



# FORE- WORD

One of the drawbacks of putting one's thoughts into print is that it is then so much easier for others to hold one to account for them. Thus, the wise author will not always be disappointed that a book, particularly a book written in comparative youth, goes out of print. The thoughts such a book contains may have been published; but languishing on the shelf in some library, they are a little less likely to haunt the writer's nightmares than otherwise.

It was thus with some trepidation that I greeted the request from Christian Focus to reprint my little, and long-forgotten, book on the contemporary relevance of some aspects of Reformation theology. I had written the book in haste in 1999, in order to deliver at a conference at the Evangelical theological College in Wales. When I did so, I had not yet reached the age of forty, that somewhat



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arbitrary boundary marker, on the far side of which it is acceptable, and indeed expected, that one will become dyed in the wool, set in one's ways and inflexible in thought. Thus, I did wonder if, in the intervening years, I might have changed my mind in fundamental ways on the matters about which I had chosen to opine.

It was with some relief, therefore, that I find that, upon a review of the book, I am still in substantial agreement with much that I said all those years ago. I still believe that a critical appropriation of the Reformation is vital to a healthy church today. I am now perhaps more concerned than ever about the need for the church to give her people a realistic view of what cross-centred Christian life and experience are. I am persuaded that the doctrine of scripture, both in terms of the phenomenon of scripture and its function in the church, will remain a primary battleground within the church. Finally, given the lure of Roman Catholicism for many disillusioned evangelicals, I believe that a proper emphasis on biblical assurance is not only necessary for a healthy Christian life but is perhaps more polemically significant now than at any time since the Reformation.

Of course, were I to write the book today, it would be different in certain respects. I would most certainly include a chapter on the importance of creeds and confessions for the effective communication, inculcation and preservation of the faith from place to place and generation to generation. I would also add



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a chapter on the importance of a clear understanding of the importance of the visible church and of the communion of saints, given that these vital aspects of New Testament Christianity have become so weak in our culture of consumerism and virtual reality. Finally, I would want to modify, or at least off-set, my promotion of biblical theological teaching and preaching by emphasizing the need for the preacher to confront and engage his hearers. 'Hey, I bet you never saw Jesus in this text before,' is not an adequate application of the Bible; and yet too many so-called redemptive historical preachers and teachers in the Vos (or perhaps, to be charitable and not to impute the sins of the followers to the founder) pseudo-Vos tradition, consider their job to be done when they produced a nice, neat, dry-as-dust lecture on a passage which does just that and no more.

In conclusion, I have always been delighted and somewhat surprised at the positive notes of gratitude and encouragement I received as a result of the first edition of this little book; and I trust this new edition will also prove helpful in some small way to a new generation of readers.

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