1909]); Charles J. Wright, 'Theology and Theological Tutors at Didsbury during a Hundred Years', in *Didsbury College Centenary, 1842-1942*, (eds.) W. Bardsley Brash and C. J. Wright (London: Epworth, 1942), pp. 51-57; W. Bardsley Brash, *The Story of our Colleges, 1835-1935* (London: Epworth, 1935), pp. 61-2. For Fairbairn see *DNB* 1912-21; W. B. Selbie, *The Life of Andrew Martin Fairbairn* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1914); Robert S. Franks, 'The Theology of Andrew Martin Fairbairn', *Congregational Historical Society Transactions*, XIII, 1937-9, pp. 140-50.

review.² Our three theologians did not treat all these themes in equal detail, but we shall see how they sought to adjust their sights, with certain consequences in respect to some cardinal Christian doctrines. We shall find that running through much of the discussion are their respective approaches to matters Calvinistic and Arminian.³

I

Robert Watts is the British representative *par excellence* of Reformed, Princetonian scholasticism. He dedicated his book, *The Newer Criticism and the Analogy of the Faith* (1881) to the memory of Thomas Chalmers, William Cunningham and Charles Hodge. He had studied under Hodge at Princeton (1849-52); he frequently applauded his teacher's methodology, and he regarded Hodge's *Systematic Theology* as being 'without a peer in the whole history of theological exposition'.⁴ Watts's apologetic manifests respect for Butler's method, and a strong belief in a God who has not left himself without a witness in the things he has made. Faith is no irrational fancy. On the contrary, reason is faith's handmaid. Certain forms of rationalism are, however, to be shunned. Some rationalists would make reason the test of revelation, and those who do this 'very soon pass into the category of those who regard Reason as both the source and the measure of all truth'.⁵ They thereby overlook the fact that 'apart from Revelation, men have become vain in their imaginations, darkened in their hearts, and have lost the knowledge of God possessed by the family of Noah after the Flood'.⁶ Other rationalists deny that anything can transcend man's rational powers. This view cannot be reconciled with scripture. As regards the promised progeny, for example, Abraham believed *against* his reason. Again, rationalism wrongly assumes that the human is the highest intelligence in the world; it would disastrously limit salvation to the wise and the learned; and it conveniently forgets that 'Men do not

² For a more detailed treatment of these themes see A. P. F. Sell, *Theology in Turmoil* (Worthing: Henry Walter and Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, forthcoming).

³ For an account of the various phases of the Calvinist-Arminian debate see A. P. F. Sell, *The Great Debate: Calvinism, Arminianism and Salvation* (Worthing: Henry Walter, 1982; Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983).

⁴ R. Allan, quoting *The Witness*, 5.7.1878, *op cit.*, p. 179. cf. A. A. Hodge, *The Life of Charles Hodge* (New York, 1880), pp. 488-90. Watts elsewhere refers to Hodge as 'my venerated teacher'. See his *The Rule of Faith and the Doctrine of Inspiration* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1885), p. xiv.

⁵ R. Watts, *The Rule of Faith*, p. 5.

⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

demand as the condition of their faith in the revelations of science that science shall propose nothing above their comprehension'.⁷

Although reason is not the source or standard of religious truth, it has the following functions to fulfil: it is that whereby we assent to the truth of propositions, and apart from such assent there can be no faith (Watts here rightly sets his face against any absolute 'belief in/belief that' disjunction). Again, reason is that which assures us that what claims to be a revelation is not immoral, absurd or impossible. Both scripture and the Westminster Confession encourage the application of reason to the biblical 'evidences', and the latter emphasises the truth that 'The Spirit in His regenerating act does not set aside Reason, but, on the contrary, renews it, and, having renewed it, addresses Himself to it . . . In a word, the Reason, as well as the heart and conscience, is brought into exercise when the Holy Spirit effectually calls the soul and translates it into the kingdom of God's dear Son.'⁸ Though not infallible, reason interprets and systematises the given revelation. But, to reiterate, what reason may never do is to become 'a standard whereby the Word of God is to be tested, and approved or condemned. It is one thing to approach the sacred volume with an apprehending power in order to learn; another, and a very different thing, to draw near with an independent revelation of our own, in order to judge of the matter that volume contains.'⁹

With much of the foregoing Pope and Fairbairn were in complete agreement. In characteristic style Fairbairn declaimed: 'The way of faith is in these days hard enough; it need not be made more difficult; and it becomes those who believe that the highest truth of reason is one with the highest object of faith, to make it clear that, in their view at least, a true theology can never be built on a sceptical philosophy, and that only the thought which trusts the reason can truly vindicate faith in the God who gave it.'¹⁰ Indeed, 'The only condition on which reason could have nothing to do with religion, is that religion should have nothing to do with truth. For in every controversy concerning what is or what is not truth, reason and not authority is the supreme arbiter . . . The men who defend faith must think as well as the men who oppose it;

⁷ *ibid.*, p. 9.

⁸ *ibid.*, p. 14.

⁹ R. Watts, *The New Apologetic; or, The Downgrade in Criticism, Theology and Science* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1890), p. 212.

¹⁰ A. M. Fairbairn, *Catholicism, Roman and Anglican* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2nd edn., 1899), p. 388; in a review of A. J. Balfour, *The Foundations of Belief* (London: Longmans, 1894).

their argumentative processes must be rational and their conclusions supported by rational proofs.¹¹ Nor did Fairbairn hesitate to draw the anti-agnostic conclusion that ‘if belief in God be in harmony with reason, the belief in revelation cannot be contrary to it; nay, the real contradiction would be disbelief. Agnosticism assumes a double incompetence — the incompetence not only of man to know God, but of God to make Himself known.’¹² Fairbairn, however, was less satisfied than Watts with Butler’s apologetic results. He valued Butler’s method, and his emphasis upon the religious worth and work of the conscience; but both Butler and the deists whom he opposed subscribed to common theistic principles,¹³ whereas the question now is ‘Whether men are to be Christians any more, or even in any tolerable sense theists.’¹⁴

For his part Pope was convinced that there is a revelation of God in nature which is not to be disparaged. But ‘the witness borne concerning His Son is the final, perfect and consummate revelation of God Himself.’¹⁵ Pope was more inclined than Fairbairn to take the force of the noetic effects of sin, and in this respect he is closer to Watts — as when he says, ‘The spirit in man that should interpret the silent suggestions of the external world, and the law written on the heart, and the monitions of conscience, is disturbed and confused by sin, and cannot verify or use aright its own irresistible conclusions. The history of mankind shows that God unrevealed in His word has after all been an *Unknown God* . . .’¹⁶ The impotence of nature is further shown by its inability to transform man into an acceptable worshipper. Grace alone can do this; and thereafter man returns to the ‘temple of nature’ with renewed insight and gratitude.

Pope does not deny the utility of the theistic arguments: ‘The Being of a God is at once an innate idea and a truth demonstrable and to be demonstrated.’¹⁷ But ‘there is a limit to their demonstrative force as

¹¹ A. M. Fairbairn, *The Philosophy of the Christian Religion* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 5th edn., 1907), pp. 18–19; cf. pp. 4–5.

¹² A. M. Fairbairn, *The Place of Christ in Modern Theology* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 6th edn., 1894), pp. 386–7.

¹³ A. M. Fairbairn, *Catholicism*, pp. 56–7; cf. his *The City of God* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 8th edn., 1903), pp. 19–20.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 58.

¹⁵ W. B. Pope, *The Inward Witness and Other Discourses* (London: Woolmer, 1885), pp. 3–4; cf. his *A Compendium of Christian Theology* (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 2nd edn., 1879), I, pp. 10–12.

¹⁶ W. B. Pope, ‘God Glorified in His Works and Word’ (1873), in *The Abiding Word* (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, n.d.), pp. 6–7.

¹⁷ W. B. Pope, *Compendium*, I, p. 234.

human evidences: they require the enforcement of the Holy Spirit's influence as Divine credentials.¹⁸ Of the three theologians Pope makes most of the work of the Spirit and, consistently with this, he stands ultimately for the priority of revelation. This, after all, is the biblical stance: 'it is certain that it is more after the manner of the Bible to set out with the credentials of Revelation itself than to array a number of internal and presumptive evidences in its absence.'¹⁹ Thus, whereas Watts, Hodge, Warfield and others conceive of the Spirit as making the theistic proofs convincing, Pope's general position is that the theistic arguments simply confirm what the believer has already perceived by the Spirit through the Word. In this respect the Arminian is a true son of Calvin.²⁰

With Pope's conviction that in the last resort we have to ground upon revelation Fairbairn came to agree, but only after an interesting progression of thought from the view that 'The theory that would derive man's religion from a revelation, is as bad as the theory that would derive it from distempered dreams'²¹ (1878), to the view that 'the basis of all religion is Revelation. Without the presence and action of God in nature, through reason and on man, I could not conceive religion as existing at all'²² (1885).

It remains to note Pope's final distinctive emphasis. Not surprisingly in a Methodist, it is upon the confirmatory role of the believer's experience. To 16 newly-ordained ministers he said, 'Remember that you are to proclaim a religion of clear demonstration . . . Your future course will be very much shaped by the theory you form for yourself on the matter of evidences. If you resolve to let the internal at all points verify the external, and live by that law, you will be a happy man . . . Dare to expect that the transcendent revelations of the Gospel shall be revealed over again in you, and thus prove their truth beyond the possibility of gainsaying.'²³

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 236; cf. p. 155.

¹⁹ *ibid.*, p. 50.

²⁰ See Calvin, *Institute*, I, vi-viii. The point at issue here is reflected in the ongoing debate between those who inherit the Butler-type of apologetics as processed by Hodge, Watts and Warfield, and such Christian presuppositionalists as Cornelius Van Til, who follow in the wake of Abraham Kuyper. See e.g. *Jerusalem and Athens*, (ed.) E. R. Gechan (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1971).

²¹ Quoted by W. B. Selbie, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

²² A. M. Fairbairn, *Catholicism*, p. 234.

²³ W. B. Pope, *The Inward Witness*, p. 23.

II

The intellectual atmosphere of the later nineteenth century was saturated with evolutionary thought, and most theologians, not least Watts, Pope and Fairbairn, found it necessary to take the measure of it. Of the three, Watts was by far the most adversely critical of evolutionary theory, both because of its inherent weaknesses, and because of its unfortunate effects upon theological statement. He found the theory of evolution wanting in so far as it was simply an account of a method, and not a theory of causation. 'True science,' he declared, 'must answer the question, "whence the first cell?"'²⁴ This Darwin's biological hypothesis could not do. Thus far Fairbairn was in agreement: the evolutionary theory in Darwin's hands 'is a modal as distinguished from a causal theory of creation, shows how the creative force works, not what the creative force is'.²⁵

Against Joseph Le Conte, Watts urged, 'It is perfectly true, as evolutionists say, that the history of life on our globe, as recorded in its strata, reveals a law of progress from lower to higher forms; but all this may be true, and yet it does not follow that the advance from lower to higher forms has been effected through the transmutation of organisms of a lower type into organisms of a higher organic structure.'²⁶ Moreover, for all his repudiations of the charge, Le Conte's position on the question of God's relation to the universe is pantheistic. After all, 'it is very difficult to distinguish between Pantheism and a theory of the Divine immanence which represents "the forces of nature as naught else than different forms of the one omnipresent energy"'.²⁷

The impersonality of the evolutionist's fundamental principle was what especially struck Pope, and he waxed lyrical about it:

Men persuade themselves to accept a law of silent, ceaseless evolution ruling in the economy of things, to which 'one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day'. See how patiently they wait upon the slow travail of millenniums and cycles of ages; watching the disappointments of nature as feebler

²⁴ R. Watts, *The New Apologetic*, p. xv.

²⁵ A. M. Fairbairn, *The City of God*, p. 17; cf. pp. 59, 62. For some Christian reactions to, and uses of, the evolutionary theme see A. P. F. Sell, 'Evolution: theory and theme', *Faith and Thought* (CIV, 1977/8), pp. 202-20.

²⁶ R. Watts, *The New Apologetic*, p. 205.

²⁷ *ibid.*, p. 321.

types perish, and allowing vast periods of time for every new and better feature to be stamped on the ascending creature. Their language is 'thou law' — not 'Thou Lord' — 'in the beginning didst lay the foundation of the earth and the heavens are the work of thine hands'. I say, let us learn to confirm our faith by their irreverent unbelief. While they abase their minds before a dread irrational necessity or force, and patiently wait upon it, let us humble our minds before the eternal majesty of wisdom in 'the patience of the saints'.²⁸

Pope's summary view of the matter was that 'as held by its best advocates this theory [i.e. of evolution] pays a high tribute to the truth against which it seems to contend'.²⁹ For 'when this theory of long, slow, cyclical development is burdened with the production of all things, the growth of moral and spiritual sentiments included, it has two unrelenting opponents: Science cannot allow time enough since the calculated beginning of the solar system; and Religion protests in the name of God, and for the honour of His incarnate Son, and for the dignity of man himself, the descendant of Adam, *Which was the Son of God*'.³⁰ Thus, while accepting development in many spheres, Pope contends that the very intricacy of the processes, to which the scientists rightly point, requires belief not in impersonal force, but in the personal God.

Fairbairn was even more eager than Pope to cash evolution in theistic terms, and to apply the principle across the whole range of natural and human experience. The application he made, however, was of a carefully qualified kind. He could not, for example, accord finality to an exclusively naturalistic reading of evolution. To his own question, 'Are we able, by the process of an evolution, conducted strictly within the terms of Nature and by purely natural forces, to account for the origin of human reason and the history of all its achievements?'³¹ he returned a negative answer; and his verdict was that the scientists' 'difficulties and our perplexities began when they tried to define matter, or to find it without assuming the mind it was to

²⁸ W. B. Pope, *Sermons, Addresses and Charges* (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1878), p. 79; cf. pp. 124-5.

²⁹ W. B. Pope, *Compendium*, I, p. 405.

³⁰ *ibid.* But for the way in which science itself has subsequently deprived Christian apologists of the argument from lack of time as here deployed by Pope see Stanley L. Jaki, *Angels, Apes, and Men* (La Salle, Illinois: Sherwood Sugden, 1983), ch. III.

³¹ A. M. Fairbairn, *Philosophy of Religion*, p. 40.

explain, or to leave it in any sense the matter known to science and yet deduce from it a living and organic Nature'.³² Fairbairn goes further and argues that we have not understood the natural until we have given due place to the supernatural. The supernatural creative mind is God: 'God is the thought that is diffused through all space and active in all time. And this involves the consequence that the form under which His relation to Nature ought to be conceived is immanence, though not as excluding transcendence . . .'³³ Further, God is ever active as creator; creation is continuous. Mysterious as this is, 'yet the key of all mysteries is man. The first and last, the highest and surest thing in Nature, is the thought which explains Nature, but which Nature cannot explain.'³⁴

If, on the evolutionary model and impelled by his own rhetoric, Fairbairn too readily sees the course of human society rolling on to ends ever nobler (a favourite word), he did nonetheless do good service in opposing naturalism, and in denouncing that variety of evolutionary thought which 'estimates a man solely by his worth to the community, is proud of him only as he has the strength that can be victorious in the struggle'.³⁵

No less severe were Fairbairn's criticisms of Herbert Spencer's philosophy. We might almost say that no Victorian theologian was 'compleat' until he had attacked Spencer: certainly Watts stood with Fairbairn in this enterprise. Fairbairn relentlessly pursues Spencer's attempt to merge his unduly *a priori* ideas on the creational cause (force) with the creational method (evolution), contending that if evolution is the creational method, force must be denied to be the creational cause; for purposive creation implies a mind. Thus, while Fairbairn 'frankly accepts' the doctrine of evolution, he finds that far from abolishing teleology, it 'only affirms it on a more stupendous scale'.³⁶ Again, no interpretation of man himself can be given by Spencerian philosophy, and 'The philosophy which fails to interpret man cannot interpret his universe'.³⁷

³² *ibid.*, p. 55.

³³ *ibid.*, p. 58; cf. *The City of God*, p. 56.

³⁴ *ibid.*, p. 60.

³⁵ A. M. Fairbairn, *Studies in Religion and Theology* (New York: Macmillan, 1910), p. 92.

³⁶ A. M. Fairbairn, 'Mr. Herbert Spencer's Philosophy and the Philosophy of Religion', *The Contemporary Review* XL, July-December 1881, p. 217.

³⁷ A. M. Fairbairn, 'Herbert Spencer', *The Contemporary Review* LXXXV, Jan.-June 1904, p. 11.

Watts is even more trenchant in his criticisms of Spencer. He grants that the ultimate cause cannot be perfectly known but, against Spencer, he denies that we are utterly ignorant of it;³⁸ and he makes merry with a force which is said to manifest itself without giving us any intimation of what force is!³⁹ He then comes boldly out in defence of the doctrine of special creation — here parting company with Fairbairn — and argues that on his own ground Spencer is defeated. For ‘The doctrine of a creation out of existing matter, involves, ultimately, the doctrine of “the creation of force”; and the creation of force is just as inconceivable as the creation of matter.’⁴⁰

Pope did not embark upon a piecemeal anti-evolutionist campaign, though he staunchly upheld the necessary harmony of the revelations in nature and in grace, and opposed any who would drive a wedge between them: ‘The revelation of natural science,’ he said, ‘cannot contradict the revelation of spiritual science.’⁴¹ He would have agreed with Fairbairn that ‘we have no dispute with natural science, properly so called, but only with what we may term scientific metaphysics’.⁴² For him, as we have already seen, ‘the universe is rational to our reason by virtue of the immanent and absolute Reason it articulates’.⁴³

Although he was quite prepared to call the scientist’s bluff by averring that ‘The idea of progress in nature, in man, and in history, was the direct creation of theology,’⁴⁴ Fairbairn was not in favour of development — least of all in theology — at any price.⁴⁵ In this connection he entered the lists against J. H. Newman and attacked the foundation upon which Newman’s doctrine of doctrinal development was built. Fairbairn held that a needlessly radical, albeit implicit, *philosophical* scepticism had driven Newman towards an authoritarianism which would support his faith and sanction the doctrinal developments to which he was committed. The upshot was that ‘the more he claimed for the church, the more he had to claim; the more he set it in opposition to the movement and tendencies of living

³⁸ R. Watts, *An Examination of Herbert Spencer’s Biological Hypothesis* (Belfast: Mullen, 1875), p. 7.

³⁹ *ibid.*, p. 9. cf. A. M. Fairbairn, *The City of God*, pp. 18–19.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p. 31.

⁴¹ W. B. Pope, ‘Jesus Anathema or Jesus Lord. A Discourse . . . on the occasion of the Meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science’, 1883, p. 21; bound within *The Abiding Word*.

⁴² A. M. Fairbairn, *The City of God*, p. 44.

⁴³ *ibid.*, p. 68.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p. 38.

⁴⁵ Neither was Watts. See *The Rule of Faith*, pp. 36–75.

thought, the more absolute and divine he had to make its authority'.⁴⁶ On his fundamental point Fairbairn insisted time and again: 'In a certain sense submission to Catholicism is the victory of unbelief; the man who accepts authority because he dare not trust his intellect, lest it lead him to Atheism, is vanquished by the Atheism he fears. He unconsciously subscribes to the impious principle, that the God he believes, has given him so godless a reason that were he to follow it, it would lead him to a faith without God.'⁴⁷

Newman replied to Fairbairn's charges in his *Contemporary Review* article of October 1885. He particularly resented the fact that Fairbairn had misconstrued his meaning, and had branded him a 'secret sceptic'. In the December issue of the same journal Fairbairn sought to clarify matters. He emphasised that Newman's scepticism is of the *philosophical* sort: he was in no way accusing him of insincerity in his religious profession. But to the main charge he firmly adhered:

What Hume did by means of association, Newman does by means of authority. The reason is, as he is fond of saying, 'a mere instrument,' unfurnished by nature, without religious contents or function, till faith or conscience has conveyed into it the ideas or assumptions which are the premisses of its processes; and with religious character only as these processes are conducted in obedience to the moral sense or other spiritual authority . . . the deliverances of conscience stand to [reason] much as Hume conceived his 'impressions' and their corresponding 'ideas' to stand related to mind and knowledge. But, then, to a reason so constituted and construed how is religious knowledge possible? How can religion, as such, have any existence, or religious truth any reality? What works as a mere instrument never handles what it works in; the things remain outside it, and have no place or standing within its being. And hence my contention was, and is, that to conceive reason as Dr. Newman does, is to deny to it the knowledge of God, and so to save faith by the help of a deeper unbelief.⁴⁸

In February 1886 Newman published privately what had originally been intended as a further reply to Fairbairn. The argument was no

⁴⁶ A. M. Fairbairn, *Catholicism*, p. 93; cf. *Place of Christ*, Bk. I chap. 1.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p. 137.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 208-9; cf. *Place of Christ*, p. 204.

further advanced, and we may agree with W. B. Selbie that 'the two men were working on different planes and using language each in a way that was hardly intelligible to the other'.⁴⁹

In an illuminating article on James Martineau, Fairbairn places the Unitarian over against Newman thus: 'Newman was never happy in the presence of conscience; Martineau was never happy away from it. The one pursued an unwearied quest for an external authority in religion; the other unweariedly argued that we had within us an ample and adequate authority and needed no other . . . his quest was for the sovereignty of God, the reign of a categorical imperative over his soul.'⁵⁰ Martineau's profoundly ethical emphasis highly commended itself to Fairbairn, whose own view was, 'There is no finer example in the history of thought of the value of the theistic temper or of the victorious force that lies in moral idealism. It is largely owing to him that our age was not swept off its feet by the rising tide of materialistic and pseudo-scientific speculation.'⁵¹ This verdict leads us to comment upon the first of two ways in which Fairbairn differed from Watts and Pope in his response to the prevailing intellectual climate. To a much greater degree than his slightly older contemporaries, Fairbairn expounded ethical considerations. This he did both theoretically, and practically as a social prophet. (Pope, good Methodist that he was, had much to say about the Christian's growing up into Christ, and concerning the ethics of redemption, but the focal point of Fairbairn's world view is, as it were, undifferentiatedly ethical in a way that Pope's is not.) Only if God is conceived in ethical terms can the transcendence-immanence balance be maintained. Apart from ethical considerations we would have an alienated, deistic God on the one hand, or God dissolved into nature on the other.⁵²

But the ethical is not simply the basis of a philosophy of religion; it 'is the strongest and most significant tendency in social and political thought'.⁵³ Few theologians did as much as Fairbairn to ensure that this was so. He held that 'The ethicized conception of God, which we owe to the Christian doctrine of the Godhead, has . . . resulted in an

⁴⁹ W. B. Selbie, *op. cit.*, p. 207; cf. Wilfred Ward, *The Life of John Henry Cardinal Newman* (London: Longmans, 1913), p. 509.

⁵⁰ A. M. Fairbairn, 'James Martineau', *The Contemporary Review* LXXXIII, Jan.-June 1903, p. 9.

⁵¹ *ibid.*

⁵² A. M. Fairbairn, *Place of Christ*, pp. 414-17.

⁵³ A. M. Fairbairn, *Religion in History and in the Life of Today* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1894), p. 9.

ethicized conception of the universe, or of being as related to God.⁵⁴ From this starting-point Fairbairn launched his crusades for more effective religious education, for the rights of nonconformists, for the amelioration of the lot of the working classes, for the sanctity of the home. He saw no way in which political and religious thought could be kept apart from each other. Indeed, 'Political thought is the religious idea applied to the State, and the conduct of its public affairs, while religious thought is but our view of the polity of the universe, and man's relation to it.'⁵⁵

Confronted by the challenges of the modern world the Church must be ready to change its ways, and must learn how to nurture in men a passion for social righteousness. When he instructs us how the Church is to do this, Fairbairn sounds more than a little like a harbinger of Paul Tillich: 'The church may have a message to the age, but the age has also a message to the church. And it is possible that in the age's message there may be most of the voice of God.'⁵⁶ That 'Citizenship in the kingdom of God best qualifies for true and efficient citizenship in the civil kingdom',⁵⁷ he was in no doubt. Fairbairn never lost the vision of the Fatherhood of God as interpreted through the Son which came to him when, having as a young man all but lost his faith, he went to Germany to study. He came to see that in view of God's Fatherhood, 'Redemption concerned both the many and the one, the whole as well as the parts, the unity as much as the units . . . only the re-building of the City of God which had fallen down could satisfy Him who had made the citizen, had planned and built the city. And I went home to Scotland to re-interpret both God and man in the terms of this larger and nobler Christianity.'⁵⁸

The second area in which Fairbairn had more to say than his older

⁵⁴ A. M. Fairbairn, *Place of Christ*, p. 423. In his ethical emphasis Fairbairn is at times reminiscent of Ritschl. But he was too much of an undogmatic Hegelian — and hence too much in sympathy with efforts of speculative construction to espouse Ritschlianism. See W. B. Selbie, *op. cit.*, pp. 185, 240.

⁵⁵ A. M. Fairbairn, *Religion in History*, p. 23.

⁵⁶ A. M. Fairbairn, *Catholicism*, p. 335. For his part Tillich confessed his liking for the days of Victorian idealism. See *The Theology of Paul Tillich*, eds. C. W. Kegley and R. W. Bretall (New York: Macmillan, 1964), p. 3.

⁵⁷ A. M. Fairbairn, *The City of God*, p. 332. It is noteworthy that, as Prof. Clemen of Halle pointed out, Fairbairn utilises the concept of the Kingdom of God ethically, but not eschatologically, in his *The Place of Christ*. See W. B. Selbie, *op. cit.*, p. 231. In this he was like his older contemporary, Ritschl, to whom he never refers.

⁵⁸ A. M. Fairbairn, 'Experience in Theology: A Chapter of Autobiography', *The Contemporary Review* XCI, Jan.-June 1907, p. 569.

contemporaries is that of the comparative study of religions. This study is complicated, and we should not expect a pioneer to speak the final word on the subject. Suffice it to say that Fairbairn begins broadly: with religion as such. The aim of his *Philosophy of Religion* is to explain religion through nature and man, and then to construe Christianity through religion. His provisional definition of religion is that it is 'subjectively, man's consciousness of relation to suprasensible Being; and, objectively, the beliefs, the customs, the rites, and the institutions which express and incorporate this consciousness'.⁵⁹

Consistently with his emphasis upon history, Fairbairn enthusiastically advocated the scientific and comparative study of religions.⁶⁰ But because of his conviction of Christ's actual and ideal supremacy, the outcome of his gradations of religions is never in doubt. He would have denied the psychological possibility of the Christian's engaging in comparative study *as if* God had not spoken finally in Christ. This stance does not, of course, preclude fairness of treatment; and it must be said that any strictures passed by Fairbairn against the views (though never against the sincerity) of members of other faiths were more than equalled in forthrightness by the adverse judgments he passed against what he deemed to be unworthy Christian views, whether sacerdotal or Calvinistic.

Something of the flavour of Fairbairn's critique will emerge if we note that, as far as he is concerned, India's deterministic Brahma is in no way helped by its uncanny resemblance to Spencer's force;⁶¹ that as between the one Incarnation of Christianity and the many incarnations of Hinduism there is a world of difference, both as to nature and purpose;⁶² and that Hinduism, with its endorsement of 'the most extravagant and the grossest and most debased cults' is a warning to any western poets and scientists who feel enchanted by the pantheistic vision.⁶³ Buddhism, which has as its highest aim the 'selfish care for one's own happiness, is a religion of death', and its acquiescence in evil *qua* universal is unacceptable.⁶⁴ For its part, Islam 'believes in the unity

⁵⁹ A. M. Fairbairn, *Philosophy of Religion*, p. 200.

⁶⁰ A. M. Fairbairn, 'The Influence of the Study of Other Religions upon Christian Theology', *Proceedings of the International Congregational Council*, II, 1899, p. 111.

⁶¹ A. M. Fairbairn, *Religion in History*, p. 119.

⁶² A. M. Fairbairn, *Studies in the Life of Christ* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 11th edn., 1899), p. 40.

⁶³ A. M. Fairbairn, *Proc. ICC.*, II, p. 116.

⁶⁴ A. M. Fairbairn, *The City of God*, pp. 97, 184-6; cf. e.g. *Religion in History*, pp. 171-2, 248.

of God with a transcendent force and fury of conviction, but it is in a physical rather than an ethical unity; God is conceived as will rather than as light, life and love'.⁶⁵

Underlying these criticisms is Fairbairn's conviction, 'A religion always is as its deity is';⁶⁶ and Christianity's deity is of the ethical sort. The Christian God has made himself known in Christ as nowhere else: Christianity is not, like other religions, simply a matter of *our* quest after God. Even so, Fairbairn desires that we listen in all the religions 'for the voice of the Eternal, who has written His law upon the heart in characters that can never be eradicated'.⁶⁷ We must at the same time, however, 'argue that a system whose crown and centre is the Divine Man, is one which does justice to everything positive in humanity by penetrating it everywhere with Deity'.⁶⁸

We need only add that with the idea of hearing the 'voice of the Eternal' anywhere else than in the Bible, Watts had little patience:

However manifest the conflict among the different heathen religions may be . . . the magic wand of generalisation can blend them into one, and prove that their fundamental conceptions have their complement and *pleroma* in the Gospel of Christ! It is as unhistorical as it is unscriptural, to allege that these religions exhibit 'natural elements of Revealed Theology,' or premonitions of the Gospel of Christ. The so-called 'natural elements' are simply residuary fragments of the lost knowledge of God, retained in systems which, instead of indicating different stages in a process of theological evolution, furnish unquestionable evidence of a process of moral and spiritual degradation.⁶⁹

As well as informing us of Watts's position *vis à vis* the world religions, these words raise sharply the question of starting-points. To this we now turn.

III

Watts determines to stand upon the inerrant, 'inscripturated' Word of God. God has spoken, and it is not for mere man to pass judgment on

⁶⁵ A. M. Fairbairn, *Proc. ICC.*, II, p. 116.

⁶⁶ A. M. Fairbairn, *Catholicism*, p. 17; cf. *Philosophy of Religion*, p. 240.

⁶⁷ A. M. Fairbairn, *The City of God*, p. 103.

⁶⁸ A. M. Fairbairn, *Philosophy of Religion*, p. x.

⁶⁹ R. Watts, *The New Apologetic*, p. 195.

what he has said. 'He who approaches the word of life for the latter purpose must be sadly lacking in that grace of humility which is one of the leading traits of those who have received Christ as their prophet.'⁷⁰ Many fell by the wayside, however, and Watts wielded a vigorous logic against them. Of his predecessor in the Belfast College, John Edgar (1798-1866), it was said that he had 'no taste for the minute discussion of theological systems'.⁷¹ Watts more than made good the omission. He relentlessly tracked down what he took to be heresy and even Marcus Dods, the object of more than one of Watts's onslaughts, had to concede, 'Grant him his premises and his conclusions inevitably follow.'⁷² To Watts the Bible had to be taken at what he deemed to be its own estimation — as the infallible Word of God; and he set his face against the theological downgrade, which was inspired by materialistic biblical criticism and evolutionary thought, and in which such scholars as William Robertson Smith, Dods, and A. B. Bruce were implicated. The fact that these were all Free Church Presbyterians and subscribers to the Westminster Confession only made matters worse.⁷³

In his Carey Lectures for 1884 Watts discussed *The Rule of Faith and the Doctrine of Inspiration*. His purpose is clear: 'The object aimed at was the reassertion and vindication of the immemorial doctrine of the Church in regard to the Rule of Faith and its relation to its Divine Author. The ground taken in these Lectures is, that "the word of God, which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy Him," and that these writings have been given by inspiration of God, through the agency of men who spake or wrote as they were moved, or borne along, by the Holy Ghost, so that the record is truly, and in the strictest sense of the term, the word of God.' Although the sacred writers do not

⁷⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 212-13; cf. his view of a fundamental error of Rome: 'This assertion of the dependence of the Scriptures for their authority upon the testimony of the Church is a fundamental error of the Papacy.' See his *The Rule of Faith and the Doctrine of Inspiration*, p. 258; cf. chaps. II and III.

⁷¹ W. D. Killen, *Memoir of John Edgar, D.D., LL.D.* (Belfast, 1867), p. 21.

⁷² Quoted by R. Allen, *op. cit.*, p. 180.

⁷³ It is interesting to note that the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland (1893) sent ordinands to Belfast to study under Watts (despite his advocacy of the use of instrumental music in church services), though after his death, at their first Synod (Inverness, 1896), they resolved to terminate this arrangement. Other factors which influenced their decision were the publication by the Irish Presbyterian Church of a hymnal, and the 'advanced' views of Thomas Walker (1862-1929), Professor of Hebrew (1888-1929) at the College. See R. Allen, *op. cit.*, p. 202. On the general issue see A. P. F. Sell, 'The rise and reception of modern biblical criticism: a retrospect', *Evangelical Quarterly* LII, 1980, pp. 132-48.

provide information regarding the nature of the divine agency in its operation on their minds, we may nevertheless formulate a doctrine of inspiration. We may affirm that 'the Spirit so actuated the human agents as to determine the language in which they gave expression to the truths and facts recalled, or communicated in the first instance, to their minds'.⁷⁴ As he elsewhere puts it, 'According to the Scriptures, the Holy Ghost had as much to do with the *efflux* as with the *influx* of the Revelation; as much to do with the *recording* of it for the instruction of others, as He had with the *communication* of it to the writers themselves.'⁷⁵

Watts is quite happy that Jesus of Nazareth shall be the key who unlocks the scriptures (and many liberals — Fairbairn not excluded — were advocating such a procedure), but Jesus's view of scripture may not then legitimately be cast aside;⁷⁶ and Watts was convinced that he shared Jesus's view. Again, there must be no capitulation to the liberal notion that the Bible is inspired because it is *inspiring*.⁷⁷ His conclusion was: 'To serve as a rule of faith and life the Scriptures must be infallible, and to be infallible they must be the word of God, and to be the word of God they must be divinely inspired . . . Faith is correlative to testimony, and saving faith is based upon the testimony of God Himself, and no book can serve as a foundation for faith which cannot furnish proof of its divine origin . . . All theories, therefore, whose tendency is to shake confidence in the doctrine that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, in which alone the Rule of Faith is found, are the word of God, must be injurious to vital godliness, and, where accepted in full consciousness of their legitimate consequences, must be, not only injurious to piety, but altogether subversive of faith.'⁷⁸

Watts saw such confidence-shaking theories all around him, and he had no doubt as to the origin of the error common to them all: 'The false theory of the intuitive principle of Causality, enunciated by David Hume, which claims that the idea of a cause is exhausted in the notion of a mere order of sequence among phenomena, has proved the fertile source of all the false philosophies and sciences which have sprung into being, and waxed and waned since his day, or which still lay claim to scientific or philosophic rank.'⁷⁹

⁷⁴ R. Watts, *The Rule of Faith*, pp. ix, xiii-xiv.

⁷⁵ R. Watts, *The New Apologetic*, p. 108; cf. *The Rule of Faith*, pp. 93-4.

⁷⁶ *ibid.*, p. 48.

⁷⁷ *ibid.*, p. 45.

⁷⁸ R. Watts, *The Rule of Faith*, pp. 90-2.

⁷⁹ R. Watts, *The New Apologetic*, p. xvii.

In *The Newer Criticism and the Analogy of the Faith* (1881) Watts set out to refute the position taken by Robertson Smith in his *The Old Testament in the Jewish Church* (1881). By now Smith had been suspended from his Chair in the Free Church College, Aberdeen, though he was never deposed from the ministry of the Free Church. To Watts, Smith's was a 'faith-subverting' theory of the most sceptical kind. What especially horrified him was Smith's denial of the redemptive aspect of the Old Testament economy during its first three thousand years. The scriptures nowhere spoke to Watts of an economy that was not redemptive, and thus what the newer criticism disparagingly rejects as mere tradition is the scriptural tradition:

With this tradition, in its essential priestly element, the mysterious drama of man's redemption opens, and with it, as fully developed in the exaltation of the Lamb that was slain to the throne of the Father to preside over the fountain of the water of life, which is to gladden eternally the city of God, the mystery of the cross is finished. It is a tradition for which, on many a moor and in many a glen, our Scottish forefathers laid down their lives; and the prayer of the author of this present vindication is, that the sons of these heroic sires may refuse all compromise with its rationalistic rival, and contend for its every jot and tittle as for the citadel of our common Christianity.⁸⁰

Nothing in Robertson Smith's article on 'The Bible' in *Encyclopaedia Britannica* allayed Watts's fears. He remained convinced, however, that 'When the analytic instruments of Nöldeke are laid down, and the battering-rams of Kuenen and Wellhausen are withdrawn, the inscription . . . the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, still abides, irradiating the building from basement to battlement, and assuring its inmates that the fortress in which they have taken refuge is impregnable.'⁸¹ Meanwhile, the fact must be faced that 'Once on the Down-grade, progress is facile and, if grace prevent not, inevitable.'⁸²

It was, perhaps, to be expected that some of those criticised by Watts should be stung into responding. Dods, for example, had little that was complimentary to say about *The New Apologetic*:

Dr. Watts is one of those unhappily constituted men who cannot

⁸⁰ R. Watts, *The Newer Criticism and the Analogy of the Faith* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1881), pp. 270-1.

⁸¹ *ibid.*, p. 316.

⁸² R. Watts, *The New Apologetic*, p. 86.

write unless they are angry. He needs the red rag to excite him, and this time he follows the lead of Mr. Spurgeon, and has brought himself up to fighting point by the imagination that the whole theological world is simply rushing to destruction, and that Dr. Watts alone can save it. He is a clever logician, deftly manipulating theological formulae; but whether these have any relation to reality he never inquires. There is no evidence from board to board of this volume that he has ever seriously pondered the matters he discusses. He is essentially an advocate, not a judge. He belongs, craving Horace's pardon, to the *irritabile genus disputatorum*.⁸³

The editor of *The Expositor*, in which those words appeared, William Robertson Nicoll, declined to publish Watts's reply; but the editor of *The Witness* obliged. Of Dods, Watts wrote, 'I have simply been doing what he bound himself to do both by his ordination and his installation vows . . . It is a singular pretension to demand liberty to teach a new faith from the seat of a chair which the old faith established, and by a mouth which the old faith feeds.'⁸⁴

Much kinder to Watts was the unsigned review in *The London Quarterly*, edited at that time by W. B. Pope. While admitting that *The Newer Criticism* was of little value at the level of technical Old Testament scholarship, the book was welcomed because it represents 'with considerable intelligibility and force the inconsistencies and incongruities of the "Newer Criticism", and furnishes, for even plain readers, evidence that the archives of redemption are not on a level with the decretals of Isidore, or, in other words, pious inventions or forgeries'.⁸⁵

Pope himself was ever the constructive systematiser, and he did not meet the exponents of the newer criticism with the same piecemeal, dissecting argumentation as did Watts. Nevertheless, his positive attitude towards the Bible, and towards 'advanced' views, is by no means obscure, and he adverted to it in season and out. Thus, in a funeral address on the Reverend John Lomas he praised this

⁸³ *The Expositor*, 4th series, III, 1891, pp. 319-20.

⁸⁴ R. Allen, *op. cit.*, quoting *The Witness*, 15.5.1891. cf. *The New Apologetic*, p. xvii: 'A Rationalistic Criticism, however timid at first, is now bold enough to lift its voice in the pulpits and theological halls of Churches once eminent for their reverence for the Sacred Scriptures as the Word of God.' Similar complaints have been made in our own time against the then Bishop of Woolwich, for his *Honest to God* (London: SCM 1963); and against the authors of *The Myth of God Incarnate* (London: SCM 1977).

⁸⁵ *The London Quarterly* LVII, Apr.-July 1882, p. 211.

theological teacher for impressing 'upon a considerable number of students the claims of systematic or dogmatic divinity in opposition to the latitudinarian characterless negation of belief that has been creeping in among us'.⁸⁶ Earlier, in his Inaugural Address at Didsbury College, Pope had warned that

Wherever we turn our glance upon Christendom, we perceive the manifold signs of a steady, persistent, ruthless, and thorough determination to bring the Christian faith, and its holy documents, and its equally holy institutions, before the bar of a reason that will know nothing of faith. . . . In spite of our holy Master's voice from heaven upon earth ratifying the ancient archives that testified of Him, men of various creeds are seeking to rob the Old Testament Scriptures of the marks of their divinity as from God, and of their historical worth as from man. The same fleshly licence . . . disports itself with the Christian records on the same irreverent principles. And there are manifest tokens that, having rent the mantles of the prophets, they are gathering around the Form most sacred to us all; and are prepared to cast lots upon the seamless robe of His truth *whose it shall be*.⁸⁷

Pope upheld the 'permanent integrity of the written word', and in a *priori* fashion argued, 'If God has condescended to inspire holy men to announce and write His will in a book, can we suppose that He would permit their writings to be abandoned to all the chances of time and all the caprices of men?'⁸⁸ It follows that as regards man's approach to the Bible, 'No man can be a genuine disciple of Christ who does not receive the Holy Oracles at His hands as a testimony to Himself given by His own Spirit to the prophets before He came, and by His own Spirit to the apostles after He departed . . . our Lord makes the Volume.'⁸⁹ Thus far Pope is with Watts; but he then introduces a qualification into his doctrine of verbal inspiration which the latter would have deemed to be fatal: 'to assert that every word was put into the mind of every writer

⁸⁶ W. B. Pope, *Sermons, Addresses and Charges*, p. 61.

⁸⁷ W. B. Pope, *The Inward Witness*, pp. 16-17.

⁸⁸ W. B. Pope, *The Abiding Word*, pp. 7-8. Watts disarmingly acknowledged the *a priori* character of his argument for biblical inerrancy. See his *The Rule of Faith*, p. 112. Elsewhere, by a *tu quoque*, he accuses the anti-verbal inspirationists of arguing in an equally *a priori* manner; and he contends that *their* assumption that a divine revelation may contain errors and yet constitute a sufficient rule of faith and practice is inconsistent with the character of God. See *The New Apologetic*, p. 122.

⁸⁹ W. B. Pope, *The Person of Christ* (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 3rd edn., 1885), p. 42.

on every subject is to lay on our doctrine a burden too heavy to be borne.⁹⁰ In support of this contention Pope provides examples of differing synoptic reports of the same incident, contending that 'the thing signified is alone supreme'. But this, Watts would say, would give man licence to decide what the thing signified is, and to embark upon that reductionist path which leads to the view that 'only those parts of Scripture which contain truths necessary to salvation can claim to be inspired'⁹¹ — the thin end of a very nasty wedge indeed, as far as Watts was concerned.

In a further respect, however, Watts and Pope are in general agreement. Watts was opposed to any form of mysticism or 'inner light' whereby the written Word might be skirted. He was even more opposed to those who would judge the written Word by their own inward standard. He recognised that there were ways of expressing an 'inward light' theory which made it a very different thing from mere rationalism: the illumination could be said to be that of the Holy Spirit. But it was the sufficiency of the illumination as *inward* that Watts repudiated. The proper doctrine of illumination by the Spirit is that the individual is illuminated by the Spirit *through the Word*. God the Holy Spirit illumines the children of God in such a way as to enlighten them as to the saving truths contained in the *objective* standard.⁹² Pope concurred, and his concurrence is the more telling because of his more mystical cast of mind. Although he made much of the inward witness of the Spirit,⁹³ he underlined the truth that 'in His Word the Eternal draws nigh to man without a veil':⁹⁴ and he set his face against all pantheising tendencies to blur the creator-creature distinction.⁹⁵

We have drawn a legitimate inference as to what Watts might have said of Pope's somewhat concessionary doctrine of inspiration; but when we come to Fairbairn's account of the ground of faith we do not have to surmise. For Watts waxed vehement against Fairbairn's fashionable emphasis upon the consciousness of Christ as constituting the basis of Christian theology. Undeterred, Fairbairn received his insights as light from on high, and was far from taking the deliverances of the newer criticism as being necessarily destructive of the faith. He was much more concerned to extend theology's frontiers until the

⁹⁰ W. B. Pope, *Compendium*, I, p. 189.

⁹¹ R. Watts, *The New Apologetic*, p. 3.

⁹² See R. Watts, *The Rule of Faith*, pp. 26-36.

⁹³ See e.g. W. B. Pope, *The Inward Witness*, p. 15.

⁹⁴ W. B. Pope, 'God Glorified in His Works and Word', p. 7.

⁹⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 11-12; cf. *The Person of Christ*, p. 73.

whole realm of life and thought was seen to find its centre in Christ, than to guard a confessional ark.

To a greater degree than Watts or Pope, Fairbairn emphasises the character of the Christian revelation as historical: 'To be complete the revelation must enable us to know the Founder, his personal history, what manner of man he was . . . what he intended, achieved and suffered.'⁹⁶ As he elsewhere puts it, 'The historical person of Christ is at once the basis and the source of the Christian religion.'⁹⁷ But that Fairbairn did not intend to remain anchored in empirical history is clear from a number of places, as when he contends that 'Christ's person is even more intellectually real than historically actual . . . Without the historical Person the ideal would never have existed; but without the ideal the historical would never have been the source of a universal religion.'⁹⁸ We may truthfully say that Christ 'Was the first being who realized for man the idea of the Divine.'⁹⁹ All of this is in keeping with Fairbairn's universalism, and many — including some less to the right than Watts — might feel that Fairbairn's language here owes more to a history-denying variety of philosophical idealism than it does to the Bible; and in the reference to Christ as the first to realize for man the idea of the Divine, they might discern the top of that slippery slope down which much liberal theology was shortly to tumble, until at the bottom the view was reached that Jesus was simply the first Christian.

Fairbairn further reveals his indebtedness to the evolutionary, developmental thought of his age when he argues that since Christ can be construed only in relation to the collective history of mankind, and since man's grasp of his significance is ever increasing, Jesus is actually nearer to us now than he was to the men of the second century. 'The earliest stage in any historical development,' he declares, 'is not the most, but the least perfect.'¹⁰⁰ Modern criticism has greatly increased our ability to know this Jesus; and Fairbairn might almost have had Watts in mind when he remarked, 'We all feel the distance placed by fifty years of the most radical and penetrating criticism between us and

⁹⁶ A. M. Fairbairn, *Philosophy of Religion*, p. 288.

⁹⁷ A. M. Fairbairn, *Studies in the Life of Christ*, p. 4.

⁹⁸ A. M. Fairbairn, *Philosophy of Religion*, pp. 16, 477; cf. p. 457.

⁹⁹ A. M. Fairbairn, *The Place of Christ*, p. 7.

¹⁰⁰ A. M. Fairbairn, *Christ in the Centuries* (London: Sampson Low, 2nd edn., 1893), p. 11. In an exposition of I Pet. 1.8 he writes: 'They [i.e. the disciples] had the less blessing of loving One they had seen; thou hast the greater blessing of loving One thou hast not seen.' See *The City of God*, p. 346.

the older theology, and as the distance widens the theology that then reigned grows less credible because less relevant to living mind.¹⁰¹ Nor would Watts derive any comfort from the reception accorded by A. B. Bruce to the book from which the remark just quoted is taken: 'He aims only at revision and correction, and above all at the breathing of Christ's spirit into theology. The fault of the book in the eyes of many will be that it alters so little.'¹⁰²

Where Watts begins methodologically with the Bible and scarcely leaves it; where Pope begins there and works outwards to some degree; Fairbairn begins in the widest possible way with the intelligibility of the world and with the religious experience of mankind. He then proceeds through the religions until he reaches the purest and most ideal one — the one whose God has made himself supremely known in Christ: a Christ whose *consciousness* of himself must guide our thought and inform our life. We must, that is, allow Jesus to be his own best interpreter; and the new history enables us to do this as never before.¹⁰³ Thus, whereas theology was once regarded as a rationalistic science in which the language of the law court reigned supreme, now the personality of Christ and his actual mind are the starting-points of theological enquiry. Theology had been scholastic rather than vital; but Strauss, however wayward in other respects, had, with his *Leben Jesu* (1835-6), driven men back to Christ.¹⁰⁴ Paul had been the peg upon whom the theologies of the anti-Gnostic Fathers, Augustine, and the Reformers had been hung, 'But the modern return is to Christ . . . He has become the centre and . . . is not simply looked at through the eyes of Paul or John.'¹⁰⁵

Nowhere is the consciousness of Christ more clearly defined than in relation to his conviction of God's Fatherhood, and of his own Sonship. To this theme we shall return; but meanwhile we must ask, 'Where does Fairbairn's position leave the Bible?' In a nutshell his belief is that the same criticism which has given us back Christ has given us back the Bible. Thus, 'Instead of saying that we had in the old doctrine a

¹⁰¹ A. M. Fairbairn, *The Place of Christ*, pp. 296-7.

¹⁰² A. B. Bruce in *The Contemporary Review* LXVII, May 1895, p. 88.

¹⁰³ It was not long, of course, before the Fairbairnian confidence that we could know the Jesus of history was rudely shaken. For the comments of one who had to revise his discipleship of Fairbairn at this point see John Dickie, *Fifty Years of British Theology* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1937), p. 60.

¹⁰⁴ See *The Place of Christ*, pp. 16, 17, 90-1, 254; cf. 'David Friedrich Strauss: a Chapter in the History of Modern Religious Thought', *The Contemporary Review* XXVII, 1875-6, pp. 950-977; XXVIII, 1876, pp. 124-40, 263-81.

¹⁰⁵ *ibid.*, p. 187.

doctrine of inspiration, I am prepared to maintain that we lost it, and turned what was meant to be a great living history of redemption into a repository of evidential texts unscientifically used, and meant only for occasional service. Through the newer criticism we get at the older Scriptures — nay, we come to see this, that the entire history that went before Christ concerned Christ; it is not a dead letter . . .¹⁰⁶ The value of the scriptures ‘is in proportion to their veracity. And our material is as our formal source. It is the ultimate deliverance of His consciousness.’¹⁰⁷ The scriptures are ‘the mode by which God as He is in Christ lives for the faith of the Church and before the mind of the world’.¹⁰⁸

All of which stung Watts into ferocious activity. He doubts whether we know Christ better now than believers in past ages did, for ‘Without a single exception, all that He possessed, whether in His personal or in His official capacity, was known before the critics or their science had any being.’¹⁰⁹ Moreover, ‘By denying the only genuine doctrine of inspiration, and proclaiming the errancy of the sacred record, they have shaken confidence in the only vehicle through which we can acquire a true knowledge of either Christ or His consciousness.’¹¹⁰ Most serious of all in Watts’s eyes is the fact that Fairbairn, and others like him, misread the consciousness. Christ’s consciousness of himself *vis à vis* God was not merely personal, it was federal. The entire Bible (to which Fairbairn professes allegiance) witnesses to this, yet Fairbairn plays it down.

At this point we pass to specifically doctrinal questions, and must investigate the views of our three divines on doctrines fundamental to the faith.

IV

To Watts the prevailing doctrinal downgrade was the inevitable consequence of the higher criticism of the Bible. This criticism enabled Marcus Dods, for example, to preach a sermon in St. Giles’ in which doubt was cast upon the received position on the deity of Christ, the atonement, and the infallibility of scripture: ‘These doctrines, as commonly set forth in the creeds of Christendom, the preacher held,

¹⁰⁶ A. M. Fairbairn, *Proc. ICC*, I, 1891, p. 97; cf. *The Place of Christ*, p. 508.

¹⁰⁷ A. M. Fairbairn, *The Place of Christ*, p. 450.

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.*, p. 499.

¹⁰⁹ R. Watts, *Principal Fairbairn’s ‘Place of Christ in Modern Theology’* (Edinburgh: Hunter, [1894]), p. 95.

¹¹⁰ *ibid.*

were not essential to salvation.¹¹¹ On Dods's view that the criticised doctrines constitute stumbling-blocks to the faith of modern man Watts sardonically comments: 'The apostles and evangelists manifestly had no idea that they were throwing stumbling-blocks in the way of inquirers, by putting into the foreground the claims of the Messiah they preached to be recognised as the Emmanuel, the Son of God, and the Jehovah. But, then, the New Apologetic homiletic had not been invented in their day.'¹¹²

Watts is the traditional, confessional Calvinist. He upholds the Westminster Confession, and cannot understand men like Dods and Bruce who, having subscribed to the Confession, now wish to sit loose to it. For his part Fairbairn, as a young man, ceased to believe in the theology of the Confession and tells us, 'For a season I became an unchurched wanderer, conscious mainly of one thing, that I had been called of God to preach another gospel than I had been trained in.'¹¹³ He was subsequently prepared to grant that Calvinism, 'a system of splendid daring', had made 'strong and commanding men';¹¹⁴ but his sojourn in Germany had opened his eyes to hitherto undreamed of aspects of the nature and purpose of God. The sovereign gave place to the Father — or, at least, to one whose Paternity was sovereign. Fairbairn could not see that the Confession gave due place to this Paternal sovereignty, and his mature verdict upon it was that, since it had been framed in order to *exclude* certain interpretations of biblical truth, and so was not generically Christian, the Confession possesses 'an innate and essential controversial character, [and] stands *ipso facto* as a sectional creed, whose nature can be changed by no softening of the terms which express assent'.¹¹⁵

Pope, of course, had never been a Calvinist, but there had been some threateningly judicial ways of proclaiming evangelical Arminianism. His biographer tells us that Pope came home from a meeting of the committee appointed to revise the official Wesleyan catechisms delighted by his success in having persuaded his colleagues to alter the first question and answer from 'What is God? — An infinite and eternal Spirit,' to 'Who is God? — Our Father.' Dr Moss judges, 'He inherited a theology that was juridical; he supplemented and softened

¹¹¹ R. Watts, *The New Apologetic*, p. 147.

¹¹² *ibid.*, p. 157.

¹¹³ A. M. Fairbairn, 'Experience in Theology', pp. 557-8.

¹¹⁴ A. M. Fairbairn, *The City of God*, pp. 27-8.

¹¹⁵ A. M. Fairbairn, 'The Westminster Confession of Faith and Scotch Theology', *The Contemporary Review* XXI, Dec. 1872-May 1873, p. 64.

it with the truer symbolism of the home, without any abatement of the sacred honours of order and right.’¹¹⁶

The two related points at which confessional Calvinism appalled Fairbairn and, to a lesser extent, Pope (whose spirit was less combative, and who had not the zeal of a convert), were the issues of the decree(s) of God and of its relation to the idea of God’s Fatherhood. Of the former Fairbairn said that

The Decree is the point whence the whole system is evolved. It is absolute, comprehends ‘whatsoever comes to pass;’ determines the number to be saved, the number to be lost, and the means necessary to bring about the result in either case. Predestination, whether as election or reprobation, is unconditional. Infants and men are alike fit subjects of the elective or reprobative decree, which is not dependent on or determined by anything foreseen in the creature. Whatever follows by necessary inference from these premises is drawn without shrinking, and the structure stands a grim monument reared by grim but true men ‘to the glory of God’.¹¹⁷

Fairbairn protested against this, and so too did Pope. It is proper to remark, however, that Pope was equally alive to the dangers on *either* side of the characteristically catholic and free Methodist way of preaching the gospel: ‘Many teach and preach a universal Gospel, which is nevertheless fettered and cramped by some secret theory of reserve in God’s decrees: from the necessity of such violent compromises between theory and practice we are happily exempt. Others, and in far larger numbers, agree with us in the universality of the benefit of redemption, but carry their catholicity of spirit to a latitudinarian excess . . . They make the common benefits of redemption all its benefit.’¹¹⁸

Undeterred, Watts maintained that the God of Calvinism was the God of the Bible; and he rejoiced that ‘Calvinism avows itself as the asserter and defender of the rights and prerogatives of God’.¹¹⁹ He

¹¹⁶ R. Waddy Moss, *op. cit.*, p. 115. Small wonder that Dr J. Scott Lidgett called Pope ‘my Master’. So W. Bardsley Brash, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

¹¹⁷ A. M. Fairbairn, ‘The Westminster Confession’, p. 75.

¹¹⁸ W. B. Pope, *The Peculiarities of Methodist Doctrine* (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1873), p. 10. For Pope, what God has eternally decreed is redemption. See *Compendium II*, p. 91.

¹¹⁹ R. Watts, *An Outline of the Calvinistic System* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1866), p. 3. The following comment of Watts upon the immutability of God brings present-day

defends the doctrine of the decree from the charges that it makes God the author of sin, destroys the free agency of the individual, and is tantamount to fatalism. The nub of his case against objectors is that 'apart from the very species of decree to which they object, there could have been no atonement for sin'; that to deny the decree *vis à vis* free agency is tantamount to denying the omniscience of God; and that 'If the events which are to transpire in the universe are with God, simply subjects of knowledge, and not matters of purpose, then this universe is not governed by Him.'¹²⁰

Watts recognises that the 'special object of aversion' is the specific decree of predestination. This comprises election and reprobation. The former encompasses the election and foreordination of some, in preference to others, to life; the latter encompasses the preterition, or passing by, of some sinners (whom God is in no way bound to save) and the judicial treatment of them according to their deserts. All of this is to the glory of God, and, since man's well-being is inseparable from God's glory, it can entail no hardship to, and involve no tyrannising over, man.

This was too much for Fairbairn, as for Pope. The former complained that under Calvinism, 'Man became, if not a mode of the infinite substance, yet a mode or vehicle of the infinite will, and the universalized Divine will is an even more decisive and comprehensive Pantheism than the universalized Divine substance.'¹²¹ The root trouble was that 'God was interpreted through sovereignty rather than sovereignty through God'.¹²² That is, 'Where Calvinism in its sterner phase went astray . . . was not in its doctrine of sovereignty, but in its doctrine of the Sovereign.'¹²³ Fairbairn went so far as to describe the prevailing scientific conception of his day as 'Calvinism with God dropped out'.¹²⁴ Determinism, election (the survival of the fittest) — the whole of Calvinism is there. In place of this we must introduce the idea of the Paternal sovereign.

Fairbairn further found Calvinism to be in essence pantheistic — so absolute was its conception of the immanence of God. He even likened

process theology to mind: 'A theism which makes provision for an increase in knowledge, or wisdom, or power, or holiness, or goodness, or truth, on the part of God, cannot long be held by any intelligent mind. Such theism is suicidal.' *ibid.*, p. 4.

¹²⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

¹²¹ A. M. Fairbairn, *The Place of Christ*, p. 168.

¹²² *ibid.*, p. 431.

¹²³ A. M. Fairbairn, *Proc. ICC*, I, 1891, p. 97.

¹²⁴ *ibid.*, p. 213.

Calvin to Spinoza, quoting the former as affirming the propriety of the pious mind's affirming that 'nature is God'. But, as Watts properly pointed out, Calvin's quoted sentence continues after Fairbairn leaves it, and concludes: 'it is baneful . . . to confound God with the inferior course of His own works'.¹²⁵ Watts is undoubtedly right here, and it is not difficult to find numerous other examples of unscholarly and biased over-statement in Fairbairn. He was not intentionally devious; but he was sometimes carried away by his rhetoric.

Fairbairn's positive concern was to establish the conception of the Fatherhood of God as the basis of Christian theology. He felt that it had been too much employed simply as a solvent of older, 'harsher' views. The outlines of such a theology he endeavoured to sketch in *The Place of Christ in Modern Theology*. He understands Fatherhood as being of the essence of God. But the Fatherhood is sovereign. The two ideas are indissoluble: 'The absolute sovereign without the father is a tyrant, a despot . . . the father without the sovereign is a weakling, a puppet or thing made rather than a maker . . .'¹²⁶ He will not allow that emphasis upon God's Fatherhood makes for undue sentimentality. On the contrary, God is holy, and 'Evil is a more terrible thing to the family than to the state; and so the theology which reduces God's government to one "legal and judicial" "in the proper forensic sense", makes far more light of sin than the theology which conceives it through His sovereign Paternity.'¹²⁷ Indeed, 'sin is the last thing the regal Paternity can be indulgent to: to be merciless to it is a necessity . . . But this very necessity prevents penalty ever becoming merely retributive or retaliatory.'¹²⁸

In similar vein Pope could uphold the doctrine of the wrath of God, and say that 'they who will make to themselves a God in whose nature there is no principle of destruction must close the Bible, and seek elsewhere'.¹²⁹ To younger ministers he wrote,

I put it to you, my Brother, whether the Gentle Father about whom enthusiasts declaim so much is the Very God of the providence of this world of sorrow and of the process of Christ's Redemption. Sin itself is, in this theology, something very

¹²⁵ See *The Place of Christ*, pp. 163-6, and Watts's criticism of the latter, *op. cit.*, pp. 97-98. The reference is to Calvin, *Institute* I v 5.

¹²⁶ A. M. Fairbairn, *The Place of Christ*, p. 435; cf. *Religion in History*, pp. 152, etc.

¹²⁷ *ibid.*, p. 444.

¹²⁸ *ibid.*, p. 467.

¹²⁹ W. B. Pope, 'The Great National Fast', 1866, p. 12; in *The Abiding Word*.

different from the abominable thing God hateth, towards which He is a consuming fire. For my own part, I cannot understand this imaginary Judge to whom appeal is made against Himself. But I do find — though I exceedingly fear and quake at finding — in all the Scriptures a Being whose love and whose holiness are one and equal, and who does not ‘deny Himself’ when He separates the wilful sinner for ever from His presence.¹³⁰

By none of this was Watts appeased. He accused Fairbairn of teaching on one page the contradictory doctrines that men *are* universally God’s sons, and that Christ’s aim was to make them such!¹³¹ He traverses the New Testament in order to show that its writers do not regard sonship as man’s by nature, and in order to underline the disruptive effects of the Fall — on which point Fairbairn is weak. He accuses Fairbairn of pontificating upon how God *must* act, and of excising the penal aspects from the divine punishment. Watts cannot stomach a God who is ever *trying* to save his children — if not here, then in the future state. Such a doctrine undermines that of eternal punishment, and prompts the question, ‘Would the regnant Father not be acting more in accordance with His relations to His sons were He to reform and redeem them *here*, rather than to postpone their reformation till the *future state*?’¹³²

Watts is surely correct in his scriptural exegesis of sonship. But Pope and Fairbairn seem to be nearer the truth in urging that the decree is the wrong place to begin if we would reach a fully Christian understanding of God. *Religiously*, no doubt, no Calvinist does begin with the decree. But so much Calvinistic *theology* has done so that the unscrambling of the ensuing results has necessitated the expenditure of a considerable amount of theological energy which, under more favourable circumstances, could have been more constructively employed.

V

Turning now to the doctrine of the person and work of Christ we find that for Pope, ‘The Divine-human Person of our Lord is the

¹³⁰ W. B. Pope, *A Letter to the Younger Ministers of the Methodist Connexion* (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1878), p. 16; in *The Abiding Word*. cf. *Sermons, Addresses and Charges*, pp. 3-4, 97-8. Watts made the same point in starker terms in his *The Doctrine of Eternal Punishment Vindicated* (Belfast: Mullen, 1877), p. 61.

¹³¹ R. Watts, *Principal Fairbairn’s PCMT*, p. 103. The ref. is to *op. cit.*, p. 48.

¹³² *ibid.*, p. 134.

mystery and the glory of the Christian faith.¹³³ He leaves us in no doubt as to the heart of his doctrine or as to the method he intends to employ in expounding it: 'While I essay to speak of that one undivided and indivisible Person whose "I" unites two natures, fills heaven and earth, and is the glory of the Christian faith, the Holy Ghost will be my sole Teacher, the whole Bible will be my text. All the Bible, I say: for no one passage, no one apostle or prophet, no single book . . . can suffice. Of this the Lord Himself has set the example.'¹³⁴

On this foundation Pope builds his scripturally based defence of the two-nature doctrine of the Person of Christ; affirms the eternal Sonship of Christ; and opposes the kenoticism which was becoming increasingly popular in his day on the ground that it undermines the immutability of God. He does not hesitate to employ the *imitatio Christi* theme, declaring that docetism 'deprives Christ's humble imitators of what is to them their noblest stimulant, the reality of His human example'.¹³⁵ But he never suggests that an example is all that guilty man needs, and he puts the alternatives thus: 'We have to decide between two doctrines concerning the great Reconciliation: one which makes it a Divine expedient for moving upon man's enmity and removing his selfishness by giving him a Divine-Human Exemplar of the evil of sin; and the other which makes it also the revelation of a process of unspeakable mystery in the heart of the Holy Trinity, a reconciliation of God to man rendering possible the reconciliation of man to God: in short, an Atonement in heaven before the Atonement on earth.'¹³⁶ Pope opts decidedly for the latter alternative.

Pope could not follow those who would separate the incarnation from the atonement and divorce Bethlehem from Calvary. Incarnation and atonement are mutually necessary to each other, and both are the work of the undivided Trinity. Again, while maintaining that redemption from sin as such is universal, and distinguishable from the special redemption of the individual, he set his face against the idea that Christ's union with the race entails the redemption of all. To hold such a view would be to 'soften and lower if not destroy the atonement: to open a way of life in which the Cross is not an object of the soul's self-despairing trust, but a symbol of high devotion; a stimulant to holiness,

¹³³ W. B. Pope, *The Person of Christ*, p. 31.

¹³⁴ *ibid.*, p. 2; cf. *Compendium*, I, p. 100.

¹³⁵ *ibid.*, p. 77.

¹³⁶ W. B. Pope, *Letter to Younger Ministers*, p. 15; cf. *The Peculiarities of Methodist Doctrine*, p. 9.

but not a refuge from sin and wrath'.¹³⁷ (At this point a Watts would wonder how an atonement eternally effected by *God* for all could *fail* to save all.)

Pope clearly distinguishes what he presents as the characteristically Methodist position from the sacramentarian and the Calvinist. The former is the position of 'those who hold the vicarious sacrifice of Christ, but limit it in its sovereign and sole efficacy to the original sin of the race, washed away in baptism through the application of the Saviour's merits. For all subsequent transgressions man's own satisfaction must be added to the Saviour's merit. Moreover, the one eternal offering is continued on altars which man has raised and not God . . . On the other side, there is the error of those who . . . make the oblation of Christ an offering in the stead of the individual objects of electing love, in whose place the Redeemer stands, satisfying every demand of justice and law for them alone, and as individuals. In opposition to these, we maintain that the Saviour assumed the place of all mankind; that it was the sin of the race laid upon Him that He voluntarily bore in His own body to the cross; and that His death was the reconciliation of the world as such to God.'¹³⁸ The atonement was made absolutely necessary by the demands of both love and justice: God's 'love provided the sacrifice which His justice demanded'.¹³⁹ It was the acknowledgement of this last point which, more than anything else, brought Arminian and many erstwhile confessional Calvinists together on soteriological questions as the nineteenth century progressed. Fairbairn, for example, emphasises the *love* behind the atonement, and says of Christ that 'the man for whom He died is all mankind'.¹⁴⁰ To such views Watts would not subscribe. He continued to uphold the doctrine of particular redemption, and declared that the sufferings of Christ were required by God, 'whose justice demanded that sin should not go unpunished'.¹⁴¹

It is not easy to square Pope's universalism with his equal insistence upon the special sonship of the people of God. He, however, is prepared to confess the mystery, and to make the test of things — in characteristically Methodist fashion — experimental: 'Speculation

¹³⁷ W. B. Pope, *The Person of Christ*, p. 46; cf. *Compendium*, II, pp. 288, 294, 336, 450; *The Abiding Word*, pp. 18-19; *Sermons, Addresses and Charges*, p. 2; *The Inward Witness*, p. 126.

¹³⁸ W. B. Pope, *The Peculiarities of Methodist Doctrine*, pp. 8-9.

¹³⁹ *ibid.*, p. 9.

¹⁴⁰ A. M. Fairbairn, *Philosophy of Religion*, p. 499; cf. 547.

¹⁴¹ R. Watts, *An Outline of the Calvinistic System*, p. 18.

may carry the election backwards to the Eternal Mind in which all things are already known from the beginning; or forwards to the eternity from which all things are regarded as having already reached their end. But in either direction we are lost if we shape our meditation in formula: such contemplations have no speech nor language for their expression. In the actual life of probation we have to join the Apostle in thanksgiving that we can infer our election from our grace.¹⁴²

The key to Fairbairn's christology and soteriology — indeed, the key to his entire theology — is his understanding of the consciousness of Christ, the main features of which he encompasses thus:

What was most distinctive of Him was His consciousness of God, the kind of God He was conscious of, and the relation He sustained to Him. God was His Father; He was God's Son. What God was to Him He desired Him to be to all men; what He was to God all men ought to be. In Christ's ideal of religion, then, the most material or determinative truth is the conception of God. He appears primarily, not as a God of judgment or justice, but of mercy and grace, the Father of man, who needs not to be appeased, but is gracious, propitious, finds the Propitiator, provides the propitiation. His own Son is the one Sacrifice, Priest, and Mediator, appointed of God to achieve the reconciliation of man. Men are God's sons; filial love is their primary duty, fraternal love their common and equal obligation.¹⁴³

Fairbairn develops his ideas — or, rather, adumbrates his vision — with less detailed exegesis than Pope, and in a manner untrammelled by (indeed, in reaction against) confessional considerations. His Christ is unique: 'He stands alone, a Person without a fellow;¹⁴⁴ and this uniqueness derives from the fact that Christ is the Logos of God, the embodiment of the divine reason which is for ever active in the world. The incarnation is the final manifestation of this Logos: 'We speak of the incarnation of God, but it were more correct to speak of the incarnation of the Word or the Son. Jesus Christ is neither God nor the Godhead incarnate, but He is the incarnate Son of God.'¹⁴⁵ As Son he is identified with mankind; he 'is of a character so universal that He

¹⁴² W. B. Pope, *The Prayers of St. Paul* (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1876), p. 76.

¹⁴³ A. M. Fairbairn, *The Place of Christ*, p. 48.

¹⁴⁴ A. M. Fairbairn, *The City of God*, p. 217.

¹⁴⁵ A. M. Fairbairn, *The Place of Christ*, p. 479.

can only be described as the Man, of a nature so humane that He is to us as realized humanity'.¹⁴⁶

Fairbairn's Christ came to 'save the soul from personal and the race from collective sin'.¹⁴⁷ This entails both judging the sin and loving the sinner; and God's judgments are 'not merely retributory or retaliatory, penal or vindictive, in the judicial sense, but they are corrective, reclamatory, disciplinary'.¹⁴⁸ As for God, from the work of Christ we learn of his passibility. Indeed, 'Theology has no falser idea than that of the impassibility of God. If He is capable of sorrow, He is capable of suffering; and were He without the capacity for either, He would be without any feeling of the evil of sin or the misery of man.'¹⁴⁹ God's very suffering prompts him to go to the uttermost lengths in making atonement. It is not that apart from a propitiatory sacrifice he could not be moved to mercy; it is that given the Fatherhood, the atonement was inevitable. The atonement provided satisfied both the love and the righteousness of God. His ultimate purpose in atonement is consistent with his regal Paternity, and it is that there shall be created a dutiful universe, and a new humanity of which Christ is the Head.¹⁵⁰

Watts painstakingly applied his scalpel to Fairbairn's position. He accuses Fairbairn of saying both that God does not need to be appeased, and that He nevertheless provides a propitiation.¹⁵¹ Undoubtedly Fairbairn does write carelessly in the extended quotation just given; and Watts (uncharitably) overlooks other sentences in which Fairbairn writes more circumspectly. What Fairbairn was anxious to maintain was that God does not need to be appeased in order to make him loving. He should not have said, however, that the God of righteousness needs no propitiation, and yet provides one.

Watts further complains that Fairbairn will not admit that Christ's death has reference to the moral law. This is not true, and Watts suppresses the fact that when Fairbairn writes, 'His death was not the vindication, but the condemnation of the law,'¹⁵² the law to which

¹⁴⁶ A. M. Fairbairn, *Studies in the Life of Christ*, p. 57; cf. *Philosophy of Religion*, p. 93; *The City of God*, pp. 219ff. etc.

¹⁴⁷ A. M. Fairbairn, *The Place of Christ*, p. 479.

¹⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p. 482.

¹⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p. 483.

¹⁵⁰ See *ibid.*, pp. 483-7; cf. *Philosophy of Religion*, p. 500; *Religion in History*, pp. 165-6; etc.

¹⁵¹ R. Watts, *Principal Fairbairn's PCMT*, p. 85. The ref. is to *op. cit.*, p. 84.

¹⁵² *ibid.*, p. 86; cf. *The Place of Christ*, p. 481.

Fairbairn refers to the Jewish ceremonial law. He also overlooks the fact that the passage contains the further advice, 'The language which describes His relation to it [i.e. to the ceremonial law] and its to Him cannot be used to describe His relation to the absolute law or righteousness of God.'

Watts is on safer ground when he criticises Fairbairn's undeniably selective understanding of the consciousness of Christ. To Watts and, as he believes, to the scriptures, the problem in attempting to recover the historic Christ 'is not simply the recovery of His sonship and its correlate as presented in the Divine fatherhood, but the recovery of the historic embassy of the Son as the administrator of the Father's will'.¹⁵³ The moral is (and it is one to which, as we saw, Pope subscribed): 'The contents of the Divine revelation are not to be measured by, or limited to, the contents of the individual personal consciousness of our Redeemer, but must be regarded as co-extensive with all that He made known in person and all that He communicated through His servants, the prophets, under the Old Testament, and through apostles and evangelists under the New.'¹⁵⁴ He proceeds to argue that 'Election, definite substitutionary atonement, effectual calling, the perseverance of the saints and their final glorification . . . are all there [i.e. in the consciousness of Christ], and as clearly expressed and as strongly emphasised as in the Epistles of Paul.'¹⁵⁵

Watts insists that although Christ *is* the Son, men are not sons of God *qua* men. Fairbairn minimises the effects of the Fall, he overlooks Christ's references to those who are outside the Kingdom, and in declaring that Christ has 'left the mark of His hand on every generation of *civilised* men that has lived since He lived',¹⁵⁶ he subverts his own theory. Watts prefers an '*O altitudo!*' to Fairbairn's acceptance of a universal Fatherhood which yet deprives millions of members of the human family of the touch of Christ's mediatorial hand;¹⁵⁷ and he strongly objects to the idea that God was under a moral necessity to save all sinners. This view, he thinks, makes nonsense of grace, and he criticised Horace Bushnell no less severely than Fairbairn for appearing to think otherwise.¹⁵⁸ Not only is the suggestion unscriptural

¹⁵³ *ibid.*, p. 92.

¹⁵⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 92-3.

¹⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p. 101; cf. p. vii.

¹⁵⁶ *The Place of Christ*, p. 6 (our ital.); cf. Watts, *Principal Fairbairn's PCMT*, pp. 119-20.

¹⁵⁷ R. Watts, *Principal Fairbairn's PCMT*, p. 121.

¹⁵⁸ For his detailed critique of Bushnell see *The New Apologetic*, chap. X. For the lapses of Dods and Bruce see *ibid.*, *passim*; Albert Barnes's Arminianism is trounced in chap. IX; and Henry Drummond's *The Greatest Thing in the World* is weighed and found wanting in chap. XII.

tural, it is also quite out of accord with the believer's experience: 'No one who has experienced the spiritual agony incident to a thorough conviction of sin ever imagines that God is under a moral necessity to pardon him, and restore him to His favour.'¹⁵⁹

It remains only to add that Watts justly finds that Fairbairn is ambiguous on kenoticism, himself averring that the veiling of a divine attribute does not involve the excision of it. On the last page of his critique he commends Fairbairn for his excellent remarks on Rome and Newman's 'surrender', but his over-all verdict is sepulchral: 'Oxford, if we are to judge by its philosophical and theological issues, such as "*Lux Mundi*?" and the present volume, is not the school in which to study either philosophy or theology.'¹⁶⁰

Watts did not expound his christology and soteriology positively and at length, but his views may be inferred from the above criticisms, and also found in the Westminster Confession. In a nutshell, Adam is the federal head of the race; Christ is the federal head of his people. God has pledged himself in covenant to his people, and a two-fold imputation results from this fact: the sins of those embraced in the covenant were imputed to Christ, and his righteousness is imputed to them. Calvinists, therefore, 'believe in the doctrine of a *real*, definite atonement, by which all the sins of those represented by Christ have been expiated, and their eternal redemption *secured*'.¹⁶¹

But to return to the main area of Watts's controversy with Fairbairn: Watts would not tolerate the subordination of God's sovereignty to his Fatherhood; and despite all the talk about Paternal sovereignty, this, he felt, was where Fairbairn's route led. The point emerges starkly in Watts' discussion of the eternity of punishment. By means of punishment satisfaction is rendered to God's outraged justice: 'Punishment . . . and those upon whom it is inflicted, lie outside the pale of benevolence; and it is simply a confusion of attributes which are, as to their objects and spheres, fundamentally distinct and diverse, to represent the Judge of all the earth as acting under the impulses of love in the infliction of penal suffering upon all his enemies . . . The claims of truth and righteousness take precedence of those which pertain to benevolence.'¹⁶² It is hard at times not to believe that what we have as between Watts and Fairbairn is not simply two different

¹⁵⁹ R. Watts, *Principal Fairbairn's PCMT*, p. 146.

¹⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p. 147.

¹⁶¹ R. Watts, *An Outline of the Calvinistic System*, p. 17.

¹⁶² R. Watts, *The Doctrine of Eternal Punishment*, p. 18.

theories, but two different gods. Nevertheless, Watts can still affirm the centrality of the cross — indeed, he places it above the incarnation in importance;¹⁶³ and this is consistent with the implicit infralapsarianism which he pits against Fairbairn's view that Christ would have become incarnate even if man had not sinned.

VI

Although Watts and Fairbairn were by no means silent on the work of God the Holy Spirit, it is Pope who writes most fully — and, as elsewhere, most exegetically and systematically — upon it. Nor was it simply that Pope sought to produce a balanced theological system. He ever regarded himself as an enunciator of Methodist distinctives,¹⁶⁴ and the themes of sanctification, assurance and holiness, on which Methodism has traditionally laid so much emphasis, are crucial to any pneumatology. Our necessarily selective comments will elucidate Pope's general position.

Pope early learned to think in terms of the correlativity of adoption and regeneration (whereas his teacher, Dr John Hannah, whom he revered, regarded the former as taking precedence¹⁶⁵). At his Hoxton [Wesleyan] College entrance examination Pope felt that he had given the 'wrong' answer on this subject, but afterwards wrote, 'The question occurs to me, How could God adopt an unregenerate man?'¹⁶⁶ The entire Trinity is involved in the work of regeneration, but the Holy Spirit is the specific agent of it.¹⁶⁷ With this Watts was in entire agreement, but at the point at which regeneration bears upon effectual calling, he differs. With reference to Calvinists, Watts writes:

Believing that the sinner cannot receive the things of the Spirit of God, or know them, but that he will, on the contrary, because of his blindness of mind and hardness of heart, regard them as foolishness, they teach that, in order to his apprehending the things of God, he must be born again. Hence they regard regeneration as a fundamental change which precedes the

¹⁶³ cf. e.g. *The New Apologetic*, pp. 199ff.

¹⁶⁴ His biographer remarks with regard to Pope's honorary Edinburgh D.D., 'He viewed the tribute as paid to him, because he was in some sense an exponent of Methodist theology . . .' R. Waddy Moss, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

¹⁶⁵ See John Hannah, *Introductory Lectures on the Study of Christian Theology* (London: Wesleyan Conference Office), 2nd edn. with a memoir by Pope, 1875, pp. 352, 358.

¹⁶⁶ R. Waddy Moss, *op. cit.*, p. 24; cf. *The Inward Witness*, p. 268.

¹⁶⁷ W. B. Pope, *Compendium*, III, pp. 5ff.

existence and exercise of both faith and repentance. They hold, that neither in this change, nor prior to it, is there any co-operating activity of the soul; but that the soul is absolutely dead in trespasses and sins, and opposed to all that is good. This change, they hold, is absolutely the result of the action of the Holy Ghost *immediately* upon the soul, whereby He creates it anew and implants a new moral *habitus*, or principle of action.¹⁶⁸

For Pope, on the other hand, the call of God is 'effectual through the Spirit's grace to all who yield';¹⁶⁹ and election may be forfeited. We have here, then, the denial of the doctrines of irresistible grace and of the perseverance of the saints. As to the former, Pope was entirely correct in thinking that the term 'irresistible' can be and has been employed in such a way as to suggest that God is harshly coercive in his dealings with men. It need not be so employed, however, and Calvinists are able to speak of the Father's drawing in the tenderest of terms.¹⁷⁰

Positively, Pope wishes to maintain the necessity of man's co-operation with God both in the reception of salvation, and (against antinomianism) throughout the Christian life. It is thus 'a great mistake to think that He takes the case of His predestined elect into His own hands absolutely, and holds Himself responsible at all hazards for their final salvation'.¹⁷¹ He can even say that the Holy Spirit 'is powerless where the human energy is not put forth in co-operation with him'.¹⁷² We can almost hear Watts's indignant protest against a God who desires to save, but who is unable to do so unless we deign to assist him. In fact he made the point strongly against Robertson Smith, whose understanding of the method of grace, he thought at first, was Socinian in that 'The only obstacle in the way of forgiveness . . . is subjective;' but he then realised that Smith's position was worse than that of Socinus, for the Scot seemed to have no need of the Holy Spirit even to produce the requisite subjective state.¹⁷³

Pope elsewhere partially draws the sting of such a charge by observing, 'What we do in the power of God is no other than the work of God within us, Who fulfils His own promises through our

¹⁶⁸ R. Watts, *An Outline of the Calvinistic System*, p. 19; cf. *The Rule of Faith*, p. 32.

¹⁶⁹ W. B. Pope, *Compendium*, II, p. 340.

¹⁷⁰ As in the sermon, 'The Father's Drawing', by John Kennedy of Dingwall; reprinted Gisborne (N.Z.: Westminster Standard, n.d.).

¹⁷¹ W. B. Pope, *Sermons, Addresses and Charges*, p. 94; cf. p. 216.

¹⁷² *ibid.*, pp. 266-7; cf. *Compendium*, III, p. 40.

¹⁷³ R. Watts, *The Newer Criticism*, pp. 140-141.

instrumentality; and what the power of God accomplishes through our energies exerted in faith is counted by Him our own act.¹⁷⁴ On the question of perseverance, however, Pope did not modify his position, and we cannot but feel that he leaves us with ambiguity. He writes: 'Provision is made in the Christian covenant for the maintenance of religion in the soul to the end. The source of this grace is the effectual intercession of Christ, caring for His own. The manifestation of it is the all-sufficient power of the Holy Spirit; in its nature and operation it is superabundant and persistent; not indefectible however, but conditional on perseverance in fidelity.'¹⁷⁵ Does this mean that Christ's intercessions may not succeed, or that what is claimed to be the all-sufficient power of the Spirit may or may not be all-sufficient in the last resort? Pope's motive throughout is to underline the importance of perseverance as an ethical duty. In Calvinism it is, rather, a grace which God bestows in order to the fulfilment of his purpose in election — a purpose which cannot but succeed, since God is God. Pope accurately observes that the Calvinistic view of perseverance is linked to the notion of predestination to life concerning which he roundly declares, 'Foreordination or predestination to life is not a scriptural idea: we are foreordained only *to be conformed to the image of His Son*; and that not in the future only, though then preeminently.'¹⁷⁶ Pope cannot accept the federal theology with its accompaniment of the limited atonement; and Fairbairn too was all for replacing what he took to be the contractual legalism of covenant theology with the imagery of the home. Watts, however, would not have been able to understand a salvation of the race, based on a universal covenant made between Father and Son, which then required the qualification which Pope spells out thus: 'inasmuch as the entire race is not saved, the probation of all is the test of each, assurance is only of present salvation, and perseverance is a grace or virtue of religion on which final acceptance depends, humanly speaking, as a condition.'¹⁷⁷

It is not easy to square Pope's objection to perseverance (Calvinistically conceived) with his doctrine of entire sanctification. He rightly denies that Christian perfection implies a new visitation of the Spirit distinct from, and additional to the state of conversion. He holds that

¹⁷⁴ W. B. Pope, *The Inward Witness*, p. 224.

¹⁷⁵ W. B. Pope, *Compendium*, III, p. 131; cf. *The Peculiarities of Methodist Doctrine*, p. 14: 'Final perseverance is a grace, an ethical privilege, the result of probationary diligence under grace; but not an assured provision of the covenant of redemption.'

¹⁷⁶ W. B. Pope, *A Higher Catechism of Theology* (London: Woolmer, 1883), pp. 289-90.

¹⁷⁷ *ibid.*, p. 286.

retrospectively, perfection is accomplished when individuals are saved. That is, believers are washed of their guilt, and consecrated to the Lord. But they are also 'complete in Christ, according to the foreknowledge of God: in the Divine intention the saving process has already reached its end'.¹⁷⁸ At this point Watts would interject: 'Can a saving process be complete in the divine intention and yet fail because of recalcitrant men? If *God* foreknows an outcome, how can it not come to pass?' — especially if, as seems to be the case, Pope agrees with Paul that 'Confirmation in holiness of heart is the immediate result of abounding love: unblamable holiness is the result as connected with the coming of Christ; and establishment in that perfection of perfect and blameless love is the eternal result.'¹⁷⁹

Prospectively, entire sanctification is a process which requires the active participation of the believer. But when he has done all, the believer has no room for boasting. Even Paul regarded himself as the chief of sinners. Above all, entire sanctification cannot be attained out of Christ. It is not for the unregenerate. The regenerate, however, may enjoy assurance, the full confidence of salvation, both because, objectively, the work of redemption has been done, and because, subjectively, the Holy Spirit has brought that fact home to their hearts.¹⁸⁰ Such an assurance is far removed from 'a mystical assurance that is quite independent of the means of grace';¹⁸¹ and it is equally far from dependence upon priestly absolution.

VII

We have reviewed the main points of comparison and contrast as between Pope, Watts and Fairbairn. We have found them at one on the mutual compatibility of faith and reason, and in at least some of their responses to the intellectual climate of their day. They part company, however, on the issue of the foundation of the Christian theological system, Watts and Pope standing closer to each other than either does to Fairbairn. This contrast works itself out in different, and sometimes mutually contradictory emphases in doctrine; though as the work of Watts and Pope shows, a more or less agreed approach to the

¹⁷⁸ W. B. Pope, *The Prayers of St. Paul*, p. 124.

¹⁷⁹ *ibid.*, p. 112.

¹⁸⁰ W. B. Pope, *Compendium*, III, p. 113; cf. *Higher Catechism*, pp. 279-83.

¹⁸¹ W. B. Pope, *Discourses: Chiefly on the Lordship of the Incarnate Redeemer* (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 3rd edn., 1880), p. 319; cf. *The Person of Christ*, p. 68: Christ is no absent Head.

nature and authority of scripture by no means guarantees identity at all points in the systems distilled therefrom.

Our three divines wrote on many more topics than we have been able to cover. Watts did battle with some whose names are scarcely known today; Fairbairn had a happy way of illuminating themes in the history of doctrine with broad brush strokes; and Pope had much to say concerning the ethics of redemption. Pope, too, emphasised the sacraments more than the others: this is in keeping with his temperament. In terms of both emotional sympathy and range of scholarship he was the most catholic of our three. To him the communion elements are 'pledges of [the Saviour's] real presence among His people to the end of time',¹⁸² and the Lord's Supper is the occasion of joyous and sacred commemoration of the past, of sacramental communion in the present, and of an avowal of faith and hope in the Lord's return.

What Pope, Watts and Fairbairn equally abhorred was sacerdotalism. Fairbairn wrote repeatedly and at length on this theme, declaring, 'The supreme moment of worship is not, as the Roman Catholic fables, when the elements are consecrated or the host elevated; but it is when the man possessed of God speaks of the God who possesses him.'¹⁸³ His ultimate ground was that 'Christ . . . called no disciple a priest, endowed none with priestly functions; made His collective society a holy and spiritual priesthood, but did not equip it with any priestly class'.¹⁸⁴ Certainly, he could never subscribe to the view that the clergy were the essential feature of the Church of Christ, apart from whose consecrating work there could be no full sacraments.¹⁸⁵ His final verdict was, 'The rise of the sacerdotal orders marks a long descent from the Apostolic age, but is certainly no thing of Apostolic descent,'¹⁸⁶ and his positive doctrine is summed up in these words: 'The Church is constituted by God in Christ, and is composed of "the called", "the saints", the men of love and peace. To it no priest is necessary, or his "instruments of grace"; grace is the direct gift of

¹⁸² *ibid.*, pp. 321-2.

¹⁸³ A. M. Fairbairn in *The Examiner*; quoted by W. B. Selbie, *op. cit.*, p. 209n. Fairbairn's view was confirmed by his experience that 'the best people I have ever known were by no means clerically-minded, or put faith in a priest, or in the actions and attitudes of a priestly body standing between God and man'. See 'Experience in Theology', pp. 556-7.

¹⁸⁴ A. M. Fairbairn, *Studies in Religion and Theology*, p. 31; cf. *Catholicism*, pp. 29, 346; W. B. Pope, *The Methodist Local Preacher*, 1879, p. 9; in *The Abiding Word*.

¹⁸⁵ A. M. Fairbairn, *Catholicism*, p. 328.

¹⁸⁶ A. M. Fairbairn, *The Place of Christ*, p. 534.

Christ; what fills the body is His Spirit; what moves, unites, and enlarges it is His love.¹⁸⁷

How shall we sum up? Watts is the doughty defender of the faith. He knows that there is something to be conserved from age to age, and he is quite sure what it is. He sallies forth, wielding often-devastating logical weapons, though he does not always completely enumerate the checks and balances in his opponents' positions. If at times we feel that he is battling with giants whose ghosts no longer torment us, at other times, and supremely in connection with biblical authority, we feel that he is addressing himself to an issue which is still very much alive.¹⁸⁸

The description of Pope as 'pre-eminently *the* Methodist theologian of the nineteenth century'¹⁸⁹ is accurate, and even today the last four words could be omitted without injustice to anyone else. He is the warmly devotional exegete, who brings from the store of scripture things new and old, and builds them into an impressive system. He does not share Watts's delight in controversy, but he can impressively defend the faith against naturalism and other foes in a sweetly reasonable way when he feels impelled to do so. He is able to be grateful for certain features of Calvinism, and was wary of 'those superficial views in which Arminianism has receded too far from its antagonist'.¹⁹⁰

Fairbairn is the prophet, the visionary, the social seer. He speaks to his time, and simultaneously looks beyond it to a yet more glorious time. Liberated himself, he desires to free others who are bound by outmoded theologies, or imprisoned within constricting ecclesiastical structures. His exegesis is not always sound; he leaves no nicely turned system; and, because our hindsight enables us to see both the now-failed liberal reductions of the gospel which Fairbairn, however unwittingly, facilitated, and the hermeneutical problems which cannot but influence any quest of the consciousness of Christ, he sounds, for all his forward-looking, the most oddly dated of our three theologians. His sometimes pontificating verbosity appeals no more

¹⁸⁷ *ibid.*, p. 527.

¹⁸⁸ We think especially of the increasingly vociferous debate on inerrancy. See e.g. *God's Inerrant Word*, (ed.) John Warwick Montgomery (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1974); Harold Lindsell, *The Battle for the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976); the new journal *Foundations*, published by the British Evangelical Council; the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy; the Evangelical Theological Society (see its *Journal*).

¹⁸⁹ Brash and Wright, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

¹⁹⁰ W. B. Pope, *The Peculiarities of Methodist Doctrine*, p. 8. John Wesley's remark that his position touched the very borders of Calvinism comes to mind.

now than it did to some in his own day.¹⁹¹ On the other hand, the emphasis of both Pope and Fairbairn upon the holy love of the sovereign God, over against the idea of the eternally worked-out contractual salvific procedure, was undoubtedly of value as according priority to grace.

Of the three, it is Pope who can still *feed* us most. 'Generally speaking,' he said, 'there might seem to be a certain contrariety between theological teaching and the utterance of devotion.'¹⁹² (What would he have said of some of today's theologians, who seem to have outgrown the need of the Church?) Pope found no such dichotomy in the Bible; and when it comes to the best kind of devotional, yet intensely theological, testimony, perhaps our Englishman, Irishman and Scotsman would find themselves in accord. Pope wrote:

Grace is in God the lovingkindness which rests freely upon man, as an object deserving nothing; the favour which goes out towards him as guilty and deserving displeasure . . . That same grace, as looking upon the misery of man bearing the consequences of his sin, and as applying the means of recovery, is mercy. And that same mercy and grace are peace in God, when the atonement provided by grace, and offered by mercy to justice, is regarded as having produced in the Divine Being Himself the propitiatory effect: reconciliation to the world or peace for man. The fountain is open in Zion for sin and uncleanness only because the fountain is open in God above: an infinite fountain of grace or favour towards the sinful race, of mercy for the sorrows and miseries of all transgressors, and of the peace of pardon for every penitent suppliant for salvation.¹⁹³

¹⁹¹ For example, James Denney, Fairbairn's shrewd fellow Scot, generally welcomed *Philosophy of Religion*, but said, 'There is a great deal of verbosity and repetition, and it seems impossible for him to be simple and concise.' See T. H. Darlow, *William Robertson Nicoll* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1925), p. 352, quoting a letter of Denney to Nicoll dated 17.5.1902. Denney's verdict on *The Place of Christ* was that 'with all his strenuousness he does not leave on one the impression of solidity'. See *Letters of Principal James Denney to W. Robertson Nicoll, 1893-1917* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1920), p. 4. More recently Willis B. Glover has branded Fairbairn a 'pompous windbag'. See his *Evangelical Nonconformists and Higher Criticism in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Independent Press, 1954), p. 154. On the other hand some distinguished scholars of the succeeding generation gladly acknowledged their debt to Fairbairn. See e.g. E. C. Moore, *Christian Thought Since Kant* (London: Duckworth, 1912), pp. 236-7; Leslie S. Peake, *Arthur Samuel Peake, A Memoir* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1930), pp. 76-8; John T. Wilkinson, *Arthur Samuel Peake, A Biography* (London: Epworth, 1971), pp. 26-7, 36, 74-5; Ernest A. Payne, *Henry Wheeler Robinson* (London: Nisbet, 1946), p. 32.

¹⁹² W. B. Pope, *The Prayers of St. Paul*, p. 13.

¹⁹³ *ibid.*, p. 54.

This being so, it is not, *prima facie*, more unlikely that Arminians, Calvinists and liberals shall ultimately consort together in the Kingdom, than that the wolf shall dwell with the lamb.

VIII

It will by now be clear that we are not among those who spurn the allegedly antiquarian in deference to the allegedly relevant. The effort to view currents of thought in a period of theological transition is worthwhile in its own right. We have considered three theological giants of nonconformity's (quantitative) hey-day, and have attempted to state and to weigh some of the themes treated in their voluminous and increasingly scarce books. We may thus have rendered an historical service. But we may also have done more. At the outset we envisaged the possibility that some of the philosophico-theological issues which challenge contemporary theology have their roots, if not their final solutions, in the days of Pope, Watts and Fairbairn. The following is a random selection of the evidence now to hand:

Pope, Watts and Fairbairn raise the question, as yet unresolved, of the relations between reason, revelation and experience. They approach the question of authority — which is still with us — in relation to the Bible (and it is not difficult to see Pope, Watts and Fairbairn as types of those currently engaged in the biblical inerrancy debate); in relation to the doctrine of development (in our time to be dealt with in an ecumenical context); and in relation to the Spirit. They exemplify the Calvinist-Arminian debate which was not so much brought to a conclusion as overtaken by other interests — at least as far as professional theology was concerned.¹⁹⁴ But is not the question, 'Who is doing what in the matter of man's salvation?' sufficiently important in Christian proclamation to warrant careful, unhysterical, renewed consideration?

Again, is not Pope's emphasis on the necessity of holding the incarnation and the atonement together salutary in face of idealised views of the former which suggest that the Christ having *come*, and being victorious, our divinisation is somehow automatic — an approach which seems to grant us the eschatological 'now' whilst robbing us of the eschatological 'not yet'? So we could go on. But enough has been said to show that Pope, Watts and Fairbairn do more

¹⁹⁴ See A. P. F. Sell, *The Great Debate: Calvinism, Arminianism and Salvation* (Worthing: H. E. Walter, 1982; Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983).

than provide an insight into their theological times: they recall us to our own theological agenda. Our title may have sounded like the beginning of a joke — but it wasn't.

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