

To write and think ‘in his own tongue’: Arthur Prior, Jack Bates & the *New Zealand Journal of Theology*

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Abstract

While the influence of John Findlay on Arthur Prior is well known, there are others who, in their own way, had a significant influence on the thought of the young Arthur Prior and the development of his intellectual career. In particular, both Lex Miller and Jack Bates provided support, ideas, and an example as to how to combine theological and political and philosophical interests that Prior followed for many years. This article discusses the influence of Jack Bates, and in particular the journal Bates cofounded with Jim Steele, the *New Zealand Journal of Theology* (hereafter *NZJT*), that Prior wrote for in the mid-1930s. It is argued that Bates can be seen to provide a model of combining theological and philosophical work and interests, as well as how to engage in the type of religious journalism that Prior noted, in 1936, was now his aim (Grimshaw 2018, p.93)¹. Prior continued, via his roles as elder in the Presbyterian

¹ Writing to Bethell 26/07/36“[...] instead of my theologizing from pulpit or lecture-hall, I shall do

Church, to interact with Bates until Prior and his family finally left New Zealand for Manchester at the end of 1958.

Keywords: Arthur Prior, Jack Bates, Theology, Philosophy, Karl Barth.

1 Arthur Prior and Jack Bates: Background

While Arthur Prior was, for many years, a practicing Presbyterian, including a session elder, he was originally a Methodist. Born and raised in the Wairarapa town of Masterton, both of his grandfathers were Methodist ministers in Australia and Prior, brought up in the Methodist church was, in his later teens and early twenties, a Methodist circuit lay-preacher during his summer holidays back in Masterton (Grimshaw 2020) - even while he was a theology student. It seems it was the influence of Clare Hunter, who he was to marry in 1936, that stopped this. In 1932 Prior enrolled at Otago University to study medicine (his father was the local doctor in Masterton) but despite having passed medical intermediate exams he soon changed for a BA in Philosophy and Psychology, or as Prior put in 1948, "Was, to begin with, a med. And did the summer exams and changed over. Was very interested in organic chemistry. Also in religion. Had figured out a sort of religion of my own." (Prior, 1948, p.1) In 1933 he described himself, along with two other students from Wairarapa college, as "aspiring divinity students of Calvinistic persuasion, now doing various stages of Arts". (Grimshaw, 2020, p.39) Anthony Kenney noted "Shortly after arriving at university he [Prior] became a Presbyterian." The reason given by Kenny is that Prior "became dissatisfied with Methodism, finding its theology too unsystematic, and disliking its stress on the felt experience of conversion." (Kenney, p.322)

From 1932-August 1936, Prior lived in Knox College, a Presbyterian residential college that also housed the Theological Hall of the Presbyterian Church and its library. Knox College housed not only undergraduates but also postgraduate students now (in the main) studying for their Bachelor of Divinity as part of their training for the

it, like Coleridge, on paper and in conversation"; and he adds a footnote comment "I have hopes of ending up eventually as the editor of a religious periodical" (Grimshaw 2018, p. 93).

Presbyterian ministry. It was a deeply Presbyterian and theological environment. Prior was an active member of the Student Christian Movement, including a year as co-editor of its magazine *Open Windows* in 1934, and (supported by the Dunedin Presbytery) applied in November 1934 to sit the Theological Hall Entrance exam. He was accepted, passed the exam, and from 1935-August 1936 (when he withdrew to marry Clare Hunter) he was a “Div” student. Living in Knox College he had access to the theological library which, however, took only two periodicals in 1933, the *Outlook* and the *NZ Journal of Theology*. (Breward, p.126) While the *Outlook* was the official weekly magazine of the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand, it is the influence of the *New Zealand Journal of Theology* and one of its founders, Jack Bates, that is the focus of this discussion.

As the history of the Otago University philosophy department notes, there was, from the start a very strong Presbyterian connection and influence in the teaching of philosophy at Otago up to the appointment of J.N. Findlay in 1933². Philosophy was regarded as a suitable preparation for Presbyterian ministry, the B.D and further theological study. In 1932, the professor of Philosophy and Psychology (and Presbyterian cleric), Francis Dunlop, had to retire due to ill health and while J.N. Findlay was appointed his successor, he could not take up his appointment until 1934. This meant the Philosophy department had to find a replacement for 1933 – and found one in Jack Bates.

John Maclellan Bates (1903-1981) (known throughout the Presbyterian Church as “Jack”) was born in Thames in the North Island, and educated under a scholarship at Auckland Grammar. He went to Otago University (and Knox College) in 1922 to study medicine but, like Prior, soon shifted to Philosophy with an intention to study for the Presbyterian ministry, being accepted for this in December 1922. (Pearson, 1994, p.4) Bates was strongly influenced by Revd. D.C Herron (1882-1955) minister at St. David’s Presbyterian church in Auckland. Herron has studied philosophy at Otago, graduating with a BA in 1909 and MA in 1910. He then studied theology at Glasgow University and the Free Church College and after war service as a Chaplain (including MC and bar) returned to New Zealand in 1919. In 1930 Herron became minister at Knox Church, Dunedin and was convenor of the Theological Hall committee when Prior wrote to request withdrawing from Theological training. (Grimshaw 2018, p.19)

² <https://www.otago.ac.nz/philosophy/dept/history.html#presbyterians>

Bates gained his BA in Philosophy in 1925 and his MA in Philosophy with 1st class honours in 1926, and was an exemplary student, regarded by Professor Dunlop as the best philosophy student he had ever taught.(Pearson, 1994, p.4) As Pearson notes, Bates “saw no conflict between philosophy and theology, for he considered that “some competence in the former was ‘*a desideratum* in a theologian’. Such a conjunction was not self-evident nor widely accepted outside the professional theological world.”(Pearson,1994, p.4) Upon completion of his theological studies in 1930, Bates was ordained into the Takapau parish in Hawkes Bay where he served until February 1933. On Dunlop’s retirement Bates applied for vacant position of Professor of Philosophy. Because of the close links between the University and the Presbyterian Church it was actually the Synod of Otago and Southland who were responsible for making the appointment. Bates was only appointed Acting Professor of Moral and Mental Philosophy for 1933. Despite the popularity and quality of his teaching he was unable to secure a permanent position, this going to J.N. Findlay. However it did enable Bates to fund post-graduate studies in Zurich under Emil Brunner. Bates spent 18 months in Zurich working on a thesis on “Calvin’s Doctrine of the Church” (Pearson, 1994, pp.9-10)³. He returned to New Zealand in 1935 to the Kurow parish in North Otago; lacking the funds to return to Zurich, his thesis was not awarded on a technicality. Yet as Pearson observes, “Bates’ theological and philosophical gifts were such that Emil Brunner, one of the greatest theologians of the century, once inquired where was this former student of his now teaching.”(Pearson, 1994, p.29)

In 1933 Bates taught every Philosophy class from stage one to honours in a course of study that included logic, ethics, moral philosophy and a special paper on Aristotle’s ethics.(Pearson, 1994, p.17) As one of his students (and later a noted churchman) Alan Brasch remembered: “... whenever one raised a point in partial disagreement with him , he developed your whole point with clear rationality and understanding until you felt you had made a very strong issue, but then demolished it, showing you how you had missed the essential truth. He was an academic in the very best sense and he was a teacher who dealt with one’s deeper struggles with philosophy rather than the mere history of

³ Pearson notes the thesis is held in the New Zealand Room of the Hewitson Library at Knox College. For an overview of the thesis, which Pearson reads as part of Bates’ ongoing interest and support for church union, see (Pearson, 1994 pp. 9-10)

Philosophical schools. In other words, he brought the issues very much to life." (Pearson, 1994, p.34)

I want to argue that the experience of being in Bates' class was crucial for Prior's thought and development as a philosopher – and theologian. Another student, Ian Dixon, remembered that Bates "elected to give a course of open lectures of a popular kind on various philosophical ideas. These frequently filled the lecture theatre in the upper Olliver on Tuesday evenings from five to six... [also, for the stage III class, for some weeks he gave] a free translation from the German of one of Schiller's works on phenomenology." (Moore & Bates, p.28) Related to this, Bates is also recorded as giving a paper on phenomenology "to a large audience" at the Otago University Philosophical Club in 1933 (*O.D.T*, 16 September 1933, p.15)⁴, discussing Husserl, Heidegger and Max Scheler – and dismissively, Spengler.

While Findlay was appointed, it is worth noting that, according to Bates, "Professor J.N. Findlay invited me to come into the philosophy department of the university. I had by that time served in a parish, so I said No, believing that I had been called to be a minister. I did find teaching philosophy attractive, and likewise theology even more so." (Moore & Bates, p.90)

Of course, Findlay was soon to offer teaching to another theologian-philosopher, Arthur Prior. For while Findlay was not a Christian, he was open to theology and forms of Christian thought and their interaction with theology. This can be seen in a number of ways, not least his Gifford lectures of 1964-1966 and, as an aside it is worth noting that the great death of god theologian Thomas Altizer commented "I knew Findlay and admired him profoundly thinking that his Gifford Lectures are one of the great works of our era. And he is perhaps our most radical theological thinker and an ultimately radical Christian."⁵

Bates had, previously to this time of teaching, set out his views on how and why Christianity and Philosophy should co-exist and be understood. He did so in *Open Windows*, a journal that had a wide readership as well as being an important influence on Prior - and an outlet for his own writing. Written when Bates was minister at Takapau, the article aimed "to set out as clearly as possible the relationship between philosophy and

⁴ Otago Daily Times, 16 September 1933, p.15

https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/ODT19330916.2.135?end_date=31-12-1950&items_per_page=10&phrase=2&query=%22philosophical+club%22+&snippet=true&start_date=01-01-1861&title=ODT

⁵ Altizer to Grimshaw, email 26 May 2015.

Christianity.”(Bates, 1931, p.10) Bates positioned philosophy as the “wish to understand rather than to act”(Bates 1931, p.10); there is an important echo of Marx’s theses on Feuerbach here and in doing so Bates is signaling that, for him, Marxism is not philosophy, but more importantly, that if one does wish to change the world then you do so via Christianity, not Marxism. For Christianity is a way of life, “not a theory or a group of theories.” (Bates, 1931, p.10) Bates also identifies epistemology as “the outstanding problem of modern times”(Bates, 1931, p10) and this is why philosophy is important for Christianity as “in the main the history of Christian thought shows that philosophy has been a help rather than a hindrance in the intellectual concerns of our religion.”(Bates, 1931, p.11) This is because “philosophy becomes not only useful but necessary” for the believer “who sees and is interested in the connections between things”.(Bates, 1931, p.11) In the end, Bates makes it an existential decision between 3 faiths – philosophy, science, and religion – and while he chooses Christianity, he not only sees philosophy as that which helps strengthen faith, he wishes “would that philosophy were studied more.” (Bates, 1931, p.24)

This is the philosophical context Prior found himself within in Bates’ classes, taught by a philosopher who was churchman and a theologian who was a philosopher; Bates found no tension between the two positions but rather saw philosophy having a vital role to support theology. But there was also more to what Bates offered than this; for Bates also provided a further option to Prior as to not only how to combine such interests but also how to express and communicate them. Prior was very interested in forms of religious journalism. Not only had he written his long essays in 1931 in which he can be seen to be practicing a type of religious journalism, he was also involved, from his arrival in Dunedin, in writing for *Open Windows*⁶ and was co-editor of it in 1934; he also contributed articles and letters (under the nom de plume “Richard Bramley”)⁷ to the national left-wing journal Tomorrow, and in 1935 was assistant editor of the student newspaper Critic.

⁶ The earliest contributions to *Open Windows* by Prior I have found are long, essayistic letters: “Albert Einstein”(March 1932, pp,16-17); and “Christianity and Communism” (October 1932, pp19-20).

⁷ see Grimshaw (2023) “Arthur Prior’s nom de plume writings in Tomorrow and the Otago Daily Times 1935-1937”.

2 The New Zealand Journal of Theology

Bates, as well as being a philosopher and theologian was co-editor with the noted Calvin scholar and minister Jim Steele of the *NZJT*, a quarterly, running from November 1931 to August 1935, that sought “to encourage and give expression to original theological work” in New Zealand. Its scope was to be “theological, biblical, and religio-philosophical – fairly freely interpreted” and it was intentionally non-denominational, aimed at “the helping of the atmosphere for moving toward Church Union.”⁸ Steele, recently diagnosed as suffering from severe Tuberculosis of the eye and spine, had to break off his ministry training as a result. According to another friend and classmate, Ian Watson Fraser, “Steele spent 3 years on his back convalescing, much of it with his back in plaster. Rev. J M Bates started the ‘NZ Journal of Theology’ (pub. 1931-35) largely to give Jim an interest to work on in bed & assist his recovery.”⁹ Fraser was at this time furthering his theological studies in Scotland and Europe, but even from so great a distance his influence on the journal would be considerable. By November 1934 Fraser had joined Bates and Steele as one of the editors and he acknowledged the important role and opportunity the journal had offered from its inception in that it “stimulated many of us into thinking out carefully our ideas before committing them to print.” (Moore & Bates, p.22)

Although Bates and Steele were agreed on the theological, biblical, religio-philosophical and non-denominational aims of the magazine, certain limits to its scope were tacitly established quite early on. Letters were written to student friends at Knox Theological Hall, to fellow Presbyterian ministers, to Archbishop Averill and to a number of other influential members of the Anglican clergy, and support was even obtained from the Principal of the Church of Christ training institution in Dunedin, Professor Haddon. No attempt appears to have been made to introduce the venture to Roman Catholics or Christians from non-protestant denominations. The magazine was apparently to be a Journal of New Zealand protestant theology - the possibility that any other kind

⁸ J M Bates to E J Tipler, 17 July 1931. Tipler was minister of Roslyn Presbyterian Church and Convener of the Theological Committee of the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand.

⁹ Fraser, Ian W. Register of Ministers 1840 to 1989. Lower Hutt: The Presbyterian Church of New Zealand, 1990.

of New Zealand theology should find expression in its pages seems not to have been seriously explored.

Of some one hundred and thirty-seven individuals and groups who would subscribe to the *NZJT* over its five-year existence, at least ninety-two of them would belong to the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand. Fewer than twenty would be Anglicans, and the number of subscribers from other denominations (Baptist and Church of Christ) could be counted on the fingers of one hand. One hundred and nineteen subscribers were members of the clergy or students in training for ordained ministry.

A similar denominational and clerical bias is evident in the list of those who contributed articles. Of the thirty-six authors published twenty were Presbyterian, four were Anglican, and a handful of articles were submitted by a Methodist, a Baptist, and Professor Haddon of the Church of Christ. All but two or three of the contributors were ordained ministers or students in training for Christian ministry. The publication was apparently to be a New Zealand Journal of protestant, and chiefly presbyterian theology, however much it might claim to be otherwise.¹⁰

Given that the *NZJT* was initiated by a couple of the brightest young stars in the emerging Presbyterian constellation of the thirties, its denominational and clerical bias is perhaps not surprising. What is surprising, however, is the extent to which the reality of the readership would come to be at variance with the brief statement of its scope and aims with which Bates and Steele began their first editorial . These aims were threefold:

- (1) To provide a convenient and easily accessible medium for the interchange of theological thought in New Zealand in a way that the denominational church papers could not be expected to do since the majority of their readers would not be interested in such technical matters.
- (2) To encourage theological research, however unpretentious, in

¹⁰ The New Zealand Journal of Theology did, however, manage to attract readers from quite literally all over the country. Their geographical distribution is interesting: Of subscribers living in the main centres, eleven were from Auckland, eighteen from Wellington, ten from Christchurch, and twenty-five from Dunedin. Twelve subscribers lived in regional centres like Hamilton and Timaru, and fifty-one inhabited small towns and settlements such as Otorohanga in the King Country, Tuapeka Mouth in southern Otago, Kirwee in Canterbury and Inglewood in Taranaki. The journal also found its way to readers in London, Melbourne, Canton, and the Punjab.

our own country, by the publication of results.

(3) To provide a reliable guide to current theological literature by making a regular feature in each issue of a survey of recent books by a competent man. This will include in its range the matters of interest in the leading English journals. Once a year we hope to publish a similar review of Continental literature. This survey will be followed by a number of signed reviews of particular books.

We are confident that much more of the kind of thought we have in view is going on in New Zealand than most people realise; but for want of some such paper as this journal it never sees the light of day, or is confined to the restricted area of some learned society. It is surely not impossible to aim hopefully at securing for this work and thought a wider public. Indeed if the Journal is to continue it must have the support of practically the whole of such a public in all the Churches in New Zealand. (Editors, *NZJT*, 1.1. November 1931, p.1)

Furthermore, three recent occurrences had helped to stir up a certain “popular interest” in theology, which led the editors to believe that there had in fact never been a more suitable time to launch a theological journal in New Zealand. The first was the “theological ferment” of the Barthian movement in Germany and its increasing dissemination throughout the English-speaking world. The second was the ongoing debate over inter-Church union. The third was the recent publication of two major works by two New Zealand theologians (or, more accurately, by two theologians domiciled in New Zealand): Dr Ranston’s *The Old Testament Wisdom Books and their Teaching* and Dr Dickie’s *The Organism of Christian Truth. A Modern Positive Dogmatic*.

Despite all the limitations, the *NZJT* offered the chance to consistently read theological thought being undertaken in New Zealand – and also, to write for such readers. As such it helped frame the thought of Arthur Prior who was both a reader of and a writer for the journal. To understand what this means, we need to turn to the content of the *NZJT* for in doing so we can gain a very clear picture of what Prior was reading – and writing in response to – during the years of the *NZJT*.

3 What Prior read and wrote: the 16 issues of the *NZJT*

Not only did the first editorial (November 1931) set out the aims mentioned above. It noted the intention “to secure and publish” all

theological research and post-graduate theses arising from the University of New Zealand granting degrees in theology as well as emphasizing that “[t]here is no better way of coming to grips with a book than to set oneself the discipline of writing a critical review of it.” (*NZJT*, 1.1. November 1931, p.2) Prior seems to have easily and wholeheartedly taken up this suggestion; for many years he was an assiduous book reviewer of theological and philosophical works. What the *NZJT* provided was the example of fellow New Zealanders regularly writing such reviews, a role Prior also took on in the ‘A Shelf of Books’ section he regularly contributed to *Open Windows* for the SCM. This discussion needs to be understood in light of a further comment in the first editorial:

In such a small country as New Zealand our scope will need to be wider than is the rule with a journal of this type. Its pages will be open to discussion of any phase of a recognised theological discipline, e.g., systematic theology, Old and New Testament studies, Church history, history of dogma, philosophy and psychology of religion, Christian ethics, liturgics, the relations of theology to international and social problems, and especially church union and missions. Special interest will be taken in work on New Zealand church history.

(*NZJT*, 1.1. November 1931, p.2)

Such an approach was central to Prior’s religious and theological thought from the next 20 years and often crossed over into his early work in philosophy. A journal of broad interests attracted a thinker of broad interests; in its very breadth the *NZJT* ensured that readers and writers, such as Prior, found something that matched their interests; facilitating an approach that encouraged an interrelatedness of theology with all areas of knowledge.

Prior was, as we know, very much a Barthian for a number of years and in the first issue of the *NZJT*, the first article was a discussion and endorsement of “The Theology of Karl Barth” by James Gibb. Gibb endorses Barth, placing him and his thought in a wider theological context, yet is also critical of Barth’s failure to use the word “father” of God, (Gibb 1931, p.6) and his “apparent insensibility to the revelation of God in the world of nature” (Gibb, 1931, p.7) (something which would also cause tension between Barth and Bates’ mentor Brunner and be discussed in the *NZJT*) – and Gibb does prefer the “lucidity” (Gibb, 1931, p.8) of Brunner over Barth. Gibb’s position is that while “Barth’s

corrective requires itself to be corrected, or at least modified in certain particulars, is he not in much closer accord on the whole with the teaching of the Scriptures concerning man than much present day theology and in a good deal of present day teaching too.”(Gibb, 1931, p.10) This would align with Prior’s own position, for while he was a Barthian, he was engaged in his own critical reading and use of Barth. Also in this first issue were articles in favour of Church reunion (a future particular interest of Prior’s), ‘The Philosophy of The Wisdom Literature’ – which emphasised “there is no philosophy in the Old Testament in the narrow Greek sense of academic enquiry into first principles and final causes with their abstract problems”(Ranston, 1931, p.22); and on the relationship of the University of New Zealand and the churches. This article speaks into the context Prior found himself as a student as well as later a religious public intellectual, and his work as a public intellectual can be understood in many ways as being an unacknowledged response to the situation laid out at the start of this article:

The University of New Zealand has a task additional to those usually performed by universities in older lands. In England and Scotland, for instance, there are many public men who can speak on public questions from the resources of a rich education and a wide experience. But in New Zealand the number of such men is very small. A duty, therefore, devolves upon the University, and incidentally upon the Churches, to raise the standard of thought on public matters, to give to the community enlightened guidance in matters relating to the spiritual interests of the nation.

(Whitehead, 1931, p.26)

This article was written by Archdeacon L.G. Whitehead, who moved in the same theological and philosophical circles as Prior in Dunedin, and was also a close friend of Prior’s confidant and correspondent, Ursula Bethell.(Grimshaw, 2018)

The second issue of the journal included a review essay of Taylor’s Gifford lectures ‘The Faith of a Moralist’¹¹ (pub.1930) by E.N Merrington, the Master of Knox College, who, Australian born and educated, also held a PhD from Harvard and had taught Philosophy at Sydney University before his theological studies and ordination. In 1936 Prior

¹¹ A.E Taylor, “The Faith of a Moralist”, Gifford Lectures 1926-1928 see: <https://www.giffordlectures.org/lecturers/alfred-edward-taylor>

was to write to Bethell of A.E. Taylor and how “The English development of Ethics has also given rise to theological development (such as that expressed in A.E. Taylor’s ‘Faith of a Moralists’) which can not be easily worked into Barthian categories of thought...Taylor and the Mauricians present more serious problems for the would-be whole-hogging Bathians than either Brunner or the Thomists...” (Grimshaw, 2018, p.83)¹²

Merrington’s review is a solid theological and philosophical endorsement of Taylor and of course Faith of a Moralists was widely reviewed internationally and Prior would have read these reviews; but it needs to be emphasised that what was novel was that here, in New Zealand, in Dunedin, in his own college, was someone he knew writing a long (10-page) review of this work.¹³ It was further encouragement that serious theological and philosophical work could be done in New Zealand. A further example of this was Jack Bates’ “A Critical Examination of Otto’s Idea of the Holy”. Here was another local theologian and philosopher writing, at length, on theological and philosophical ideas. In this article we get an indication of Bates’ philosophical method, which he would soon employ teaching students (including Prior) in 1933. Perhaps most important is his statement: “...it is by general suggestion rather than by overt suggestion that philosophies are most potent. A given position may be most carefully guarded against mis-interpretation and qualified to avoid excess, but its general drift is always what is most widely received, and perchance acted upon.” (Bates 1932a, p.63) For Prior, in his work in theology and ethics and then logic, what is most important is how a general position is ‘acted upon’. In fact, his tense logic is very much the logic of how a position is ‘acted upon’. This is not to claim a place for Bates in the history of tense logic, but rather to note the ongoing role Bates had, in his teaching, writing and editing, on Prior. What is interesting is Bates’ distinction whereby “Many men may believe in God as active in the world in an ethical sort of way, but it is a characteristic mark of a religious man to be conscious of Him as over and above him, objective and as we say, transcendent.” (Bates, 1932, p.69) Prior in the 1930s can be identified as having a belief in God that covered both these positions, yet over time it would seem his belief reduced from the transcendent to the

¹² Prior also states that on the question of natural theology “I find von Hugel or A E Taylor much more profitable reading than much Barthianism” (Grimshaw 2018, p73); and elsewhere in his letters Prior emphasizes his interest in the value found in Taylor.

¹³ It is also clear from the Otago University library catalogue that Otago held the 1930 publication of The Faith of a Moralists.

god of ethical action and so his own position gradually shifted, in Bates' schema, from the religious to the philosophical.

If vol.1, No. 3 was rather meagre in content, No. 4 contained a translation (by the editors) of Karl Barth's "Some Questions Which Christianity Must Face".¹⁴ Published in English, by a New Zealand journal only eight months after its first Swiss publication, this made Barth's writing almost (for the times) immediately available to New Zealand readers. Prior, in Knox College, would have read this and it can be understood as informing what can be described as Prior's emerging political theology. Barth states:

"A religion is a declaration which before all claims and actually takes possession of just that true life of man (his daily inner life), which makes man entirely its auditor and prisoner, its new messenger and its soldier. Twenty years ago the centre of interest was in philosophies. Today it is in religions...because quite new religions have appeared on the scene."

(Barth, 1932, pp.138-139)

These new religions are Communism, Fascism and Americanism (humanism). Barth also notes the new life in eastern religions, especially Islam and "strange new hybrids (anthrosophy!)" (Barth, 1932, pp.139-140) Prior was to become quite concerned about all these developments (if never specifically mentioning Americanism [humanism]), but he certainly saw Communism and Fascism as religions to be opposed and he also critiqued the growth the 'strange new hybrids'. What is interesting is that Prior almost immediately drew upon this article in writing a long essay letter for *Open Windows* (October 1932) on the topic "Christianity and Communism". Prior comments "in these columns we have heard much of Communism as a social system, as a party organization and as a philosophy of life; yet it has hardly been considered at all as a religion – and a religion it is first and foremost." (Prior, 1932, p.19) Given the *NZJT* article appeared in August 1932 it would seem that Prior read Barth's article in the *NZJT* and was immediately spurred to write for *Open Windows*. Yet at the same time, Prior was signalling himself a Christian Socialist, as a member of the Peace Army that was

¹⁴ It was noted that this first appeared in the *Feuille Centrale* of Switzerland in January 1932, and then a French translation (approved by Barth) appeared in the French Christian students magazine *Le Semeur*.

soon to become the NZ Army of Reconciliation. Also in his letter he expresses hope for Russian communism to become aligned to the cause of Christianity so together they can ensure the attainment of social progress. Prior's relationship to socialism and communism is an interesting one and beyond the scope of this discussion, but we can see the influence of Barth's article upon his thinking, even if he was more open to the shared aims of social progress to be found in and between communism and Christian socialism, while deeply and centrally opposed to the pagan nature religion of the rising German National Socialism.

This issue also contained 'The Ethical Implications and Consequences of the Theology of Karl Barth' by Ian W. Fraser who, having completed theological study in New Zealand in 1930 then undertook a 3 years of postgraduate study at New College and University of Edinburgh, including a summer studying under Barth at Bonn. Fraser also spent time with John Baillie at Union Theological Seminary (where he gained his Th.D) and upon return to New Zealand in 1933, became a co-editor of the *NZJT*. Fraser discusses Barth's views of the transcendence and immanence of God, defending Barth against accusations that his system is dualistic. Fraser also emphasises the epistemological focus of Barthian theology; that is, Barth's thinking is as much epistemological as it is ontological. In other words the distinction between humanity and God is an epistemological one more than an ontological one; we can see here the basis of the attraction of Barthian theology for Prior, for his philosophical thought was and is, in the end, far more epistemological than ontological. It is Barthian theology that provides the bridge for him between theology and philosophy. Furthermore, as Fraser observes, "In history, we find it is the Calvinistic systems that have produced the ethical movements of religions." (Fraser, 1932, p.148) I am not claiming that this article in any way can be said to be determinant on Prior's thought, but rather that such an article, written by a New Zealander in a New Zealand journal is aligned to elements of Prior's thought, then and later. In other words, in reading such an article Prior was able to envisage himself as part of a local theological conversation that was also an international one, written by someone who had studied with Barth. Also of possible interest for Prior is a short review essay by "Editor" (it is clear this is Bates) of Nicolai Hartmann's *Ethics* vol 1, that states this is a philosophy text that theologians need to read and be aware of; and draws attention to Hartmann's criticism of Kant concerning issues of subjectivism, formalism and intellectualism and, having covered these in precis, notes

it is “of extreme interest that Hartmann is influenced by Aristotle in his study of Philosophy.” The reviewer then throws down an intellectual challenge, stating they look forward “to a treatment of questions of theology from the point of view of Hartmann’s ethics.”(NZJT, August 1932, p.158)

An article that aligned with Prior’s interest, both then and later was G.S. Troup’s “The New ‘Middle Ages’ and a New St. Augustine”. This discusses and endorses Nicholas Berdiaeff, described as having “two of the outstanding marks of a prophet”, that is the insight into underlying causes of world events and his sharing “in the strivings and sufferings of those who bear the brunt of bringing new things out of old.”(Troup, 1932 p.176) Troup discusses Berdiaeff’s *The New Middle Ages* (1923), as then yet untranslated from the French. As such, this was probably Prior’s first introduction to Berdiaeff; and we know from his letters that he became a reader of Berdiaeff, and even met him in Paris, in 1939¹⁵. The article is both a precis of Berdiaeff’s thought and a selection of quotes, concluding by noting while his thought resembles Barth’s, “Berdiaeff does not abase man and his powers in the dust to exalt God.”(Troup, 1932, p.182) [We know Prior read this article as he was to soon mention its influence]. Also in this issue, Bates (this time under his own name) writes a review essay of Vol. II of Hartmann’s *Ethics*. In this review Bates states “[t]here is an autonomy of religious values and this is a matter of great importance at the present time. The philosopher and the man of religion who understands his faith are not agreeing as they should.”(Bates, 1932b, p.188) The rest of the review outlines how Hartmann’s philosophy of ethics has application to theology.

The first issue of 1933 begins with J.V.T Steele’s long article on the Boston Personalism philosophy of Edgar Sheffield Brightman (Steele 1933), which again provided a model for Prior of (local) theologians writing on philosophy – and the application of philosophy to theology. In this issue also appeared “Art and the Kingdom of God” by Rev.F. Robertson which is a defence of the value for a role of arts in christian life and thought; that is, “religion itself cannot come into full existence until expressed through art, that is, through all the creative arts”(Robertson, 1933a, p.203) and so rejects what it terms “the fallacy of Puritanism”.(Robertson, 1933a, p.204) This article led to a discussion in

¹⁵ This was probably facilitated by Donald Attwater of the PAX pacifist organization Prior joined in Britain; Attwater also being a translator of Berdiaeff, including of *The End of Time* (1933) that included “The New Middle Ages”.

the next issue (May 1933) wherein an established parish minister G.D.Mcrae, and also, Arthur Prior, respond to Robertson's article. It would appear Mcrae first wrote a response to Robertson; Robertson was asked to reply and then Bates asked Prior to respond to both Robertson and Mcrae. Robertson was to also respond to Prior, however printing issues meant Robertson only replied to Mcrae¹⁶. As Prior was a student of Bates it can be conjectured that Bates asked Prior to write his contribution. Prior begins by stating his belief that in the modern world we need to "renew" and engage in "re-capturing" much of the "outlooks and interests of the schoolmen, statesmen, poets, priests and common people too, in the Medieval Church." (Prior, 1933a, p.231) In this article we become aware Prior is a close reader of the Journal because he explicitly states that "[m]any articles which have appeared in *The New Zealand Journal of Theology* have strengthened my conviction of this need of the modern world". (Prior, 1933a, p.232) Prior then mentions Troup's article on Berdiaeff as helping to formulate this need, that other articles help to meet the need and then, there are articles such as Robertson's that "fail to meet it and provide typical examples of the modern march away from fundamentals." (Prior, 1933a, p.232) Prior also critiques Mcrae's discussion as being "even more definitely" an example of the problem. (Prior, 1933a, p.232)

Prior is writing here as much as a logician as theologian, wanting clarification of "the meaning of such terms as 'art', 'form', 'morality', 'asceticism', 'puritanism' and so on, and a detailed study of their possible logical or concrete interconnections." (Prior, 1933a, p.232) Prior also states his own position, "that to the Christian all real art (like all real thought and all real life) is a sacrament and that to the Sacrament (of Holy Eucharist) we should bring the highest to which our art can attain." (Prior, 1933a, p.232) It is also of note that Prior mentions the artistry of God in "non-human nature" and that this is of note - like 'human-made art' - "only in so far as it ultimately tends to 'glorify God.'" (Prior, 1933a, pp.232-33) In doing so he is expressing a position closer to Brunner than to Barth in relation to 'natural theology' and here the influence of Bates can be discerned; yet at the same time, Prior's argument is for a medieval-

¹⁶ The discussion concludes with: "[We regret the exigencies of time in printing prevented us from giving Mr Robertson an opportunity of seeing Mr. Prior's remarks. In any case these expressions of opinion are to be regarded as a discussion and not as a controversy. We invite such discussions from our readers. - Ed.]" *New Zealand Journal of Theology*. II, 3 (May 1933), p.234

derived role of art as existing within the culture and thought of the medieval church as sacramental art. Prior is here in the first attempts of outlining a theology of art, something which he was to expand upon in his 1934 essay "Theology and Art" which shared first place in the Otago University Review competition (with "Decadence" by Dan Davin¹⁷). In this short essay, Prior discusses art from the perspective of a theologian "principally because my own vocation happens to be that of a theologian rather than that of an artist." (Prior, 1934a, p.26) This self-designation is telling, for at this time Prior was a philosophy student not yet a candidate for theological study. Prior's article seeks to clarify what theology can say about art, while acknowledging that whether it is art or theology, it is very difficult to decide if either is "in any absolute sense a 'good thing'" because of "the plain fact that to Absolute Good – to be more explicit, the Righteousness of God – we are strangers and enemies." (Prior, 1934a, p.27) Yet both Art – "as in the novels of Dostoevsky – or, for that matter in the tragedies of Shakespeare" (Prior, 1934, p.27) and theology can plainly reflect what we know of existence for "the world of art is just as truly God's world as the world of theology." (Prior, 1934, p.27) In this article we can see Prior reasserting his *NZJT* argument that we should seek a re-expression of the Medieval Church's integration of art, knowledge and theology. The theologian is called upon to "say the world of art is just as truly the world of the Christian God... as the world of theology." (Prior, 1934a, p.27) (In this type of statement we can see how and why Prior was regarded as an important support by the then-Christian artists Toss Woollaston and Colin McCahon). Prior further supports a medieval integration of art and theology in his statement that it "must be admitted that art, with many other humanly valuable things, has suffered sadly both at the hands of a gloomy asceticism and despotic ecclesiasticism which has called itself Catholic and at the hands of protestant Puritanism in many of its manifestations." (Prior, 1934a, p.27)

Prior's intention becomes clear in the second part of this short essay where, having drawn upon T.S Eliot's 'The Use of Poetry and Use of Criticism', he dismisses "the artist-turned-theologian" (Prior, 1934a, p.28) and the tendency in "an age of theological decadence" of the temptation

¹⁷ Prior joined Davin editing the Otago University magazine *Critic* in 1935 the start of a life-long friendship. Davin included a character (Ralph Dawson) based on Prior in his novel *Not Here Not Now* (Robert Hale: London, 1969) based on life at Otago University in the 1930s.

for viewing art as “giving a religious vision which positively supersedes the work of theology.” (Prior, 1934a, p.28) Rather, the theologian acts to remind believers they do not possess God and to remind unbelievers “that they have not disposed of Him.” (Prior, 1934a, p.28)

As such, “Theology and Art” (Prior 1934a) can be seen to arise out of Prior’s writing in the *NZJT*. It is an extension of his claim of the need to engage with a rethinking of the Medieval Church’s integration of art and theology. Prior is therefore, in this later essay, writing in his own way a less explicit call for a new Middle Ages; that is, an integrated outlook that as well as ensuring the inter-relationship of art and theology also retains the integration of Philosophy and Theology. This is why, in “Theology and Art” (Prior 1934a), while a Philosophy student, his identity is expressed as that arising from his vocation as theologian. Here we can also note the influence of Bates, the philosopher who was, in his vocational identity, a theologian.

Another article we can be assured Prior read is Alan Watson’s discussion of the Oxford Group movement (Buchmanism) (Watson, 1933a), because, in his letters and in his writings in *Open Windows and the Student*, Prior, as a Calvinist, is centrally opposed to the Oxford Group’s piety and public confession. Furthermore, Watson is frequently mentioned in Prior’s letters to Bethell (Grimshaw 2018) as someone whose views are worthy of reading.

Also in this issue is Prior’s review essay of Nathan Söderblom’s *The Living God* (1933). Prior begins by observing Oxford University Press have been providing “some excellent English translations of the two or three of the magna opera of the foremost living continental theologians, e.g. Otto’s *Idea of the Holy*; Heiler’s *Prayer*; Barth’s *Epistle to the Romans* (in preparation) and Söderblom’s *The Living God*” (Prior, 1933b, p.251) - and in doing so allowing us insight into his reading and interests at this time. Söderblom’s book is his Gifford lectures of 1931 and discusses the comparative history of religion. Prior spends some time approvingly putting Söderblom’s ‘catholic’ protestantism in perspective and then discusses the distinction between natural religion which is part of human development and supernatural religion which is “a revelation of a Living God.” (Prior, 1933b, p.252) Prior is keen to demonstrate his reading and knowledge, noting in relation to Söderblom’s discussion of the eschatological and apocalyptic elements of Christianity: “ Albert Schweitzer, Alfred Loisy, Friederich von Hügel, Karl Barth, Friederich Gogarten and others have had much to say on this question; and Söderblom’s summing up of the whole matter is an excellent one. He

lacks, however, the enthusiasm about eschatology that we find in the Barthian school." (Prior, 1933b, p.252) It needs to be remembered that Prior is, at this time only 18 years old, yet here he has both contributed to a debate and written a review for a national journal of theology. He had obviously come to the attention of Bates in his philosophy classes and been offered these opportunities, which also would have drawn him to the attention of the wider church and a different readership from his writing in *Open Windows*.

Also in this issue Bates contributes two detailed reviews, one on H. Richard Niebhuur's translation of Tillich's *The Religious Situation* and the other on Inge's *The New Twilight of the Gods*. Bates endorses Tillich's book as being "one of the kind which expresses clearly and elaborates interestingly what numbers of discerning people think vaguely but cannot state impressively." (Bates, 1933a, p.256) He notes its prohibitive price for New Zealand readers but draws attention to the statement of use of its content in J.H. Oldham's pamphlet on Religious Education; which can, we are informed, be obtained from Dr J.D. Salmond of Knox College. Yet, in spite of Bates' endorsement¹⁸ - and Tillich being in the forefront of the anti-capitalist revolt and articulating a new attitude of "belief-ful realism" (Bates, 1933a, p.257) - it seems Prior was not drawn to Tillich's thought, preferring instead Barth and the earlier Calvinists to Tillich's Lutheran-derived socialism and existentialism.

The next issue (August 1933) included a long article on "Religion and the Spirit of Capitalism" (Fisher, 1933) by Allan G.B. Fisher, at that time Professor of Economics at Otago (1925-1935). We can be sure Prior read this article and knew Fisher, as in a letter to his communist cousin Hugh Teague in 1938 (Grimshaw 2018, p.167), Prior has a long discussion of Fisher's *The Clash of Progress and Security* (1935) and seems to have been promised some work in 1938 for the journal *International Affairs*, published by Chatham House where Fisher was Price Research Professor. (Grimshaw 2018, p.164, p.193, p.194n6) Including a detailed discussion of Calvinism and its influences on capitalism (drawing on, it notes, Weber and Tawney), Fisher's article is a type of economic and social theology focused upon questions of material progress and in many ways can and should be read alongside his later essay on "The Economic

¹⁸ Bates (1995, p.23) records that when *The Religious Situation* first appeared in English in the late 1920s, he introduced this to his classmates at the Theological Hall.

Implications of Material Progress"¹⁹ (1935) and his book *The Clash of Security and Progress* (1935). The detailed discussion on Calvinism seems to suggest this is the result of discussion with Bates on theology as it stands distinct from all of Fisher's other writings at this time. Furthermore, this article seems to be a version of an address Fisher gave to the Philosophy Club in June 1933²⁰. We can be sure Prior was in the audience.

In the final issue for 1933, Prior contributes his first stand-alone article to the *NZJT*, "Dostoevsky – A Modern Apocalyptic" (Prior, 1933d). As has been noted above in discussing his 1934 "Theology and Art" essay, Prior was a reader of Dostoevsky²¹ and this *NZJT* article needs to be read alongside his article "Dostoevsky" which had just been published in *Open Windows* (Prior, 1933c) Therefore the two articles need to be read side by side, with the *NZJT* article being in effect and expansion of this earlier article. Bates would have read the *Open Windows* shorter article and so, it may be conjectured, supported and encouraged Prior to expand that article into the *NZJT* one.

Prior's *Open Windows* article, in the series 'Modern World Leadership' has as its subheading ' "The hunger for eternity of Dostoevsky" – Karl Barth', which arises from Barth's *Epistle to the Romans*.²² Prior's focus, in reference

¹⁹ I would also suggest that Fisher came to contribute to the *NZJT* having recently published "Moscow Impressions" (John McIndoe: Dunedin, 1932, 36pp) which is a report of his travels in Russia in January 1931. His *NZJT* article can be read as further thinking out of what he discusses here, in particular, one of his concluding statements in the pamphlet: "The stony soil in which Communism will flourish is the poverty and misery of its people. Any country which earnestly tackles its own economic problems, and organizes reasonable economic standards for its own people, can afford to completely ignore Communist propaganda." (p.36) His *NZJT* article in part seeks to expand this by asking what protestant religion offers and supports in relation to capitalism and, by default, economic and material progress, that Russian orthodoxy does not.

²⁰ "Religion and Capitalism", ODT 17 June 1933, p.16.

https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/ODT19330617.2.120.7?end_date=31-12-1950&phrase=2&query=%22religion+and+capitalism%22&start_date=01-01-1861&title=ODT

²¹ Also, in his letters, when in 1937 Prior writes of culling his personal library in preparation for the journey to Europe, he notes he is retaining "all of my Dostievsy & Solovyof & Merezhkovsky..." (Grimshaw, 2018, p.113)

²² As Blake and Rosario note, Barth finds that "Dostoevsky's hunger for eternity" speaks to the universality of his oeuvre (1968: 252). The reference is to *The Epistle to the Romans*, translated from the sixth edition by Edwyn C. Hoskyns (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968). From: "Journey to transcendence: Dostoevski's theological polyphony in Barth's understanding of the Pauline KRISIS", Elizabeth A. Blake and Ruben Rosario *Studies in East European Thought*, Jun., 2007, Vol. 59,

to Dostoevsky is “to say a little about those aspects of his message which are most significant in the modern situation, which he himself regarded as central and vital to his own thought and being, and which are in particular danger of being ignored or avoided today.”(Prior, 1933c, p.5) In discussing Dostoevsky’s influence, Prior notes that both Karl Barth and Nicholas Berdayev were among those who “abandoned their paganism” due to the influence of Dostoevsky and so driven “towards a full faith in the Divine Master” (Prior, 1933c, p.5) as well as being among those influenced by Dostoevsky’s Christian apocalypticism²³. Prior then discusses how Dostoevsky’s Christian anarchism aligns with the politics of the Christian Pacifist group, the New Zealand Army of Reconciliation²⁴, of which Prior is a part.(Prior, 1933c, p.6) This is followed by a short discussion of what we can term the political theology expressed in the ‘The Legend of The Grand Inquisitor’ from *The Brothers Karamazov*, which is opposed to all human attempts to create or impose an earthly utopia. Prior, via Dostoevsky, then critiques the efforts of the Roman Catholic church, Russian Communism, the British Empire, fascism, Hitlerism and nationalism more generally as “towers of Babel”, while against all of these stands “in our midst” the Son of God.(Prior 1933c, p.6)²⁵

Prior’s NZJT article, “Dostoevsky – A Modern Apocalyptic” focuses on *Crime and Punishment*, *The Idiot*, *The Possessed*, and *The Brothers Karamazov* as containing “a certain basic contradiction, a fundamental dualism” (Prior 1933d, p.4) between a “fierce and burning faith” and “a very stark realism.”(Prior, 1933d, pp.4-5) Prior argues that Dostoevsky cannot be properly understood by those concentrating on either his faith or his “artistic realism.”(Prior, 1933d, p.5) Prior emphasises – in line with his *Open Windows* essay – Dostoevsky’s central opposition to “that

No. 1/2, Dostoevski’s Significance for Philosophy and Theology (Jun., 2007), pp. 3-20, 168

²³ Prior lists here also W.E. Orchard, T.S. Eliot, Albert Schweitzer and Don Miguel de Unamuno.

²⁴ A short-run Christian pacifist and anarchist group led by Lex Miller with Prior as secretary. For a discussion of this group, see Grimshaw, ‘Prior’s politics’ (forthcoming.)

²⁵ At the conclusion of his article Prior lists a bibliography comprising: “Dr. John A. Hutton, “Guidance on Russia from her literature”, N. Berdyaev, “The Russian Revolution”(and others of the “Essays in order” series); Karl Barth , “The righteousness of God”(included in “The Word of God and the Word of Man”); W.E Orchard, “The Necessity of Christ”; Translations of Dostoevsky’s chief works are included in “Everyman’s Library.”

doctrinal or political ecclesiasticism which claims a firm footing in this world and in this life of man" (Prior 1933d, p.5); rather, this world, Prior emphasises via Dostoevsky, "could only incline us to doubt and to question." (Prior, 1933d, p.5) Here we can read the echoes of the Barthian emphasis on Dostoevsky; that is, we cannot turn to this world for the basis of faith or hope, rather, like Dostoevsky, as Prior emphasizes, joy is to be found in the resurrection and the victory over death. This emphasis on resurrection and its victory over death means that "those tendencies, forces, ideas, realities which press upon us in every walk and aspect of life" (Prior, 1933d, p.6) have meaning in relation to this central act of God, so that political and social actions and events (including, Prior mentions, Bolshevism) actually help remind us of the centrality of "the Wholly Other – 'God and immortality.'" (Prior, 1933d, p.6) That is, via Dostoevsky we become aware of – and able to identify – "the God-denying spirit" (Prior, 1933d, p.6) of the times. Here Prior notes the importance of those drawing on Dostoevsky to do so and, as in *Open Windows*, emphasises Barth, Unamuno and Berdyaev, while stating that "both outside the visible Church and within it, heathenism is becoming more and more obvious and open." (Prior, 1933d, p.6)

These two short articles, read in tandem, signal what Prior is reading at this time, but more so, what he is moved to communicate to others. This is, in many ways, one of the core pillars of Prior's theology: the apocalyptic Christ restated for the Modern World; a theology opposed to all forms of modern heathenism, a theology that reads the world for what such reading tells us we are lacking. Eschatology is a central element of what we can begin to identify as Prior's political theology. Philosophy is therefore, in this schema, that which helps us understand the world, understand ourselves and in doing so reminding us, in relation to the apocalyptic gospel, of what we and the world are lacking. At this time philosophy is very much the handmaiden to theology; that is, handmaiden to a political theology.

Following Prior's article is one by James Aitken arguing for the necessity of science and religion for each other (Aitken, 1933), an argument that echoes the type of argument made by Bates regarding philosophy and theology; that is, each is necessary, but in each case either science or philosophy need religion or theology to complete their world view.

What would have been of central interest to Prior in this issue is Ian Fraser's translation of "Sermon from *Komm Schopfer Geist* by Karl Barth and Edvard Turneyson." (Fraser 1933) Fraser's translation of this

sermon from Barth and Turneyson's collection of sermons from 1924 actually predates the translation of *Komm Schopfer Geist* by the Americans Grieg W. Richards and Elmer Homrighausen in 1934 (published as *Come, Holy Spirit*)²⁶. This sermon, later published in *Come, Holy Spirit* as "Passing all understanding" focuses on 'real Christianity' beginning with the surrender of oneself to God, that is "the mark of true Christianity, that it begins at the point where we humans stop" (Fraser, 1933, p.16) signalled by "boundary line" of the Cross and the resurrection. Barth is also in the brief notes on books and magazines, with this section leading with (and endorsing) the famous Hoskyns' translation of The Epistle to the Romans and McConachie's The Barthian Theology. The former is also the subject of a longer review essay by A.C. Watson who, reading it as parish minister and preacher, writes a very strong endorsement, noting what surely also drew Prior to Barth: "an interesting feature is the dependence upon a few men, Kierkegaard, Overbeck, Luther, and of course Calvin. In literature Barth shows dependence upon Nietzsche and Dostoevsky. I find there are at least twenty references to the latter, and there are many resemblances in spirit and thought between these two men. They share the element of drama, the eschatology, the divine paradoxes." (Watson, 1933b, p.31) It can also be wondered, given that Prior was to write an unpublished manuscript on Barth ("my own Companion of Barth's Dogmatik") (Grimshaw, 2018, p.158, p.195)²⁷, if his attention was grabbed by Watson's statement regarding the importance of Barth's reiterating of points, "I rather imagine that the whole of his thought could be easily expressed in not more than fifty pages." (Watson, 1933b, p.31) This is exactly the sort of challenge it is easy to imagine the young Prior rising to.

In 1934 Prior took over the co-editorship of *Open Windows* and it would seem this took much of his time and focus. We can however know he continued to read the *NZJT*, not only because he was moving his way toward applying for theological training for 1935 but also, as he continued to reside in Knox College, access to the journal was readily available – and he continued to move as much in theological circles as philosophical ones.

Because Prior noted in April 1934 that his "pet idea" happened to be the theology of Karl Barth (Prior, 1934b, p.22) we can be sure he read Ian

²⁶ See D. Densil Morgan, *Barth Reception in Britain* (London, T&T Clark) p.149

²⁷ See (Grimshaw 2018 p158, p195); Prior wrote to Bethell on 2/6/38 that his book on Barth had been returned by the SCM press and he had sent it to T & T Clark.

Fraser's "The Corruption Of Human Reason, Discussed In Relation To The Theology Of Karl Barth." (Fraser 1934a) Positioning Barth versus Schleiermacher (and so it can be noted versus John Dickie who favoured Schleiermacher), Fraser, with Barth, argues against what is termed "the unchristain view" that puts humanity "in the centre of thought, which sees the meaning of life as a gradual progress of man towards perfection." (Fraser, 1934a, p.43) Employing Barth's Epistle to the Romans and his very recently translated Dogmatik (1932) Fraser discusses Barth on original sin, the resultant gap between humanity and God, and the crossing of the gap by God in moments of crisis. Fraser then presents his own view as a moderation of Barth's scepticism of reason but also draws upon "modern psychology" to apply both "rationalization", described as "the psychological process by which faulty reasoning occurs" and "projection" described as "by which one's own shortcomings are ascribed to others, in order to obviate having to lower one's estimate of oneself." (Fraser, 1934a, p.46) Fraser does so in order to state "Modern psychology supports the Christian view that human reason is corrupt – though not wholly corrupt." (Fraser, 1934a, p.47) Prior was deeply interested in Barth and issues of human reason and this article, even if drawing on psychology, aligns with his thinking wherein christian faith could and should draw upon thinking from other disciplines.

Prior was also sure to have read the second in the series on the Oxford Group movement, and also Alan Watson's 'Human Personality – Creative or Created?' as it had a section on 'the philosophy of history' which is presented as "the quest for a determination of the right standpoint from which to view the whole activity of man as an historical and social being." (Watson, 1934, p.55)

In the May 1934 issue, Jim Steele's review article of R.N. Carew Hunt's biography of Calvin would have attracted Prior's attention. Steele notes that Carew Hunt is, like Sir Edwyn Hoskyns, an Anglo-Catholic because an number of Anglo-Catholics have engaged in translations and discussion of continental Protestant thought. (This Anglo-Catholic link also brings to mind the comment of the English vicar, Kenneth Packard²⁸ that Prior struck him as 'a High Church Calvinist....[and] I wonder if he will end up as a Roman? Rome has a way of getting a good many people of that type...' [Grimshaw, 2018, p.198]). Steele endorses Carew Hunt's

²⁸ Packard was vicar at Flimwell vicarage, Hawkhurst, Kent; the Priors camped there during the Munich crisis.

book, describing Calvin as “essentially the brains of the Reformation” who “supplied the answer to the Council of Trent”; he also notes “the amazing vitality” (Steele, 1934a, p.83) of the modern movement drawing inspiration from his thought, centring all on this on the Epistle to the Romans (and hence drawing a line from Calvin to Barth). Steele emphasises the importance of Calvin’s sociology for his thought – and the importance of his sociology for the presbyterians of the sixteenth and seventeenth century. Prior not only increasingly turned to Calvinists of this period but also engaged in his own discussions and forms of Calvinist sociology. We can be sure Prior would have read this book, given this endorsement by Steele; he very likely bought it, but if not, then the Hewitson Library at Knox College does hold a first edition (1933).

In the book and magazine notes, J.N. Findlay’s Meinong’s *Theory of Objects* is recommended “to philosophically-minded New Zealanders” because of Findlay’s recent arrival at Otago University and his “gift of exposition” of a difficult subject. (Scott, 1934, p.86)

In the longer reviews, Prior would have read Steele’s discussion of both Christopher Dawson’s *The Spirit of the Oxford Movement* and Visser ‘t Hooft’s *Anglocatholicism and Orthodoxy*; the latter’s Barthian reading of Anglicatholicism aligning with Prior’s thinking on ecumenism. Steele also reviews the translation of Adolf Keeler’s *Karl Barth and Christian Unity*, drawing attention to the mention in this book of articles published in the New Zealand Outlook on the teaching of Barth, which is used as an example of how Barthian thought and theology “is making its impetus felt even in the remote confines of the British Empire.” (Steele, 1934b, p.96) Steele identifies points of connection between Barthianism and Anglo-Catholics, and the degree to which Barthianism is a type of new reformation for “the objective, miraculous and apocalyptic nature of Christian truth” against modern culture and as such involves, for the church, “the life and death struggle of the existential level.” Also of note is how, while Barthians find a common ally with Catholics in opposition to Hitler, at this point “[f]or the Barthians Americanism is the anti-Christ of modern Christianity, which takes the place which the Pope took in the minds of the Reformers.” (Steele, 1934b, p.96) This is worth noting because Prior was far more aligned with the anti-Hitler focus of Barthianism than that which was anti-American Christianity. We can also be almost completely certain that Prior read this book as there is a first edition held in the Hewitson library.

In the next issue (August 1934) James Baird’s discussion of ‘Total Depravity’ (Baird, 1934) wherein Augustine and Barth on sin, and Barth,

in the end endorsed, would be sure to have been read by Prior. Similarly, given Prior's oft-stated interest in what John Allan thought, we can be sure he would have read and agreed with Allan's critique of the Oxford Group Movement (Allan, 1934) which roundly dismisses, with examples from christian history, the claim of the Oxford Group to receive particular guidance. Also of interest would have been Ian Fraser's short review of Barth's first volume of his *Dogmatik*, which Fraser reviews from its original german form, setting out its central framework and emphasis. (Fraser, 1934b)

In the November 1934 issue, we can be sure Prior would have read Bates' long lead article "Some Points At Issue Between Emil Brunner and Karl Barth". (Bates, 1934) In this, Bates, who studied under Brunner, begins by emphasizing their differences as being like those between Luther and Calvin, with Barth being more like Luther and Brunner being more like Calvin. This distinction is interesting, for Prior is very much a Calvinist in his thinking, yet very much also a Barthian; Brunner rarely appearing in his writing or letters, except for Brunner's *The Divine Imperative* (1937) which Prior admires. This article is Bates' discussion of Brunner's *Natur und Gnade. Zum Gespraech mit Karl Barth* (1934) (which he presents in translation as *Nature and Grace: A Discussion with Karl Barth*). In this Bates, presenting this debate for the first time (we can assume) for his readers, and writing from his own experience of Brunner and his own translation from the german, sets out carefully the points of both disagreement and agreement between Brunner and Barth on, as Bates puts it, Brunner's contention that theology should be able to speak to the non-believer in a way that is felt by that non-believer to be relevant to their situation and that humanity "must have some native capacity for recognizing the divine which has not been destroyed by sin, else how would man be able to know it was God who was speaking when the Word came to him?" (Bates 1934, p.3)

Prior would have read this article with interest not only because it enabled access to a debate causing controversy throughout dialectical theology but also because he was interested in the issue of natural theology, in this coming down squarely on the side of Barth. Bates begins with a clear and detailed discussion of Barth's position, focusing on his doctrine of the Word of God. Brunner is then presented as also arguing for what Barth does, but that Barth "draws false consequences" and this means Barth regards those who do not agree with him "as betrayers of the original position whence the consequences are drawn". (Bates 1934, pp.5-6)

Having set out the 6 central points of Barth's "false consequences" Bates then carefully discusses Brunner's responses to these, which comprise "Brunner's *theologia naturalis*". (Bates, 1934, p.10) At this point Bates makes an important philosophical comment: "any one who reads the 1922 edition of Barth's *Romans* will be astonished at the broad stream of Platonic speculations about God which are mixed up with the main current of biblical doctrine. And Brunner's own earlier works show the same preoccupation." (Bates, 1934, p.10) This comment is important for it is a reiteration of Bates' position that philosophy is centrally important for theology, not only because philosophy so influences theology, but also so a theologian can identify when such influence occurs. Bates then sets down Brunner's Calvinist natural theology and references Calvin's own form of natural theology, his doctrine of man and how these form the basis of Calvin's ethic. Bates' position, in support of Brunner, is that Barth possesses "a poor sense of the historical" (Bates, 1934, p.13)²⁹ and he then states his own position, in line with Calvin, that the Christian lives between two poles of Word and History; this is resolved in The Word became Flesh. That is, not only does God speak to us in the act of God speaking to us in the immediately present moment, but that, as Brunner emphasizes, God speaks to us "here and now on the ground that He has already spoken." (Bates, 1934, p.13) Furthermore, Bates states that nature, the bible and Jesus Christ are all symbolic speech of God "or as Kierkegaard puts it 'indirect communication'. For direct communication with God is a mark of heathendom, not of Christianity, and what men make direct contact with is not God, but gods. To deny the revelation in 'nature' is really to abandon the revelation in Scripture and to run the risk of falling into a concept of revelation which belongs to pietistic hothouse enthusiasm." (Bates, 1934, p.13) This article is important for a number of reasons; it is Prior's philosophy lecturer undertaking theological discussion and writing, proving yet again to Prior that there does not have to be a decision to be either a philosopher or a theologian. Secondly, this is a philosopher defending neo-orthodoxy and Calvinist theology, again providing a model for Prior to follow. Thirdly, it raises issues of natural theology that Prior will continue to engage with; in his case, deciding for the Barthian argument over Brunner's. But also, perhaps

²⁹ This is the source of Prior's statement to Bethell in a letter (12/8/36) that "J.M. Bates says Barth has a 'poor sense of history'. (Grimshaw, 2018 p.83) That Prior references this article two years later signals he not only read it but also thought deeply about it and this point in particular.

providing a possible reason why he began to turn more to Calvin and the Scots reformers to think through issues of natural theology, rather than just staying with Barth. Finally, Bates' article predates by over a decade any widely available English translation of this debate. It signals New Zealand scholars could involve themselves, from New Zealand, with theological debates happening in the northern hemisphere – and outside the English-speaking theological world. But also, in its outlining of the issues and framing of how to consider it, Bates' article could also be regarded as a form of religious journalism of the type Prior signaled an interest in pursuing. Linked to this article, later in this issue, attention is drawn to the publication of the translation of Brunner's *The Mediator* – the one book by Brunner that Prior commends.

The first issue for 1935 begins with Jim Steele's long essay "Calvin's Conception of the Life of a Christian Man". In conclusion, Steele states Calvin's argument arises not "from a cold and remorseless logic" but that "his appeal is essentially a religious appeal" and that Calvin was "a keen observer of life fully sensible to the realities of human existence." (Steele, 1935a, p.43) We can note Prior's engagement with Calvin follows a similar line of thought; it is not that Prior necessarily changed his thinking due to Steele's article, but it was confirmation his engagement with Calvin was on the right track.

Ian Fraser replies to Bates on Brunner by arguing for Barth, while acknowledging "perhaps the majority of our readers" will follow Bates throwing "in his lot with Brunner." (Fraser, 1935, p.49) Fraser argues for Barth's position on revelation, invoking Kierkegaard to identify that, as in Barth, "in theology, logic is not the highest category." (Fraser, 1935, p.50) This is an indication of how Prior as a logician could also be a Barthian, for logic was for the world of philosophy, but in theology, revelation provides "the truth logic cannot grasp." (Fraser, 1935, p.50) That is, while both science and religion "deal with the whole of life" because of the methods used, the nature of knowledge and the use to which they are put means "[t]he difference, then, between reason and revelation is not quantitative, but qualitative." (Fraser, 1935, p.53) Again this is a local theological engagement with an international theological debate, with Barth's side taken by someone who had studied under him – just as Bates had studied with Brunner. It also helps us understand that Prior's Barthianism was a minority position even amongst those New Zealanders who aligned themselves with neo-orthodoxy.

In the May 1935 issue, Prior returns with his essay on "*Maurice's Kingdom of Christ*." (Prior, 1935) It is interesting to consider how Prior

came to be attracted to Maurice's thought. One argument would be through Christian socialism; but it is also clear Prior's reading of the Anglo-Catholics Father A.G. Herbert and Father H.G. Kelly also lead to Maurice. (Prior, 1935, p.81)³⁰ It also appears that Prior constantly read and drew upon Kingdom of Christ to think about any number of topics.(Prior, 1935, p.82) In fact it could be said that this text was a central hermeneutic tool for Prior, as he notes regarding his use of Maurice that "Maurice incidentally, was fond of pointing out just such a mutual illumination between the Bible on one hand and present and everyday experience on the other."(Prior, 1935, p.82) It is also clear that Prior's later habit of constructing dialogues to set out the various positions on an issue derives from volume 1 of Kingdom of Christ where Maurice begins with an "Introductory Dialogue With A Quaker"(Maurice, 1959, pp.27-42). In Prior's discussion it is clear that one element of Maurice that he admires is a type of what can be termed theological logic whereby Maurice both identifies how a tradition (in his discussion, Lutheran, Calvinist and Unitarian) may have "caught a vision" of truth but how they must also not seek to claim a monopoly of truth for then they will lose "the essence of real faith".(Prior, 1935, p.84) What Prior does question is Maurice's positioning of the gospel as the answer to the need of man, whereas Prior, while agreeing, would place this secondary to the gospel as primarily "the Son's fulfilment of His Father's will."(Prior, 1935, p.85) Prior does use Maurice to attack the fundamentalist for a position whereby "the Bible is a book in his world, and not he a person in the world of the Bible".(Prior, 1935, p.85) What it means to be in the world of the Bible is, for Prior, to be in the world of what "seems a dull book at times, but it speaks to us; sometimes after we have been reading it and have put it away again, it speaks to us, in echoes, of what Barth calls a 'strange new world' and what Maurice calls a 'Kingdom', in which God lives and reigns, and does mighty works, and deals with and speaks to real and ordinary human beings just like ourselves."(Prior, 1935, pp.85-86)

This balancing of Maurice and Barth is central to Prior's current and future thinking in theology and religion and over the next decade Prior navigates his way between what can be described as his two theological mentors. For example, the following year Prior set out his thinking in an address to the Friends of the Reunion Movement, comparing Maurice

³⁰ In his letters (Grimshaw 2018) Prior makes frequent reference to Maurice, Kelly and Herbert.

and Barth.³¹ While in this *NZJT* article, Prior reads Maurice as a thinker aligned with the more recent study and discussion of apocalyptic literature, and noting the limitations in Maurice's thought because of his time, he does state Maurice caught "the abiding essence of all Apocalypse in his insistence that the New Age of the Coming One is brought in by an Act of God – the Kingdom is, first a [sic] foremost, a *God-given* reality, not something we must seek to bring into being for ourselves." (Prior, 1935, p.86) Prior still existed very centrally in such a God-given world in which his Christian socialism was, via Maurice and others, an apocalyptic theology of response, undertaken, as he goes on to state, whereby we "seek signs which precede us and our experiences, which were there before we ever thought of them, which gave birth to us rather than we to them." (Prior, 1935, p.87) This is why the *NZJT* and Jack Bates are crucial for understanding how Prior the philosopher can also be Prior the theologian. Philosophy is that which supports theological thinking, not that which supplants it. If all reality is God-given, then philosophy helps us understand it. It does not negate such a view. Prior lives and experiences reality as an apocalyptic theological reality; that is, of a world to come that philosophy helps us understand – but does not ultimately explain. For Prior, Maurice helps understand what the signs of a "Kingdom of the Redeemed" (Prior, 1935, p.83, p.87) might be, but also that religion should not become subordinate to politics, nor to religious parties and systems. In his appreciation of Maurice, and Prior's recognition that it now among the Anglo-Catholics that Maurice has "his faithful following" (Prior, 1935, p.81), we can now more easily understand the basis for that later description of Prior as "a High Church Calvinist". (Grimshaw, 2018, p.198)

Publication had to cease with the August 1935 issue because the Printer (Bates' father) could no longer afford the cost of production. (Bates & Pearson, 1995, p.15) It begins with a long discussion of Brunner's *The Mediator* by Jim Steele, situating it in the larger discussion of neo-

³¹ See: "Two Writers Compared. Address to Reunion Group", Otago Daily Times 12 September 1936, p22:
https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/ODT19360912.2.161?end_date=31-12-1950&items_per_page=10&query=reunion+group+maurice+barth&snippet=true&start_date=01-01-1861&title=ODT
 (This was most probably reported by Clare Prior. It is also the first peice mentioned [but not by name] in the letter from Prior to Bethell in September 1936. See (Grimshaw, 2018), letter 12 p 98)

orthodox theology. We can be sure Prior carefully read this article, not only because he was deeply immersed in neo-orthodox thought, but also because it discusses so many of Prior's theological influences. This article again demonstrated that theological thought and discussion of a high standard could occur from within New Zealand and by near contemporaries of Prior. Steele made an important insight that also helps further explain the attraction Anglo-Catholic thinkers held for Prior. In discussing the central importance of what is termed "the sociological principle" of the fourth book of Calvin's *Institutes*, whereby we understand "sovereignty as the end of all revelation and which extends to all relations of life", Steele states: "it is because the Anglo-Catholics have grasped this that they are ready to recognize what Barth and Brunner have to say, whereas those who may otherwise be expected to recognize and appreciate their teaching do not because they have lost themselves in a nebulosity which is always the product of individualism." (Steele, 1935b, p.107) Prior's Christian socialism was likewise an anti-individualist theology, and his Calvinism and Barthianism – combined with that which he derived from Maurice, made him attuned to the Anglo-Catholic reception of neo-orthodoxy. Also of interest to Prior would be Steele's comparison of the thought of John Dickie (as a typical representative of the Scottish Reformed tradition) with that of Brunner, and here Steele identifies a vital relation between both sides to be found in Calvin. (Steele, 1935b, pp.107-109) Similarly, it can be argued, it was Calvin that enabled Prior's holding together the neo-orthodox and Scottish Reformed traditions, and further enabled him to venture further back into the Scots reformers.

Following the end of the journal, Bates and Steele continued as parish ministers, but also ran theological refresher courses in 1935 and 1937 for the Presbyterian church. Of note is their collaboration (while in adjacent rural parishes in North Otago) at the request of the Life and Work Committee of the General Assembly to write for the New Zealand Presbyterian Church's commemoration of the 400th anniversary of the first edition of Calvin's *The Institutes of Christian Living in 1536*. As part of this, Bates and Steele published their own translation of chapters 6 to 10 of Book III of Calvin's *Institutes*, using a collection of early editions of the *Institutes* and the Latin text of 1559. (Pearson, 1994, p.15) The

resulting pamphlet³² came out in 1936; 1500 copies were printed and one third were sold in Australia. (Pearson, 1994, p.15) We can be sure that Prior read a copy (and most probably owned a copy); just as we can be assured that he would have read the special edition of *The Outlook* (July 27, 1936) entirely devoted to Calvin and primarily written by Bates and Steele; of note is the emphasis on “the revival of Calvinism”, identifying “the Barthian ferment” as the “new Calvinism”.(Pearson, 1994, p.15)

4 A Manual of Doctrine

Bates wrote a number of booklets for the church and then, in 1950, as Convenor of the Doctrine committee³³ wrote *A Manual of Doctrine*³⁴, in effect “a layperson’s theological text book”. (Pearson, 1994, p.25). It discussed questions of religion and Christianity; the principal doctrines of the Church; and how Christianity was practiced in worship, prayer, work and witness. The ‘work and witness’ of the believer was to be undertaken as the ‘responsibilities’ of the believer to both their fellow-Christian and to the non-Christian. Prior, who had been on various General Assembly working groups with Bates, reviewed the book for the New Zealand *Listener* under the heading “Christian Doctrine” (Prior 1951). This is not only a review of the book, it is also Prior, as a philosopher, also publicly stating his theological beliefs. Endorsing the book, Prior states it should be read beyond the Presbyterian Church as “the majority of New Zealanders, would probably be the wiser for having read some sort of handbook or guide to the principal doctrines of Christianity; and here is a very good one, and one written, so to speak, in our own tongue.” (Prior, 1951, p.12) Prior compared it favourably to Profesor Dickie’s *Organism of Christian Truth* because “they propound the same ‘middle-of-the road’³⁵ version of Christianity”(Prior, 1951, p.12) and observes “Mr Bates shares with (or has inherited from) Principal Dickie a keen awareness of the background, prepossessions and weaknesses of men upon their understanding of Christianity, as of

³² John Calvin on Christian living, translated into modern English from the 1559 edition of Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian religion*, on the occasion of the 400th anniversary of the publication of the *Institutes* in 1536.

³³ Pearson (1994) notes this was a large committee with 26 members that included “most of the leading theological minds in the church” (p.25); including Allan and Fraser who wrote for the *NZJT*.

³⁴ It was reprinted in 1951 and a second edition was published in 1960.

³⁵ Bates, in reviewing his theological career in 1980, stated in its “theological standpoint”, the *Manual* “reflected middle of the road thinking” (Bates 1995, p.22), but was “now dated”.

everything else.”(Prior, 1951, p.12) Prior notes Bates’ theological style, which can be seen as very similar to Prior’s own religious and theological writing – and indeed his philosophical writing at this time: “...perhaps the most marked feature of the Manual is its freedom from what might be called ‘scholasticism’. Mr Bates is never content to present the received expositions in the received technical terms; he always tries to say things, and to ‘work them out’, in his own way.”(Prior, 1951, p.12). As Pearson (1994, p.26) notes, the general tone of Bates’ Manual was neo-orthodox, but more in the line of the theology of Brunner than Barth; while Ian Breward observed that this book provided “a theological consensus” for generation (Pearson, 1994, p.26); especially for the lay members of the Presbyterian Church. In this the Manual more than achieved its task, set by the General Assembly, of being as Bates recorded “a popular statement of the Christian faith intended primarily for those seeking admission as communicant members of the Church, together with office bearers, youth leaders and church members generally.” (Bates 1995, p.21). Prior concludes his review by stating that while Bates, in his view, has taken “too narrow a view” on ‘The New Life in Christ’, he “should not like to undertake the re-writing of this chapter myself.” (Prior 1951, p.13)³⁶. This is a fascinating statement by Prior; on the one hand a emphasis that Prior was both not ‘middle of the road’ in his theology but also still more Barthian than the then-predominant Brunnerian theology of Bates and the Manual³⁷. Yet Prior is here also signaling that while he was now a philosopher still interested in theology, he was no longer primarily a theologian in his thinking or writing. A decade earlier we can conjecture

³⁶ What Prior might express as constituting ‘The New Life in Christ’ can be discerned in a form of public-intellectual Christianity undertaken by Prior in the New Zealand Presbyterian magazine the Outlook. Between February 1950 and November 1951 Prior wrote a column under the pseudonym Naphtali, described as “a column of answers to questions on theological or ecclesiastical matters which were purported to have been sent in by readers.” See Dennis McEldowney, Donald Anderson. a memoir, (1966 p.38). McEldowney wrote of how Anderson took over Prior’s column; Anderson doing so under the pseudonym, ‘Gad’. I thank Anne-Maree Mills for alerting me to this refence, which has resulted in a forthcoming article.

³⁷ Bates (1995, pp.14-15) mentions that Brunner’s Dogmatics was the standard text book on systematic theology for a generation of New Zealand Presbyterian clergy; but also that Brunner’s position on nature and grace “had more appeal” in New Zealand, than Barth’s famous “Nein” so that “in general”, Brunner’s theology “enjoyed great acceptance among Presbyterians”, especially his ‘treatment of the doctrine of man.” Bates observed Brunner’s appeal and influence stretched throughout the church and the university, and that, via studies he prepared, Bates introduced Brunner to Bible Class conferences and the SCM.

that this rewriting of the chapter is exactly the sort of task Prior would have set himself, whether in the pages of the SCM Student or in the theological journal *Presbyter*.

5 Conclusion

It could be said, in conclusion, that what Bates achieved in *A Manual of Doctrine* is what Prior had learnt from Bates and from the *NZJT* more than a decade earlier: it was possible 'to write in our own tongue' on theological and theological-philosophical matters from New Zealand; not only at the level of an SCM journal but also within the pages of a theological journal. The *NZJT* and Bates provided a way of combining theological and philosophical thought that Prior followed right through to, at least, the mid-1950s. More so, the *NZJT* provided a ready body of locally-produced theological material for Prior to engage with, with the model that people he knew were writing for others in a different way and level from that experienced in the SCM journal. The *NZJT* also provided Prior with another outlet for his writing and thinking, in this case, edited by people he knew and respected. Finally, in reading through the *NZJT* we can gain a clear insight into what Prior was reading at the time, identifying writing and thinking that clearly influenced him. If Findlay taught him all he knew about logic, Bates, it can be argued, taught Prior to write and think 'in his own tongue.'

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