

THE GOD OF ALL GRACE

The Westminster Conference Papers 2023



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The Westminster Conference

for Theological & Historical Study

The Westminster Conference meets for two days each year, usually in December. During the conference, six papers are presented, three on each day, examining the history, doctrine and practice of people, events and churches associated with the Puritans, their forebears and successors. The perspective is that of evangelical and reformed Biblical Christianity, focusing on central gospel themes such as grace, faith, atonement and justification and the outworking of the gospel in the lives of believers.

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Thomas Aquinas: A ‘Dumb Ox’?

Aaron Prelock

PASTOR AT ST GILES CHRISTIAN MISSION, ISLINGTON

Interest in Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) has continued to increase in recent years, focusing on his ‘theology proper’ but extending to his theological method. Different thinkers line up for and against; debates develop, sometimes aggressively. Yet, for many, Aquinas remains something of a closed book. We know the name; we are, perhaps, aware of the issues; do we really know what is at stake, and why Thomist thought and conclusions are so significant? This paper will help to guide us in understanding Aquinas and his impact on the evangelical scene.

There are some habits by which man is disposed to an end which exceeds the proportion of human nature, namely the ultimate and perfect happiness of man, as stated above. And since habits need to be in proportion with that to which man is disposed by them, therefore it is necessary that those habits, which dispose to this end, exceed the proportion of human nature. Wherefore such habits can never be in man except by Divine infusion, as is the case with all gratuitous virtues.¹

¹ St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 5 vols, (Notre Dame, IN: Christian Classics, 1948), 1a2ae, Q.51.4.responseo.

Matthew Poole: A Man of the Book

Benedict Bird

LECTURER AT WESTMINSTER SEMINARY, NEWCASTLE

Those who know the name of Matthew Poole (1624–1679) will usually connect him with his three-volume commentary, in English, on the whole of the Scriptures. What may be less well-known is his massive *Synopsis Criticorum* — a digest of comments on the whole Bible, in Latin. A vigorous Protestant, a committed Nonconformist, and an erudite scholar, this survey of his life and labour will help us to know the man and to appreciate his convictions and, perhaps, to value more greatly his output as a commentator and polemicist.

‘Ministers are living books, and books are dead ministers; and yet dead, they speak.’¹ So said Matthew Poole (1624–1679), who yet speaks through his books.

Poole deserves to be better known. He lived in an age when those who aspired to a dull life were very likely to be disappointed. Born just before the beginning of the disastrous reign of Charles I, and

¹ Thomas Harley, *Matthew Poole: His Life, his Times, his Contributions along with his Argument against the Infallibility of the Roman Catholic Church* (Bloomington, IN: iUniverse, 2009), x.

Henry Venn (1725–97): 'Fired with Love Unfeigned'

Lewis Allen

SENIOR PASTOR OF HOPE CHURCH, HUDDERSFIELD

Some men seem to be born for friendship and cooperation. Henry Venn (1725–97) stands among them. Venn came to saving faith in his Clapham curacy, and laboured in devoted ministries in Huddersfield, West Yorkshire, and then near Cambridge. His preaching, pastoral care and writing reveal Venn's delight in serving others with the gospel and through his personal friendship. We will follow Venn's theological journey, explore the role he played in both church and society, and trace the legacy he left for nineteenth century evangelicalism.

Henry Venn was one of the most significant leaders of the eighteenth century evangelical revival. His name is associated with the town of Huddersfield, West Yorkshire, where for twelve years as vicar his preaching and pastoral work bore remarkable fruit. Professions of faith under Venn's preaching numbered in the thousands, and numerous men in the parish began their course towards pastoral ministry under his care and fired by his example. Whilst in Huddersfield Venn wrote what would become a best-seller, *The Complete Duty of Man*, his exposition of evangelical belief and behaviour. Venn's son John and grandson (another Henry) published *The Life and a Selection from the Letters of the Late Henry*

The Trinity and the Cry of Dereliction

Thomas Brand

**MINISTRY DIRECTOR OF THE EVANGELICAL FELLOWSHIP
OF CONGREGATIONAL CHURCHES**

Christ's cry of dereliction in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark is widely misunderstood in the Evangelical church and academy. This paper seeks to retrieve classical Trinitarian orthodoxy and apply it to the cry in a way that simultaneously upholds divine impassibility and acknowledges the strength and mystery of Christ's utterance. The communication of idioms is used to argue that at the cross, God the Son was truly forsaken by the Father but that the forsakenness was experienced by the Son only in and according to his assumed human nature.

Introduction

Come with me in your mind to Westminster Abbey. It is 1st July 1643 and the Westminster Divines are in the nave of the Abbey listening to the opening sermon by William Twisse. After this they process to Henry VII's Chapel, where they held their meetings until 2nd October, at which time they moved during the colder months to the Jerusalem Chamber.

Theodore Beza: Pastor *Par Excellence*

Paul Wells
EMERITUS PROFESSOR OF THE
FACULTÉ JEAN CALVIN AIX-EN-PROVENCE

Theodore Beza (1519–1605) is emerging from the shadow of Calvin. He was the major theological figure of the second part of the sixteenth century, a man of European stature. The pastoral dimension of his work has often been overlooked. We will focus on Beza's vision of the ministry, his pastoral network, his flock, and his pastoral writings, not least the influential *Table of Predestination*, showing that predestination preached is not a menace to the assurance of salvation but necessary to it in the context of the 'order of salvation.'

After Luther came Melanchthon, after Zwingli came Bullinger, and after Calvin came Beza. This seems a neat schema, but the 'Reformers in the wings' category underrates the followers as mere echoes of their master's voice.¹ Beza's reputation has probably suffered more than his counterparts, as he is suspected of having hardened Calvin's teaching into scholastic Calvinism.

¹ David Steinmetz, *Reformers in the Wings*, Oxford, University Press, 2001; see Chap. 15 on Beza.

The Golden Life of Eric Liddell

David Campbell

PASTOR OF NORTH PRESTON EVANGELICAL CHURCH

Eric Liddell (1902–1945) has been much-honoured as a physical athlete but, perhaps, overlooked as a spiritual athlete. Among Christians, he tends to be celebrated more for his stand at the 1924 Summer Olympic Games than for his sacrificial service as a missionary in China, from where he was eventually called to glory. This paper presents a more complete picture of this eminent servant of Christ, considering not only the more glamourised aspects of his life, but also showing us the character of a man who ran his race to the very end.

I would like to begin with some words from 1 Samuel. They are from the lips of the LORD himself, spoken through an unknown prophet to Israel's high priest, Eli: 'Those who honour me I will honour' (1 Samuel 2:20). I take these words as our starting point because they very helpfully introduce us to the subject of this address, Eric Liddell, athlete and missionary.