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RENEWED CONFIDENCE IN THE GOSPEL

The Christological Problem of  
History and Revelation in the Writings  
of H R Mackintosh

by

The Reverend Jack Holt B Sc BD

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of

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Approved by \_\_\_\_\_  
Chairperson of Supervisory Committee

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ABSTRACT

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Chairperson of the Supervisory Committee:

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It was in 1984 that I graduated with an Honours Degree in Divinity from Glasgow University. I continued my studies by attempting a Master of Theology in the two disciplines of Systematic Theology and New Testament Studies that I majored in for the BD. However, a new parish and a new family soon filled my available time and I did not complete what I started. In 2004 I passed my 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary in the ordained ministry, which is not usually of significance except that, for me, it was the half-way marker from my retirement. I felt it was important to try and do something mid-point to renew my interest in theology. My interest in my two subjects continued through Christology and the New Testament pursuit for the Historical Jesus.

I wish to acknowledge first, my surprise, and then, my thanks, to Prof. George Newlands. Surprise, because he was assigned as my Supervisor 20 years ago on my first attempt. Second, thanks, for steering my thinking upon a wide-ranging subject towards a source I would not naturally have chosen, and for his guidance and support throughout the process. I owe my wife, Sandra, a debt of gratitude as my editor of the finished work and for her constant encouragement when work and family circumstances threatened to undermine my willingness to keep finding the time. Finally, my dad, also Jack Holt, died during the second year of my research, which means this is the first work of substance in my life that he has not witnessed and acknowledged with his usual pride. I dedicate this work to his memory and to my mum, Margaret, whose fortitude and hope in living without him also renewed my confidence in the gospel.

## INTRODUCTION

I write this paper as a parish minister of the Church of Scotland, ordained for twenty years, committed to weekly preaching based on the Bible readings from the authorised Lectionary. In this capacity I have used commentaries in my preparation and through them have become aware, especially in relation to the gospels, of the various problems scholars have encountered as they subject these documents to the historical critical method of interpretation.

At the same time I have always had an interest, throughout my ministry, in that strand of biblical and theological thought encapsulated in the title, 'The Quest for the Historical Jesus'. Books ranging from Gunther Bornkamm's *Jesus of Nazareth*, Gerd Theissen's *The Shadow of the Galilean* and Edward Schillebeeckx's *Jesus* to John Meier's *A Marginal Jew*, E P Sanders' *Jesus and Judaism*, and N T Wright's multi-volume work, *The New Testament and the People of God*, *Jesus and the Victory of God* and *The Resurrection of the Son of God*.

What both the commentaries and my wider reading suggested to me, with various degrees of certainty, was that if I stood up in a pulpit and preached out of the gospels as they are now found in the Bible, I was guilty of presenting people with a false view of Jesus.

The commentaries use Form Criticism, Source Criticism, Redaction Criticism, and the other tools and apparatus of scholarship, to inform the reader. They



suggest what Jesus did do or say, and what he did not do or say. They highlight the many contradictory elements within the parallel accounts and explain how the theological bias of the author or the contemporary circumstances of their community has influenced and shaped their use of the material. No commentary ever says, 'Just take it as read.'

In the books mentioned, and in many others, the problems facing the serious historian trying to explore behind the paltry sources to 'what actually happened', is explained at length. What the historian needs is not contained in these sources, and what the historian must ignore, as outside their province, is all too ready at hand in tales of miraculous birth and resurrection from the dead. Though we now have access to a greater understanding of first century Palestine through the work of related disciplines, and a greater sophistication in the understanding and use of the languages involved, and can apply a delicate finesse in the use of the literary tools, still a Jesus who can be universally accepted as having lived a particular life is beyond reach.

Nevertheless on one point all the books agree. The Jesus presented by the gospels is not the real Jesus, the one who, if we could have had him taped and videoed, lived in history.

As a minister and preacher one lives with the tension between the consensus of scholarship - that one must be sceptical about the gospels when it comes to

discovering the truth about Jesus - and the weekly practice of public worship. Week by week in the church these gospels are read, as they are, to people, the vast majority of whom are not only ignorant of what scholarship says, but also of the gospel which they are hearing. For they only hear it in fragments, torn from the context of the whole, and in this day and age are not likely to be reading it for themselves at home in any regular pattern.

And these people are believers, or seekers. They are not simply listening to history, but believe that the person of Jesus is alive and present. They are not hearing about a figure from the past out of polite interest, but to know the figure they have come to accept as Saviour and Lord is with them in the present day. What they need to hear from the preaching of the gospel is how the words and deeds of the person set in his own time, become relevant to them in their own time.

For this preaching to have effect the preacher must have confidence in the gospels rather than scepticism about them. But such a stance today has the ring of fundamentalism about it; a crude literalism that treats the Bible as though it were not so much 'breathed out' by God but typed on the divine word processor. It would be to stand like King Canute against the prevailing tide of scholarship over the past one hundred years, vainly trying to turn it back to a time before the ascendancy of reason.

Yet even behind these statements there is another essential question: is it Jesus, the Jesus that lived, that one is meant to be preaching? Is it not another figure the people need to meet, namely, the risen exalted Christ? For the majority of people who did meet Jesus in his historical existence found him to be many things, but the revealer of God was not one of them. Is the biblical record not that of a written witness to the faith of those who experienced Jesus both in life *and beyond*, and who proclaimed that Jesus was the Christ? But surely more than knowing history is at work here?

Enter H R Mackintosh. There are many reasons for choosing to examine the issues through the writings and teaching of this now sadly overlooked scholar. Redman, who recognises his world-wide reputation as a theologian known to and read by pastors, scholars and lay-people alike, wrote that could now be said of Mackintosh what he had once said about Ritschl,

“He is today behind a passing cloud too near for appreciation and too far away for gratitude.”<sup>1</sup>

First, he was a Scot, a minister of the Church of Scotland, and a considerable influence on generations of men (and it was only men in those days) who shared that vocation. Above all, he remained a preacher of the gospel. It is

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<sup>1</sup> Redman (1997) p1

stated that he “rejoiced to preach 48 Sundays out of 52.”<sup>2</sup> Therefore, he was not “concerned for the abstract, philosophical and technical points of theology. But the way in which doctrine lays the foundation for pulpit ministry.”<sup>3</sup> He was fond of saying, “what cannot be preached ought not to be believed.”<sup>4</sup>

As one whose interest in Christology is primarily motivated by the vocational ministry, I will seek to examine the issues through the theological thinking of a man motivated by similar concerns.

Secondly, he was writing at a time when the early pioneers of the historical critical method had laid down the foundations for much of what is now almost universally accepted by scholarship. But Mackintosh lived at a time when the work of these men was still open to criticism, treated as mere ideas rather than irrefutable truths. He was not bound to accept that the gospels must be interpreted by the historical critical method. He retained a confidence in the gospels because he believed that, *as they are*, they were vehicles through which the historical revelation of God in Jesus Christ was conveyed to people in each succeeding generation. He was convinced that in the gospels people met the real Jesus, the Jesus that mattered, the Jesus that created in people faith in God.

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<sup>2</sup> Redman (1996) p201.

<sup>3</sup> Redman (1996) p201.

<sup>4</sup> Redman (1996) p201.

As someone who was theologically trained in the methods of historical criticism, I want to be exposed to the views of a theologian who was not in awe of what these methods could achieve, yet did not seek to dismiss this work as irrelevant, nor diminish its results.

Thirdly, and in contrast, Mackintosh was no fundamentalist or theological Luddite. An erudite man, grounded in philosophy and widely read in contemporary German theology<sup>5</sup> he was well able to express the issues that arose from taking this position and to defend them against the arguments of others. And central to that confidence was the recognition of a uniquely difficult problem peculiar to Christianity “of Revelation and History and their relations to each other.”<sup>6</sup> Mackintosh in his writings explores this problem, and the other issues relating to it.

This thesis will examine Mackintosh’s understanding of history and revelation and what he considers to be the relationship between them. It will test his confidence in the gospels enquiring if such confidence can still be held today. Can the preacher have integrity in presenting Jesus without being too heavily reliant upon the results of historical criticism? On the other hand, would Mackintosh be taking the same position if he were writing today? I want to

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<sup>5</sup> See the next chapter for details. “The many reviews of foreign theology in *The Expositor Times* reveal the breadth and depth of his familiarity with the diverse German theological scene.” Redman (1997) p4.

<sup>6</sup> Mackintosh (1937) p179

investigate if Mackintosh's arguments still stand today, or whether they belong firmly in the past, made obsolete by the scholarship and historical developments of the interceding decades.

My intention is first to set Mackintosh within his historic context, as considerable changes have taken place in the world and theological thinking since his death. His name rarely appears in surveys of 20<sup>th</sup> century theological thinking<sup>7</sup>, books written specifically about him are few<sup>8</sup>, and so present day readers may be unfamiliar with the man and his work.

Next will be a statement about the specific areas for study. It is not my intention to give an overview of the totality of Mackintosh's theology. Rather there is an area of Christology that I am interested in exploring and to bring Mackintosh's thoughts about these matters to bear upon that discussion. Without pre-empting the content of that chapter I intend to narrow the field to the areas of the Bible, History, Revelation and the Holy Spirit.

The next four chapters will look at Mackintosh's writings in relation to these four areas. As Mackintosh did not write any books directly relating to these areas, his thought has to be gleaned as he touches upon these matters in relation to other topics. Following an overview of his thought, a critical

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<sup>7</sup> Biographical outlines are to be found in certain reference works, such as Hart (2000). The article is written by John L. McPake who used a contrast of Mackintosh and Barth as the basis of his doctorate.

assessment will be made as to whether his theology has stood the test of time, and remains valid and useful in helping the modern day preacher have confidence in the gospel.

Finally I will draw together these various strands and present my conclusions as to whether Mackintosh's confidence in the gospel remains well founded.

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\* The only two known to the present author, beyond references in journal articles, were Leitch (1952) and Redman (1997).

## Chapter 2

### SETTING H R MACKINTOSH IN HIS HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The facts of Mackintosh's life can be found in various places.<sup>9</sup> Hugh Ross Mackintosh was born in Paisley on 31 October 1870, the fourth child of Janet Ross and Alexander Mackintosh, a Gaelic-speaking minister of the Free Church serving in the Gaelic Free Church in Paisley. Both his parents died in 1880, when he was 10 years old, and he was brought up by an aunt and uncle at Edderton in Ross-shire, where his uncle was also a minister of the Free Church.

Mackintosh demonstrated his intelligence from an early age, *dux* of Tain Royal Academy at sixteen, then distinguishing himself at George Watson's College, Edinburgh. He read at Edinburgh University gaining a first in philosophy (and the Ferguson scholarship, 1893) and a second in classics. While reading philosophy he was taught by Professor Andrew Seth Pringle-Pattison (1856-1931) whose Personal Idealism<sup>10</sup> was to greatly influence Mackintosh's later theology.

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<sup>9</sup> Much of the material in this chapter is based on information obtained from articles in Dictionaries, the book by Leitch (1952) and the book and article by Redman (1997) and (1996).

<sup>10</sup> Personal Idealism, "a belief in the metaphysical autonomy of personality, as opposed to both Naturalism, which considers personality an outcome of 'the mechanism of Nature' and Idealism which considers it an 'adjective' of the Absolute." Quote from the online University of Melbourne article about William Ralph Boyce Gibson (1869-1935). No author credited.



Next he studied theology at New College, Edinburgh. His teachers at New College included A B Davidson (1831-1902) and John Laidlaw (1832-1906). The latter is considered the most likely source for his interest in the theology of Ritschl. As was common at the turn of the century Mackintosh spent some time studying in Germany under Martin Kähler (1835-1912) at Halle and used proceeds from winning the Cunningham Fellowship in 1895 to sit under Wilhelm Herrmann (1846-1922) at Marburg. The former wrote an influential book *The So called Historical Jesus and the Historic Biblical Christ*, and the latter was also the teacher of both Rudolph Bultmann and Karl Barth. In his later life, Mackintosh would retain a friendship with Herrmann and correspond with his former teacher until the latter's death. He also studied under Reischle which gave him his introduction to Ritschlian theology, leading to his dissertation for his DPhil at Edinburgh, *The Ritschlian Doctrine of Theoretical and Religious Knowledge* gained in 1897.<sup>11</sup>

In the same year he was ordained into the Free Church (the United Free in 1900 and the Church of Scotland in 1929) and was inducted into the charge at Queen Street, Tayport. He was then called in 1901 to the newly formed U.F. charge of Beechgrove church in Aberdeen. These short ministries produced the book of sermons, *Life on God's Plan*, published in 1909. The parish

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<sup>11</sup> This hand-written thesis in a simple black-covered note book, written in black ink in a tiny hand that makes it now difficult to read in places, is retained along with his lecture notes and other documents in New College Library. It is of note that his entire reading for the thesis appears to have been about a dozen books, all but one written in German.

ministry was cut short in 1904 by his elevation to the Chair of Systematic Theology in New College, which he held until his death. He was awarded honorary degrees from Edinburgh, Oxford and Marburg<sup>12</sup>, a testimony to the high regard in which he was held in academic circles in his day.

T F Torrance, a student of Mackintosh towards the end of his life, said of him,

“To study with H R Mackintosh was a spiritual and theological benediction, for he was above all a man of God, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. His exposition of biblical and evangelical truth in the classical tradition of the great patristic theologians and of the Reformers was as lucid as it was profound, but it was always acutely relevant, for the central thrust of the Christian message was brought to bear trenchantly and illuminatingly upon the great movements of thought that agitated the modern world.”<sup>13</sup>

In 1932 Mackintosh received the highest honour the Church of Scotland can bestow when he was made Moderator of the General Assembly. Following his Moderatorial year he led an official deputation to Denmark,

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<sup>12</sup> Mackintosh became good friends with Prof. Karl Heim, a systematic theologian, and between them they set up a student exchange programme between Edinburgh and Tübingen. It was in recognition of this ambassadorial work that Mackintosh was honoured by Marburg. See Redman (1997) p2.

Czechoslovakia, Romania, Germany and Hungary. By the latter country he had already been presented with a *Festschrift* entitled *Hungarian Protestantism, its past, Present and Future*.<sup>13</sup> In 1933 when he was in Budapest he was invited to speak to a gathering of 10,000 elders of the Reformed Church.

His previous major contribution to the General Assembly had followed the Union between the United Free Church of Scotland and the Church of Scotland in 1929. He was invited to convene the committee that was to write a *Short Statement of the Church's Faith*, which was issued in 1935. This recognised the work he had already completed in a similar vein for the United Free Church in 1921.

In his private life he had married Jessie Air, third daughter of David Air, a prominent Dundee businessman on 8 June 1899, and they had four children, a son and then three daughters. His health began to fail from 1932 onwards. Many said it was a direct result of the arduous tour he had just completed. He was addressing a conference for lay missionaries in Stornoway, when he died, on his wedding anniversary, on 8 June 1936.

According to Redman, Mackintosh's distinguished tenure at New College was marked by a "sincere attempt to understand and accept modern thought-

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<sup>13</sup> Torrance (2000) p72. The conclusion of the book is a reprint of *An Appreciation of H R Mackintosh, Theologian of the Cross*, by Torrance.

forms without jettisoning the evangelical faith".<sup>15</sup> He was said to have read every important theological book published in Germany and Great Britain, evidenced in his many published reviews, essays and monographs. He had a passion for bringing the fruits of German theological thinking to an English speaking audience. He edited and translated Friedrich Loofs, *Anti-Haeckel: an Exposure of Haeckel's View of Christianity* (1903) and Johannes Wendland's *Miracles and Christianity* (1911). He also worked in partnership with A B Macaulay to edit and translate Albrecht Ritschl's *The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation* (1900); with Alfred Caldecott on *Readings in the Literature of Theism* (1904) and with J S Stewart on F D E Schleiermacher's *The Christian Faith* (1927).

He also wrote a number of books himself: *The Person of Christ* (1913); *Studies in Christian Truth* (1913); *Immortality and the Future* (1915); *The Originality of the Christian Message* (1920); *The Divine Initiative* (1921); *Some Aspects of Christian Belief* (1923); *The Christian Experience of Forgiveness* (1927) and *The Christian Apprehension of God* (1928). There were two further volumes of published sermons, *The Highway of God* (1931) and *Sermons* (posthumously, 1938).

But in terms of his own writings, Mackintosh probably wrote two major significant books, in addition to those mentioned above. The first was

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<sup>14</sup> Kováts *et al* (1927). This book is also among Mackintosh's papers at New College Library, and bears an inscription of appreciation from the General Conventus of the Hungarian Reformed Church.

<sup>15</sup> Redman (1997) p4.

(though chronologically later), his own survey of the development of theological thought, *Types of Modern Theology* (posthumously, 1937), in which he assesses the contributions of Schleiermacher, Hegel, Ritschl, Troeltsch, Kierkegaard and Barth. It was in this book that Mackintosh revised his earlier assessment of Barth to consider him the outstanding theologian of the early twentieth century. Here also, his early approval of Ritschl is tempered by the recognition of the errors to which his thought ultimately led, and his distaste for some of those who belonged to the Ritschlian School is expressed.

The second book was what became a standard student textbook on Christology, *The Person of Jesus Christ* (1912). Even in the early 1980's this book was still being recommended to first year students of Divinity at Glasgow University.<sup>16</sup>

Its success as a textbook is due to the comprehensive historical survey of the development of Christology from apostolic times to what was then the present day. However the book is not merely an historical survey; in it Mackintosh gives a personal account of his own position, which arises from his belief in the soteriological significance of the Incarnation, which in turn requires an historical basis for Revelation. This union of the human personality of Jesus with the incarnation of the Son of God leads him to reject the traditional creedal formula of Chalcedon and to turn to the idea of kenosis

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<sup>16</sup> This was when and why I purchased my own copy of the book.

to explain the basis of that union. However his position was strongly criticised by one of his former pupils, D M Baillie, in his book *God was in Christ*.<sup>17</sup>

While history's verdict upon the work of some individuals in any sphere of human endeavour is their originality of thought, most practitioners are recognised as having been influenced both by their predecessors and by their contemporaries. In the field of theology Macintosh would be bordered by such original thinkers. Before him were the German theologians: Schleiermacher whose work he opposed and Ritschl with whose work he was initially in sympathy. Contemporary with him was the Swiss theologian, Barth, whom Mackintosh first regarded with suspicion, but later considered the most important figure to emerge in the early twentieth century.

All these men were, and are still considered to be original thinkers (though a study of their own theological development demonstrates the inspiration for their theological positions was drawn from reaction to, or sympathy with, the philosophical and theological ideas, still influential, whether historical or current). Any major work that tries to give an historical survey of theology will certainly include Schleiermacher and Barth, but rarely, if ever, Mackintosh.

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<sup>17</sup> Baillie (1961) p94ff.

However, what original thinkers require, especially those building a system, are other scholars who can assess, criticise and sift the wheat from the chaff. This Mackintosh demonstrated was his field of expertise. The prophet Isaiah wrote, "He made my mouth like a sharp sword, and in the shadow of his hand he hid me" (Isaiah 49:2 NRSV). It is the hope of the present author that though Mackintosh is largely forgotten today, and overlooked in historical surveys as of any significance, nevertheless, in his works are important words, hidden by God. Once uncovered and understood, Mackintosh's thoughts may speak afresh to the issues that still need to be addressed. The issues revolve around the regaining of confidence in the gospel and establishing the relationship between the historic Jesus and the biblical Christ.

Redman, who has made the most exhaustive study of the career of Mackintosh has recognised four phases.<sup>18</sup> From 1897 to 1903 is the period in which Mackintosh was strongly influenced by the work of Ritschl. Then from 1904 to 1913, through the work of Herrmann, Kähler, Denney and Forsyth, Mackintosh engages with the Christological problems of the day, and moves away from the Ritschlian to a more distinctively dogmatic and Reformed position, resulting in the publishing of *The Doctrine of the Person of Jesus Christ*. From 1914 to 1927 he lives through World War One and its aftermath upon theological thinking resulting in an emphasis upon atonement and eschatology. This culminates in the Sprunt Lectures for 1927 delivered at

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<sup>18</sup> Redman, (1997) pp22-25.

Union Theological Seminary at Richmond, Virginia, later published as *The Christian Apprehension of God*. Finally, from 1928 to 1936 there is the Barthian phase, during which he begins to speak significantly of 'the Divine Initiative'. He speaks of a return to dogma, to eschatology and to church consciousness. He takes a renewed interest in the works of the early Fathers, in particular, Athanasius, and in the Reformers, particularly, Calvin.

Perhaps most significantly, as his former students of that period have testified, he undertook a major rewrite of his lectures. In the collected papers of Mackintosh at New College, there is a complete set of one page lecture summaries for his dogmatics course, which were handed out to students in advance. These contained the main points and allowed the students to concentrate on the lecture, rather than be constantly taking their own notes. These had remained virtually unchanged for many years. However, in these latter years, Mackintosh would instruct the students to strike out complete paragraphs and replace them with new material he dictated during the lecture.

It is necessary to keep this overview in mind as we proceed. The intention is to draw together what Mackintosh thought and wrote about four particular subjects from across his whole career. As we have noted that career contains distinctive phases each with its own particular interest. It demonstrates developing thought and openness to new theological insights. There are large areas of Mackintosh's theology that this present work shall not consider,



primarily his soteriology, but which, nevertheless, would have influenced what he has to say upon the chosen areas of study.

However, again following Redman<sup>19</sup> it is relevant to our study of the Christological issues to understand what were the key theological areas Mackintosh sought to resist. From the time of Paul onwards good theology has often emerged from a process of refuting what was considered to be error. At the time of writing *The Doctrine of the Person of Jesus Christ* Mackintosh was still in the early phases of his career, and he perceived four problem areas that had to be exposed as error.

The first was the Quest for the Historical Jesus. Much will be said about this as it is the heart of the present thesis and so no further comment is required now. The second was to take issue with Harnack's historical approach to the development of christological doctrine. Mackintosh was disdainful of Harnack's dismissive theological conclusions to his historical inquiry concerning what he perceived as the origins of Christology in the primitive Church. In one of his lectures on this subject Mackintosh uses the analogy of electricity: someone may say that the origins of electricity are found in the properties of amber however this does not exhaust all that can be said about it.

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<sup>19</sup> Redman (1997) pp27ff.

The third was the history of religions schools which saw in early Christianity a syncretism of ancient Middle Eastern religions, with little of originality to offer. Mackintosh identified historicism and relativism as the errors of this approach caused by a failure to include the Resurrection as a vital component in the origins of Christianity.

Finally, there was the traditional scholastic and rationalistic approaches to Christology that gave birth to the creeds of orthodoxy. Mackintosh felt it was one thing to read the gospels in the light of the apostolic witness, but another to read them in the light of the Chalcedon Definition. Being bound by traditionalism was the error and finding better symbols for describing Christological beliefs was the challenge.

In what follows Mackintosh's christological statements will be gathered together across these various strands as part of the matrix of his thought and ideas relevant to this work's chosen areas of thought - the reasons for which are outlined below.

### Chapter 3

#### GOING TO THE HEART OF THE PROBLEM

A contemporary of Mackintosh was Albert Schweitzer, whose book, *The Quest for the Historical Jesus*, would open the floodgates on a subject very much still debated to the present day.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries the many writers of lives of Jesus, with whom Schweitzer takes exception, had introduced an important corrective to Christology made possible by the focus on humanity in the Enlightenment, namely, the human nature of the Christ. It was this that prompted the writing of lives of Jesus. But it was undertaken using gospel material short on biographical detail and psychological motivation, both of which had to be added by the imagination of the writer to satisfy the criteria of the modern biography.

What Schweitzer noted was how such additions produced versions of Jesus which were actually images of the author and his values, rather than pictures of Jesus in his own first century Palestinian setting. At the same time, philosophers and theologians were dipping their toes into the waters of historical criticism, and creating the first wave of scepticism with regards to the content of the gospel and so, with it, the accepted picture of Jesus found there.

From these two bare strands there has been woven a rich tapestry concerning what role history plays as the vehicle of revelation. That the quest for the historical Jesus has had not one, or two, but three waves, each carrying a multitude of theological positions and versions of Jesus, demonstrates that that role has never been universally or satisfactorily explained.

The quest seems to continue to accept scepticism about the gospels, though now to varying degrees. There are those who consider they have found a small bedrock of unassailable facts,<sup>20</sup> while others are coming round to a greater confidence that the gospels may be more reliable than previously thought.<sup>21</sup> But behind all this activity is the belief that there is a truly historic figure of Jesus that is different (perhaps paler but more interesting, or darker but less appealing) from the gospel witness.

What is universally accepted is that the genre of 'gospel' is not primarily to convey history. Rather they are faith statements, they witness to revelation. It was Bultmann's recognition of this point that led to his own rejection of history as the vehicle of the revelation. That, he stated, was accomplished by the apostolic preaching.<sup>22</sup> The gospels are records based on that preaching, witnessing to its content and application. However Bultmann's views have

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<sup>20</sup> cf. e.g. Sanders (1985) p11. He presents 8 "almost indisputable facts".

<sup>21</sup> cf. e.g. Blomberg (1997)

<sup>22</sup> cf. Bultmann (1952) p3. "But the Christian faith did not exist until there was a Christian kerygma; i.e., a kerygma proclaiming Jesus Christ...to be God's eschatological act of salvation."

not carried the day. His own pupil, Ernst Käsemann, in his famous lecture, rekindled the quest, put history back in the frame, and thus raised once more the question in what way does history convey revelation.<sup>23</sup>

It is perfectly apparent that the bald facts of the life of Jesus do not, of themselves, create faith or conviction. They do not reveal to the uninterested bystander God in Jesus. Related questions are then raised as to how a temporal and transitory event can convey eternal truth.

These are all questions that were in their infancy when Mackintosh was writing and which he took seriously, returning to them in various places. Our interest in looking at the issue using Mackintosh is that, not being an original thinker, and having no great system of his own to erect, we are, hopefully, able to perceive the generalities of the matter and also observe the critical and objective evaluation he makes of it. It may be possible then to see whether theological thinking on this issue has moved on in any significant way in the intervening years, or whether, in fact, an earlier assessment has presented solutions that have been overlooked or overshadowed by more influential theological thinking.

So we shall consider what Mackintosh said in his various writing on the subjects of History and Revelation. But as the only major source of any

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<sup>23</sup> Käsemann (1969) pp23-65.

material relating to the historic life of Jesus is the canonical gospels<sup>24</sup> the question must be asked about how Mackintosh understood the Bible. Though he shows evidence of the emerging use of historical-critical method in his writing, he also demonstrates that he is not compelled to take their findings as the last word on the subject. This raises the interesting question of his own understanding of scripture that allowed him to take such a stance.

Even today the more conservative scholars find it virtually impossible to be taken seriously should they seek to approach the Bible outside the disciplines of accepted scholarship. Now if labels are being attached then Mackintosh would be regarded as old-school liberal. Then is reading Mackintosh today an exercise in discovering afresh how indebted we must remain to those pioneers who developed the literary and historical tools, now *de rigueur* for mining the gospels? Or does he hold a key to understanding the Bible that has been forgotten as the sceptical results of scholarship have taken hold?<sup>25</sup>

Finally, if Jesus is to be understood as Revelation in History, then the place of the Holy Spirit in bringing this to bear on the hearts and minds must be

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<sup>24</sup> Though cf. Akenson (2000) p171ff. The sub-title of his book is 'A Skeleton Key to the Historical Jesus' While most scholars believe Paul said next to nothing about Jesus and focused entirely on the crucified-risen Christ, Akenson believe he has found four basic facts about Jesus in his writing.

<sup>25</sup> I am reminded of the interest in Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*, and how universal is the interest in proving its sceptical conclusions about the gospels. At the time of writing *The Gospel of Judas* is about to be printed in English, and again there is a groundswell of interest in its radically different presentation of Judas from the canonical gospels. As human nature never changes, it is not hard to see how, over the decades since Mackintosh's day, the sceptical point of view would be the more interesting.

included in any discussion of these issues. Mackintosh stated as much in discussing the theology of Ritschl.

“The Gospel picture of Jesus, the events of His career, read simply as a chapter in the record of the past, are not in themselves an immediate or transparent disclosure of God. To be that, they must be illumined from above. For one thing, they must embody the personal presence and act of God, as events in which God is approaching and addressing us; for another, the Spirit operating within us must open our eyes to their transcendent meaning. Thus revelation and the Holy Spirit are realities which interpret each other, and apart from the other neither has any significance that we can apprehend. Hence to study Christ historically and to believe in Him as the sole and sufficient Word of God are wholly different things. Only as God is in past facts do they reveal; only as His Spirit brings home their import does the revelation become effectual.”<sup>26</sup>

In this statement Mackintosh makes a number of assertions:

1) That history in general and the life of Jesus in particular, as that which can be apprehended by any person, does not of itself give ‘an immediate or transparent disclosure of God’. In other words there is nothing self-evident in

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<sup>26</sup> Mackintosh (1937) p179.

any historic event that reveals God, including the life history of Jesus of Nazareth.

2) That the work of those scholars and theologians in seeking to discover the historical Jesus would confirm this view of history. That it is possible to question the validity of any story or saying demonstrates that, of themselves, they do not require to be understood as revelatory.

3) History is the vehicle of revelation. However that form of understanding of an event or person comes through the self-interpreting of God, as an activity of the Spirit working directly in a person and allowing the significance to be recognised and understood. There is a paradox in this assertion. While Mackintosh can state that history is in fact incompetent to deal with these matters, he nevertheless is clear that a framework of the life of Jesus is necessary for revelation to take place and for faith to be received.

4) That this work of the Spirit, and the revelation received, will lead to the conviction that God is a 'personality', a being capable of personal interaction and engagement with another. Personal qualities and experiences lie at the heart of what Mackintosh believes both about God and man's knowledge of God.

These then are the four areas under consideration in this thesis. Each succeeding chapter will begin with what Mackintosh has written on the subject and conclude with some critical assessment of his work.



## Chapter 4

### THE BIBLE AS THE WORD OF GOD

The parish minister opens his Bible and reads the lessons for his Sunday sermon. How is he to approach this text? When he opens up a commentary he will be given information about the text. His Bible is a translation in English based on the best available versions and fragments in the original language. He will be told of the variations between these sources and of the meaning of difficult words and concepts somewhat lost in translation. He will be helped to understand the meaning of the passage in context within the book in which it is found, of how ideas can be found in other related passages, of what other commentators have considered in their commentaries. The commentary is a tool for analysis and the Bible becomes a book to be examined primarily as a literary form. But this is not surely what the preacher has opened the Bible to do. Has he not wanted to encounter the living God, to be addressed by God, to know God?

In the writings of Mackintosh it becomes apparent that this is primarily how he sees the Bible. As a philosopher and systematic theologian it could be argued that biblical studies were not his field and that is why he takes the Bible simply at face value, so to speak. But the truth is that he had come to see the Bible in a particular way because of his theological thinking. As Leitch

comments, in summing up Mackintosh's move away from his Ritschlian origins,

"...the fundamental principles of Mackintosh's thought...were long overlaid, at first rather heavily, by elements of Ritschl and his followers which made their true nature not always easy to discern. Yet he did not look only at the Ritschlians: he looked still more at the Bible, in which he saw things they had never seen. And if at first their influence somehow obscured his view, yet it was only a morning haze which later rose to leave the peaks of biblical doctrine clearly outlined against the evening sky."<sup>27</sup>

So what did Mackintosh say about the Bible?

Mackintosh had utter confidence in the Bible as the Word of God. He quotes favourably these words of Robertson Smith,

"If I am asked why I receive Scripture as the Word of God, and as the only perfect rule of faith and life, I answer with all the fathers of the Protestant Church: because the Bible is the only record of the redeeming love of God, because in the Bible alone I find God drawing near to man in Jesus Christ, and declaring to us in Him His will for our salvation. And this record I know to

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<sup>27</sup> Leitch (1952) p118.

be true by the witness of His Spirit in my heart, whereby I am assured that none other than God Himself is able to speak such words to my soul."<sup>28</sup>

And because this knowledge of God is not the product of man's search but God's condescension:

"The Word of God, his revealing utterance, is not to be argued with but something we have to listen to on our knees."<sup>29</sup>

That the Bible, as the Word of God, should be the foundation of all Christian thinking, rather than the field of human speculation is expressed in this quote where he compares the work of Ritschl to that of Barth:

"That Barth is definitely a more Christian thinker than Ritschl, no one, I should suppose, can doubt who takes revelation seriously. But in declared intention and programme the two theologians are much nearer to each other than has often been supposed. The difference may, perhaps, be shortly put thus: Ritschl undertakes to furnish a theology inspired throughout by Scripture, but too

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<sup>28</sup> Mackintosh (1928) p81.

<sup>29</sup> Mackintosh (1928) p91.

often fails to keep his promise, whereas Barth is set upon thinking out something that will deserve to be called a 'Theology of the Word of God', and has so far proceeded with a consistency and power which is engaging the attention of the whole Christian Church."<sup>30</sup>

In introducing his own lectures on Church Dogmatics he stated that it exists to serve the Church – particularly the preaching of the Church – and defined it thus: the

“elucidation of the full content of Revelation, of the Word of God as contained in the Scripture.”<sup>31</sup>

In one of his lectures Mackintosh states that scripture is a record of revelation, and that nowhere in the New Testament is the Word of God equated with a written document. He therefore dismissed any notion of a doctrine of verbal inspiration, seeing this legal, rather than spiritual theory arise from a need for an absolute authority within the Reformed Church. Of it Mackintosh said,

“It ignores the idiosyncrasies of the Biblical writers, the historical conditions under which they wrote, and their own

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<sup>30</sup> Mackintosh (1937) p147f.

<sup>31</sup> Mackintosh (2000) p74

professions. The apostles quote the Old Testament loosely and no New Testament writing except the Apocalypse claims to be inspired. What we are given are personal communications and testimonies, or collections of memorabilia or traditions.”<sup>32</sup>

When it comes to understanding the content of the Bible, Mackintosh is clear that its stories and words should be seen primarily with the character of testimony. These stories and words have been laid down in their particular form to witness to the impression made on the minds and hearts of the authors of their experience of God, or in terms of the New Testament, also of Jesus. To those scholars, using the tools of literary and historical criticism, who recognise the editorial hand of the gospel writers on their choice and use of material, and who, thus, accused them of fabrication of said material, Mackintosh would state,

“the impulse to select, to fling on words and incidents a light answering to the later situation of the church is natural and intelligible, not the impulse to deform or fabricate.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Mackintosh ‘Scripture as the Source of Doctrine (1)’ (Summary sheet of a lecture).

<sup>33</sup> Mackintosh (1912) p8.

Mackintosh would not agree with the finding of redactor criticism, that the evangelists were interpreting the tradition, for him their chief aim was simply to record the historic tradition.

He is impressed that much of the Bible has the shape of what he calls biography. It should be noted however that with particular regard to the gospels he does not consider them biographies in the traditional sense of the word. In his book *The Divine Initiative*, however, he does use the word, 'biography' thus defined: "great personalities and their spiritual experience."<sup>34</sup>

He says,

"How much of the Bible would be left if you cut out everything about Abraham, Moses, David, Jeremiah, St Paul – not to speak for the moment of the Name that is above every name."<sup>35</sup>

But what comes across in all of Mackintosh's writings is how the gospels, in particular, bring to life a living personality.

"The gospel writers gained a wonderful impression of Jesus, enshrined that impression in books, from books we catch that

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<sup>34</sup>Mackintosh (1921) p41.

<sup>35</sup> Mackintosh (1921) p41.

impression, without a too disturbing pre-occupation with matters of chronology or the afflictions of conceptions.”<sup>36</sup>

In the case of the Old Testament, the primary witness is the prophets, described as men

“to whom God spoke first, and they answered his call. That the conviction of God, and his urgent claim on them, does not rise out of their own speculative ponderings, or from any self-induced rapture, is sufficiently demonstrated by the fact that the greater prophets shrink from the realisation of the Divine presence...A higher hand has been laid upon them, constraining them to listen and, when they have listened, to obey.”<sup>37</sup>

Mackintosh perceives the prophets to be people singled out from the crowd to possess a greater insight into the life of things. Likened to the great poets such as Keats and Wordsworth, the prophets were capable of expressing through words the nature of reality in a way that is denied to most. Once written these experiences and insights are accessible to the masses who vicariously can share them. So to Hosea and Isaiah are given visions of God’s

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<sup>36</sup> Mackintosh (1912) p6.

<sup>37</sup> Mackintosh (1928) p72.

love or of a Suffering Servant, but their words once recorded can be used by others to gain their own insight into these matters.<sup>38</sup>

He also believed that the revelation of God recorded in the Scriptures was given by degrees, until it reached its perfection in Jesus Christ. Thus the prophet was someone who, while receiving a genuine revelation of God, did not fully understand all that he received. Indeed, Mackintosh considered it possible that such a prophet could so record his experience that it gave

“a misleading impression of this or that feature in the character of the God he is proclaiming.”<sup>39</sup>

It is the failure to grasp this unfolding nature of Scripture that causes difficulty for the reader of the New Testament who then turns to the Old Testament, and is confronted there with a God of an apparently different character.

“Had the prophet known Jesus Christ, he would still presumably have had something to say about the wrath of God, which is a great fact; but he would have said it otherwise.”<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Mackintosh (1928) p73.

<sup>39</sup> Mackintosh (1928) p79.

<sup>40</sup> Mackintosh (1928) p80.



In reading the Bible, as the Word of God, it is important our interaction is with the totality of that witness, and that it be undertaken with an awareness of the need for the indwelling Spirit to create the condition of correspondence between what is read and what is being personally experienced. In the case of Jesus, Mackintosh writes,

“If the pictured Christ be the die, the impression within the Christian consciousness answers it part for part. Both reveal the actual Jesus. As He imprinted Himself on the disciples’ mind, He imprints Himself to-day on ours; and in both cases harmonious effects flow from a single real cause.”<sup>41</sup>

If the Bible is understood as the Word of God because it is the vehicle for recording the testimony of revelation then the place of the Holy Spirit in Christian theology takes on primary importance.

“But the operation of the Spirit is as characteristic an element of Christianity as the incarnation. If, in virtue of Jesus, faith is rooted in the actualities of the past, in virtue of the Spirit it finds its perpetual dynamic in the present. The principle of life and power known as ‘Holy Spirit’ is no one casual factor in perfect religion by the side of others; it is that to which everything else

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<sup>41</sup> Mackintosh (1912) p319.

converges, and apart from which nothing else – not even the revelation of Jesus – could take effect.”<sup>42</sup>

Yet it would be wrong to gain the impression that Mackintosh held a fundamentalist or literalist view of Scripture. He was not guilty of idolising the Bible, holding to a view that it is

“a supernatural communication of Divine truths in the form of the verbally inspired teaching of Holy Scripture. For then the Bible becomes once more, much as in medieval orthodoxy, ‘a book full of Divine information or infallible truths about doctrine and morals’, and saving faith is ‘assent to correct propositions, found in the Bible, about God, the universe and the soul of man.’”<sup>43</sup>

Rather Mackintosh believed that the revelation to which the Bible bore witness was of the person of God in Jesus Christ.

“What He gives us in Christ is Himself, not just facts *about* Himself.”<sup>44</sup>

But also that

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<sup>42</sup> Mackintosh (1912) p508.

<sup>43</sup> Leitch (1952) p103 quoting remarks from Mackintosh’s lectures.

<sup>44</sup> Leitch (1952) p104.

“no human propositions – not even those of Scripture itself – could ever express the whole truth of the living God: ‘The greatest truths can never be all enshrined in words; they must wait for a life in which they are incarnate.’”<sup>45</sup>

This meant that while the Bible must be approached reverently and in dependence upon the work of the indwelling Spirit, the task of formulating Christian doctrine was not reduced to the tabulation of proof texts:

“it does not follow that every doctrinal statement about Jesus must be sanctioned verbally by a word from His lips or by a distinct apostolic utterance. What is required rather is that the New Testament picture as a whole should be truthfully reflected in our construction as a whole. Let the portrait of the historic Jesus, contained in primitive testimony, be brought to bear directly upon our mind, saturating it through and through; and thereupon let us proceed to give free systematised expression to the thoughts that arise within us.”<sup>46</sup>

According to the principles of reason, the Bible is a work of man. No one holds to the view that the authors were not in full possession of their human

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<sup>45</sup> Leitch (1952) p104.

<sup>46</sup> Mackintosh (1912) p319.

faculties when they first committed these texts to paper. Therefore the tools of literary criticism which can be applied to any other written work can and should be applied here also. However the Bible is not like any other book; for of no other book is the claim made that it is a witness to the revelation of the living God. And no other book requires the reader to possess more than their human faculties to unlock its message.

Mackintosh was, therefore, of the belief that the Bible could only be authoritative for Christians. It is a belief he shared with Luther.<sup>47</sup> However he rejected the idea that the Bible was to be understood as a 'doctrinal code book'. The atomic view of scripture as consisting in proof texts did not represent the true nature of the book. Not the writings but the writers were inspired, and what they gave was a many voiced testimony to Christ. Therefore, "only those scriptural ideas are entitled to acceptance which are in harmony with Christ and help express his meaning for faith."<sup>48</sup>

Mackintosh therefore believed that the task of the theologian was to extract his material from the overall body of scripture and thereafter to formulate it into dogma, whose purpose was the edification of the Church. He did not believe that the theologian ever simply reproduced scripture.

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<sup>47</sup> Mackintosh, 'Scripture as a Source of Doctrine (2)'. (Summary sheet of a lecture).

<sup>48</sup> Mackintosh, 'Scripture as a Source of Doctrine (2)'. (Summary sheet of a lecture).

If Mackintosh's understanding of Scripture stands, then taking an analytical approach to biblical interpretation will have a similar effect to taking apart a television to see how it works. The alternative is to simply sit in front of the television, switch it on and enjoy the programmes. If this was not the case we would have in life the opposite of Jesus' words: God has hidden these things from the simple and given them to the wise and learned.

What the Bible is, remains vital to the question of whether it is right to use it as the basis for discovering the historical figure of Jesus. In the words of Leitch the question remains:

“whether the medium is a historical biography of Jesus of Nazareth or a testimony to Jesus Christ.”<sup>49</sup>

### **A Critical Response**

Read a modern commentary of the gospel and questions of veracity are to the fore. Did Jesus really say this or do that? Take, for example, the word about judging other, found in Matthew 7:1 and in Luke 6:37. The parallel places it within the Q material, and because of linguistic differences, the task is to find which of these is the original. Due to a more fully developed form in Luke, that retains a poetical coupling, commentators generally regard Luke as original. But as to whether Jesus said it, opinion is generally favourable though

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<sup>49</sup> Leitch (1952) p108n.

not conclusive, Schweitzer only saying that it “may derive from Jesus.”<sup>50</sup> The next question is to context, and meaning. So, again, Schweitzer asks,

“Did Jesus take the radical approach of forbidding all judging, while the community, in which it became necessary at times to reprimand, stood for judging as generously and carefully as possible?”<sup>51</sup>

However, Mackintosh reads this saying and addresses none of these questions. For him none are as important as the realisation that here in these texts is evidence for the claim that Jesus is a unique personality.

“The uniqueness of Jesus for his own consciousness could not be more startlingly demonstrated than by this fact, that he who forbade his followers to judge each other should have foretold that he himself would judge the world.”<sup>52</sup>

In ignoring the critical questions relating to the text, is Mackintosh misusing it in this statement? Or in focusing on the critical questions have the commentators drained the words of their spiritual content?

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<sup>50</sup> Schweitzer (1982) p167.

<sup>51</sup> Schweitzer (1982) p168.

<sup>52</sup> Mackintosh (1912) p33.

The commentator might argue that he is trying to remain objective and neutral about the text allowing the tools to unearth its truth. But the Bible, according to Mackintosh, is not an objective or neutral book. It has nailed its colours firmly to the mast. "These are written so that you may come to believe..." (John 20:31 NRSV) We come to the Bible not that it might inform us, but that God might address us. It presents us not with truth to be discovered but with a person to be recognised and known.

In a way the Bible resembles a movie biography. When people, who really knew someone, see that life portrayed on screen, they usually have difficulty. First, the person is played by someone who may, or may not bear a physical resemblance. To take two recent examples, Jamie Foxx's appearance as Ray Charles was uncannily accurate, whereas Kevin Spacey's appearance as Bobby Darin was criticised as being too old. Secondly, and more importantly, those who know the person's life well usually complain that liberties have been taken with the person's life.

Whenever a person's life story is brought to the big screen, a disclaimer usually appears at the beginning or end, stating that certain events have been altered, that certain characters have been added or deleted or mixed, that the chronology has been changed.

What is the reason for this free and creative use of historical facts? It is done for dramatic effect. The movie wants to do more than simply recount every event and personal encounter in chronological order. It wants to convey to the audience – who do not personally know the subject – an impression of that person, a sense of the significance of the life in order to draw in the audience and involve them in the unfolding story.

Mackintosh understood the Bible as a literary form of a movie biography. For him the importance of the book was not its information or its historic accuracy about its subject – God or Jesus. Rather, it was written in this form to create an impression on the mind and heart. Not a passing impression, but a lasting, life-changing impression. And Mackintosh believed, because it was his own personal experience, that the Bible did this handsomely. He would say that the greatest truths are not captured in written propositions but are incarnated in a life.<sup>53</sup>

In this way Mackintosh is right to claim that the gospels are, and yet are not, biographies. Anyone wanting to have an accurate biography of Glen Miller, who uses the film *The Glen Miller Story* as the starting point for how he came to be associated with the tunes that made his name, will end up with fictional nonsense. For example his future wife's home phone number was not Pennsylvania 6-5000 – the title of one well-known composition. However the

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<sup>53</sup> Mackintosh (1912) p310.



film gives the viewer a great sense of the combination of dogged determination and lucky break that created an original and distinctive sound in big band music.

Mackintosh is unperturbed by parallel, yet dissimilar sayings, in the gospels, and of chronological clashes or shifted contexts, because finding his way back from this starting point to accurate biography is not the purpose of reading the Bible. Rather, he can take its pages at face value because, read as such, it breathes life into its subject, Jesus, and reveals the greatness of his person.

But how does Mackintosh know that the Bible is conveying the truth about its subject? When he says of the gospels, “They depict Jesus, in short, as any onlooker of goodwill might have watched Him in Palestine”<sup>54</sup> how does he know that is so?

Reading Mackintosh one cannot escape the sense that he is aware of his subject - Jesus - almost from another source. That when he reads the Bible, he can have confidence in their portrayal of Jesus because it accords with his prior knowledge -

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<sup>54</sup> Mackintosh (1912) p6.

“The portrait of Jesus as He lived in His familiar habit among men.”<sup>55</sup>

It's as if the Bible doesn't speak to someone who doesn't know Jesus, but for one who has already encountered him it confirms: this is He.

There has to be truth in this position. Mackintosh himself has to admit that reading the Bible *per se* will not make Jesus live out of the page. This requires the attitude of faith in the reader and the illumination of the Spirit at work while the reading (or hearing) takes place. So faith and the Spirit are necessary to reading the Bible and receiving it as the source of revelation. However the Bible remains the witness to the revelation rather than the content of the revelation itself.

But where does the initial repository of faith come from? In his lecture 'God in Christ (1) Christ's Relation to Faith' Mackintosh states that “our knowledge of Christ is not *a priori* or authoritative but mediated through redemption as an experience.” Elsewhere he will equate this experience to faith and conclude that such faith comes from the gospels from which all our saving knowledge of God comes. Faith is therefore “the gospel and the believing mind in their inseparable unity.”<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Mackintosh (1912) p6

<sup>56</sup> Mackintosh 'Christian Experience as the Medium of Doctrine.' (Summary sheet of a lecture)

However, lest these definitions of faith as experience lead to accusations of a rampant subjectivism, Mackintosh will state that “theology is concerned with experiences in view of the creative fact of Christ.”<sup>57</sup> That is, theology is meant to convey the experiences we ought to have. It is experiences of “not what we have received but what God in Christ is offering.”<sup>58</sup>

This experience is the mediation of redemption and is the work of Christ’s Spirit directly upon a person and giving rise to the response of faith. It is this that allows Mackintosh not to be precious about the Bible. Whatever questions are raised by criticism are addressed not to revelation, which is independent of the Bible. They merely and usefully interrogate the witness. But the witness can withstand this without concern because

“There are better sureties within our reach. We have the promise of the Spirit, to lead the Church into all truth; we have the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever; and to which the Spirit bears witness perpetually in the hearts of men. These are the real – these, when we speak strictly, are the only and sufficient – guarantees that the mind of the believer, working freely on its data, will reach conclusions that are in line with the

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<sup>57</sup> Mackintosh ‘Christian Experience as the Medium of Doctrine.’ (Summary sheet of a lecture)

<sup>58</sup> Mackintosh ‘Christian Experience as the Medium of Doctrine.’ (Summary sheet of a lecture)

great faith of the past. Wherever sincere thinkers are impressed with Christ as those were impressed who gathered round Him at the beginning, there the truth will be."<sup>59</sup>

However, the greatest implication of this view of Scripture is in the subsequent theological reflection that follows upon reading it. Because Scripture bears witness and is not itself the revelation, it does not need to be regarded as the ultimate authority. Christ - that to which it does witness - is the ultimate authority. And the theologian's task is to present as clearly, widely, wholly and relevantly (to each succeeding age, to each social, cultural and geographical context) the spectrum of belief, doctrinally, ethically, practically, and devotionally.

But that presentation cannot be a flight of fancy. It must remain true to the original revelation, of which the Bible is the witness. So while there is freedom, there is also constraint. Again Mackintosh balances well this dialectic. For, if the theologian is steeped in that biblical narrative, then he or she can have confidence to "proceed to give free systematised expression to the thoughts that arise within us."<sup>60</sup> And it is precisely here that Mackintosh's awareness of the results of literary and historical criticism addresses this issue.

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<sup>59</sup> Mackintosh (1912) p320

<sup>60</sup> Mackintosh (1912) p319

For what this work testified to beyond any shadow of a doubt is the freedom the original writers felt towards the tradition, even as they remained true to it. And Mackintosh invites the theologian to have the same confidence in freedom about contemporary theological reflection on that tradition.

Only as the two are held bound together is this possible. Remove the constraint of fidelity to the Bible and as Mackintosh says,

“we launch ourselves upon the wide, uncharted sea of mysticism.”<sup>61</sup>

But to those who give the Bible a (mistaken) ultimate authority and who are suspicious of those who appear to treat it casually, and who, Mackintosh says, want

“the cry be raised for some inflexible rule by which to measure the correctness of opinions, it must be replied that no *legal* guarantee for unchanging orthodoxy can be given.”<sup>62</sup>

Mackintosh manages to give to the Bible an essential and central place in his theological thinking. Yet reading him at one level it would appear this is due

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<sup>61</sup> Mackintosh (1912) p319.

<sup>62</sup> Mackintosh (1912) p319.

to an uncritical acceptance of scripture as the Word of God, almost in denial of the work of scholarship.

However, a closer reading reveals that while Mackintosh was aware of literary and historical criticism, he was not in awe of it as a method for theological reflection. Rather, he had great confidence in the written narrative, and in the purity of motives of its writers, accepted as God's Word, as a witness to the revelation that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. He recognised and understood the reason why these writers displayed a fidelity to the tradition and an impressive freedom in recording and presenting it. And he believed contemporary theological reflection should be composed along the same lines.

## *Chapter 5*

### THE MEANING AND PURPOSE OF HISTORY

Mackintosh is clear that it is through historical events and inspired personalities that God has revealed himself. However, as will become apparent, he did not believe that these things, in and of themselves, created the revelation. Once again the work of the Holy Spirit is the vital component. And so the question of how history is understood must also be addressed.

Into the Apostles' Creed was placed a statement that ensured that Christianity must always be understood in terms of history: "He suffered under Pontius Pilate." Pontius Pilate is a figure from history. Though not much is known about him his existence is not in doubt. He was the prefect in Judaea from 26AD until 36AD<sup>63</sup>, though the stories of him from sources other than the gospels tend to portray a man with a different temperament.<sup>64</sup>

But of Pontius Pilate no one will ever wonder whether he had a pre-existence, or rose from the dead. No one will ever say in him we saw the human face of God. His history moves from birth to death and then ends. His continued influence over the world is non-existent, the only reason he is known to our

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<sup>63</sup> Meier (1991) p373

<sup>64</sup> cf. Josephus (1981) and (2006).

generation because of his place in the history of another, the person who suffered under him -- Jesus.

That Jesus of Nazareth is a unique person can be seen simply from this fact; that though he lived an historical life, he cannot simply be defined by it unlike everyone else. Since the quest for the historical Jesus began there has been no acceptance and agreement by scholars and historians as to who he was, what he did, or what his life means. It is this supra-historical dimension that Jesus introduces to us that gives to Christianity its greatest dilemma, namely how to relate history to revelation.

As already stated Schweitzer had observed in the varied works of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century lives of Jesus that the picture of Jesus in his own first century Palestinian setting were being drawn in the image of the authors and their values. His observations coincided with a new scepticism among philosophers and theologians with regards to the content of the gospel and the picture of Jesus found there.

It was in reaction to this approach that Ritschl built his system of theology on a foundation of the New Testament and the historical life of Jesus there portrayed. He wanted an end to the subjectivism that had found a starting point for theology in the believing soul, not in historic fact, as was the case with his illustrious predecessor, Schleiermacher. In the introduction of the



latter's book *The Christian Faith* he coined the famous definition of religion as, "the feeling of absolute dependence." It is this feeling that convinces the believer about God's reality rather than comprehension of dogma.<sup>65</sup>

Ritschl wanted an end to the forms of mysticism that sought to bypass the historic revelation and find its own techniques for communion with God. So Ritschl came to the conclusion, as Mackintosh states, that

"if our relationship to God is to be that of accepted children, it must be mediated by apprehension of His decisive Word, spoken in Christ, of judgement and mercy. With all the fathers of the Reformed Church, Ritschl taught that this Word of God is to be found in Scripture only."<sup>66</sup>

Mackintosh commends Ritschl for turning around the idea, begun in Schleiermacher, that man's beliefs about God begin with the Christian consciousness. Rather belief begins from "the presentation of God in Christ set forth in the New Testament."<sup>67</sup> However he also took issue with Ritschl's historic positivism that equates the revelation of God with the fact of Jesus' life as recorded in the New Testament.

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<sup>65</sup> Schleiermacher (1976) p132.

<sup>66</sup> Mackintosh (1937) p147.

<sup>67</sup> Mackintosh (1937) p148.

“The Gospel picture of Jesus, the events of His career, read simply as a chapter in the record of the past, are not in themselves an immediate or transparent disclosure of God.”<sup>68</sup>

Mackintosh tackles the problem of the relationship of history to revelation in the chapter, ‘Christology and the Historic Christ’ in his book *The Doctrine of the Person of Jesus Christ*. We shall seek to follow his position and arguments closely as they go to the heart of the matter.

Mackintosh begins with the statement that

“if Christology is to be valid for the modern mind, its point of reference and of departure must be fixed on the Jesus Christ of history.”<sup>69</sup>

While this seems self-evident in our day, Mackintosh reminds us that it was born out of the Reformation, which rejected the Western Catholicism view of equating Christianity with the Church which in turn was considered as Christ, “the perpetual incarnation of God in the world.”<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Mackintosh (1937) p179.

<sup>69</sup> Mackintosh (1912) p306.

<sup>70</sup> Mackintosh (1912) p306.

Mackintosh then gives his reason for the need for Christianity being rooted in historical fact: it is a religion of atonement.

“God has reconciled us to Himself through His Son, attesting His gracious will by Jesus who lived and died and rose again.”<sup>71</sup>

Elsewhere Mackintosh indicates that he perceives humankind as recognising their need of God, “it is real and definitely characteristic of man.”<sup>72</sup> He sums up that need in terms of various aspects of human life both individual and corporate: on the personal level thirst for fuller existence, rescue from suffering and change and death, and the power to win character, while socially and globally the need to live in harmonious fellowship with others together across national and racial divides.<sup>73</sup> This need touches not one aspect of humanity, but its totality; the conscious, the intellect, the heart.<sup>74</sup>

Because Christianity offers something to people in their historical existence, so it must be rooted in the same basis of reality. Because atonement is about dealing with guilt by offering forgiveness, it is something that is experienced in a life lived in time and space. And so

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<sup>71</sup> Mackintosh (1912) p307.

<sup>72</sup> Mackintosh (1921) p13.

<sup>73</sup> Mackintosh (1921) p28.

<sup>74</sup> Mackintosh (1921) p29.

“The need of salvation cannot be satisfied by a bare idea. Not mere ideas but facts are indispensably vital; facts which have existence in the same field of reality as we ourselves, i.e. the field of history.”<sup>75</sup>

The poet may state that “the earth is full of the grandeur of God”<sup>76</sup>, but Mackintosh is clear that on one thing: nature is silent; it does not declare the merciful heart of God, it does not speak the word of forgiveness.

“What must I do to be saved? is a question to which Nature can make no reply. Sun, moon, and stars cannot answer it, nor can earth and sea. Our infinite hearts the Infinite One has made first and foremost for Himself.”<sup>77</sup>

And though all people live an historical life, history *per se* is not self-evidently revealing God, only in certain events and personalities. And the single place where people can encounter the merciful Fatherhood of God is in Jesus.

“He is indeed present in all events, ruling past and future ceaselessly; but yet in one unique tract of reality the veil upon His working grows diaphanous, and we behold His very heart... Only

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<sup>75</sup> Mackintosh (1921) p29.

<sup>76</sup> Hopkins (2002) p128.

<sup>77</sup> Mackintosh (1921) p30.

in the fact of Jesus does a basis of religion exist not made by man, but given by God Himself.”<sup>78</sup>

It becomes clear that humankind’s sinful condition must be resolved by an act of God, and so Christianity proclaims that God himself drew near, revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. In him there was a revelation of the true nature of God and his response to the sinful human condition.

But now Mackintosh indicates the objections on philosophical grounds to such a claim. For if God is the ultimate reality, the absolute, then how is it possible for “anything absolute to appear in time and space?”<sup>79</sup> Isn’t time and space defined in terms of change and mutability, by progression and transformation? How can the eternal and immutable God reveal himself through the contingencies of time and space? In this context Mackintosh quotes the words of Lessing: “Contingent historical truths can never afford proof of necessary truths of reason.”<sup>80</sup>

Mackintosh’s response is first to question the perceived understanding of the purpose of history.

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<sup>78</sup> Mackintosh (1921) p30.

<sup>79</sup> Mackintosh (1912) p308.

<sup>80</sup> Mackintosh (1912) p308.

“No one inquired whether conceivably it has been ‘assigned to man to have history for the manner in which he should manifest himself’ and whether accordingly in our search for the meaning of the world we are bound not to stop short with principles, truths, laws because what we seek is given only in facts, events, historical transactions.”<sup>81</sup>

He counters the claim of Lessing by challenging the perceived wisdom that history is contingent.<sup>82</sup> This is particularly the case for the person who has become aware of God’s sovereignty and providence, to one for whom life has purpose and the unfolding of seemingly random, unconnected events great and small come to be seen, with hindsight, born of a discerning spirit, to be instrumental in bringing the person to the full maturity of self. Likewise, the large course of history, properly understood, reveals that the forward movement of humankind has been through learning from the previous experiences of prior generations.

Secondly, the claim is countered by recognising that the Christian message does not consist in necessary truths of reason. What faith says of God in

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<sup>81</sup> Mackintosh (1912) p308.

<sup>82</sup> Mackintosh (1912) p308.

terms of his love and desire to save the world is not self-evident, but must be believed in the conscience and heart.<sup>83</sup>

Thirdly, to the idea that a historic faith must be regarded as merely relative rather than absolute, Mackintosh responds that this is simply an assumption, based on bad metaphysics that can be changed, as indeed some philosophers of his day were beginning to do. Here were the beginnings of doubt about the closed mechanical system of the world itself now overtaken by the relativity theory of Einstein and the random theories of quantum mechanics. And so Mackintosh's venture "whether the novelty emergent at a specific point in history was an absolute and all sufficient Redeemer"<sup>84</sup> seems less speculative now than perhaps it sounded at the time of writing.

Finally in refuting the *a priori* notions of historic relativity, Mackintosh notes that the religious life of man is not moved on by abstract conceptions. "Each vast movement starts with a man."<sup>85</sup> This is how history unfolds: new ideas are married to particular minds, given shape and take on influence as other people are touched by the charisma of that life embodying the idea. History is littered with such pivotal, original mover-and-shakers, and Mackintosh states that the

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<sup>83</sup> Mackintosh (1912) p308.

<sup>84</sup> Mackintosh (1912) p310.

<sup>85</sup> Mackintosh (1912) p310.

“axioms of a mechanical psychology break down helplessly before a Paul, a Luther, a Wesley, acknowledging their inability to deal with the original and inscrutable factors these names represent, it is hard to see how they can expect to cope with the incomparable life of Jesus.”<sup>86</sup>

For in him, Mackintosh sees, not one among many, but one whose life and continued influence over lives means “we touch the supreme mortal reality of the universe.”<sup>87</sup>

Next Mackintosh deals with the question of the effect of literary and historic criticism of the New Testament upon any attempt to base faith in the historical Jesus. He voices two arguments from his opponents: first, to found faith on what has been shown to be “imperfectly attested narratives of the past” is to “condemn the faith of simple believers to permanent insecurity as the satellite of scholarship.”<sup>88</sup>

The second argument Mackintosh addresses is the opposite point of view: what if it were found the gospels were in fact historically trustworthy; does that not keep Jesus tied as a figure in his own time, for

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<sup>86</sup> Mackintosh (1912) p310.

<sup>87</sup> Mackintosh (1912) p310.

<sup>88</sup> Mackintosh (1912) p311.



“his teaching follows the methods practised by His prophetic forerunners, His beliefs are drawn largely from the Old Testament, and His conception of the universe was that current in His day. Can His thought of God have escaped unharmed?”<sup>89</sup>

Mackintosh begins his response by stating

“that nothing in the past can be so certain for the historian, *purely as an historian*, as that it will bear the weight of personal religion.”<sup>90</sup>

In other words Mackintosh declares the historian and his skills incompetent to the task of declaring Jesus as the Redeemer of the world. He might be able to investigate the man but not, in this case, the meaning of the man, which belongs to the realm of faith. And even the historian is a person who confronted with the claims of Christianity may find that in Jesus he meets God.

Mackintosh’s argument here is that the personal experience of saving faith meeting, through the preaching of the gospel, the living Christ, receiving the

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<sup>89</sup> Mackintosh (1912) p311.

<sup>90</sup> Mackintosh (1912) p311.

forgiveness of sins, is such that the truth of it cannot be denied. The proof is in the eating, as it is said.

Mackintosh's conviction is that the proof of Christianity is not found through historic criticism but in its continued power to change lives, to win people's loyalty, devotion and worship to God. However in examining what the historical critic has to work with, he also contends that the New Testament in all its parts presents radically the same Christ, and that if the scholar or the simple reader comes to it in believing faith, then both will apprehend

"Jesus Christ as in the sovereign power of His resurrection He fills the primitive believing consciousness."<sup>91</sup>

His conclusion about the value of historical criticism as a means to apprehend the truth about the Christian faith is "research can no more give us a redeeming Christ than science can give us a living God." Historical research cannot give certainty.<sup>92</sup>

But Mackintosh is aware that he appears to be saying that only the personal experience of the individual believer counts towards verifying the Christian faith. And he will state otherwise, but first he wishes to maintain that only

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<sup>91</sup> Mackintosh (1912) p313.

<sup>92</sup> Mackintosh 'History and the Gospel' (Summary sheet of a lecture).

someone who has a believing mind, and therefore has engaged with the revealing history, can have a true knowledge of God and recognise the truth about Jesus as witnessed in the gospel accounts.

Mackintosh turns now to the argument put forward by Martin Kähler<sup>93</sup> who saw no value in trying to get behind the gospels to find the real Jesus before he was made the figure of Christian veneration. Kähler was convinced that the present gospels were by their layout and content not meant to be seen as biographies of Jesus, and those who wish to write such a biography are

“Compelled to fill up the meagre outline with private fancies, based on psychological analogies which really are irrelevant to a sinless life.”<sup>94</sup>

He contended that it was by the preaching of Jesus as the Christ that the Church came into existence and the gospels are records of their preaching which

“accordingly must remain the vital soil of her life and the final court of appeal by which the truth of her message is sanctioned.”<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Kähler (1964). For a brief summary of Kähler's contribution to the debate see McGrath (1986) pp76-80.

<sup>94</sup> Mackintosh (1912) p313.

<sup>95</sup> Mackintosh (1912) p314.

But Mackintosh, though in broad agreement with this argument, still finds it not without its flaws. These relate to the question of

“whether after all the Gospel can rest for us simply on the faith of other men?”<sup>96</sup>

Quoting John 4:42, and referring to words of Luther, Mackintosh is clear that the only real faith that matters is when a person can say from the heart; this is what God has done *for me*.

“The grounds of faith accessible to apostles are open to us also.”<sup>97</sup>

And it is here that we find Mackintosh expressing the ground of his own faith. For him the gospels do more than describe a man and his life; they convey from its pages a personality. Mackintosh sees in Jesus a figure who commands the loyalty and obedience in others because

“He makes His own overmastering impression and subdues us to himself.”<sup>98</sup>

In another place Mackintosh states,

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<sup>96</sup> Mackintosh (1912) p314.

<sup>97</sup> Mackintosh (1912) p314.

<sup>98</sup> Mackintosh (1912) p312.

“...truths which we acquire by hard thinking do not necessarily appeal to our hearts or to our entire personality; they have no power to change us and make us like themselves. Whereas truths which we learn through people, through their life and character, inevitably grip at our very heart; they change our view of ourselves and indeed of life as a whole. They alter our conception of the universe and of our conduct within it...”<sup>99</sup>

It is this intimate knowledge of a person that matters and which becomes so indelible that issues relating to the gospels become secondary. As Mackintosh puts it

“It can be employed to control the evangelical narratives themselves” to the point that we are “released from peripheral details”. This knowledge of the reality of Christ’s person “is so real and sure it tests and attests its own constituent elements... Thus the apostles’ faith is for us a mirror reflecting the actual Jesus, and enabling us to know Him for ourselves.”<sup>100</sup>

Mackintosh now asks what is exactly meant by the phrase, ‘the historic Christ’? His answer begins with the work of Wilhelm Herrmann. He states that for Herrmann the saving revelation of God was not a mere multiplicity

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<sup>99</sup> Mackintosh (1921) p42.

<sup>100</sup> Mackintosh (1912) p314.

of facts but a unity around a fixed centre which he understood as the "inner life of Jesus Himself."<sup>101</sup>

At this point Herrmann introduces a distinction between the ground of faith and the convictions generated by faith. The former is this inner life of Jesus, which is

"a moral ultimate behind which criticism cannot penetrate and in virtue of which Jesus comes home to us as the personal manifestation of a redeeming God."<sup>102</sup>

The latter are beliefs and thoughts that are created by this faith in Jesus, such as his pre-existence, resurrection and exaltation. Mackintosh questions the validity of this contrast and whether it can be justified to reduce the historic Christ to his inner life.<sup>103</sup>

Mackintosh uses the example of the resurrection to indicate that what makes belief in it possible is the impression Jesus the man has made on the mind and heart. It is our awareness of his greatness that makes the possibility of resurrection for him credible where it may not be thought so of another. Also

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<sup>101</sup> Mackintosh (1912) p315.

<sup>102</sup> Mackintosh (1912) p315.

<sup>103</sup> Mackintosh (1912) p315.

the resurrection is surely part of the saving event and affects how the person of Christ is understood.

“A Christ whom we know to have been raised out of death, and shown Himself to His disciples as the Living One, and a Christ of whom we are not quite certain whether He is risen or not, are obviously so different that they must evoke a quite different religious interest.”<sup>104</sup>

And so Mackintosh rejects the arguments of Herrmann and his limiting of the historic Christ to his inner life:

“...the ‘historic Christ’ is not the carpenter of Nazareth merely, the Hero of humanity, the ancient religious genius; He is the Lord who rose again to the glory of the Father.”<sup>105</sup>

Elsewhere Mackintosh makes clear that, in contrast to Ritschl, he does not wish to limit the revelation from Bethlehem to Calvary, for in this way nothing is said about either Christ’s pre-existence or his exaltation. He is clear that he wants to believe in the *Word* became flesh.

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<sup>104</sup> Mackintosh (1912) p317.

<sup>105</sup> Mackintosh (1912) p 317.

“For him (Mackintosh) historical revelation which is the ground of faith and theology is not merely in Jesus’ earthly life: it is the work of the Lord who comes into history from the bosom of the Father and is now present in his risen power all days unto the end.”<sup>106</sup>

In other words historicism results in

“the pre existence of Christ being little more than a meaningless symbol and the present sovereignty of Christ reduced to a posthumous influence.”<sup>107</sup>

In summary Mackintosh states that

“the Christ entitled to be called historic is the Christ mediated to us by the testimony of the apostles; so mediated, however, that in their witness we are able to perceive and know Him independently.”<sup>108</sup>

He calls attention to the Gospel of John and the manner in which the earthly life of Jesus recorded therein is already charged with the consummated

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<sup>106</sup> Leitch (1952) p197.

<sup>107</sup> Leitch (1952) p197.

<sup>108</sup> Mackintosh (1912) p317.



significance of his exaltation. In this way the author of the Gospel affirms that the historic Jesus and He in whom faith sees the last and all-sufficient manifestation of God are one and the same. Mackintosh then makes a statement guaranteed to draw up the modern reader:

“We cannot but read the Gospels and feel that this Man is destined for resurrection; and what the writers of the New Testament have done is not to overlay the concrete facts of history with confusing and irrelevant mythology, but with profound spiritual insight to construe Jesus’ whole career in the light of its stupendous issue.”<sup>109</sup>

Mackintosh makes it clear that Christianity has always identified Christ the Lord with Jesus of Nazareth. And any proposal to somehow separate these two, and set free the real Jesus from confines of untrustworthy legends, ends with an imaginary construction; one based on a naturalistic assumption about the possibility of the existence of a transcendent Person.

And the singular event that holds the two together is the resurrection. He quotes Forrest<sup>110</sup> at this point:

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<sup>109</sup> Mackintosh (1912) p318.

<sup>110</sup> Forrest (1897) p158.

“The resurrection constitutes the great point of transition in the Christian faith, at which He who appeared as a single figure in history is recognised as in reality above historical limitations, the abiding Lord and life of souls.”<sup>111</sup>

And so

“The transcendent Christ, active ‘all the days unto the end’, guarantees the Jesus of Palestine, forever anew He grants to men the very experiences undergone by the primitive group of believers.”<sup>112</sup>

### **A Critical Response**

It is in approaching the questions of the relationship of history to theology, and more particularly Christology, that Mackintosh is seen clearly in his own historical context. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries a revolution in historical thinking had been taking place. Ironically, it had been led, at the outset, by theologians and biblical thinkers.<sup>113</sup> But it reached a stage where it was supposed that history could be scientific in the manner of the natural sciences. It was Auguste Comte, who coined the phrase that characterised this point of view: positivism. And historical positivism was the

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<sup>111</sup> Mackintosh (1912) p318

<sup>112</sup> Mackintosh (1912) p319.

<sup>113</sup> Richardson (ed) (1981) p156.

dominant theory of history until the 1930's. As J B Bury<sup>114</sup> was to claim in his Inaugural Lecture at Cambridge in 1902: "history is a science, no less and no more."<sup>115</sup>

Thus history was the gathering of objective facts, putting them into chronological order, and making judgements based upon them about the meaning of events. Anything that could not be considered an objective fact was 'unhistorical' and had to be discounted from historical study. Mackintosh is fond of using the word 'facts' which may be due to the influence of this philosophy of history at that time. It must be recognised he is writing his main works in this time and it is this kind of thinking against which he is seeking to defend Christianity.

Interestingly Mackintosh, though coming into contact with the work of Barth, did not live long enough to be influenced by that other giant of twentieth century German theology, Rudolf Bultmann. It was Bultmann above all others who wrestled with the problem of history and theology. The early paths of Barth and Bultmann ran in parallel, and both were causing ripples of concern in the circles of German theology from the same period. However, as Bultmann's breakthrough work was not published until after Mackintosh's death it is not surprising he does not feature in his writings.

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<sup>114</sup> "John Bagnell Bury was a British classical scholar and historian. The range of Bury's scholarship was remarkable: he wrote about Greek, Roman, and Byzantine history; classical philology and literature; and the theory and philosophy of history." Quoted from on-line article in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*

Certainly it is with Bultmann that Mackintosh would have had to contend as he argued the case for minimising the results of historical criticism on the figure of Jesus and in his own assertions about the gospels presenting, not so much historical facts, as a towering personality.

As a young man, Bultmann had also been a liberal, with a keen interest in the personality of Jesus. Kuschel quotes from an early letter of Bultmann where he says,

“One may have some objections to points of detail in Protestant scholarship; I think that e.g. Bousset (Göttingen) has not drawn out the personality of Jesus sufficiently in his *Jesus*.”<sup>116</sup>

However, his development of Form Criticism would lead him to depart from such a view. By the late 1920's Bultmann would contend that:

“Historical source analysis has achieved two things: first it has unmasked the uncertainty of what people thought they knew about the personality of Jesus; and secondly, it has shown that the Gospels are not concerned to depict a great, historical personality ‘Jesus’.”<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Richardson (ed) (1981) p156.

<sup>116</sup> Kuschel (1992) p126.

<sup>117</sup> Kuschel (1992) p131.

The issue raised by Kähler about the historical Jesus or the historic Christ lies at the heart of the wide gulf between Mackintosh and Bultmann. It is indisputable that Mackintosh sees the dangers of tying faith too closely to the historical individual who was Jesus of Nazareth. Nevertheless with his emphasis on the personality of Jesus he is convinced that the human life as it was lived in time and space was what impacted upon the lives of those who met him. This human life was what inspired their faith in him.

Bultmann agreed with Kähler's main thesis and rejected the historical Jesus in favour of the historic Christ. This led Bultmann to a critical examination, and then further to a radical re-interpretation, of the gospels, in a term ever to be associated with his biblical scholarship: demythologising.

In stripping the gospels of those elements that he defined as mythical, Bultmann wanted to present to contemporary society the Christian faith in its essence, set free from its depiction in a world-view that incorporated elements firmly belonging to a pre-scientific age. However, Bultmann's intention, which was to remove all mythical elements, eventually led to a backlash led by his own former pupils. They came to realise that their teacher's definition of myth had been too wide sweeping. According to Kuschel Kummel put it that Bultmann had summarised

“elements of the New Testament picture of the world and the mythical features of the Christ-kerygma under the common denominator of ‘myth’ and thus blocked any possibility “of separating the mythical features which are perhaps indispensable to the central kerygma of the New Testament from those which are dispensable or open to misunderstanding and from the merely contemporary limitations of the world-view.”<sup>118</sup>

It is here that two other assertions of Mackintosh need to be taken into consideration. First, there is his insistence that because Christianity is, at its core, a religion of atonement, it must be based in history. Mackintosh believes that Christianity is about what God has done for humanity. Since it relates to forgiveness and re-creation, which is experienced in time and space, Christianity’s origin and source needs to be rooted in the same historical context. On the understanding that, “against you, you alone, have I sinned.” (Psalm 51:4 NRSV) and “who can forgive sins but God alone?” (Mark 2:7 NRSV) then only if God is in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, does the life of Christ have any relevance and meaning.

Directly related to this is Mackintosh’s concern that what we have in Jesus Christ is the ‘Word made flesh’, and that the incarnation of the Second Person of the Trinity is the subject of the gospel. It therefore matters that

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<sup>118</sup> Kuschel (1992) p162f.

both the pre-existence of Christ as well as his subsequent exaltation is involved in the story.

While Mackintosh made such statements in reaction to the historical positivism of Ritschl, he did not use the word 'myth' to describe what he envisaged (it is another item missing from his subject indexes). In his time this word was still being used to describe collections of fantastic fairy-tale stories, naïve pre-rational explanations of the world and nature, or even irrational conceptions of reality. There were the Greek myths that everyone knew and of them this was clear: they were unhistorical.

Bultmann had his own definition of myth; it was

“that mode of conception...in which what is unworldly and divine appears as what is worldly and human or what is transcendent appears as what is immanent, as when, for example, God's transcendence is thought of as spatial distance... Mythology is a mode of representation in consequence of which cult is understood as action in which non-material forces are mediated by material means.”<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Bultmann (1953). This book is available online at 'religion-online.org' and is where the present author obtained it. In this form there are no page numbers to isolate the quotes.

This definition was used to guide Bultmann in his work on the New Testament. However, such a definition begins with the same premise as that outlined above: myth essentially means unhistorical, and certainly means unbelievable.

However, in recent times myth has been re-evaluated not merely in the sphere of theology but across a wide spectrum of disciplines. The view now held is that myth is a system of experience which at all events is fundamentally different from the one that guides us today, that is science. No less a theologian than Pannenberg has stated that,

“modern Christian theology must concede self-critically that in giving up myth it has often handed itself over to the instrumental reason of the scientific world-view, and now with the crisis of modern, scientific and technological rationality has in turn found itself in crisis.”<sup>120</sup>

In other words, the language of myth is now understood to be an essential way of stating the truth that lies outside the realms of scientific forms. Ironically this position is made possible, in part, by those very scientific discoveries that dealt the fatal blow to the old closed system certainties. The

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<sup>120</sup> Pannenberg (1968).



limitations of those certainties had been instrumental in encouraging historians and theologians to seek to discard the language form in the first place.

The Christological issues of pre-existence and incarnation, cross and resurrection are no longer being put on the same level as the pre-rational belief in demons and spirits. Rather they are the serious study of present day theologians who have come to understand that the mythical elements contained in the gospel are in fact essential to the truth to which they witness.

It is interesting that even as this paper is in the process of being written, in Scotland, Canongate are publishing a series of books about the Greek myths in contemporary language because the publishers believe that myth remains an important means by which people understand themselves in the world. In a post-modern society hope is being offered not by science and technology but by ancient stories. What they are being offered is the truth about the world and themselves.

As a respected Oxford don and renowned classicist, as well as a populist apologist of Christianity, C S Lewis, wrote of myth in terms of offering a partial solution to the dilemma of knowledge, namely the inability to hold together abstract thought and concrete realities: "We lack one kind of knowledge because we are in an experience or...lack the other kind because

we are outside it.”<sup>121</sup> Or as he puts it, “to taste and not to know or to know and not to taste.”<sup>122</sup>

He believes that myth is not, “like truth, abstract; nor is it, like direct experience, bound to the particular,”<sup>123</sup> What myth does is to present, in a story, something that allows us to experience “as a concrete what can otherwise be understood only as an abstraction.”<sup>124</sup> He continues: “what flows into you from the myth is not truth but reality (truth is always *about* something, but reality is that *about which* truth is)”<sup>125</sup>.

Lewis contends that “as myth transcends thought, so incarnation transcends myth.”<sup>126</sup> What makes the gospel so profound is that

“The old myth of the Dying God, *without ceasing to be myth*, comes down from the heaven of legend and imagination to the earth of history. It happens – at a particular date, in a particular place, followed by definable historical consequences. We pass from a

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<sup>121</sup> Lewis (1971) p34.

<sup>122</sup> Lewis (1971) p34.

<sup>123</sup> Lewis (1971) p36.

<sup>124</sup> Lewis (1971) p35.

<sup>125</sup> Lewis (1971) p35.

<sup>126</sup> Lewis (1971) p36.

Baldet or an Osiris, dying nobody knows when or where, to a historical Person crucified (it is all in order) *under Pontius Pilate.*<sup>127</sup>

He concludes, "if God chooses to be mythopoeic- and is not the sky itself a myth? - shall we refuse to be *mythopathic*? For this is the marriage of heaven and earth: Perfect Myth and Perfect Fact..."<sup>128</sup>

The key event upon which all of this must bear is the Resurrection. How is it to be understood? For Mackintosh, the case is clear; here is where the good work of Ritschl and those who followed him, such as Herrmann, in seeking to base faith on objective fact, rather than subjective feeling, did not go far enough. They did not consider the resurrection as part of the history of Jesus, part of what created faith, part of what must be included in the interpretation of who and what Christ is.

"No line of demarcation can be drawn prohibiting us, in our assertions regarding Him, from passing beyond the hour of His crucifixion. The limits within which Christ is revealed are not fixed between Bethlehem and Calvary. He is revealed also in His rising from the dead."<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Lewis (1971) p36.

<sup>128</sup> Lewis (1971) p37.

<sup>129</sup> Mackintosh (1912) p317.

Heumann's separation of that which creates faith and that which is created by faith places the Resurrection in the experience of the church rather than that of Jesus. But Mackintosh contends that the witness of the New Testament is

“Not to overlay the concrete facts of history with confusing and irrelevant mythology, but with profound spiritual insight to construe Jesus' whole career in the light of its stupendous issue.”<sup>130</sup>

Here is Mackintosh's acceptance of the fact that the gospels are written from an eschatological perspective. The first witnesses to the Resurrection understood it as prefiguring the fulfilment of God's purposes, now only presently exhibited in the person of Jesus. As they told the story of Jesus, their intention was to impart this same knowledge about this life to the reader. As Mackintosh noted

“We cannot read the Gospels and not feel that this Man was destined for resurrection.”<sup>131</sup>

Mackintosh sees in the gospels a great Personality because the historic life has not been presented in sterile objectivity, but conveyed through a lens,

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<sup>130</sup> Mackintosh (1912) p318.

<sup>131</sup> Mackintosh (1912) p317.

allowing the white light of the resurrection to disperse a rainbow of colour over the former historic existence. His regard for the intended destiny of Jesus is not a personal insight, but the result of the inspired authorship of the original writer, who has thus fulfilled his literary art.

Therefore it becomes evident that those who wish still to free Jesus from the gospel setting into what they perceive as the historical truth will always be left with a figure who, though always interesting, will inevitably appear less than what he has come to signify in history. Contrary to Mackintosh's thought, it was not the greatness of Jesus' human personality that created the faith people have in him. It is not that his life made him credible for resurrection. Rather his resurrection created faith that led to a re-orientation about the significance of his life.

But Mackintosh is right when he asserts that there must be more than simply the moments between birth and death in the life of Jesus to do justice to his significance. This is why the stories about Jesus take the form they do. They are not the added elements; they are the essential elements to enable the writers to tell the story of the Word made flesh. This is a mythical story, yet it is not purely myth, because it differs by being rooted and grounded in a particular human being located in a specific time and space.

While the historians may wish to use the gospels as sources for their work, because of the nature of the gospels, they will be compelled by the parameters of their discipline to remove elements beyond the scope of their research. However, the biblical scholar has a different task: for that work requires an understanding that this story was written in a pre-scientific age and that elements of that world-view must be in this story, and as such must be recognised and interpreted accordingly. However, if the above discussion holds, then there must not be a rationalising of the material, as Bultmann attempted, to make it credible to modern eyes and ears.

The fields of literary and historical criticism have developed since Mackintosh's time. These developments have enabled scholars to redefine and better use the concept of myth and also to abandon the historical positivism that Mackintosh rejected. They have led to the refutation of the stance Bultmann felt was necessary for modernity to comprehend the gospel.

However, this has not led to a settled response by scholars to the quest for the historical Jesus and the reason for this lies in another field of study, namely, that the overarching meaning of this particular historic figure lies not in himself, but rather, in that he is believed to give knowledge and comprehension about the essential nature and character of God. Therefore, to the questions of biblical interpretation and historical criticism must be added a further, what does it mean that Jesus is the revelation of God?

## Chapter 6

### REVELATION

Since the previous chapter strongly advocated the use of story as a carrier of truth, may the following story be indulged within the context of the formality of this thesis.

In the film, *Field of Dreams*, the character, Ray Costella, a farmer in Iowa, begins to hear a voice. The voice says specific things, "If you build it, he will come." But the voice doesn't give any explanation to meaning of what is said. Costella has to figure it out. And eventually he figures out he should build, in the middle of his cornfield in Iowa, a baseball field. He also believes the person to come will be a former baseball star, 'Shoeless' Joe Jackson, given a second chance to play the game he loved.

As the story progresses, the voice gives additional information, and other characters are drawn into this vision. But the true story arc is Costella reviewing, with a greater objectivity and insight, the relationship he had with his father, also a baseball player, who imparted his love of the game to his son. By the film's end, Costella discovers that 'he (who) will come' is not Joe Jackson but his own long-dead father. The son finds himself now fully reconciled to his father, the last image showing the two men playing ball together.

In this movie a man receives what to him is externally given knowledge. The knowledge, however, is not foreign to him. It has relevance to his past, his present and his future. This knowledge imposes itself upon him, yet must be freely accepted before it can be acted upon. This knowledge will lead both to a change in how his past is understood, and the action he will take to shape his future. But ultimately this knowledge will give him a new perception of, and relationship to, someone he already knew. He will know him more truthfully and respond to him more lovingly.

If the film's subject matter was to be summed up in one word that word could be 'revelation.'

Mackintosh defines the word thus:

"Those creative acts or events or personalities, through the instrumentality of which a new type of religious experience, of fellowship with God, is initiated and given its specific character."<sup>132</sup>

What happens in the realm of fiction to Ray Costella and his father, according to the Christian understanding of this general definition, is what happens in the realm of history to the Christian (and the Christian community) and God.

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<sup>132</sup> Mackintosh (1928) p88.



Through words (Scripture), that must be interpreted in and through life's experience, events in the past and present are seen with new eyes and understanding. This new understanding has the ultimate outcome of filling the content of a (perhaps, already established) relationship with God, with a more profound truthfulness. God, who was thought known, now appears in a clearer light of apprehension, resulting in a deeper response of love, in obedience and devotion.

But the ultimate example of this process is that the word that initiates the process is not merely that which is written, or even spoken: "And the Word became flesh and lived among us." (John 1:14 NRSV)

"In Him we see, once and for ever, what God would have us know concerning Himself as the Judge and Redeemer of us all; and the liberating and cleansing effect of Christ upon our lives is guarantee to faith that the revelation which He embodies is true. That which in fact does bring us to the Father, does persuade us to adhere to God, as holy love, is His self-revelation."<sup>133</sup>

As Mackintosh states elsewhere:

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<sup>133</sup> Mackintosh (1928) p88.

“All religious knowledge of God, whatever existing, comes by revelation; otherwise we should be committed to the incredible position that man can know God without His willing to be known.”<sup>134</sup>

This is the witness of the biblical record, through both the prophetic and apostolic writings. The Bible, states Mackintosh,

“does not encourage us to think of revelation as taking place by the sudden preternatural conveyance of mere information or bare doctrinal theorems. It rather bids us conceive of God as unveiling His character and purpose through objective events and historic personalities, which faith is taught to interpret as luminous with transcendent meaning and predictive of yet greater Divine manifestations in the future.”<sup>135</sup>

He observes,

“There must be a reason for this singular fact that this book (the Bible) which all agree contains the purest religious truth...should be so largely composed of the records of human

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<sup>134</sup> Mackintosh (1928) p70.

<sup>135</sup> Mackintosh (1928) p74.

life, human experience, human adventures of faith. 'There is such a reason... God revealed Himself through history.'<sup>136</sup>

There are for Mackintosh two stages in revelation. The first is the primary stage which can be defined in terms of the three factors that are universally available, namely nature, history and the moral conscience. In Paul's letter to the Romans he gives recognition to these factors as leaving no one able to say they did not know of God. However he also states that as avenues of revelation these three had failed to bring people into a true knowledge of God or into a satisfactory relationship with God. What was required was the second stage of revelation, called remedial, a new and better manifestation of God,

"so powerful and tenacious in its effects that sin must give way and eventually be driven from the field."<sup>137</sup>

This revelation, par excellence, began in God's choice of Israel to be the people of God. Through their history, and specific persons within that history, the primary revelation available to all is added to by a remedial revelation which is characterised by being particularised, beginning "at one centre and spreading out from that nucleus."<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Mackintosh (1921) p42.

<sup>137</sup> Mackintosh (1928) p76.

<sup>138</sup> Mackintosh (1928) p76.

Within that particular history a major element that informed it as revelation is the words of the prophets. This diverse group of people were united in a profound sense of calling, and their task was

“to decipher the signs of the times, and to translate the meaning of events into language intelligible to their contemporaries; for, as has been said, ‘revelation is no revelation until it takes the shape of human thought.’”<sup>139</sup>

Mackintosh also states that two other points must be taken into consideration. First, that God’s revelation of himself, though relative, is true. He is knowable but remains still unknown. Secondly, there is an historical development in primary revelation in which the Divine reality is gradually disclosed, as though God were letting our eyes adjust to his light bit by bit. This means that a genuine revelation can be granted to a prophet who yet may not understand all God is trying to say to him. It would be thus possible for such a prophet to distort or darken and so mislead about features of God’s character.

Turning from the biblical witness to trying to formulate the principles that would define an event as revelatory, Mackintosh uses the work of Rothe.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Mackintosh (1928) p77.

<sup>140</sup> Richard Rothe (1799-1867) was a German Lutheran theologian.

The question the latter posed was this, Is revelation essentially outward or inward, or both equally? The answer given is it is all of God though it has two distinct aspects. The first is the interposition of God in the actual history of the world. This, Rothe called Manifestation. On the other side is the divine enlightenment of prophetic people, enabling them to interpret the events in which God is manifested. This, Rothe called Inspiration. Mackintosh sums up as follows:

“Both things together, outward event and insight quickened from above, form, as a living unity, revelation.”<sup>141</sup>

While Mackintosh is in broad agreement with this approach he does recognise a drawback in confining God’s manifestation to outward events, whether in nature or history. The example he quotes to justify this is Jesus’ experience of Sonship as the highest revelation of God’s Fatherhood, yet this experience was no outward event.<sup>142</sup>

However, the point is made that outward events, “bare happenings in space and time”<sup>143</sup>, in themselves are insufficient to make God known to people. There must be beside them, vitally connected to them, the divinely given insight that such an event has the significance of God.

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<sup>141</sup> Mackintosh (1928) p82

<sup>142</sup> Mackintosh (1928) p82.

<sup>143</sup> Mackintosh (1928) p83.

It is this recognition that history without illumination contains no divine self-disclosure that allows Mackintosh not to be intimidated by the development and deployment of the historical critical method upon the Bible, particularly the gospels. In fact Mackintosh makes the claim that

“the revelation which calls forth saving faith and imparts to such faith not probability merely, but certainty and triumphant power – the person of Jesus Christ, in short – is something that historical science cannot touch, much less destroy.”<sup>144</sup>

And what the person of Jesus Christ gives us is ‘the perfect revelation of the Father’:

“To redeem by authority, by atonement, by the gift of life – this *is* revelation. The words of Jesus are the voice of God. The tears of Jesus are the pity of God. The wrath of Jesus is the judgement of God.”<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Mackintosh (1928) p84.

<sup>145</sup> Mackintosh (1912) p340.

In short, "Christ is the revealer of God." And from this Mackintosh draws the following conclusion: "only He can reveal perfectly who *is* what He reveals."<sup>146</sup>

Mackintosh is certain that the words and deeds of the historical life of Jesus conveyed to the minds and hearts of human beings knowledge of God's essential self, and this is only possible because Jesus was God incarnate.

"...He lived out the transcendent life which constituted His personality, confronting men as His Divine self, and letting the fact of His being tell on their minds as revelation."<sup>147</sup>

Mackintosh summarises then as the five "chief constitutive features"<sup>148</sup> of revelation, the following:

- 1) Revelation is personal. Mackintosh understands God as divine Person addressing human persons through the Person of Jesus Christ. The major difference between Christianity and other forms of religion is that it is a movement of God towards humankind, rather than the aspirations of humanity rising to meet God.
- 2) Revelation in quality is moral. By this Mackintosh means that God does not impose his being before human beings: he does not express

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<sup>146</sup> Mackintosh (1912) p341.

<sup>147</sup> Mackintosh (1912) p341.

<sup>148</sup> Mackintosh (1928) p90ff.

his will in “a body of statutory dogma”<sup>149</sup> Rather it has to be freely accepted and responded to, it appeals to the highest level of conscience and for the willing surrender of heart.

- 3) Revelation is supernatural. Mackintosh appears to use the word ‘supernatural’ in the sense of God’s freedom rather than describing the manner in which the revelation takes place. There is no necessity at work, it is all of grace. Nothing requires God to reveal himself, and there is nothing human beings can do to possess it in and of themselves. Revelation is supernatural in that there are particular persons or events that weigh heavily with the significance of God.
- 4) Revelation is historical. Mackintosh means by this that like a view seen through a lens, where the focus is adjusted and the image becomes increasingly sharper, so through human history, has God’s nature and purpose become increasing clear. Revelation does not come all at once, but builds upon what has already been experienced previously. Secondly, it is historic in that its content has not been fixed by human speculation but by given events in time, chosen not by human beings but by the will of God, culminating in the life and death of Jesus.
- 5) Revelation evokes and nourishes faith. This is really the other side of all that has thus far been said. Revelation is given to elicit a response. Because of the manner of revelation, through objective events and

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<sup>149</sup> Mackintosh (1928) p91.



recorded words, there is a universal aspect to revelation.<sup>150</sup> But because that manner also is not one of external imposition, not everyone is compelled to see in these things God. Though the revelation is externally given, internally it must be so interpreted and embodied. This human activity is called faith.

Of course there is a clearly seen danger with this understanding of revelation, and it is one Mackintosh anticipates. What is to prevent a person or body from declaring their particular dissertation on God as revealed truth? This, in fact, has been the problem down the ages. Mackintosh agrees with the insight of Luther that "God must be conceived wholly according to Christ."<sup>151</sup> And for us the record of his life and the faithful expression of that life as revelation of God by the Church are both contained in Scripture. Mackintosh reiterates his confidence in that source and appeals to others to share that confidence.

"At each point Christ must be our guide. Let Him explain Himself; do not obscure or modify His revelation by principles gathered elsewhere. Above all, never dilute His Gospel to the prescription of any half-religious philosophy."<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> see below for a further development of this idea.

<sup>151</sup> Mackintosh (1928) p94.

<sup>152</sup> Mackintosh (1928) p94.

However, as a further caveat, Mackintosh immediately dismisses the idea that he, thereby, has limited God's self-revelation exclusively through Christ. He willingly accepts that God has not so confined the manner of his revelation. However, while God can speak to conscience, through nature, it remains an axiom for Mackintosh that only in the gospel of Jesus Christ is the claim made "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father." (John 14:9 NRSV)

### **A Critical Response**

According to Leitch, Mackintosh used to introduce his lectures on dogmatics by defining it as "the elucidation of the full content of Revelation, of the Word of God as contained in Scripture."<sup>153</sup>

In effect this demonstrates the limited way in which Mackintosh understood the mode of God's revelation. Though God had revealed himself in history, it appears to be only that history which is recorded in Scripture that actually is revelatory. And though God reveals himself in personalities, it is only those personalities that are recorded in Scripture that are revelatory. And though God has ultimately and supremely revealed himself in Jesus Christ, it is that life as witnessed to in Scripture that is revelatory.

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<sup>153</sup> Leitch (1952) p36.

Mackintosh did not see theology as a creative enterprise but an interpretive exercise that brings to human understanding the fullness of God as he is witnessed to in Scripture.

However, as Mackintosh said,

“The first thing declared in Scripture concerning God is that He is the Creator...The God of Christian faith is in no sense a means to our ends; He is the Lord, whom we and all things serve.”<sup>154</sup>

But if we consider the biblical axiom that humankind is made in the image of God, then the expectation of creativity as part of our existence would be justified. And such creativity in theology is required to bring the biblical witness concerning God to bear upon the larger sweep of history. If the Word of God reveals God's nature and being, and if God is the Lord over all, then by extrapolation theology is able to speak not only to specific events but also to bring meaning to all events.

Such work has in fact been done by other theologians including Pannenberg.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Leitch (1952) p87, quoting Mackintosh in *Expository Times* XLIII (1931-32) p203

<sup>155</sup> Wolfhart Pannenberg, born 1928, was a Protestant systematic theologian, among whose published works was the influential book on Christology, *Jesus-God and Man*, SCM Press Ltd, 1968. Subject of

In the previous chapter it was demonstrated that the manner in which the Resurrection was understood within history was of vital significance. Pannenberg has been described as a theologian whose Christology was neither 'from above' or 'from below' (though he himself argued strongly for the latter)<sup>156</sup> but rather a 'Christology of the resurrection of Jesus'.<sup>157</sup>

For Pannenberg *the event* in which God disclosed himself was the resurrection of Jesus. As Mackintosh has stated, an historical event, *per se*, is not necessarily revelatory, but must be invested with the significance of God. In the life of Jesus, his every moment can be subjected to historical investigation without direct reference to God. But that is not possible with the Resurrection. By its very nature, the only means of explanation is God, and so it is *the* place of God's self disclosure.

Pannenberg also held that the resurrection was to be understood eschatologically, and as such he could then draw the inference that

"the apocalyptic expectation of the 'resurrection from the dead'  
is the eschatological fulfilment of history and thus the final self-  
revelation of God that is anticipated in history. The meaning of

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many biographies, a fine summary of his life and thought is to be found in the *Boston Collaborative Encyclopedia of Modern Western Theology* (online), written by Peter Heltzel

<sup>156</sup> Pannenberg (1968a) p34ff.

<sup>157</sup> Kuschel (1992) p402.

history generally has been disclosed in a concrete historical event  
– as it were in anticipation.”<sup>158</sup>

Pannenberg’s creative theological thought then devised seven “dogmatic theses on the doctrine of revelation”<sup>159</sup> Of these the one with most direct bearing on our immediate discussion is the third:

“(3) In contrast to special divine manifestations, the revelation in history is open to anyone who has eyes to see it: it has universal character.”<sup>160</sup>

His conclusion, from his doctrine of revelation, was that the resurrection was an objective historic event, witnessed by all who had access to the evidence. Now for this to stand up to theological scrutiny Pannenberg had to demonstrate the inadequacy of one of the three critical historical principles enunciated by Troeltsch.<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Kuschel (1992) p403.

<sup>159</sup> McGrath (1986) p165 who conveniently draws together in summary form the content of Pannenberg’s book, *Revelation as History*.

<sup>160</sup> McGrath (1986) p165.

<sup>161</sup> Ernst Troeltsch (1865-1923), was a German philosopher and historian of religion, who applied the methods and insights of W Dilthey’s philosophy of history to an analysis of the Christian faith. cf. Richardson (ed) (1969) p351 for a summary.

Troeltsch was one of the subjects in Mackintosh's book, *Types of Modern Theology*, under the heading, "The Theology of Scientific Religious Ideas."<sup>162</sup> Mackintosh names the three principles as *criticism, relativity* and *analogy*.<sup>163</sup>

The particular principle under discussion here is that of analogy, which Mackintosh summarises as follows:

"religious thought in history has everywhere been at work on similar lines, with the result that, as the discerning might have predicted, virtually all the important doctrines of Christianity have a counterpart or *vis-a-vis* in other faiths."<sup>164</sup>

Now Mackintosh, understanding Troeltsch as operating out of the field of the history of religions, wants to deny that the New Testament writers have simply tapped into a universal pool of doctrinal ideas and fashioned them into their own particular story, and he chooses to use as his illustration the resurrection.

"The fact has still to be accounted for that, to take the example of the Resurrection (sic), these hopes of a 'Divine mortal' who

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<sup>162</sup> Mackintosh (1937) p181ff.

<sup>163</sup> Mackintosh (1937) p197.

<sup>164</sup> Mackintosh (1937) p199.

should overcome death became certainties; and this, it may well be argued, was due to the irresistible force of fact.”<sup>165</sup>

Mackintosh keeps the resurrection within the sphere of historical investigation by his reference to ‘facts’ and reinforces that with the history of the church and its tenacity in both proclaiming and dying for the truth of this belief. Though he takes issue with how analogy is interpreted he is comfortable with the idea in principle stating

“the perpetual pressure of God’s seeking love upon the human spirit, and man’s incurably religious disposition, we need feel no difficulty in recognising in these alleged analogies...instances of the eager questions which from the earliest times man has been asking himself about God.”<sup>166</sup>

However while it may have been in relation to other religions that Troeltsch formulated the principle, Mackintosh could not anticipate that later theologians would use it *within* Christianity to make acceptance of the resurrection *as* an historical fact, an impossibility. As McGrath puts it:

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<sup>165</sup> Mackintosh (1937) p200.

<sup>166</sup> Mackintosh (1937) p200f.

“Traditional Christian beliefs, particularly the resurrection of Jesus, appear to rest upon events without present-day analogies, with the result that Christian faith and historical enquiry seem doomed to go their separate ways. As one observer pointed out, ‘without the principle of analogy, it seems impossible to understand the past; if, however, one employs the principle of analogy, it seems impossible to do justice to the alleged uniqueness of Christ.’”<sup>167</sup>

At this point Pannenberg is credited with providing the definitive response to Troeltsch’s principle. In effect he saw that it was a tool that had taken on the appearance of a world view. The problem was due to a biased anthropology that saw the human viewpoint as the only valid viewpoint within history. But according to Pannenberg it is God who is the ultimate bearer of history and its meaning.<sup>168</sup> The negative use of this principle was based on the presumption

“that if there are no other events subject to the experience of the historian which is analogous to the event under investigation, there is thereby sufficient reason to believe that the alleged ‘event’ did not, in fact, take place in the first instance.”<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> McGrath (1986) p170.

<sup>168</sup> McGrath (1986) p171.

<sup>169</sup> McGrath (1986) p171.



And the obvious example of such an event is the resurrection. And so Pannenberg's conclusion is

"If history does not begin in a dogmatic manner with the restricted concept of reality according to which 'dead men do not rise', it is not clear why history should not fundamentally be in a position to speak about the resurrection of Jesus as the best-established explanation of events such as the experiences of the disciples and the discovery of the empty tomb."<sup>170</sup>

While McGrath is happy to acknowledge the work of Pannenberg in this regard, in fact, Mackintosh had stated similar conclusions a generation previously. In his general criticism of Troeltsch he points out that with regards to history

"The possibilities have been fixed in advance; the facts are compelled to fit the method by which they are to be treated; ... historical research as these writers conceive it may without offence be characterized as a particular kind of game, one rule being that wholly unique events, or miracles do not happen."<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Pannenberg (1968a) p107.

<sup>171</sup> Mackintosh (1937) p203.

Just like Pannenberg, Mackintosh detects the core of the problem:

“The sweeping conclusion, that no special revelation is possible, has been secured by turning it into an axiom.”<sup>172</sup>

Mackintosh also recognises the impossibility of human beings, from their standpoint within history, having the ability to discover from the panorama of temporal events the particular ones that give meaning to the whole. Nor does humanity possess a “criterion of ultimate value”<sup>173</sup> that remains untouched by experience that can be brought to bear on judging events and forming history’s meaning. And so again Mackintosh reaches the same conclusion as Pannenberg,

“What Christian faith declares is that the true understanding of history can be had solely from the point of view supplied by God Himself. The insight of faith is a product neither of *a priori* thought nor of empirical observation; it is the spiritual certainty possessed by one whose eyes God has opened to the fact of Christ.”<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> Mackintosh (1937) p204.

<sup>173</sup> Mackintosh (1937) p204.

<sup>174</sup> Mackintosh (1937) p204.

Though separated by decades, and with Pannenberg never alluding to having read Mackintosh, the similarity of the conclusion reached by these two theologians on this issue is remarkable. Pannenberg would summarise it thus: The Christ event is God's revelation because of the resurrection of Jesus. This act must be understood eschatologically and is of universal significance. But for this to be so understood, the resurrection must be allowed to stand as an historical event, and all critical, philosophical and theological objections to such an understanding can be refuted. Because the Christ event is a self-revelation of God, there must be identity between what is revealed and who is revealing, and so Jesus must belong to the essence of God himself.<sup>175</sup>

But if history is to become revelatory by what means do human beings apprehend it as so? If God is the one opening eyes, as Mackintosh states, by what means does he do so? The answer is the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>175</sup> Pannenberg (1968a) p129.

## Chapter 7

### THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Having read extensively Mackintosh's works and lecture notes Leitch observes in his book on Mackintosh that one significant way in which he differentiated himself from the theologians who were his greatest influences, Ritschl and Herrmann, lay in the central place he gave to the Person of the Holy Spirit, in understanding how God's revelation through the historic life of Jesus was conveyed as such to the Christian believer.<sup>176</sup>

Mackintosh was able to say,

“the Holy Spirit is no one casual factor by the side of others, but that to which everything else converges, and apart from which nothing else – not even the revelation of Jesus – could take effect.”<sup>177</sup>

He writes,

“Study of the question how God effectively commends His love to the mind and heart of man by interior persuasion led the

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<sup>176</sup> Leitch (1952) p111.

<sup>177</sup> Mackintosh (1912) p508.

Church to its doctrine of the Holy Spirit – an inevitable step. And since the Giver of this new life of faith must be as Divine as He who revealed it in history, Christian thought rightly proceeded to affirm the oneness of essential being that unites the Spirit to the Father and the Son.”<sup>178</sup>

In his lecture on “Biblical Concepts of the Spirit”, Mackintosh sees the main development in the biblical tradition of the Spirit as essentially from a charismatic power in the historical portions of the Old Testament, tempered with an ethical quality in the writing of the prophets, through to the New Testament’s sign of the in-breaking of the Messianic age as experienced in the life of all true disciples of Jesus.

He sees the primary manifestation of the Spirit in the production of the confession of Jesus’ Lordship in the life of believers. He also credits Paul with making the identification of the Spirit with the risen and exalted Christ, and in another lecture, “The Spirit in Faith and Experience”, draws out the implications of this.

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<sup>178</sup> Mackintosh (1928) p210n.

In trying to speak of a doctrine of the Holy Spirit, Mackintosh would start from this identification. Nothing less than the whole life of Jesus will show what the Spirit means. It must include sonship, fellowship with the Father, righteous zeal and compassionate love for the sinful. This is the Spirit that Christ bestows.

But for the modern believer it is only through the Bible that God's saving will is made known in an authentic and fundamental fashion.<sup>179</sup> Thus when Mackintosh says that:

"It is only in and through the Bible that God's Word of judgment and mercy reaches us...Thus the tie between the Word of God and the Bible is an absolutely vital tie; His Word is recorded and conveyed in the Bible and the Bible alone."<sup>180</sup>

This conviction rests on the interior work of the Holy Spirit illuminating the recorded words and events, bringing to life the pervading personality of Jesus, and thus revealing the Father.

But the primary role of the Spirit is not merely to breathe the life of God into ancient texts but to create and sustain the relationship between the exalted

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<sup>179</sup> Mackintosh 'Means of Grace (1) The Word' (Summary sheet of a lecture).

<sup>180</sup> Leitch (1952) p106.

Christ and his followers. Turning again to the Scriptures for his description, he speaks of Christ, the Giver of the Spirit.<sup>181</sup>

Mackintosh considers that in his time the significance of the Holy Spirit was downplayed. There were those who regarded faith as acceptance of credal beliefs. Others marginalised the Holy Spirit by trying to paint a convincing full-realised picture of the first century Jesus.

“In neither case is fellowship with the present Lord made central.”<sup>182</sup>

“It is only as the Spirit ... one with Christ Himself – comes to perpetuate the spiritual presence of the Lord...that we are quite liberated from the impersonal and external, whether it be lifeless doctrine or the historically verified events of an ever-receding past. Only through the Spirit have we contact with the living Christ.”<sup>183</sup>

Mackintosh turns to the Gospel of John finding there evidence not of the Spirit as a substitute or compensation for an absent Christ but rather the “higher mode in which Christ Himself is present.”<sup>184</sup> Mackintosh is equally

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<sup>181</sup> Mackintosh (1912) p373.

<sup>182</sup> Mackintosh (1912) p373.

<sup>183</sup> Mackintosh (1912) p373.

<sup>184</sup> Mackintosh (1912) p374.

comfortable speaking of the Spirit of Christ or Christ as Spirit.<sup>185</sup> He notes how the phrases “I will come to you” and “when the Comforter is come” are used interchangeably, and that this identification is necessary not to give rise to the charge of tritheism, or to go beyond the apostolic witness by suggesting a separate and advanced revelation by the Spirit alone. Quoting Scott he writes:

“the office of the Spirit consists in declaring the mind of Jesus and perpetuating the work He had accomplished in His earthly life.”<sup>186</sup>

He himself writes,

“The glorified Saviour is identical with the Jesus who sojourned on earth, and the work resumed under larger conditions, with an access of Divine power, is but the continuation of His earthly task in the light of which it must be interpreted.”<sup>187</sup>

It is clear to Mackintosh that only after the death and resurrection was it appropriate for the Spirit to be given, for only then was the full extent of the

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<sup>185</sup> Mackintosh (1912) p376.

<sup>186</sup> Mackintosh (1912) p374. E. F. Scott was Professor of Biblical Theology, Union Theological Seminary, New York, who wrote *The Fourth Gospel: Its Purpose and Theology*, published by T & T Clark, Edinburgh (1906), the book from which Mackintosh here quotes.

<sup>187</sup> Mackintosh (1912) p374.



gospel and revelation of God completed. But the error now is to consider the Spirit in isolation from the Christ who preceded him in earthly existence. Rather

“The coming of the Spirit is equivalent to the return of Christ as an unseen and abiding presence.”<sup>188</sup>

In another book Mackintosh also makes it clear that, for him, the Spirit is also that which institutes the church as a society of people rather than a collection of individuals, and is the inspiration for the church’s missionary activity in the world.<sup>189</sup>

### **A Critical Response**

While Leitch may consider that Mackintosh has given the Holy Spirit a central place in his theology, the fact remains that, from the content of his various books, the Holy Spirit is not given a great deal of space.

However what he does say about the Spirit is central to his Christology. Firstly, the Spirit is the one who opens the eyes allowing one to see the self-revelation of God in the historical life of Jesus, and in the written record of

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<sup>188</sup> Mackintosh (1912) p374.

<sup>189</sup> Mackintosh (1921) p98ff.

those events in the Bible. Secondly, the Spirit is what enables the Christian to experience in the present the reality of the risen, exalted Christ.

But what Mackintosh does not do is comment upon the role of the Spirit in making the connection between the sphere of history and that of revelation.

Mackintosh can state

“Revelation, in its perfect form, is mediated through One Who (sic) belongs to history, to the self-same sphere of reality in which we ourselves live...Christianity has in its veins the life-blood of fact.”<sup>190</sup>

But how are these two connected? One is a transcendent doctrine, while the other is an immanent one. It is ironic that what is required is something that can tie two contradictory elements together, for Mackintosh took issue with this very thing in his criticism of the Chalcedon Definition.

Chalcedon was a council convened to settle the vexed question of the relation between the divine and human natures in Christ. As defined by the Westminster Confession this is stated as

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<sup>190</sup> Mackintosh (1921) p46f.

“Two whole, perfect, and distinct natures, the Godhead and the manhood, were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion.”<sup>191</sup>

The purpose was to try and express how two contradictory, yet necessary, things relating to the truth about Jesus Christ could be considered together. Mackintosh’s objections to this Definition were twofold.

Firstly Mackintosh argued that it put into the life of Christ an incredible and thoroughgoing dualism.<sup>192</sup> He rejected the view that Christ did one thing as God, and another as man.

“It hypostatizes falsely two *aspects* of a single concrete life – aspects which are so indubitably real that apart from either the whole fact would be quite other than it is, yet not in themselves distinctly functioning substantialities which may be logically estimated or adjusted to each other, or combined in unspiritual modes.”<sup>193</sup>

Secondly, Mackintosh was concerned that the term ‘nature’ was being defined falsely, because it was being used as though real apart from personality.<sup>194</sup> It

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<sup>191</sup> Mackintosh (1912) p293.

<sup>192</sup> Mackintosh (1912) p294.

<sup>193</sup> Mackintosh (1912) p295.

<sup>194</sup> Mackintosh (1912) p296.

was only this ill-defined terminology that allowed the Definition to be made, but its shortcomings were quickly realised in an impersonal humanity tied to the Second Person of the Trinity. Mackintosh puts the problem thus,

“If (the doctrine of two natures) takes Jesus’ manhood seriously, as the New Testament does by instinct, it makes shipwreck on the notion of a double Self. If, on the other hand, it insists on the unity of the person, the unavoidable result is to abridge the integrity of the manhood and present a Figure whom it is difficult to identify with the Jesus of the Synoptic Gospels.”<sup>195</sup>

Mackintosh understood that the question of how Jesus could be both God and man required an answer and because he took exception to the traditional formulation he gave his own, that of kenosis.<sup>196</sup>

Mackintosh takes the view that the present situation of Christ is that he is divine, and that his divinity is eternal. But the life of Jesus was “unequivocally human”.

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<sup>195</sup> Mackintosh (1912) p297.

<sup>196</sup> Mackintosh (1912) p463ff.

“The life Divine in Him found expression through human faculty, with a self-consciousness and activity mediated by his human *milieu*.”<sup>197</sup>

This was achieved by God’s self-emptying, though Mackintosh does not speculate as to the mechanism that made this possible. He also knows there are critics of the theory, including Ritschl, who said that for the Kenotist, Christ in his earthly existence has no Godhead.<sup>198</sup>

Mackintosh responds by quoting Brierley, who said,

“Chemistry does not show any more of Him than there is in chemistry; the revelation will be all shut up within its laws and limitations. May we not expect that in history, on the plane of human affairs, the same law will obtain? If God will not put more of Himself into chemistry than chemistry will hold, may we expect that He will not put more of Himself into humanity than humanity will hold. And thus the self-limitation, the self-emptying of deity which we are told is an impossible conception, becomes the first condition of any revelation at all.”<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> Mackintosh (1912) p470.

<sup>198</sup> Mackintosh (1912) p485.

<sup>199</sup> Mackintosh (1912) p486.

While some theologians maintain the usefulness of the Kenosis Theory<sup>200</sup> it is ironic that many of its criticisms have been documented by one of Mackintosh's own pupils, D M Baillie.<sup>201</sup> This digression was intended to demonstrate that Mackintosh recognised the problem of trying to reconcile divine and human spheres and had also tried to provide a scheme to do so, even if it was not strongly held by others.

But in relation to the even bigger question, namely, how can the eternal be revealed in the temporal, how does history relate to revelation, Mackintosh gives no response. He only acknowledges that this problematic question is a mystery.

“There is for example the relation of an eternal God to events of time. No mystery could be deeper than the fact – accepted by all types of Christianity – that the Eternal has revealed Himself notably in a human being who lived at the beginning of the Christian era...”<sup>202</sup>

Perhaps the response lies in the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Some years ago Tom Smal wrote a book entitled *The Forgotten Father*, but in Christology the problem is usually the forgotten Spirit!

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<sup>200</sup> Interestingly, the use of the Kenosis Theory has been used more recently in relation to Creation than with Christology, as a means of bringing theology and science closer together, as seen in the work of physicist and priest John Polkinghorne (ed) *The Works of Love: Creation as Kenosis*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001. (Paper)

<sup>201</sup> Baillie (1947) p94ff.

When the gospel records the question that Jesus put to his disciples, "But who do you say I am?" The answer given by Peter, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." (Matthew 16:15f NRSV) is not attributed by Jesus to his powers of human deduction, nor his rare intuition, but to a revelation from God. Peter has witnessed the same events as the crowds and Pharisees, so obviously if the events in themselves revealed the truth about Jesus everyone would have come to the same opinion. The events don't do this. Rather a decision is reached internally. It is based on the external events of course, but also on a given insight into those events hidden from other eyes.

If it is God who is opening the eyes then it has to be by the Spirit, which is always the designated form of God working from within the human existence. It would appear that the Spirit of God enables a paradox to exist, which human reason would try to resolve.

I have sympathy with Mackintosh's assessment of the different ways the New Testament and tradition handle the personhood of Christ. The problem of trying to unite the human and divine into a single entity that makes sense of all the data remains problematic. But that is because it is seeking to bring transcendence and immanence, eternity and time, deity and creature, into a consistent whole. Rather than seek the solution in theories of philosophy or

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<sup>202</sup> Mackintosh (1912) p471.

personality, should the paradox not simply be accepted and its resolution found in the Person (the single Person) of the Spirit?

Is not the Spirit the one who comes forth from God, bringing order to the chaos of creation, and inspiration to blind eyes and deaf ears? Does the Spirit not speak to spirit?

Looking back over the various sections of this thesis and the arguments discussed in each we find that the common element that can liberate each one from a theological quagmire is the Spirit. Mackintosh has made his case for the Spirit's work in breathing God into the human words of the Bible, and of breathing God into the human activity of Jesus. However he does not give a comprehensive view of how Pneumatology relates to Christology, as to why such should be the case.

Looking to another theologian, such as Zizioulas,<sup>203</sup> we find that his first question is to ask, "Is Christology prior to Pneumatology or the other way round?" His answer is that as long as the unity between them remains unbroken the question can remain a "theologoumenon".<sup>204</sup> But this answer indicates that the Spirit cannot be seen as simply the divine device for relating

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<sup>203</sup> Zizioulas (1985) p123ff. A Greek Orthodox theologian whose book tackles a number of related issues including the relationship between Christ, the Spirit and the Church.

<sup>204</sup> Zizioulas (1985) p129.



humanity to the Godhead, rather this is the outworking of the place the Spirit already holds in the Incarnation and the life, death and resurrection of Christ.

Zizioulas reminds us that only the Son became incarnate; '*becomes history*'<sup>205</sup> and thus the work of the Spirit is of a different order (this does not mean the Spirit cannot be involved in history, only that the Spirit does not become history). In fact Zizioulas suggests the Spirit's work is the opposite: to liberate the Son and his work from history. The Son dies on the cross, thus succumbing to the bondage of historical existence, but the Spirit raises him from the dead.

"The Spirit is the *beyond* history, and when he acts in history he does so in order to bring into history the last days, the *eschaton*. Hence the first particularity of Pneumatology is its eschatological character."<sup>206</sup>

The second aspect of the Spirit's work is to enable Christ to exist as a 'corporate personality'. Christ is not just an individual, not 'one' but 'many'.<sup>207</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> Zizioulas (1985) p130.

<sup>206</sup> Zizioulas (1985) p130.

<sup>207</sup> Zizioulas (1985) p130.

“Pneumatology contributes to Christology this dimension of communion. And it is because of the function of Pneumatology that it is possible to speak of Christ as having a ‘body,’ i.e. to speak of ecclesiology, of the Church, as the Body of Christ.”<sup>208</sup>

When Mackintosh defines the role of the Spirit, it is not in terms of eschatology, but of missiology.

“When we open the New Testament we perceive that people living the Spirit-filled life felt an irrepressible desire to impart that which they had received; the Spirit revealed to them the world’s absolute need of the Gospel and enabled them to meet that need...”<sup>209</sup>

He does, however, give the Spirit his place as the giver of communion.

“The Spirit, in short, is the Spirit of One who did not merely touch and change individual lives, but rather established a Kingdom. His eye was bent upon a community ruled in all its parts by love and righteousness.”<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> Zizioulas (1985) p131.

<sup>209</sup> Mackintosh (1921) p98.

<sup>210</sup> Mackintosh (1921) p100.

However, the mission of the Church was based upon its eschatological<sup>211</sup> understanding of what God had done in Christ. The Church was living in the last days and this gave her message its note of urgency. Mackintosh's theology is rooted in soteriology and based on the forgiveness of sins.<sup>212</sup> This concentrates upon the saving of a person from his past, by means of a past historical event i.e. the death of Jesus. The apprehension of this act of redemption leads through baptism to the person being initiated into the Church, by nature a tradition-guarding institution. Such a soteriological position thus emphasises the restoration of a fallen humanity with a present experience of unbroken communion with God. The result for Pneumatology is that the Spirit brings the fruits of a renewed past into the present.

However a truer sense of the biblical picture of the Spirit in that he is a foretaste of the *future*<sup>213</sup> brought into the present. In Mackintosh can be found

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<sup>211</sup> It would be wrong, however, to give the impression that eschatology did not figure within the theology of Mackintosh. First, he lectured upon the subject. But he did so in that fashion of 'Last Things'. As the title of his book on the subject, *Immortality and the Future*, suggests, he taught about the condition of the soul after death, the Second Coming, the Last Judgement and the final state of all. In other words his eschatology was entirely future orientated, rather than based upon a Spirit-filled experience of the present. This may have been in the process of changing as the influence of Barth took hold. In his extensive rewriting of his lectures with a renewed emphasis upon eschatology there may have been a greater emphasis upon what is being described here.

<sup>212</sup> Mackintosh wrote his other major work on *The Christian Experience of the Forgiveness of Sins*.

<sup>213</sup> Ephesians 1:13-14

the Reformed emphasis upon 'being saved from', but what this leads to is the neglect of the 'being saved for.'

The oft stated phrase is 'we are in the world, but not of the world.' The institution of an eschatologically-orientated community, set in the midst of the world, as yeast, or salt, or light, witnessing by their distinctive lives to the world's ultimate consummation, is what Christians are 'being saved for.'

Bringing a foretaste of the eschatological future into the present is an essential role of the Spirit along with engendering communion. Therefore Pneumatology must be held in tandem with Christology and allowed to have a greater influence in forming the doctrine for the person and work of Christ.

Like Leitch, Redman also credits Mackintosh with a distinctive theological emphasis on the Holy Spirit that was missing from the work of say Herrmann or Kähler. Mackintosh saw the Spirit as that which made the historical basis of salvation through Jesus Christ contemporary and immediate.<sup>214</sup>

But while this was a commendable advance on those theologians who failed to make that connection, it still falls short as an adequate doctrinal understanding of the Spirit that simply needs a means to bridge the historic past and the present. The lack of firm relationship between eschatology and Pneumatology

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<sup>214</sup> Redman (1997) p64.

in Mackintosh's Christology is a reason why he was not able to further a solution to the relationship between history and revelation.

## Chapter 8

### CONCLUSIONS

What has been learned from this study, and in particular, how does what has been learned affect me as a minister of the Gospel?

I begin by recalling that before my calling into the ministry there was my calling to be a Christian. The heart of Mackintosh's theology is based upon the premise that Christianity offers a person a relationship with God, the creator of the universe, the Alpha and Omega. The book that influenced him and which he recommended to his students<sup>215</sup> was Herrmann's *Communion with God*. The preacher's task is surely still to proclaim what God has done in Christ to make such communion with God possible and sustainable.

The preacher has two things to bring to that task: 1) his own personal experience of that relationship, and 2) the witness to that which is its source as recorded in the pages of scripture. And what is primary is the personal experience.

This is what comes through time and again in Mackintosh's theology. It is not speculative, rationalistic or philosophical, but rather, it expresses and unfolds

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<sup>215</sup> Mackintosh (2000) p84.

what has been known inwardly. Though it has not been the subject of the chapters in this thesis, there has to be an acknowledgement of the stress Mackintosh laid upon soteriology. As Torrance put it, he was a theologian of the Cross. The atonement for sin and the sacrifice of Jesus, that allowed God to exhibit both judgement of divine holiness and love, are at the heart of Christianity.

“The rendering of atonement is to be understood, then, in terms of the inward experience of the incarnate Son in a profound union with sinners in the actualities of their alienated existence and fearful perdition – ‘My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?’ – whereby he took completely upon himself shame and responsibility for their sin and guilt in acceptance of the righteous judgement of the Father, but all in unbroken union with the Father and in perfect identity in will and mind in his condemnation of sin.”<sup>216</sup>

There is something refreshing, in this day and age, about reading a theologian whose work does not come across as merely an academic exercise but actually sounds as though the author has personal involvement in the things of which he writes. Mackintosh is a man arguing for what he, first and foremost, believes with all his heart, his soul, his strength as well as his mind.

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<sup>216</sup> Mackintosh (2000) p85.

Can theology be done by men and women who don't believe it? Surely, academic acumen and intellectual rigour isn't enough. Therefore the study of Mackintosh has reasserted that "For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you." (1Corinthians 11:23 NRSV) is a vital truth for the preacher.

In considering the second element, namely the study of the Bible, the reading of Mackintosh has instilled a fresh confidence in treating the Bible as a book at face value. The issue of finding the historic Jesus behind the sources, and the writer's agendas and editing, which has been of such importance to countless biblical scholars, remains less important, first to theologians but no less to preachers.

Mackintosh expresses the sense of a recognisable personality coming from the gospels' pages, one that strikes a chord with the sympathetic reader. In using the array of historical critical tools at their disposal, scholars, in search for what really lies behind the book, ignore, and must ignore, that which has had the greatest influence on the writing of the gospels. Namely, the gospel writers have an experience of Christian community and their own faith in the living Christ, both of which has been given to them by the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. Spirit speaks to spirit, and in reading the gospels, the reader has received back the sonic echo sent by the Spirit.



However we cannot dismiss the life of Jesus as having no relevance to the Christian experience, as those not enamoured with the Quest might wish to advocate. While all can accept that the gospel writers place their emphasis upon the death of Jesus, a person is not known simply by a death. Death comes at the end of a life, and God has made himself known through an historical personality, and in the stories these writers remembered, in the words they memorised, in the details and in their scriptural assertions. The story of Jesus is of a life that ends in death. It is not only the record of a death.

His life is not recorded for historic purposes but for present purposes. Living in communion with God forms a personal and communal relationship. The Christian and the Church are the work of the Spirit, who creates the *unio mystica* and the Body of Christ. Spirit speaks to spirit and the sonic echo of scripture takes form in the person and community to a definite shape.

At a time when biblical authority and hermeneutics are threatening the Church with disunity, it is also good to be reminded that the Bible's place of supreme eminence does not require it to be turned into an idol. Mackintosh understands that theology cannot be reduced to the simple quoting of scripture, but must include 'the elucidation of the full contents of revelation.' As such it requires that the whole spectrum of doctrine must be upheld. In his critique of the historical survey and of other theologians' ideas, Mackintosh

must be commended for his ability to identify where stresses and omission have led to an incomplete theology, or where human ideas have been given ascendancy over the biblical witness.

Had he lived today Mackintosh, I believe, would have had sympathy with the modern concept of narrative theology. This school of thought takes as its starting point the obvious: that much of scripture, and definitely the gospels, are in the form of story. Rather than dissect that story to find its constituent contents, or look for the story behind the story, or try and get into the mind of the writer, narrative theology accepts the gospel as a story, told using the idioms of story, and considers what the story says. Through such an approach the conclusion reached is that the writers were engaged in trying to bring to life a person, and by what they include and omit, to state who they believed him to be and what he has done, as that person, for them. A recent television series on the miracles of Jesus, screened by the BBC accepted this approach and, therefore, gave one of the most positive and attractive portraits of Jesus ever seen in the media.

Mackintosh's emphasis on the gospels as vehicles for conveying the personality of Jesus would be in tune with this approach to hermeneutics, as is his overall confidence in the gospels, in distinction to the attitude of profound negativity and scepticism in his own time by most schools of thought.

But what then of the historical Jesus? In the John Ford film, *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, there is this exchange of dialogue: "You're not going to use the story, Mr. Scott?" "This is the west, sir. When the legend becomes fact, print the legend."

If the life of Jesus had been committed to video-tape, and then simply watched, would the significance and meaning of that life had been revealed? The answer is surely no. The gospels record events in the life of Jesus. These events are told with direct and oblique allusion to the Old Testament. The stories that are remembered and recorded in the gospels are those conceived as signs of fulfilment and epiphany. They are told retrospectively from the perspective of witnessed resurrection, and are contemporised to speak into the context and circumstances of the writer's community. No objective bystander put pen to parchment, for all were writing from the position of subjective belief and conviction.

This multi-layering is not then to be identified, isolated, and removed to produce the bare facts of history and subsequently the actual truth of the event. Rather it is to be accepted that this very multi-layering is what reveals the truth. The 'legend' has become the fact. So print the 'legend'.

We have not been given a historical Jesus but a biblical Jesus anchored in time and space because he was an historical entity, rather than the figment of the

imaginations of fanciful storytellers. Those who would find parallels to elements of this story in the myths of other religions and cultures, and conclude from this literary dependency, miss the point that such parallels still happen to this day. In many art forms people have witnessed an allusion or even a more direct comparison to the Christ event. Often these are indeed the case, but sometimes the author will deny any such thing. So how is an allusion to the story so recognisable? The New Testament writers were correct when they stated that all things were made by him and for him. Christ is in the fabric of the world, and as previously indicated C S Lewis wrote that once in time God made Christ's universal myth happen – at a particular date in a particular place followed by definable historical consequences.<sup>217</sup>

But why was this step necessary? The Incarnation would appear to have both an epistemological and soteriological significance, rather than simply the latter as Mackintosh is keen to contend. The speculative question, 'if there had been no fall, would Christ still have come', requires to be answered affirmatively. It was not only the negative aspects of human existence that needed to be addressed, rather the universal longing for God. This longing, exemplified in all forms of religion and appearing to be of human origin, had to be revealed as the creature's response to a primordial divine aspiration to be known as we are known.

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<sup>217</sup> Lewis (1971) p36.

While we are capable of making sense of the sensual environment that is the universe (though many questions even relating to the sphere of science remain and their answers are presently beyond our reach) how could humanity make sense of God? Though characterised as Spirit, the Incarnation gives rise to the possibility of relating God through the more understandable category of 'person'.

It is significant that in the historical process of formulating the doctrine of the Trinity, terms that had been adequate for describing the human person had to be fundamentally reformulated to be adequate for describing the divine person. As is well documented the Cappodocian Fathers were able to finally resolve how to relate the unity of God to the revelation of Father, Son and Holy Spirit by breaking the synonym that existed between 'hypostasis' and 'ousia' and in vesting the former with an ontological content it previously lacked. But such innovations were felt necessary to remain faithful to the biblical witness of the Incarnation, of the Word becoming Flesh, of the divine entering history.

History is the field of human meaning, through the personalities and events that have shaped nations, societies, and all areas of human endeavour and achievement. Those who would advocate the primacy of the Christ of faith believe that to loose Christ from historical constraints will give the event greater universal significance, freeing it from its pre-scientific, pre-rationalistic

prison. What becomes imperative is the message; what is proclaimed. The teaching is distilled into ideas, ideas that can be the ground of a structure for moral and ethical living. But is Calvinism the same as the theological thinking of John Calvin? Is Marxism the same as the economic philosophy of Karl Marx? Is Thatcherism the same as the political agenda of Margaret Thatcher?

History teaches that once the ideas are free from the initiators of them, even in their own life-time, they are moulded into something different. Wasn't this a major reason Mackintosh eventually came to be so critical of Ritschl? Through his reading of those who were of the Ritschlian School he saw more clearly the pitfall associated with the original ideas by the way they had been altered and changed by the master's pupils.

This is why the unique heart of Christianity, as opposed to any school of thought within it, rests on the truth of the resurrection. The need to free Christianity from its historical roots is unnecessary because the originator is still presently sovereign over its development, as the Head of the Body. There is no Christ and Christ-ism because while the Church has undergone continual historical development over two thousand millennium it has remained, through its ontological relationship, intimately connected to Jesus of Nazareth, whose significance rests as much on who he is, as what he taught.

The removal of the resurrection is gauged by historians as necessary because, by their principles, it must be viewed as 'unhistorical' and beyond their field of enquiry. However theologians are not bound by the same constraints and indeed it is paramount that they keep the Church anchored to the biblical Jesus as a particular historical entity. His life events, understood correctly only from this perspective, are the only means to create the very kerygma that is so foundational to the Church's existence.

The historical question that is legitimate for all interested historians is "How did the Church come into existence?" Though social, cultural and religious reasons can be postulated for its consequent expansion, development and influence, the moment of its coming into existence comes down to mystery from a purely historical point of view. As with science, reaching the infinitesimal point just prior to the fact of the birth of the universe, the very point can't be accounted for, but that we are here cannot now be denied.

The disciples' testimony to an event they witnessed and called the resurrection of Jesus is that point for the Church. It explains everything that happened thereafter. Their knowledge that this was not an event that happened to them, but to Jesus, that he convinced them of its truth, that they then acted as they did because of it, places the resurrection in the domain of history rather than that of mere subjective faith. Therefore the quest for the historical Jesus is always to be compromised where biblical scholars and theologians try to put

on the historians' clothes and work only with their tools to make that discovery. To make sense of Jesus between his birth and death by such methods, and then to assume that this meaning of his life will have the same significance for the deepest spiritual longings of humanity is a huge assumption and it is inevitably proved inadequate. However the true effect is to open a door to a gross subjectivism wherein the prejudices and presumptions of scholars are allowed to prevail in producing an authentic portrait of Jesus that, as Schweitzer pointed out so long ago now, has more in keeping with the author of the work than Jesus of Nazareth.

The Quest for the historical Jesus has always been based upon some form of paradigm that underpinned the endeavour. Originally it was the Enlightenment belief in the natural and the rational that informed the new science of historical research, and removed from the picture of Jesus all that could not be explained by its methods. The second wave of the Quest using the tools of literary criticism sought to discover the degree of creative influence the Church brought to the formation of the gospels. These are the sole repositories of our knowledge of Jesus, and due to the prevailing scepticism still present from previous generations, what was considered unique and attributable to Jesus was judged to be extremely small. This led again to a vacuum that had to be filled by the speculations of those undertaking the Quest. The most recent wave of the Quest has moved away from interrogating directly the sources and instead builds up a more



substantial picture of what the world in which Jesus had to live and move was really like and reads the gospels in the light of this research. However this has led to a continued scepticism about the gospels and an unshakeable confidence in the veracity of other secondary sources along with the willingness to build entire world views on the flimsiest of evidence. The result is a mosaic of pictures of Jesus.

After more than 100 years all of these quests have failed to produce a picture of Jesus that has commanded more than minority interest, while the biblical Jesus remains the subject of the faith of millions of ordinary people. Surely it is time to remove the need for an underlying paradigm and return to the same confidence in the sources that Mackintosh exhibited; a confidence that in recent times more scholars are coming to share.

This is not to undermine the work of scholarship, but to understand its place in the scheme of things. It is always going to be helpful to have those who dedicate their lives' work to enhancing the Church's knowledge of its sacred writings. The more that is discovered about the life and times of Jesus the more light will be thrown upon particular passages in a constructive way. Mackintosh understood this relationship and so was able to discern its usefulness without requiring to be threatened by its results. That was because he could see that what has to be accepted is that the gospels are historical documents used not to record history but revelation.

So the preacher of the gospel understands that his task is to use the narrative story not to take people back to the time of Jesus but as the material, rooted in its particularity of time and place, in which God will become known as we are known. Here is the primary purpose of the kerygma: as from the first sermon of Peter until today, it is to state that God was in Christ reconciling the world to God's self.

In today's climate of religious fundamentalism and its impact upon a secular world in terms of moral absolutism and terrorism, there is discomfort when speaking of revelation. Perhaps this is the reason why few do speak of it now as the primary way in which Christianity is understood. In a multi-faith culture it raises questions of exclusivity and primacy that sound arrogant in a time where all things are regarded as relative or simply the same. Perhaps that's why such energy is dissipated in finding a Jesus who is 'just one of us', and no more.

But the concept of revelation cannot be jettisoned for convenience's sake. It alone ensures Christianity is not a religion, i.e. a system of rites and practices and sacred rituals through which human beings seek to appropriate the divine. Rather it is a movement of grace where the divine reaches out to and establishes an ontological communion with that which has been created. Mackintosh used the concept of kenosis to try and give intellectual content to

how the infinite God became finite human in the person of Jesus, in distinction to the credal formulation of Chalcedon. While there were those critical of its usage in such a precise manner, it is a term that seems appropriate to describe whatever self-emptying had to transpire to allow the human mind and heart to be confronted by the reality of the divine in a comprehensible and life-affirming way. That anything can be classed as revelation rather than the outworking of human speculative reason is miraculous unless we have an image of God as simply some bigger, wiser, but invisible, version of ourselves. Here again we find that Mackintosh in his writings recognises this truth and considered himself privileged to handle such holy things with the purpose of keeping that revelation comprehensible in each new generation.

But what exactly was the revelation that we have been given? There are those, from Marcion onwards, who would see in the gospel a vision of God distinct and superior to what had previously been known by people of faith. The former is then understood to be false and so must be rejected, replaced by the truth. But Jesus did not come to reveal a new God but to confirm that the known God was being true to who God was and what God had previously promised.

Yet despite that, a new experience of God, consisting in what God was in essence, was included in the event of Jesus. Was it accidental? As was stated

above, no, the epistemological dimension of the Incarnation was a primary purpose of the event. Yet it was not primary in execution. Rather the soteriological aspect, based on previous knowledge of God, was to the fore. However, the method of God in achieving this aim was not recognised immediately due to the person chosen, and the means used. The historic life of Jesus as it unfolded was not accepted or understood as revelatory even on a soteriological level.

How this became revelation was by the means of an event that stands unique in the annals of history: the resurrection, in history, of Jesus. This is the actual revelation. Everything else is a re-evaluation based upon it. This is recognised, perhaps most clearly, in the New Testament in the life of Paul. His understanding of his religious heritage and God's fulfilment of it, of God's future intentions and how this had been accomplished, all come from a revelation of the risen Jesus, recognised by Paul as such.

This leads to the radical re-evaluation that will allow a strict monotheistic Jew to place a crucified contemporary in the same sphere of existence as God. It will allow him to abandon Torah-observance as the foundation of his relationship with God and to live by unmerited grace instead. It allows him to reinterpret the scriptures and to find in them confirmation of his own call to be an apostle to the Gentiles. All of this is the consequence of the primary revelation, the resurrection; an event beyond the reason of man to accomplish.

The resurrection, as we have seen, is the heart of Christianity. It is *the* revelation. Out of it arises the belief in a Trinitarian God, the Incarnation, the atonement, the church, the kerygma, the worldwide mission as the fundamentals of this faith.

The revelation of a resurrected Jesus is what makes Christianity distinctive in the market place of world religions, and allows any inter-faith dialogue to be conducted with honesty. Christians cannot take credit for it, nor deny it. It is there, under-girding everything believed about God and life, both here and hereafter. And it, rather than scriptures, sacraments or worship practise, should be the core factor in determining doctrinal, moral and even ethical positions.

Whether anyone would pass by Pannenberg to find Mackintosh is questionable, but it is manifestly true that both of these theologians have done the Church a service by maintaining their loyalty to the concept of revelation. Mackintosh stood firm in a time when the Church's confidence in revelation was about to wane as she moved through the fraught times of the Second World War and beyond to the frightening uncertainties of the present day. Pannenberg realised the consequences for theology of allowing revelation to retreat in embarrassment to the margins and encouraged it to be brought again to the centre of theology.

The preacher of the gospel has been given the hermeneutic tool for biblical interpretation: the resurrection of Jesus.

Rather than seeking to strip the gospels to find a naturalistic historical core, the narrative has to be held intact and be guided by what prompted the remembrance of these particular events in this precise form. Rather than jettisoning the historical particularity to glean a timeless teaching, the story must be told because it was this particular individual who was raised from the dead. Only when the narrative is respected for what it is, a witness to the resurrection, can the kerygma be maintained as good news about God.

Now this presupposes that those who come to the story see it for what it is. And this is patently not necessarily the case. Consequently the objective nature of the revelation i.e. something that God has done, is only appropriated in a profoundly subjective manner. Not everyone witnessed the resurrection as resurrection as is made clear through that enigmatic verse at the end of Matthew's Gospel: "And when they saw him they worshipped him; but some doubted." (Matthew 28:17 NRSV)

How could doubt be possible if the risen Christ was objectively visible to the senses? Could it be that he was not thus visible? Returning to Paul we are reminded how he always stated that he stood on an equal footing with the original Twelve because he too had seen the risen Jesus. In Acts that

encounter is related three times as the conversion on the road to Damascus. Within these stories there are variations of detail as to who sees and hears what. However, in the letters it is clear that Paul never describes what in fact happens, other than to say that Jesus appeared to him. Consequently we will never be able to define exactly Paul's experience of the risen Jesus. It seems clear that whatever this 'appearing' consisted of it probably involved other than the testimony of the senses. The subjective element, however, has an objective reality behind it, namely, the Holy Spirit.

What makes a person a Christian? The answer the New Testament presents is possession of the Holy Spirit. From conception, baptism, signs and healings and the moment of death, the gospels place the life of Jesus within a framework of Pneumatology. And in Acts the inception of the Church, as the Church, is the coming of the Holy Spirit. The mission of the Church witnesses the Holy Spirit's presence as defining membership. In the letters of Paul only those who have the Spirit belong to God.

Despite a Trinitarian theology that states the Persons are equal, there has been a sad neglect of Pneumatology in Western Christianity, and in the Reformed tradition particularly. For the Reformed Christian coming to faith by hearing the gospel and through personal conviction, encouraged in personal prayer and corporate worship focused upon God the Father, and united through sacrament and community to Jesus, the Holy Spirit can appear to come on the

scene as an afterthought. His role has been minimised to unwelcome charismatic gifts (outside the charismatic movement) and moral education.

But in the light of all that has so far been said, what should be designated as the role of the Holy Spirit? History is the sphere of human activity. The Holy Spirit is the expression of God's activity within that sphere. The life of Jesus by being instituted by the Spirit becomes a unity of human experience and divine intention. The person of Jesus is fully engaged in human activities, thoughts, aspirations, feelings, emotions, is affected by the interaction of other persons upon him, and has the same capacity for communion with God. But due to the Holy Spirit all of this has also become the outworking of divine will and purpose without confusion, without change, without division, without separation.<sup>218</sup>

But this work is not completely revealed until the resurrection of Jesus takes place. While the resurrection is not a historical event in the life of Jesus, in that it removes him from the constraints of time and space, nevertheless the Spirit's work is now to work within those to whom the knowledge and confirmation of this event shall be given. With this work comes the paradigm shift that allows the Spirit's activity within the historic life of Jesus to be recognised and understood. This in turn brings into existence a community created by all who have received the same outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>218</sup> as stated in the Chalcedonian Definition



These experiences of the Risen Christ and the reflections upon the life and death of Jesus, and the re-evaluation of scripture that follows, gives rise to the content of the kerygma. What is preached is not a biography of a recently departed man, but the triumph of God whose participation in human history is proclaimed in the remembered and witnessed events and words of Jesus, now told by those enabled to recognise their divine significance. And when this kerygma is preached it is used again by the Holy Spirit as the means to bring into existence responding faith in the listener.

Not that this all happened in a completed form all at once. History remains the medium for human activity, and the Church existing in time and space experiences all this in stages, the speed of comprehension now shaped by all the human factors that respond or resist. Now the historian can bring his evidence of events and circumstances, of personalities and social, economic and political conditions that dictate the passage of the Church's progression and development.

But as that happens what God has done in Jesus remains intact, and exerts its own influence upon that same progression and development. This continues to be the work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit locks the Church into that particular moment in time in the past which is the historic life of Jesus, yet also the same Spirit, through the resurrection of Jesus, locks the Church onto

that future moment which is the eschaton. We live in the present moment best when we do not attempt to break either lock. The history of the Church shows the evidence of when that has happened and what was done to restore the right order.

The preacher of the gospel has the task of maintaining fidelity to the original revelation, but of allowing the Holy Spirit to continue plumbing its depth as history unfolds and new chapters of human development open, and to keep before the Church its present state of tension between past and future, history and eternity.

Leitch said of Mackintosh

“At the beginning he stood within the nineteenth century – near its outermost border, no doubt, yet within it. For his mode of thought was deeply coloured by it, and his terms of expression (whatever his dissatisfaction with them) were its terms. But by the end he had reached a point where the view was very different, and where he found himself standing side by side with Barth.”<sup>219</sup>

There is a sense that even the end of Mackintosh’s journey looks dated from the modern perspective with the dialectic theology eclipsed by so

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<sup>219</sup> Leitch (1952) p204.

many other forms of theological expression. But what makes Mackintosh still have relevance and vibrancy for the reader today is that he was always engaging with the fundamental core of Christianity.

In his conclusion to his book, Redman states,

“Theologians are not in the business of preserving and conserving a heritage, nor in the wider academic pursuit of knowledge. It is to instruct the Church so that it may understand its message and its implications as fully as possible and communicate that message clearly to those within and without.”<sup>220</sup>

It is clear that Mackintosh saw all that he taught and wrote in this light and I wish to acknowledge the benefit I have gained from an exposure to his work and reflecting upon the issues that are at the heart of what I do week in, week out as a preacher of the gospel.

Redman’s estimation of the man he studies in greater breadth and depth for his doctorate than I have been able for this dissertation was as follows:

“His significance for theology today is not to be found in the predictions that came true; or in the trendsetting formulations he left behind, but rather in the way he fixed his theological attention

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<sup>220</sup> Redman (1997) p257.

on Jesus Christ and with remarkable consistency was able to spell out the implications of the gospel for the church's proclamation."<sup>221</sup>

I can only heartily concur and conclude with the hope that many others will, like myself, stumble upon the writings of Mackintosh and discover that they can bring a renewed confidence in the gospel.

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<sup>221</sup> Redman (1997) p258.

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