

## Introduction to the Second Edition

The subtitle of this new edition is, not surprisingly, the same as the first edition—“A miscellany.” This perhaps suggests to us the meaning of the adjective miscellaneous which in most dictionaries is defined as a haphazard collection, or a random assortment of items. By using the noun miscellany, however, while I accept the notion of an assortment, this is a collection that is not just thrown together willy nilly, but is closer to the idea of an anthology or compilation of my writings in the last forty years. So what can you expect from this compilation? The answer is two-fold.

First, the book is substantively changed from the first edition not only in using new materials—that replace earlier chapters—but in a remarrying of the chapters from the first edition, plus the new pieces. This gives you, the reader, the option of dipping in and out of the book without feeling you have to read it right through. Second, the book contains a wider range of the differing styles and genres I have utilized over the years. So academic chapters of some length and complexity—for example, my piece on C. S. Lewis and Platonism, which originally appeared in the *Scottish Journal of Theology* in 2004, are interspersed with social media and journalistic presentations. These include Broadsheet obituaries, magazine extracts, accessible articles from professional journals, book reviews, conversations with scholars, and a printed sermon from a church newsletter.

There are two decisions I have made and one overwhelming fact that need further explication by way of introduction to this miscellany (William Abraham and Andy Kinsey have done most of the work necessary for this exordium). The first decision is that I have not grouped the sections together in terms of publication dates. A linear approach is perfectly acceptable but I have put together this collection by substantive content and similarity of subject matter because I think it is easier to follow. However, I have tried very hard to avoid a pitfall I think too many academics fall into: and that is I have not tried to harmonize the various accounts of religious phenomena

I have dealt with over the years. Like most people, I have changed my mind on a number of issues, but I have made no attempt to prevent contradictory accounts appearing here;<sup>1</sup> in short, I have left the scaffolding of my thoughts and observations intact so that people can see where I might have gone wrong or could have done better.

The one big “overwhelming fact” that has dominated my scholarship over the years—from 1973 to the present—is not original; indeed I am unapologetic for trying to stay loyal to the common tradition (sometimes couched in the language of “a rule of faith”).<sup>2</sup> I passionately believe that Christians need to stand together under one banner if they are going to make an impact for good in the world. It is not enough to be ecumenical, however, for ecumenism can be built on shifting sands not solid rock. We need a faith that prioritizes the gospel as good news and that is why I base my approach to theological education on what C. S. Lewis called “Mere Christianity” or “Deep Church.”

Deep Church essentially separates tradition from traditionalism and is predicated on the concept of a common tradition—shared by Catholics, Orthodox, and Protestants—despite the very real schisms of Christendom. These discriptions are primarily disputes over *authority*—from the belief of bishop collegiality and the Nicene Creed as the distillation of apostolic faith in the Eastern Churches, to the belief that gradually emerged in Rome, namely the universal jurisdiction over the whole church of the pope and magisterium, to Protestants taking the Bible as their ultimate authority. Despite these separations, however, the narrative of the gospel was preserved. I mention this because one of the problem with schisms is they outlast their potency. If we want to come together under one banner we have to know where the barricades are. I know this sounds like something out of Victor Hugo’s *Les Misarables*. But the truth we have to contend with is that since the philosophical Enlightenment of the eighteenth century and through to the modernist and postmodern era, the common tradition has faltered to the point of collapse and nearly died.

Given this self-evident truth, the miscellany ends with a short chapter on mission. Christianity cannot be true to itself unless it opens its arms to

1. Though I have retained the right to put things straight when I have changed my mind on particular facts or ideas.

2. See Everett’s brilliant exposition in *The Rule Of Faith: A Guide* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2015).

The Rule of faith is more flexible than formal creeds: theologians of East & West thought of it in terms of a summary of apostolic teaching and preaching. In the Latin West the rule of faith is particularly linked to St Hilary of Pottiers (c. 315–67).

the poor and the hungry.<sup>3</sup> But neither is the church true to itself unless it lives and preaches the gospel. We may not have economic certainty in the near future, and the possibility of severe climate change threatens the very existence of the created world. The Christian church offers a banner under which we can stand and fight with hope and fortitude.

*“He brought me to his banqueting house and his banner over me is love”  
(Song of Solomon 2:4).*

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3. This is not a new idea for the churches of Christendom: St John Chrysostom (c. 347–407) would not allow Christians to participate in the Eucharist unless they first gave alms to the poor.