

ROBERT BANKS - A Reply  
**THE "APOLOGIA PRO THEOLOGICA MEA"**

(Written almost immediately after the publication of Banks' chapter in  
*God Who is Rich in Mercy*, 27.2.1990 - not looked at since)

Robert Banks' assessment of my theology in *God Who is Rich in Mercy*

My chief criticism of this article is that Banks has acquainted himself with only a small section of my published theological writing. For example, he has not apparently consulted my broadcast talks which are contained in several volumes in the College library, and which had a weekly audience of 1500 listening; nor my theology I, II, III, IV published by the External Course Department of Moore College and which have had a very wide circulation over the years, being first published in the External Course in about 1960, or earlier.

In addition there are a good number of typeset copies of theological addresses and sermons of mine available in the library or with me.

Robert never consulted me about his article. I was not aware that he or anyone else was writing it until it was published. My contact with Robert Banks was minimal after his leaving College. He was in College from 1959-62, about four years. After leaving College he went to Adelaide and from there to England. I did not see him during this time, and after his return only occasionally, when we talked about his work and never discussed theology. I therefore think his knowledge of my theology was too inadequate as a basis for his article.

A great deal of Robert Banks' criticism of my theology dwells on omissions, things which I do not emphasise, and such like.

These criticisms are illegitimate for criticism of omissions can only be made if the whole area has been surveyed. But Banks has not surveyed the bulk of my theological writings. He has not read them, eg. he has not taken into account:

1) *My Broadcast Talks*

I broadcast for 18 years (first fortnightly, and then for the rest of this period, weekly), on practical, theological and ethical topics. They are all available in the library. For most of these 18 years these talks were for a quarter of an hour each, giving ample time to develop and apply a theological theme.

2) *My Printed Doctrine Course*

I wrote these in my late 30s. Subsequent reprints have been amplified a little. They are freely available through the External Department of Moore College.

3) *My Sermons which are Theological Expositions*

Some of these are in the College library, mostly on cassettes. A great number are in typescript in my possession. They would fill out my theological emphases, but it could not be expected that Banks would survey these for his essay (however the broadcast talks and the doctrine course are readily accessible).

Banks acknowledges (p.383) that in my writing that "God's love and graciousness is held to be the fundamental aspects of his character". It is God's love and graciousness, he says, that lie at the root of all main Christian beliefs.

Banks seldom (or never?) acknowledges a contribution I have made without putting in a rider that, in some way, takes away from it, eg.

- \* p. 387, last sentence of first paragraph
- \* cf. p.385 - ref. to DWB Robinson
- \* p.384, last Scripture of paragraph 1
- \* cf. p.383 - last line 'occasionally' (etc etc)

[x]

Banks quotes Thielike as saying that we must indigenise the phrase "not by works" [ ] refers to the [ ].

P. 392

Banks states of me, "More is said about the continuing place of the law in the Christian life, than about the centrality of the fruits of the Spirit".

In this comment Banks betrays an inadequate doctrine of the Spirit, as though the Spirit were an independent entity. In this he reflects the error of the Charismatic movement. The fruits of the Spirit are our sanctification, our reflecting of the image of Christ. Our sanctification is God's purpose; he chose us to be conformed to the image of Christ. But the fruit of the Spirit does not grow independently of the word, of the law, that is, of God's revealed will expressed in the law and exemplified in Christ.

The Spirit [ie. God in us] works in us his will so that we then give expression to this, that is the fruit of the Spirit, God's character, is visible in our lives.

The law is logically prior to the fruit of the Spirit, for it is through the law, that is our knowledge of God's will, that the Spirit produces his fruit, through giving us the will and the power to follow that will, that is obey that law.

[y]

Banks makes the same mistake in the next sentence, separating the Spirit from the Trinity as almost a separate entity and so dividing God. It is of the wrong thinking of the Charismatic movement.

He writes, "The role of the Spirit in helping the worshipper appropriate Christ in the sacraments is constantly emphasised by him. However, in talking about the sacraments he does not say much about the Spirit's presence"(p.392). But it is Christ that the sacraments centre on exclusively. We are baptised with the name of Christ; we celebrate the Lord's Supper in remembrance of Christ. It is the Spirit who works in us to make Christ present to our minds and hearts. The Spirit does not speak of himself, but of Christ.

God is present, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, but it is the incarnate God, Jesus of Nazareth, on whom our thoughts and emotions are focussed in baptism and the Lord's Supper, focussed on his death, focussed by the Spirit within us, focussed so that Christ is central in the sacraments to us as we use them. (*Expand on the reasons why I regard "God- [ talk" as [ ] freely; it is so important that it is.)*

Banks does not like my view of Scripture, and what he might regard as my 'Calvinism'

ie. God's sovereignty in a person's salvation.

I hold both positions for one reason only. Both are very clearly taught in Scripture; and confirmed by reason, experience vindicates their truth.

Banks does not like my concept of the Word and the Spirit. He appears to wish to emphasise each separately. In this he has not understood John 17.

Banks does not like my failure to emphasise that the Lord's Supper is a 'real meal'. But, in fact, it is not. In a real meal, our first objective is to obtain food for the satisfaction of the body in company and fellowship with others, but our fellowship and conversation will be of terrestrial things for the most part, just as our activity is terrestrial. To try to turn the Lord's Supper into a real meal is to trivialise it, as experience of house church communions shows.

The Lord's Supper is not a real meal. If you are hungry, have a meal at home, says St. Paul (I Cor). It was after the meal that Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, "Dinner being ended Jesus took the cup ...". The Lord's Supper is a time for our entire concentration to be on Christ, lifting our hearts to heaven in each other's company.

Banks complains that "The biblical emphasis on the Lord's Supper as a real meal ... does not surface in his [DBKs] writings". The reason that it does not surface in my writings is simple. Banks' statement about "the biblical emphasis on the Lord's Supper as a real meal" is quite wrong. The only references to the Lord's Supper in the Bible make clear that it is not a real meal. In the Bible, it takes place when the meal is finished and hunger has been satisfied. All the gospels which record the Lord's institution of the Lord's Supper draw attention to this. All state "When the meal was finished Jesus took a bun and broke it, and gave it to them, and he took a cup and said, Divide it among yourselves". Similarly, when St. Paul instructs the Corinthians about how to conduct the Lord's Supper, he gives clear instruction that those who are hungry should have their meal at home first. The Lord's Supper is not to satisfy hunger, that is, it is not a real meal.

It is an activity in which the food, the bread, and the wine, are symbols, signs, sacraments, not real meal ingredients to satisfy hunger and so sustain our physical life. Those who make the Lord's Supper part of a real meal, as some house churches do, trivialise the Lord's Supper, since the chief objective of a "real meal" is to obtain sufficient food from what is available (Cf. I Cor 11) and to carry on ordinary conversation in the process.

When the meal - whether at home or in church - is ended, then let all come together to remember Jesus fully and completely, to the exclusion of all other thoughts so that we might fellowship with him.

Banks shows himself to be an anti-Calvinist, which I hadn't realised before he wrote this critique, and it only comes out indirectly - of course. It comes out as follows:

- \* His dislike of my speaking of the imperfections of the law of God (p.392)
- \* His dislike of my treatment of Romans 9
- \* His dislike of my underlining of the sovereignty of God
- \* His criticism that I under[ ] the love of God
- \* His criticism of my distinction between the concepts of justice and mercy

[I]

I hate having to justify myself but I am told I have an obligation to do so as no one else is in a position to.

Robert Banks begins his criticism with the statement, "DBK seems to have developed his theological method too independently of the wider world of theological discussion".

Because he has <sup>had</sup> the slenderest personal contacts with me he has perforce to base this comment on my theological writings. He bases his comment on the fact that I am not constantly citing and footnoting references to contemporary scholars; but to assume that consequently that I am unacquainted with modern theological scholarship is *non sequitur*; it doesn't follow logically. It is a question of what I am aiming to achieve, to accomplish by my theological writings.

By God's providence, from early youth, I have had very great opportunities of personal relationship and theological cross-fertilisation with scholars in the universities of England, Scotland, and America, and by their visits to Australia. And, of course, I have had access to the great libraries of England; the Bodley, Oxford, Cambridge, London, and the British Library, as well as the growing libraries of Tyndale House, Cambridge, and of Moore College, Sydney. I do not believe that I am unacquainted with the writings of modern scholarship.

If I do not normally constantly refer to them in the pages of what I write, it is due to my understanding of how theology should be written, or what the objective is. The objective is to make clear some aspect of "the whole counsel of God", and to [II] <sup>then</sup> see how it applies to our life.

True theology is an explanation of God's revelation. Therefore there should be constant references to holy Scripture to assure the reader that what is being said is well grounded; but there is only need for an occasional reference to a writer in the last half-generation.

Most of Christian theology has been done in the past. A theologian should be very well acquainted with the pivotal thinkers of the past and of the present (of which there are one or two). Their thought will enter into his own thinking but, unless he is writing a history of theology, they will not be referred to by name.

A reason - and a most important one - that modern theological writers are not of much help - except to provide an interesting stimulus here and there, is that the presuppositions of their theological writings are so different from classical Christian theology that it makes much of their conclusions of little value. True theology must be based on, to quote our Lord, "what God has spoken to you". This is the Scripture as we have it in our hands. What God has spoken to us must of course be true, infallible and inerrant. Any other concept is unthinkable. Yet the members of the wider theological reading to which Banks believes I should be constantly referring reject this view [III] of Scripture, which was the view of Jesus and his apostles and of all the theologians up to a generation or so ago. The "modern theological academy"

has such a fundamentally different presupposition on which their theological thinking is based that an election that chooses this or that among their conclusions to include in the theological whole is likely to weaken rather than strengthen the result. This does not mean that a theologian should be unacquainted with modern writings, but it is more important to be acquainted with the older writings. My object and consequently style of writing does not quote either older or modern writers. But I am not criticised for not quoting the ancients, but only the moderns, and the deduction is drawn that I'm unacquainted with these latter!

In footnote 56 Banks cites Dr Sasse, Herbert, and Runia as Australian theologians with whom I should have interacted. In fact, I have discussed with these authors in our house and elsewhere the subject matter of their books which he cites. The fact that I have not made explicit reference to them ought not to lead to the conclusion I have not interacted with them. And I could go on, but it is most distasteful.

**[IV]** Some of Banks' criticisms are value~~d~~ judgements, which of course are highly subjective, but which he believes are sufficient to condemn my different value judgements. For example, p.389, in a very early writing of mine a critique of Dodd's book on the parables (a [ ] prescribed textbook for ordinands), which I gave by introduction at a bishops' conference when I was in my early 30s, I described the conclusions of Dodd about the parables of Jesus as having nil value. This is true, because of Dodd's presuppositions, namely by literary criticism a completely different meaning can be given to the parable than that which the text plainly gives. Dodd, of course, is a great scholar. It was my privilege to be a member of his seminar. Nevertheless it remains true and it should be stated that his method (which he shares with almost all modern scholars) leads to conclusions which are worthless for those who desire to hear what God has spoken to us, for his conclusions are not those which the text, that is, the Scripture, is plainly making, for with great learning and skill he has altered the text.

Most of Banks' criticism is criticism of what I do not say, what I have omitted. "Unlike Calvin, whom he so much admires, he rarely draws on the humanities." The assumption is that I am unacquainted with the humanities (is Banks' reference to my admiration **[V]** of Calvin derogatory?). Certainly I admire Calvin for his faithfulness to scripture, his accurate comprehension of its teaching, his clarity of exposition, but I do not admire his tone of polemics (which he shared with many of his contemporaries, and which his situation would have made necessary), but <sup>must</sup> ~~not~~ I follow him exactly in his abrasive literary style?

(Banks shows little understanding of the possibility of the growth in depth of theological understanding. Thus he quotes my [most] earliest article - the Aramaic background of the Gospel, p.389 - as containing a possible reference in conflict with later theological activity. My not quoting the Dead Sea Scrolls. It is all highly negative and based on what I don't do rather than on what I say.

Absence of the direct reference to the Dead Sea Scrolls ought not necessarily to be taken as indicating lack of interest in them, as Banks does (p.389) and thinks more accurate. Surely a kinder conclusion would be that I did not think that the Dead Sea Scrolls bore directly on my subject.

I think Banks' article shows signs of being written hastily and superficially, and that he has been scraping for things to say. Was this in fact the case?)

[VI] On p.388 Banks writes, "DBK speaks only in passing of contemporary challenges of belief in God, and does not deal seriously with them".

This criticism is beside the mark, for it is a criticism for not doing something other than I am doing. I am writing theology, not apologetics, and substantive, expository theology and not polemical theology. (Though in my broadcast talks I do both from time to time, writing apologetics and polemics.) This is a deliberate policy as a reference to the opening paragraphs of my *Christian Doctrine* would have shown. Certainly there is a need for apologetics and polemics today, but both are based on theology proper, and there is an even greater need for this these days for, until people get their theology right, their apologetics and polemics will be off the target. That is why in such time as was available to me for writing, I concentrated on writing theology, that is on the integration, exposition, and implications of God's revelation, which is the only source of true theology.

When I wrote *polemical theology*, it was in each case the result of requests of friends who asked me to write on a particular topic or theological position, to expose the theological errors and it was my hope that [sic] to write always graciously and charitably, as my mentor TC Hammond always did.

[VII] Banks does not ~~ex~~vince an historical sense in reviewing my writings, which in the select bibliography which the editors include, covers writings from my early twenties to my late sixties! However, he is not able to draw attention to any contradictions though there are differences of emphasis over this period and of course differences in exegesis, for it would be tragic if there wasn't growth in [ ] the understanding of the word over forty years; though apparently the differences do not appear in the publicly published material that Banks has under review.

Under *Biblical Basis* Banks writes (p.390), "Does it do justice to God's love and wisdom to append them to his sovereignty and power as DBK appears to do here?". This criticism is not fair. The theme of the lecture was the sovereignty of God. The lecturer must concentrate on his subject if he is going to say anything worthwhile. However, I made it clear that (as Banks quotes), "To the knowledge of God's sovereignty must be added a knowledge of his wisdom and love".

Banks criticises me, not only for distinguishing between sovereignty and love, but also distinguishing between mercy and justice. Yet the two concepts are very clear,

though they go hand-in-hand in God, as all his attributes do, for God is his attributes and God is one - 'simple', as the old theologians put it.

Banks appears to be a universalist (which we'd all like to<sup>62</sup> if Scripture allowed it!), when he combines mercy and justice. He writes, "[This] concept offers the hope of rehabilitation for offenders in and through their experience of retribution". This concept is not found, for example, in the teaching of Jesus, or in 2 Thessalonians, or in the book of Revelation.

**[VII-2]** Banks' third criticism under the heading *Biblical Basis* is for the third time based on what I haven't written in any Moore College lectures. He writes, "The doctrine of the Spirit is undeveloped in his writings. This is clear from the structure and content of his book on the nature of God". (p.391). Once again I must emphasise that this book is a reprint of five lectures given to a lay audience. The five subjects chosen are subjects of importance, but I could not choose every subject of importance on the doctrine of God. But they were subjects which I believed needed emphasis in the context of my hearers. But they were not the only subjects which needed emphasis. A choice had to be made of five.

The Spirit is God, and what is said of God is said of the Spirit.

**[VIII]** Banks appears to criticise my use of 'inerrancy' as though I am in error when, in his words, "which he [DBK] appears to use as a synonym for infallibility" (p.380). The two words are different as Banks recognises I recognise, but in certain contexts they are synonyms. Thus what God says to us is both infallible and inerrant. It is impossible to conceive of it being anything else, both infallible and inerrant. Every word in the Bible has been spoken to us by God, as our Lord and St Paul say explicitly. What God has spoken to us through these words is the task of the theologians to understand and make clear, for at first sight the reader may jump to the wrong conclusions as to what God has said to him in Scripture.

The error which so many evangelicals share these days with almost all modern biblical scholars is to separate off the Bible as a third entity along with God and [ourselves/Christians]. In this way it is possible to discuss the Bible as a thing in itself, and to discuss for example whether it is inerrant or merely infallible or neither or both. But the Bible is not a thing in itself. There is only God and those to whom God spoke. The Bible is God speaking to us - one entity; and our receiving God in his word which we hear and respond to - the second entity. It is the same when two

human friends speak to each other. There are two entities, the two friends. Their words are them. With God, [IX] the word he speaks to us is him, utterly truthful, inerrant and infallible, all these words in this context are synonyms.

**[A]** Banks makes assertions which are really matters of opinion. Thus he asserts "the range of interests addressed in DBK's theology is relatively circumscribed. For the most part there is a preoccupation with doctrinal matters and only occasional discussions of ethical ones" (p.394).

Two comments may be made. Firstly, ethics flow from doctrine. The doctrine must first be established before the ethical implications are drawn out. It should not be regarded as an imbalance in the writings of a theologian that he gives priority to theology. Even if he gave no attention to ethics, it could still be argued that he was acting within his discipline. Secondly, Banks has confined his attention to too small a section of my writings, ie. to my purely theological expositions which happen to have been published publicly, all of which were written on specific subjects. And not even all of these. For example, he does not seem to know of my article on *The Christian Doctrine on Sex*, published in the *Australian Highway* but not listed in the select bibliography of this volume.

Banks adds as a parenthesis to his comment quoted above, "While his radio broadcasts contain a greater percentage of material on moral questions, there is still an imbalance between the two". What constitutes an imbalance is a matter of opinion, and cannot be decided without knowing the object the broadcasts were aiming at, and his estimate of what his hearers needed most of all to be instructed about. However, if they are examined it will be found that almost all (I should hope all) my broadcast talks have an ethical conclusion drawn out from the theological exposition that precedes it. But there will be some which are chiefly ethical in subject matter, yet even these have a theological exposition on which they are based. This, I believe, is the correct methodology for all preachers. The theological exposition of Scripture should be his main theme but never without the ethical implications being drawn out from the theological exposition. At other times, ethical subjects will be the main theme of the preacher-teacher, but never, one would hope, without their theological basis being clearly seen.

**[B]**

Banks objects to my statement that since the Christian Gospel is "relevant to men and women everywhere and in every age and culture ... it does not need indigenisation" (p.394). Two mistakes underlie Banks' comment. Firstly, a failure to understand what the Gospel is. The Gospel is very simple and hardly ever preached. It is summarised by Peter in his words to Cornelius, and his kinsfolk and friends: "He charged us to preach to the people and to testify that Jesus is the one ordained by God to be the Judge of the living and the dead". This Gospel does not require indigenisation. Its concept of coming judgement is simple, clear and



approved by the conscience of every human being, and that Jesus of Nazareth is to be the Judge is also a very clear concept, though this concept is not so readily approved!

Secondly, the implications of the consequences of accepting the Gospel will of course differ in some respects in differing cultures. This is what Banks apparently means. He speaks about the necessity of indigenising the Gospel. But this is to fall into the almost universal error of modern Christianity, Catholic and evangelical alike, in which the consequences of the Gospel are confused with the Gospel and preached as the Gospel, rather than what they are in truth, the ethical implications that flow from the Gospel (Cf. the Lausanne Congress).

In supporting his criticism of me in this matter, Banks makes a grave mistake when he follows Thielike in reinterpreting St Paul's denunciation of salvation by works as applicable "to the way in which most people seek to 'justify themselves' in our society through their secular job and activities", or [as] Paul and the Reformers use the phrase 'justified by works'; works which justify the doer in the eyes of God. But for people to justify themselves in our society through their secular job and activities is something ... **[C]** If Paul and the Reformers use of the phrase 'justify by works' is now to be applied to this sort of justification it is not indigenisation but alteration of the Gospel. Of course, each culture will have its own errors which oppose the Gospel, but the Gospel itself is so simple, clear and of universal apprehension that indigenisation can only alter it.

As I have said, the consequences of the Gospel in any culture will differ somewhat from culture to culture and the preacher must know his culture to be as helpful as he could be. However, in most cases, the hearer can make his own application of the Gospel to his life and social setting.

But if the Gospel is not being preached, then all sorts of indegenisation activities are promoted to make what is preached appear relevant.