
Correspondence

**FROM Dr. George M. Ella
Mülheim
Germany.**

Dear Sir,

The **Theologoumena Pantadapa** is an absolute must and it was highly stimulating to read the background material on Owen and his works in Issue No. 16. In connection with this, I would like to comment on Jim Packer's remark that some of the learning revealed in Owen's research is "inevitably out of date." In Hebrew studies 'out of date' often means 'out of sight is out of mind' as there is perhaps no branch of linguistics which has been so neglected as this. Owing to the tendency of Liberal theologians to accept any myth that might discredit the antiquity of the Scriptures and their testimony, true scientific research into Biblical Hebrew has hardly progressed since the days of Owen.

Though the work of the Tiberian Massoretic scribes, which is dated later and later as Liberal theology develops, is taken as the cradle of Hebrew vocalization, it may interest readers to know that 17th and 18th century Hebrew scholars rejected the idea of a Massoretic origin of vowel pointing on the grounds that the Tiberians were not skilled enough in linguistics and could never have spontaneously created such a precise and perfect system as that used in the Holy Scriptures. They rejected the Massoretic theory, along with the up-and-coming evolutionary ideas of history and linguistic development as unscientific and developed by people who put a belief in fables before hard study. The results of their research showed that the Massoretic pointing was either taken over from or based on much older forms. Bishop Ussher, for instance, believed that Ezra re-pointed the Hebrew text of the Jewish Bible on the Jews return from (exile in) Babylon around BC 454, arguing that there was a form (of vowel pointing) even before that.

I became familiar with Owen's teaching on (Hebrew Vowel pointing) in the sixties whilst studying Hebrew under Ringren, Magnusson, and Erlandson at Uppsala University. I found out then that all the evidence regarding vocalization was on Owen's side. Obviously the main evidence for Owen's teaching is to be found in Scripture. Jesus said unmistakably in Matt. 5:18, "Till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled." Here, Jesus refers to two separate letters in the Old Testament canon, the jot or yodh, which is the smallest consonant in Hebrew (used roughly equivalent to our "y" sound. Ed.), and the tittle or keraia, which is the smallest vocalization letter or sign. Pioneering linguistic laws which became known in a modified form as Grimms' Law (after the Grimm brothers) half a century later, Dr. John Gill showed that the Greek keraia was the Hebrew vowel sound Hireq (transcribed Chirek by Gill) or dot which formed the basis of all Hebrew vowel pointing. Besides using internal evidence and his enormous linguistic acumen, Gill produced a mass of archaeological, numismatic, and documentary evidence to prove the antiquity of the Hebrew points.

Arguing from supposed Massoretic times when pointing was allegedly invented, Gill shows that points were in general use at the time and even printed versions of vocalized Bibles were in circulation. This information was laughed at by later source critics who were ignorant of the fact that Bibles printed in page-blocks were known for centuries before moveable type was invented. Then, continuing to probe backwards to the time of the Prophets through the works of Ben Asher, Ben Naphtali, Saadia Baon, Jerome, Rabbi Ase, the Sura Academy, the Rabbot, the Jerusalem Talmud, Origen's Hexapla, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, the Jonathan and Onkelos Targums, Josephus,

Nechuniah Ben Kanah and Ptolemy Philadelphus, Gill shows how any talk of a 'late' date for Hebrew vocalization is just not to be taken seriously. He argued that Biblical Hebrew was rapidly becoming a dead language by the time of the return of the Exiles, so it is hardly surprising that evidence points to a use of vowel signs after that period to guarantee correct pronunciation by non-native speakers or by Jews who had forgotten their mother tongue. However, other Semitic languages, closely related to Biblical Hebrew, are known to have had vowel signs long before this period as witnessed by ancient coinage and ostraca. Incidentally, modern diggings have revealed Semitic vocalization from the 9th Century BC.

Liberal theologians have long supported their pleas for re-writing the Bible text on grounds that, when copying older texts, guesses as to the vocalization have led to 'wrong' readings. Where mistakes have been proved, however, this has invariably been in interpreting consonants, their being little evidence of faulty interpretation due to vocalisation and where this does occur the change in meaning is negligible.

In various popular modern works a mythical 'Sumerian' language has been postulated which has captivated the minds of certain Biblical scholars who have immediately placed this proto-language well into the third millennium before Christ and proudly proclaimed that it was thus a pre-Semitic language (that) was spoken in the Mesopotamian area where Ancient Hebrew eventually developed. According to their own form of logic they have then postulated various polytheistic and vulgar myths which are supposed to be the fore-runners of the Biblical but highly 'censored' creation stories etc. I am not arguing for the certainty of Hebrew being the original language, I am merely suggesting that anyone taking the trouble to examine most alternative theories will find themselves confronted with a scholarly standard of veracity much akin to Rudyard Kipling's 'just-so' story of *How the Elephant Got Its Trunk*.

G. M. Ella: January 1997

**From: Mr. H.C. Mullin
Hamiltonhill, GLASGOW.**

Dear Editor,

Reading the Winter issue of "*Peace and Truth*" (1996), I was interested to note that the editor J.M. Brentnall~ had published a long ten page extract from James Atkinson's study- "*Martin Luther and the birth of Protestantism.*"

I actually bought that book just a day before, in a revised edition. However, I have not yet read it through. Yet the forward expresses views that made me feel the very book should be debated publicly in the ranks of Protestantism.

Politicians say that a week is a long time in politics. It is quite certain that a whole political situation can be changed in that short period of time, and with it the opinions and relationships held most tenaciously by lots of men. If it be so in politics, how much more should it be in theology, when there is so much more at stake? As God opens up the mind through further study, men can embrace beliefs that were formerly anathema to them.

Now the forward to James Atkinson's revised book was written in 1982. Thus, it may be the case that his beliefs have undergone very great change since those days. I mean, that is a whole fifteen years ago. Yet it is of great interest to a subscriber to these doctrines called Calvinism to note what Professor Atkinson wrote in those days. They can only be described as alarming.

He tells us Pope John XXIII was "universally loved," and that when he called Vatican II, he brought Catholicism, to a "re-birth". He wants us to believe "with this kind of theology, Catholics and Protestants may move forward together in amity and unity". He even says "The Spirit would not be blocked...Vatican II may yet issue in the movement which Luther inaugurated. Certainly Luther is the harbinger of Vatican II".

What? Are we to say that the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of Truth, inspired the Catholic hierarchy to compose the false doctrines set forth by Vatican II?

I find such an opinion totally astonishing to

say the very least. I am reminded of how Ian Paisley of the Free Presbyterian Church of Ulster wrote in his booklet, "Antichrist",

"In order to deceive the people in the pews the apostate 'Protestant' clergy are now energetically campaigning in a great white-wash of Popery..The Pope, the ecumenists and their dupes tell us, is a truly godly man, a sweet and blessed representative of Christ..."

Professor Atkinson goes on to write of Pope John Paul II (the present incumbent of the Papal throne), that he is a "warm, spiritual, charismatic personality." Yet this is the Pope who when a man shot him, prayed to the Madonna in his distress. The Professor goes on to say "educated Catholics" no longer subscribe to the dogmas of the Catholic Church hierarchy. This is creating a sort of polarisation of opinion inside that religious organisation with educated sceptics, and a superstitious uneducated underworld at opposite ends of the pole.

In such a situation, James Atkinson thinks a study of the writings of Martin Luther could have an impact, leading to a greater union between Catholics and Protestants, because Luther's aim was to restore his deeply beloved Catholic Church to its Biblical basis and its rightful mission and message.

Dr. Wylie in his *"History of Protestantism"* (vol.1) tells us Pope Leo sent a bull into Germany denouncing Luther. That bold man of God took the Pope's bull and consigned it to the flames, but let Wylie tell the tale:

"A placard on the walls of the University of Wittenberg announced it was Luther's intention to burn the Pope's bull."

Wylie goes on to relate how Luther and some 600 doctors and students at the University, followed by a great mass of citizens, made their way in a long procession to the east gate of the town, bearing the bull of the Pope, the Canon Law, the Compend of Gratian, the Clementines, the Extravagants of Julius II, etc.. These were all cast into the flames,-and Luther uttered the fearsome words over the Pope's bull:

"Since thou hast vexed the Holy One of the Lord, may everlasting fire vex thee and con-

sume thee."

In the end Luther wrote to the people of Germany:

"Unless with all your hearts you abandon the Papacy, you cannot save your souls. The reign of the Pope is so opposed to the law of Christ and the life of the Christian, that it will be safer to roam the desert and never see the face of man than abide under the rule of Antichrist. I warn every man to look to his soul's welfare, lest by submitting to the Pope he deny Christ."

Luther went on to say (of the Catholic Church):

"I abominate the Babylonian pest."

Where are the "educated Catholics" of Professor Atkinson's vision, who would agree with Martin Luther's condemnation of their Church and Pope? I spoke to intelligent Catholics, at university in the 1970's. They subscribed to all the false doctrine Calvinists abominate, even after I handed out a number of copies of **Lorraine Boettner's** solid study, *"Roman Catholicism"* (I did not receive one copy back again- perhaps they consigned them to the flames- eh?). I could not see any of them uniting with Protestants to form one universal church, except one based on their doctrinal terms, and how could any faithful Protestant subscribe to the doctrinal errors of Popery?

All over Western Europe a massive assault is being launched at the Protestant faithful. In books, magazines, newspaper articles, television and even from pulpits, a vast smear campaign without precedent in the history of religion is being orchestrated against the things most surely believed by Protestants. Always the Protestant is seen as being at fault, and is denounced as being a reactionary bigot and obscurantist. Why? Just because we subscribe most fervently to the faith once delivered to the saints in the old despised Bible, rather than to the haverings of fallible men. Yet the strange thing is the people who run the vast communications industry are mostly apostates, who sneer that the Bible is unscientific nonsense. Meanwhile they all cry for Church unity with the Pope at the head.

Since this is the case, it seems to me that editors of strictly Protestant magazines and newspapers should take very great care over whose works and opinions they publish, even when they are "historical authorities" like Professor James Atkinson. Any such writer might influence the sheep of Christ into years long anguish of mind, since their writings might be seen as reliable because they were published in some reputable magazine like Peace and Truth. But one can hardly describe any man who supports the present-day ecumenical movement in any way as reliable or orthodox.

As I said, I have not yet finished James Atkinson's book. Nevertheless, in the light of the words he wrote in his foreword, might it not have been more prudent for the editor of Peace and Truth to publish safe extracts from say Wylie or D'Aubigné's histories, if he wanted to set forth the views of Martin Luther?

Iain Paisley, in his book "*Antichrist*", **Hislop** in his brilliant "*Two Babylons*", all the confessions of faith of the major Protestant denominations, show that the Roman Catholic Church is Mystery Babylon the Great, the Mother of harlots and abominations of the earth, exposed by the Spirit speaking in the Scriptures (See Revelation chapters 17-18). For any professor of history at any English university to say that Protestants could ever unite with that "whore of Babylon" (Rev. 17) is astonishing, to say the very least.

The Professor seems to think it somehow shameful for there to be divisions between Catholics and Protestants, as if the Lord Jesus had made an error when He commanded His people:

"Come out from the midst of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sin, and that ye receive not of her plagues."

I question the wisdom of John Brentnall publishing this extract from James Atkinson's book. Surely the brethren at the Peace and Truth must know that the Holy Ghost has set them up as pastors over the flock of Christ, to safeguard them. Should they not have taken care to read the foreword

in Professor Atkinson's book, to see that this historian had praised Catholic scholars, two Popes, and Vatican II? I certainly think so.

All Protestants must see that a slackness in doctrinal belief has entered the Visible Church, and that those who insist upon sound doctrine are liable to be vilified, but are we to give up the things most surely believed amongst us in order to bring about some specious kind of Church unity? That is truly unity in the dark, as an old Banner of Truth book said.

Excerpt: letter from Mr. M. Dove

Bournemouth, Dorset.

Dear friends / Editor

It was a delight to see the review of John Owen's massive work *Theologoumena Pantadapa* in Issue 16 of the BRJ., and also the succinct precis of the book by Hugh Williams. However, to be perfectly blunt, I was absolutely stunned to see a comment regarding the apostate (for that is what he is) J. Packer, as having no *finer recommendation* of the work than his; I would have to agree that in the past and perhaps this was in that past that the foreword was written, he did indeed write some great and sound things, but let us not forget that this man is not only an Anglican (which gives one suspect thoughts already), but he has as we are all aware of recently, signed a document promising not only to not evangelize romanists, but worse still to aid them...Frankly, if Mr. Packer is the finest recommendation that can be found then we are in dire straits indeed, and the sooner the Lord returns to put us out of our misery the better.

Editor's comment: A timely warning from Mr. Dove regarding Dr. Packer. I *should have made it plain* that I referred only to his high **Academic** standing as an expert on the Puritans. No endorsement of his ecclesiastical polity was intended. However, *wrong* though he may be in this latter respect, I would hesitate to judge him as "apostate" totally, rather I would urge prayer for him and exhortations as per 1 John 5: 16a; and James 5: 19-20.