

# FOUNDATIONS

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**Theme Issue on Pastoral Ministry**

**What is a Pastor?**

**The Pastor and Public Worship**

**Ministerial Depression**

**The Pastor & Contemporary Culture**

**The Humanity of Christ**

**Medicine for the Soul**

**The Image of God in Man**

British Evangelical  
Council

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**Foundations** is published by the **British Evangelical Council** in May and November; its aim is to cover contemporary theological issues by articles and reviews, taking in exegesis, biblical theology, church history and apologetics – and to indicate their relevance to pastoral ministry; its policy gives particular attention to the theology of evangelical churches which are outside pluralist ecumenical bodies.

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## Editor's Notes

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Of the making of many books on pastoral ministry there is no end. Christian publishers' catalogues and bookshops are full of books aimed at helping pastors become better pastors. The problem is that most of them seem to want to make pastors become something other than what they are called to, namely who for love of Christ aim to seek, feed, heal, guide and protect the sheep for whom Christ laid down his life. Whatever the virtues of current secular models of leadership – the manager, therapist, social worker or even professor – they are not what the Bible says the pastoral leadership of God's people is fundamentally about. Leadership of God's people is fundamentally about being Christ-centred shepherds.

One of the classic works on this subject is **Richard Baxter's *The Reformed Pastor***, which the Banner of Truth keeps in print. No pastor can read this work without being deeply challenged. Baxter's vision, zeal and compassion are compelling. Of course Baxter has to be read in context. The world of 21st century Britain is very different than that of 17th century Britain. It would be impossible today to visit and catechise in the way Baxter did. Nevertheless we must not lose Baxter's vision for evangelising in depth albeit with different methods. Another more recent classic is **William Still's *The Work of the Pastor*** (Rutherford House/Paternoster 1996). Many of us owe William Still an incalculable debt for the model of his faithfulness and godliness during his long and fruitful ministry in Aberdeen. This short book is his distilled understanding of the pastor's work. Basically a pastor is a man of prayer who unleashes the word of God onto a congregation, both publicly and privately and through it onto the world. Through the expository preaching of the word unbelievers are converted and believers built up and equipped for ministry. Key to the pastor's effectiveness is his death to self, his confidence in his call to a particular congregation, his walk with Christ, being himself in Christ, his determination to prepare sheep for sacrifice on God's altar and his conviction that the word of God has power to change lives and churches. As with Baxter, much in Still's own context must be taken into account and his principles adapted accordingly to our own circumstances. But that said, this is the one book I would give a young pastor with the admonition to read it at regular intervals during his ministry. It is full of seeds that by God's grace will bear fruit in God-honouring ministries.

But there are other excellent books on pastoral ministry. One of the best is **Derek Tidball's *Skilful Shepherds: explorations in pastoral theology*** (IVP 1986/1997) Having discussed different approaches, Tidball defines pastoral theology as 'the interface between theology and Christian doctrine on the one hand, and pastoral experience and care on the other' (p. 24). What is refreshing about this book is how Tidball gives the former priority over the latter, unlike so many books on the market. He eschews a 'how to' approach to pastoral theology for a more biblical approach. The first section of the book seeks to establish biblical foundations and merits careful reflection by pastors especially the chapter on Paul. The second section is an historical survey of pastoral ministry which, while necessarily cursory, offers many insights into fruitful ministries from the past. The chapter on the 20th century highlights some of the challenges to pastoral ministry with which most of us are familiar. The final section looks at the themes of belief, forgiveness, suffering, unity and ministry from a pastoral perspective.

Occasionally Tidball straddles the fence on some issues, but all in all this is a wise guide through some of the difficult areas of ministry. A more recent book by Tidball is his *Builders and Fools* (IVP 1999) in which he looks at ministry in terms of the biblical metaphors of ambassador, athlete, builder, fool, parent, pilot, scum and shepherd. The chapter on the leader as a fool is particularly insightful about ministry in a culture in which pastors don't make sense and must point people away from the wisdom of man to the wisdom of God. Every chapter is very challenging and thought-provoking. I would especially recommend it as the basis for a discussion in a leadership team or fraternal as well as for personal reflection.

Peter White's *The Effective Pastor* (Mentor 1998) contains a lot more of the 'how to' than the two Tidball books but without losing its theological focus. The book covers most aspects of pastoral ministry and has many helpful things to say about the pastor as a man of God, preaching, public worship, discipling younger and older believers, developing a congregational strategy, evangelism, stress, administration, etc. As such this is a very good book on ministry. I think that White is a little too ready to draw upon secular management theories and the behavioural sciences for support, but that said he has distilled a lot of sanctified common sense and has reflected biblically on ministry. There are a number of echoes of William Still's concerns in the book, which should help us apply some of his principles in our contexts today.

One of the most significant writers today on pastoral ministry is Eugene Peterson, an American Presbyterian minister who has recently retired from teaching at Regent College in Vancouver. His trilogy on pastoral ministry beginning with *Five Smooth Stones* contains much excellent material, especially in the introductory essays. You won't agree with everything he says, but you will find him stimulating and helpful. From the vantage point of a man with long pastoral experience in a normal church (Peterson is by no means a mega-church superstar), he writes with humane wisdom concerning the very ordinary work of the pastorate. What I like about Peterson is the way he invests the stuff of pastoral ministry, such as visiting an older Christian, with the glory of Jesus Christ. In some measure this comes out in a book he has written with Marva Dawn entitled *The Unnecessary Pastor* (Eerdmans 2000). The title expresses the conviction that true pastoral ministry is unnecessary to what our culture thinks is necessary (being paragons of goodness and niceness, custodians of moral order, chaplains of culture), what we think is necessary (holding the church together, keeping the show on the road), and what our congregations think is necessary (being the experts, leading in a worldly fashion, being a success). Instead Peterson and Dawn call for ministers who as humble servants of Jesus will teach and preach the word, pray, lead and simply be the shepherds people really need. To this end Dawn reflects on pastoral ministry from Ephesians. While she has much good to say (her comments on the church as a missionary congregation of disciples is very insightful) I found her chapters somewhat contrived and discursive. Peterson is much better in his reflections from the Pastoral Epistles, particularly in his thoughts on how Paul lived the Scriptures.

Of a similar nature to Peterson (it is commended by him) is one of the best books I have read recently on pastoral ministry. In *The Art of Pastoring: ministry without the answers* (IVP-USA 1994) David Hansen adopts an autobiographical approach to the subject. With humour and insight he takes us through his experience as the pastor in a

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# What is a Pastor?

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Mark Johnson

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Before we begin to ask what pastoral responsibility entails, it would be useful to set down some markers in relation to the terminology used in the New Testament to describe the office of pastor. This has been a focus of considerable debate between differing views of churchmanship, but it is true to say that within evangelical scholarship there is reasonable consensus as to the interpretation of the material available at this point.

It is probably worth noting in passing that we ought to exercise caution over trying to canonise particular views of New Testament churchmanship. The New Testament church, as seen through the eyes of Luke in Acts and in the subsequent insights given through the letters, was an evolving church. It was emerging from its roots in Judaism and it was learning to adapt to the entirely new challenges of incorporating Gentile converts and establishing itself in Gentile cultures. There was no code, or blueprint given in New Testament revelation as the indisputable rule for the way that church life should be structured and run. Even though the so-called pastoral letters contain a significant amount of prescriptive material in this vein, it still takes the form of guiding principle rather than a wooden code. As we piece together the various glimpses we are given of church life in that era, we cannot help but be struck by the great diversity which existed – not in belief – but clearly in practice between churches and regions. Indeed, this seems to have contributed to the richness of the character of the church of that time. We never see any attempt among the apostles or the church leaders of those days to impose any kind of uniformity on different congregations. The most striking example of this is in the aftermath of the Jerusalem Council. If ever there was an occasion to establish uniformity of structure and practice among the churches in the New Testament era, then that presented a golden opportunity for it to happen. However, far from issuing sweeping directives to the churches, the apostles and elders who met on that occasion were surprisingly minimalist in the conclusions they reached. They simply required abstinence from food sacrificed to idols and avoidance of sexual immorality. The degree of latitude given on the way things could be done in particular church situations was quite striking.

As we scan through church history with an eye on this aspect of church life, we are again struck by the diversity that has existed. There are differing views on churchmanship and on church practice through the ages and throughout the world. Various attempts to argue a *ius divinum* understanding of any one position has failed singularly. The furthest any serious thinkers have been able to go along these lines is to say that in their opinion certain views of structure and practice approximate more closely than others to the data available in the New Testament, but in so doing acknowledge that there are always lessons to be learned from the wider fellowship of the church universal to which every particular church should be open.

These general comments, by way of background, help us to appreciate why there has been disagreement between different church groupings over the question, ‘What is a pastor?’ To a large extent it has arisen from the fact that the New Testament uses

three different terms interchangeably to describe the office under consideration. Those words are: *episkopos*, *poimenos* and *presbuteros*, meaning, overseer, pastor and elder respectively. Different church traditions have tended to latch on to different words to define their own approach. Most obviously, those who wish to emphasise hierarchical authority have become known as ‘Episcopalians,’ those who have favoured collegiate responsibility, ‘Presbyterians’ and mild mannered Independents simply have their ‘pastors’!

There is no need here to go over all the arguments as to why no one of these terms are to be elevated at the expense of the others. Rather we need to build on the fact that all of them point to there being a special office instituted by Christ and intended for the care of his flock (Ephesians 4:11-12) and also that each of them is designed to contribute something important to our understanding of what that office and its responsibilities entail. The major point at issue within ongoing discussion of this terminology is whether or not the New Testament envisages two distinct offices of those who teach and those who have oversight, or two different sets of responsibility within the one category of leadership. The debate has a long history and in some ways comes down to a matter of semantics as the practical outworking of both positions is very often the same in reality.

There is a sense in which we could home in on one aspect of this office as it is presented in the New Testament, singling out the pastoral element of his responsibility. To do that would be to take the term ‘Pastor’ in a narrow sense and perhaps lose sight of the larger perspective given in the Scriptures. Instead, we will try to consider the full-orbed character of what it means to be a ‘pastor,’ ‘minister,’ or whatever label we might choose to use (within reason) and attempt to relate it to the needs of the contemporary church.

## **Pastoral Care**

If we take the term ‘pastor’ first – a word which has obvious connections to the task of caring for sheep – we will appreciate something of what pastoral care involves in terms of caring for people who belong to the flock of Christ.

Paul emphasises this responsibility at a particularly poignant moment in his own travels as he meets up with the elders from Ephesus on the beach at Miletus at the end of his second missionary journey. There he says, ‘Shepherd the church of God’ (Acts 20:28). One really needs to get into the mindset of the pastoral world of New Testament times to appreciate what the apostle means by this. He is obviously developing the imagery which Jesus himself was so fond of using and which he so often applied to himself as the Good Shepherd.

It is clearly bound up with developing a truly caring relationship with God’s people, one which is built upon trust and respect. Jesus highlights a striking feature of a shepherd’s work in the Ancient Near East when he says, ‘My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me’ (John 10:27). Unlike shepherds in many other cultures, those of Jesus’ day did not drive their sheep, but led them by the sound of their voice.

The story is told of a bus-load of tourists in Israel who had heard this detail about Jewish shepherds, but when they stopped for a rest-break, they saw a flock of sheep and they were being driven – not led – along the road in a somewhat distressed state. The

tour guide smiled when he saw their reaction to this sight and quickly told them, 'That was the butcher, not the shepherd!'

Humour aside, that little tale actually says a lot about where our contemporary attempts at pastoring can come unstuck. Instead of developing trust and confidence with our people, we 'lord it over' the flock (1 Peter 5:3) and create a spirit of alienation and resentment and end up butchering, rather than pastoring the flock. Pastoral care takes place within the context of a pastoral relationship.

That presents its own challenge as we try to contextualise it in a world which is very different from that Mediterranean ease in apostolic times, when people had time for each other, for community and relationships. Our world is very different with busy schedules, long hours and rampant individualism. Yet we cannot allow the defects of contemporary culture to become excuses for not fulfilling pastoral responsibility.

It may well be that the model of church life, advocated by the Puritan, Richard Baxter, which structured congregational life around a grouping of some fifty families – all of whom would be visited regularly by the minister – would be hard to sustain in the present climate. However, there are ways of achieving the same end of providing pastoral care for everyone in the church by different means. There is no reason why the pastor alone is the only one able to provide that kind of care. Indeed, there is a strong argument which says that the pastor alone ought not to provide that care by himself. Especially given the risks involved in pastors meeting with female members of their flock without anyone else being present.

Another argument for a broader view of how we dispense pastoral care lies in the fact that no minister can claim to be omniscient in his ability to deal with the whole spectrum of pastoral needs. There will be cases of depression, addiction, breakdown in relationship and other situations in which he will be out of his depth in trying to cope. In too many cases where pastors have overstepped their competence – even with the best intentions – they have ended up doing harm and not good.

The New Testament has sufficient 'one another' passages to make the church realise that we need to draw upon the range of skills and abilities present in the family of God in such a way as to minister to the needs of those around us. Even the simple fact of an individual's limited capacity to minister to the needs of others should flag up the wisdom of spreading the burden of responsibility.

All of this is borne out by the fact that Paul's command to the Ephesian elders is couched in a plural form. They were not meant to go it alone, or be one-man ministries in isolation. The kind of church leadership envisaged in the New Testament is always corporate with shared responsibility and skills which were complementary. Such a principle translates naturally into the sphere of pastoral care.

The safeguard to ensuring that such care does not become haphazard, or a source of confusion and conflict, lies in its being kept within the orbit of the oversight of those formally entrusted with the care of the church. A team approach to pastoral care is being adopted increasingly by churches wishing to address this need efficiently and effectively. In doing so, this allows the necessary structure and co-ordination in the care being provided and ensures that ultimate responsibility still rests with those to whom it has been given.

## Pastoral Ministry

Although it is both wise and biblical to draw some distinction between the ministry of instruction and the ministry of oversight in the church, it would be wrong to divide them from each other completely. All forms of ministry must ultimately be Word-based, grounded in and shaped by the Word of God. We do not draw on the Bible for our pulpit ministry, psychiatry for pastoral care and the wisdom of the board-room for the ministry of oversight. Every aspect of the life of the church is brought under the jurisdiction of Scripture and those who are leaders in the church must themselves be led by God's Truth.

That said, however, we need to spend a moment thinking about pastoral ministry in the sense of how the Word is ministered through and by the leadership of the church.

The obvious and primary means that Scripture sets before us is through the formal teaching office of the church. Both Old Testament and New Testament recognise that there are those who have been specially equipped, called and commissioned by God to minister his Word to his people and to the world. The church is meant to recognise such men (yes, the office *is* restricted to males only!), help them to cultivate their gift and then press it into service while giving due respect to them on account of their office and work. Belief in the primacy of preaching has suffered severely in our multi-media, drama-driven age and the church is none the better for this loss. Regardless of popular opinion, it is through the medium of the preached Word that God has promised to mediate his blessing in a unique and distinctive fashion.

Those who have been called to full-time pastoral care of a congregation need to keep in mind the central focus of their calling: namely the ministry of God's Word. Like Timothy before us we need to devote ourselves to anything which will make us better preachers. Many things are important in our work, but one thing takes pride of place, it is the preaching of God's Word.

Too often, however, it is the 'other things' of pastoral responsibility which damage our effectiveness in the one area that matters most. With the pattern of 'one-man ministry' having become the norm in so many church situations, the poor minister finds himself becoming the proverbial jack-of-all-trades, but master of none. In an ideal world with the kind of church funds we dream of, churches would simply hire the number of full-time staff who can cater for the different aspects of pastoral needs that exist in a congregation and neighbourhood. More often than not the reality of our situations is quite different (as it was in New Testament times.)

The goal for those in leadership, then, is to see that we are 'to prepare God's people for works of service' (Ephesians 4:12). We are to identify and develop particular gifts in others so that the body of Christ might minister to itself (Ephesians 4:16) and in turn be able to minister to the world around. The picture that Paul paints in this Ephesian passage is captivating. It is the sight of the diverse, motley crew of converts who make up the average congregation becoming the instrument in God's hand for advancing his kingdom and cause in the world!

It will of necessity involve developing other Word-based ministries in the church and in the wider community – this is what we see happening in the wonderful array of situations in the New Testament from opportunities for personal witness right through to formal proclamation of the Scriptures. There are in this context Word-based ministries who do allow for gifted women to exercise their gifts – working with other

women and with children – but all under the oversight of a leadership entrusted with responsibility for teaching the Bible.

Pastoral ministry, then, must have a very clear focus: to bring the Bible to the people and to bring the people to the Bible. The ultimate goal is for the lives of men, women, boys and girls to be literally remoulded through the influence of God's Truth as they hear it and respond to it by faith and obedience (Romans 6:17).

## **Pastoral Authority**

Authority is a dirty word in today's world. 'Who says so!' is the defiant watchword of a generation which has been nurtured on the notion that the customer is always right. Sadly that same individualistic spirit of defiance has settled comfortably into all too many churches. Church government has been reduced to the art of the possible and no longer has any real sense of it being the outworking of Christ's supreme government of his people as they are brought increasingly under his lordship.

The term *episkopoj*, overseer, carries connotations of authority and it is woven through all the aspects of responsibility entrusted to those who hold this office in the church. It is not an authority which is based on the power of personality – the personality cults which have become so prominent in so many evangelical circles are anathema in the sight of Scripture. Indeed, it seems that at least two of the great New Testament pastor-teachers – Paul and Timothy – had pretty unimpressive personas. Nor is it an authority which derives from authoritarian attitudes. There can be a kind of jack-boot authority which crushes, rather than cultivates the Christian spirit. Yet again, it is not a democratically delegated authority which always depends on majority votes.

Instead the New Testament sets before us an authority which is devolved by Jesus Christ upon the office to which he calls the individuals he has equipped to hold that office (Ephesians 4:11). The weight of authority invested in that office is seen in such commands as, 'Obey your leaders and submit to their authority ...' (Hebrews 13:17). The need for such authority is demonstrated by Paul's practice of quickly returning to places in which he had planted churches in order to appoint elders in them, or, as in the case of Crete, sending a colleague to do so on his behalf.

Authority in any sphere of life is something which we ought to view positively and not negatively. Although we so often think of it in terms of restraint and punishment, it is given by God primarily to establish an order in his world which is meant to reflect the order of his character. The same is true in the life of the church. Hence, the function of those tasked with exercising authority in the church is primarily to so order the life and work of God's people that there might be harmony, unity and growth towards maturity.

Whether we look at it from the imagery of agriculture, athletics, or the army – all of which are used by way of illustration in Paul's writings – the discipline exercised in the church is intended to be constructive as well as restrictive.

The practical implications of this run far and wide for pastors and their flocks in the anti-authoritarian age in which we live. It is not just that there needs to be the courage to exercise punitive church discipline when circumstances call for it, but that there needs to be vigorous positive efforts made to restore a biblical attitude to authority where it has broken down, or perhaps never existed in the first place. It has a bearing upon the way that marriage and family life is viewed in light of Scripture, the attitude

to the authority structures of the state in their various forms and, of course, the attitude to the authority of Christ over his people mediated by his Word and through the overseers he has appointed to take care of his people.

## Pastoral Care in Action

Any pastor with any integrity will be painfully aware of his own imperfections. We are overwhelmingly conscious of the 'Great Shepherd of the sheep,' Jesus Christ, and his perfect love and perfect care for his people. We are but undershepherds and more often than not we behave as if we were the hired hands who Jesus denounces in John's Gospel. Yet the amazing thing is that it is through such weak and imperfect leaders that Jesus has chosen to accomplish his work of building the church.

Our imperfection and failure must not become a psychological barrier to our fulfilling the calling Christ has given us. We serve, not relying on our own strength and wisdom, but rather by humbling ourselves under God's mighty hand, knowing that he will use and honour our work in his own good time (1 Peter 5.6).

The need of the hour is that we might pray and labour to become better pastors in order that our congregations might be filled with better Christians. Because, when that is so, the light of the gospel will burn more brightly and the world will know that God truly is among us!

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joint charge in Montana. Again this is not a book by a mega-church star with a new approach that is guaranteed to solve our problems, but rather an honest account of the joys and sorrows of normal church life. At the end of a nine-year pastorate both churches had a combined attendance of 270. Hansen is very honest about his struggles in ministry, not least with the doctrine of eternal punishment. I suspect that many of us have gone through spiritual and doctrinal dark nights of the soul that few if anyone know about. It is encouraging to read how one pastor came through the struggle secure in his convictions (as a Calvinist) and with new power in his preaching and evangelism. Hansen sees pastoral ministry flowing from being a disciple of Jesus. He is down on trend-driven, task-driven ministry and enthusiastic about preaching the word and taking walks in the woods to pray. There are many delightful vignettes of the strange and wonderful people that make being a pastor so worthwhile. This book is a refreshing read that will do your soul good.

Let me mention several other books that may be of interest. In *Relational Leadership* (Paternoster 2000) **Walter Wright**, the recently retired president of Regent College, has a lot of good things to say about leading Christian organisations. As the title suggests, for Wright leadership is primarily about relating well to other people and involves both being people of character who are worth following and nurturing godly character in others. Like White, Wright draws heavily on management theory and tries to unsatisfactorily to fit it to Scripture. It is not that what he says is wrong, only that it is not necessarily what the Bible is saying. **David Benner's** *Care of Souls* (Paternoster 2000) is a very

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*Editor's Notes continued from page 12*

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# The Pastor and Public Worship

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*John Palmer*

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Corporate evangelical worship in the UK has seen great changes over the last fifty years. New Bible versions have become available. New hymns and songs have appeared in increasing numbers. These changes and others have been enthusiastically embraced by some, cautiously welcomed by others, and resisted with varying degrees of passion by yet others.

This article is concerned with a further change to worship patterns – namely, the movement away from the traditional pattern of worship, where the minister stands at the front – often in a pulpit or on a platform – and leads the worship throughout. In many churches there are now different people praying and reading the Scriptures and leading the time of praise. This sometimes has reached the extreme where to a visitor the minister appears as an isolated figure, waiting forlornly at the side for someone to deign to ask him to preach. Is this change – which of course has happened to various degrees in various churches – good or bad; Scriptural or the opposite?

Two questions need to be kept in mind, although the nature of their interlinking is such that we shall need to answer them together. These are: first, should the pastor of a church, who is going to preach, lead the rest of the worship? Secondly, how much control should he have over the content and leader of any parts that he is not leading? In other words: is the alteration which we have seen in the worship practices that have obtained since the Reformation, the completion of that reformation, in this area of worship? Or is it a retrograde step?

Now some who support such changes will doubtless seek to do so by referring first to I Corinthians 14:26. Does not Paul speak here of many participating in worship, with hymns and teaching and tongues? Yes, he does – but not to commend it. The Greek phrase at the beginning of the verse can best be understood as the equivalent of our colloquial ‘What is this I hear’? The author is surely not alone in remembering times at school where the teacher was late arriving. Gradually the noise level rose. People began to leave their seats; perhaps a prank or two was played. Suddenly, the door opened; and there stood the teacher. His ‘What’s going on here?’ was not a statement of approval! Paul, certainly, addresses the Corinthians here as ‘brothers’. This is not a harsh or loveless rebuke: but it is a rebuke.

For the worship at Corinth needed rebuke; and it needed it because it was disorderly. Everyone had a hymn which they wanted to sing, or a word that they wanted to give. The result was an act of worship which was not pleasing to God. He is not a God of tumult, but of peace (v 33). So our worship of him should reflect this. This is part of a wider matter: that our worship should reflect the nature of God. He is Spirit: so we must worship him in spirit. He is truth: so we must worship him in truth. He is holy: so we must worship him in holiness. He is the God of peace: so our worship must be peaceful.

This does not mean that Christian worship should be boring, lacklustre, or a formality. Such worship exists – but we must strive in prayer and preparation that in as far as is in each of us, our church’s worship will not dishonour God like this. However, we must also eschew any striving by human means to make corporate worship

interesting, exciting, or full of the unexpected. If our worship is centred on God, he will make sure it is all of these things, to the extent that he is glorified by it being so; and to the extent that we truly approach him to worship him, and not to gratify ourselves under the guise of worship.

In v 40 of the same chapter, we are given further guidance concerning our worship. All, says Paul, is to be done 'becomingly' (*euschemonos*). The word means in a way which is beautiful – to God – because it is well put together. The Greek idea of a beautiful object – a building, a human body, or whatever – was one in which each part was in perfect proportion, and in its rightful place. So worship which honours and pleases God is that which has a right balance between its proportions.

Moreover, in the same verse of his Word God tells us that our worship is to be 'according to order' (*kata taxin*). The latter word is that from which we derive 'taxonomy' – the science of naming animals and plants in their right order. In worship this means simply – that there should be an order of service. It should have been carefully thought out. The one who leads the worship should ensure it is adhered to as far as possible. We are by nature sinners; and sin is disorderly. We are by the new birth redeemed sinners; and our worship should reflect that we are being re-made into God's image. We should fight against disorder in worship; not glory in it.

The movement away from a structure of worship which is ordered throughout by the pastor is often founded on a confusion between form and formalism. The former, as we see above, is highly desired by God. The latter is just as severely condemned. In Isaiah 1 God calls the thoughtless, formal, offering of his own instituted sacrifices a 'meaningless trampling of my courts'. If our worship is a formal ritual, only undertaken for the sake of doing what we believe is right outwardly, it is exactly the opposite of that which is 'in spirit and in truth.' When Evangelical worship in a church is merely formal, reformation is an urgent priority.

However, the way to prevent worship from being merely a form involves changes in the hearts of the worshippers. These are deep and costly and often – not always – a slow process. Certainly such a malaise goes far deeper than being solved by the sticking-plaster of changing who conducts the worship. Indeed, where the latter change takes place on its own, it is to be feared that often this diminishes the worship. What is gained in freshness is often more than lost in reverence.

Such considerations do not of themselves prove that the preacher should lead all the service. Nor is it that the Scripture insists that he must do so. Yet when we are aware of the way in which God is pleased with well-formed, orderly, worship, where the whole time from beginning to end is composed of parts that fit well together, the advantage of all being planned and led by the same person become obvious.

Consider the relationship between the hymns and the sermon. There are hymns that fit certain sermons and those that do not. If, for example, one is preaching on God's providence, it would be ill-judged to have one hymn concerning the person of the Holy Spirit, one celebrating Christ's resurrection, and one expressing penitence for sin. Any good hymnbook includes a number of hymns and Psalms which declare God's rule over his world and express the Christian's praise and trust which result from the belief in this great truth. These are a fitting accompaniment to a sermon on the same theme. If however, the preacher and the one – if there is just one – who chooses hymns are different people, then that which is sung is likely to lead the thoughts of the

congregation in one direction, and that which is preached in another. This does not mean that the worship is unacceptable to God. It may be good – but the good can be the enemy of the best. Surely we should as churches do our utmost to offer to God that worship which is well-pleasing because well-planned and well – put together? Is there a better way of choosing what is sung?

If the preacher chooses what the congregation are to sing, surely he is also the best person to introduce the hymn. Again, out of carelessness, in many churches the hymn is announced too briefly. Some just give out the number and the first line; or even just the number. If, however, the hymn is the right one to sing at that point in that act of worship, it is often appropriate to point out the links with what has gone before, or what will come afterwards. Again, sometimes it is worth pointing out in some detail part of the text of what is to be sung, highlighting the thought behind it. This too is surely a task for the one who has chosen the hymn as part of an integrated act of worship.

If the preacher should be the best person to choose what is sung, he should certainly be the best person to choose what is read from Scripture. It is usual practice for the reading to include the verse or passage from which the preacher intends to speak. Where the reading should begin and end, he can best judge, by how much of the context he will mention in his sermon. If there is to be more than one reading of Scripture, the other reading should also be an integral part of the worship, and thus also chosen by the same person. We have Scriptural warrant for the preacher choosing the reading in the example of Christ, Luke 4:16-27. This seems to have been the normal practice in the synagogues, and in default of anything in the Scripture telling us differently, we can be sure it has God's approval.

Then there is the question of whether the preacher should read the Scriptures. In 1 Timothy 4:13, Paul instructs Timothy to 'give careful attention to the public reading of Scripture (*'anagnosei'*), to exhortation and to teaching' (NIV). This implies strongly that Timothy himself was to read the Scriptures in public worship. As this is the only text that bears directly on this matter in the New Testament, we must say that the normal practice for our churches should be this. There may be reasons why sometimes there is an advantage for someone else to perform this task. Yet it is to be feared that often those who do so – including preachers – do not realise the importance of this part of worship. Here, alone, we can be sure that we are hearing God speaking to us, infallibly and authoritatively. The man who has prepared himself to speak, aware of his own fallibility, as one who 'speaks the very words of God' (1 Peter 4:11), is surely the person who is most spiritually prepared to read the Scriptures reverently.

Moreover, if he is preaching from the passage, he knows the points which he believes are the most important; so he can give these due emphasis in his reading. If he is preaching on John 10:16, for example, he might be intending to make the point about the certainty of Jesus saving his sheep whom the Father has given him. So he will emphasise: 'I *have* other sheep who are not of this fold. I *must* gather them also. They *will* hear my voice and come to me; and there *shall* be one flock and one Shepherd.' Another person, reading the same passage, but not knowing what is on the preacher's heart, might well come to this verse and emphasise the verbs instead. Does this seem a precise point? Yes; but, as one of old said, we serve a precise God. Any attitude in worship of: 'well, God knows our hearts; even if things could have been done better' misses the point. God does know our hearts – and he knows the sin which can lead us

to prefer to please man – by giving him an opportunity to read the Word – rather than God – in having it read as well as possible.

The third aspect of worship which the preacher does not always lead is the public prayer. Here, the issue is not so clear-cut. Acts 4:42 tells us that the Jerusalem church continued in ‘the prayers’. Paul in 1 Timothy 2:8 says that men who are holy should pray. I personally am far happier to involve godly men of my congregation in leading congregational prayer on the Lord’s day when I am preaching, than in any other part of the worship. It can be a real blessing.

Nevertheless, it is surely true that public prayer is not to be undertaken lightly. There needs to be serious consideration about what to intercede for in the corporate worship of the Lord’s people. One important matter is surely the spiritual state and needs of the congregation as a whole. Now all should be concerned about this, not just the pastor. However, he will be surely a man who is devoting himself more than others to bringing the church – individually and together – to the throne of grace. So, his heart and mind should be the most full of all the congregation of pertinent matter when he arrives for worship on the Lord’s Day.

Even when the church’s pastor is not leading the congregation by praying himself, surely he should be the one who determines who does so? Vocal prayer in the presence of the congregation is a serious business. The aim is to be for what is said to be pleasing to God, and thus produce a heartfelt (and audible!) ‘Amen’ from the congregation. Not everybody has the spiritual and natural qualifications to do this.

The changes which have come over worship are part of a wider picture. There is a spirit of rebellion around in the world against the idea of leadership; or that one person is equipped to do carry out a task better than another. This has invaded the church. We have our ‘levellers’ who seek as much as possible to weaken the role and function of spiritual leaders. This is to re-Corinthianise the church. If we take God’s Word and his worship seriously we must ensure that in this vital area of church life, as in all others, such tendencies are resisted.

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*Editor’s Notes continued from page 8*

interesting book on the interaction between pastoral care, spirituality and therapeutic psychology. If nothing else this book offers a useful primer of therapeutic psychology from a broadly Reformed perspective. But Benner does more than that. He has many refreshing things to say about the nurturing of spiritual life as at the heart of pastoral care. This is a timely reminder in an age in which life problems are the meat and drink of much pastoral counsel. Like the Puritans, Benner would put the emphasis on the care of the inner life of the Christian. Readers will by no means agree with everything Benner writes but he should stimulate us to reflect more deeply on the meaning and practise of pastoral care. In this light I would recommend reading a number of the *Puritan Classics* published by the Banner of Truth. Books such as **Richard Sibbes’s *Bruised Reed***, **William Bridge’s *A Lifting Up of the Downcast***, **John Newton’s *Letters*** and **Ralph Venning’s *Learning in Christ’s School*** (Banner of Truth 2000) are invaluable for helping us understand the nature of pastoral ministry as, to use Benner’s expression,

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# Ministerial Depression: the way in and the way out

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## *An anonymous pastor*

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**T**he purpose of this paper is to give an honest account of my experience of depression and breakdown in the ministry and to seek to share lessons from it. I am doing it with a view to my own benefit as well as for the benefit of others. I didn't keep any record of events and memory soon fades. I do this very aware of a number of weaknesses in what I am doing

*It won't be relevant to every one*

In a recent review of a book on depression the reviewer pointed out that experience of depression is very personal and that one person's experience may be of limited help to others. I myself found that tapes on ministerial depression which I was lent, which I know have been very helpful to others, were almost irrelevant to me. My hope is however that my experience may strike chords with others and so help them.

*Depression is not unique to ministers*

Mid-life crises and depressions happen to many middle-aged men and therefore general advice on depression may be helpful to all of us. However there are certain unique features of the ministerial life, and so of ministerial depression, which justify the distinction made. A friend who has been actively involved as an elder in evangelical churches for many years told me recently how entering a pastorate had greatly changed his perspective on church life.

*I don't highlight some important things*

My wife's love and support was constant and I could take it for granted. Without this the pathway would have been far darker, and the failure to highlight this, and some other positive and negative aspects of my situation, doesn't mean they are not significant.

## **The Events that took place up to the breakdown**

Up to the time of my illness I was extremely busy in a demanding pastorate, with various extra-church activities. I had been over ten years in a pastorate which continued to be extremely difficult for a number of reasons. Though the church had been generally evangelical during its past history the last two pastorates had been short and not particularly strong. The last major pastorate was doctrinally very influenced by the pastor's background in Pentecostalism and British Israelism. This meant that he had no real doctrine of the church and his approach had been controlled by an unhelpful pragmatism. This left its mark both in church practice and the attitudes of many of the church members. Since then a number of people, from very different evangelical backgrounds, had joined the church and had very different views about church life and as to what the church's future might be. These factors meant that there was no real consensus about what the church members were seeking in a pastor. This showed more and more in divisive and unhelpful attitudes as time went by. In retrospect it is clear

that several groups all had their own agenda for the future church and my success was measured only in terms of that agenda and not in terms of the progress of God's kingdom. In addition I often found that they had formulated their agenda in ways which sprang from unspoken and not-thought-through assumptions from their own background. This meant that there was a great deal of criticism without any clear suggestions as to what we actually ought to be doing.

Factors that particularly affected me were:-

i) the absence of any kind of church discipline for behaviour which was blatantly unchristian, and in some cases clearly immoral, and the lack of support and the opposition I encountered when I made any attempt to set standards.

ii) well established and antagonistic leadership in some departments of the church's life which meant that some areas of the church's life were sealed against me and that some people were either cut off from my influence or, in a number of cases, turned against me. This did have very damaging effects on people who had actually been converted through my ministry and who needed help and support but were alienated from me because of the influence of 'friends'.

iii) desertion by 'evangelical' members of the church who in leaving wrote off the church and my ministry, often saying some deeply hurtful things about my ministry and about me in doing so. For some reason this was a repeated experience over a number of years and always seemed to affect people with great potential to provide valuable future leadership in the church. Both my wife and I were deeply hurt and bewildered when people whom we had befriended and supported turned against us. Particularly as they were those in whom we had invested much hope for the future.

iv) a lack of support and sympathy for a biblical, viewpoint on abortion, women's ministry, ecumenism and other crucial pressure areas in modern church life. The church's paper acceptance of the Scriptures as, 'our only rule of faith and practice' seemed to be just that, a paper acceptance. Such mental and spiritual estrangement from people in the church cannot be reversed in the short term and leads to continual strain and tension on those in leadership.

In any honest assessment of a breakdown we also have to look at personal factors which affected the situation. There are several:-

#### *Weaknesses*

My mother points out that as a little boy I was easily discouraged and hurt. This factor certainly affected me and especially so when it seemed that there was no approval for my ministry forthcoming from either church members or the Lord. Often we felt let down by people but it hurt far more that the Lord didn't step in with clear and obvious blessing and so vindicate and reassure us.

#### *Mistakes made by me*

I did not succumb to the dangers of siding with a group in the church and thereby producing party spirit but I was unduly pessimistic about the chances of people changing and was not sufficiently inventive of ways around seeming impasses in church life. In some respects I put this down to a crucial lack of faith. In addition, my preaching did sometimes show the hurt I was feeling and probably polarised people rather than won them over. I fear my ministry was truthful but sometimes deficient in encouragement and love; though I think this sprung from near despair rather than

vindictiveness. I was completely unaware of the effect my feelings were having on my preaching and only a chance remark by a very devoted and loyal church member about my 'telling us off' when preaching alerted me to what I was doing.

### *Isolation*

While there were a number of dear and godly people in the church, who I loved and respected, there was simply no-one with whom I was able to establish any sort of close friendship. I have always been a person who likes and needs to have friends around and this isolation, which I know from conversations and observation affects many professional people in middle life, became intensely difficult to cope with.

### *Overwork*

This is easier described than cured. What do you do in a smallish church with no-one willing to act as Church Secretary? You do the job yourself and that adds to your strains. However, for those with a fragile self-image, sheer hard work and hoped-for approval of others outside the church is a powerful motive to add to an already crushing workload. It can be almost a badge of honour for a minister to be told how tired they are looking and to work without a day off.

### *Felt lack of success*

While we saw conversions through door-to-door evangelism and from within the church we saw no numerical growth, partly due to the age composition of the church, and this was deeply depressing to me. Add to that the church's downtown location and securing church growth is extremely difficult. If others were not condemning me as ineffective, and that was not infrequent, then I was condemning myself.

### *An additional precipitating factor was difficulties I found in some extra-church interests*

Like many pastors in difficult pastorates I had coped by using outside interests, such as denominational involvement and fraternal involvement, as a relief from church tensions and as a means of encouragement. For various reasons, some of which involved disagreements with others whose opinions were significant to me, these outlets became very unsatisfactory in the short term and became emotionally draining when I desperately needed support and positive feedback. Quite unknown to them, and I am sure unintentionally, I was deeply affected by disagreements with, and felt disapproval from, one or two senior men in the ministry.

## **The Breakdown Itself**

There were a number of symptoms appearing as the depression mounted.

i) *I was unable to sleep properly and would either stay awake till 3am or wake up at 3am and be completely unable to get back to sleep.* At first I responded in the most macho way possible by getting up early and working but this couldn't be sustained for long.

ii) *I was unable to study properly because concentration was difficult.* This was very discouraging because producing fraternal papers and other contributions of this kind was an important source of encouragement and an avenue of hoped-for approval for me. This way of coping was no longer available to me.

iii) *I had a feeling of worthlessness and didn't expect others to like me or respond to my ministry.* I quite seriously believed that no-one could want or value my friendship.

iv) *Criticism, which was always very painful, became disabling.* After one visit from a church attender which began, 'After the children's talk I get absolutely nothing from the service'. I was unable to preach the following Sunday. This fragility continued and became worse.

v) *I completely despaired about my ministry and, though I had no real sense of being led to another pastorate, felt that I had to leave the church and try somewhere else.* Not receiving a call from another church when seeking to move added to my hurt. I at no time had any desire to be out of the ministry but believed I couldn't stay where I was.

These factors finally mounted up to the point where I was unable to function any longer as a pastor and therefore I was forced to take sick leave. Rather than relieve the situation my symptoms actually became a lot worse:-

i) *I felt as if surrounded by a thick fog and as though I couldn't communicate to anyone at all.* My wife tells me that I hardly spoke to her for several months.

ii) *I lost assurance, not of personal salvation but of God's existence, and would wake up in the middle of the night almost screaming, terrified of dying.* This was not entire disbelief and never became so but it was a constant temptation and pressure.

iii) *I had a terror of inactivity and had to work with my hands all day.* I couldn't face the thoughts inside although I was not at this stage really identifying what was wrong. This desperate need to be active is very atypical of those suffering from depression. It was however my way of avoiding my demons rather than confronting them.

iv) *I felt a deep anger because I felt that people treated me as less than human and that my feelings were treated as being of no account.* I felt I had become a rôle and not a person: someone who people could and did insult and abuse but who was not allowed to retaliate or to feel and show hurt. I felt these feelings could easily erupt into violence.

This emotional collapse continued for several months but there was slow improvement and after six months I was able to return to preaching once a week. The ten hours therapeutic work a week allowed without affecting benefit meant that I did little but prepare and preach. Another six months later I resumed work on a full-time basis but with very limited input to the church. Over four years later I am just about resuming most of my former responsibilities.

## **Recovery**

What aided my emergence from depression? There were a number of factors:-

### **An understanding psychiatrist**

The first psychiatrist I saw was very confident that medication would work the trick but no medication seemed to shift my mood in the slightest. He was quite frank that he saw no way of helping me by counselling but passed me on to another psychiatrist. She was immensely helpful. She was not an evangelical but was certainly open to spiritual realities in her dealings with me. Cognitive therapy, which was the approach she used, was a helpful challenge to depressed thinking. My expressed feelings such as, 'I'm a failure' would be met by the rejoinder, 'Come back next week and show me from what's happened in your ministry that you're a failure!' Surprisingly the evidence was that I was not as much a failure as I felt!

More important was her acceptance of my belief system. On one occasion she asked me, 'What passage in the Bible would you turn to in order to express your present

feelings? I'll read them and come back to discuss them with you next week.' My choice of Jeremiah 20:7-18, 'O Lord, you deceived me ...' and Jeremiah 12:1-13 left her somewhat depressed herself. I myself was greatly helped as Scripture is so honest about what God's servants do actually feel and experience and is equally open about the fact that there are no readily available cures.

On another level we simply got on well and I felt, for the first time in years, that I was talking to someone who genuinely liked me and cared about what I was feeling. It is a sad fact that this alone was very important to me.

### **A spiritual crisis**

While I don't feel backsliding or tolerated sin had led to my depression, I certainly felt great difficulty in accepting my experiences of years of hard slog in the ministry, little by way of conversions and blessings, and now this complete breakdown of usefulness. One Sunday night when I was sitting in the congregation of our own church things came to a crisis. That night the attendance was particularly low and I went home distraught. Lying in bed in the early hours of Monday morning the spiritual root of my unhappiness finally emerged. It was that in my heart of hearts I felt that the Lord had let me down. Strangely, until that night, I had not been at all aware that I felt this and if asked would have denied it with absolute sincerity.

As I shared this with those who were trying to help me their reactions were interesting. One senior minister obviously found it hard to cope with and seemed to withdraw from me because of it. Though that may be an unfair judgement of his behaviour stemming from the inaccurate judgements of others and their behaviour it is easy to make in a time of depression. The psychiatrist listened to what I said and responded, 'Well, you don't believe that do you? How are you going to deal with it?' In retrospect I believe the Lord graciously withheld the identification of this problem from me till I was able to respond to it appropriately.

### **God's grace at work in the church**

One unusual aspect of my experience has been that I have been able to resume serving the Lord in the pastorate that I was in before my breakdown. Several things happened to enable this:-

#### *a) God raising up leaders in the church*

After some very unsatisfactory experiences it was wonderful to have one or two people of real ability and spirituality move into leadership positions. Humanly speaking without them the road back would have been almost impossible.

#### *b) the contribution of neighbouring ministers*

One neighbouring minister helped greatly by accepting involvement in the church and chairing deacons's and members' meetings. This enabled younger leaders to establish themselves in leadership and encouraged them when it was very difficult.

#### *c) God uniting the church in love*

In God's providence a factor in precipitating my breakdown, though not causing it, was a horrific car accident which involved a church member and her family. I had to spend time with the grief stricken family, I sat with the lady when the life support machine was turned off and then conducted the funeral and continued to support the family. After this much misunderstanding and estrangement within the church melted

away. The church became far more united with one another and with me during my absence than they had been with me there.

*d) God working in people's hearts*

Miraculously even people who were strongly and overtly opposed to me were changed by God's grace. This sometimes happened when people were challenged by others about their attitudes to me but sometimes there has simply been a manifest change without any confrontation taking place. This has been and continues to be a wonderful kindness from the Lord.

**Moving on from Breakdown**

Nearly five years later, I still cannot work as intensely or for as long as I used to. My ability to study and prepare has been impaired noticeably. When I am tired or going through stressful times I have a tendency to slip back into depression with a sense of failure and hopelessness and a fear of death dominating me.

However, without any significant numerical growth having taken place, there is a deeper unity in the church and we can now move on and make decisions and develop as a church in a way we couldn't before. There are a number of lessons I have learnt and am endeavouring to put into practise:-

i) *To be gentler with those who doubt and are weak in faith.* Prior to my illness I couldn't easily understand those who had trouble believing what I was clear and certain about. That has changed a lot and I know these changes in me have proved helpful to some people.

ii) *To accept God's calling for me.* Lack of acclamation and acceptance by others doesn't not mean that I am not doing God's will. Paul accepts his life, '*being poured out like a drink offering*' (2 Timothy 4:6) which means that its significance is solely godward. I am trying to learn to think like that.

iii) *To accept other people's insights and judgements on situations in the church and also on the way I am reacting to those situations.* I am thankful for those in the church who are concerned for the good of God's kingdom and for my good. They may be wrong in their assessments from time to time but I trust them because they don't have a hidden agenda and when they rebuke me or disagree with me it is with good motives.

iv) *To seek to persuade people and encourage them to obedience rather than to come down heavily on their disobedience.* To show them that what I desire from them is actually what the gospel requires of them.

**In Retrospect**

A little while has elapsed since writing this and again our church life is passing through a difficult time. We like to think that times of difficulty lead to times of blessing but they may be to prepare us to glorify God in further times of difficulty and discouragement. I am still prone to be discouraged and not a particularly innovative leader so these are hard lessons. What is still a rich blessing is the love and encouragement received through both church officers and members as shared experiences of joy and sadness have forged deep spiritual bonds.

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*For obvious reasons this article has been written anonymously*

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# The Pastor and Contemporary Culture

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Paul EG Cook

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**E**vangelical ministers and churches are beginning to feel themselves under considerable pressure to accommodate to modern culture in all its various expressions. What we are being asked to do is represented simply as a matter of progress and of moving with the times. We ought to be willing to be up-to-date in our attitudes, our thinking and our practices; otherwise we cannot hope to influence the modern man. Much of this pressure for change is coming from within the church. The word 'culture' is increasingly being mentioned in addresses and articles. In some circles one almost gets the impression that unless we purchase clothes from Next we shall be regarded as spiritually outmoded. But some of us have discovered that what is 'next' often turns out to be a 'has been' and we are back in fashion! Others would have us believe that unless we sing mindless little choruses, almost wholly taken up with little 'me', and therefore decidedly in tune with modern culture, we shall lose the younger generation. Incidentally, the real test of what effect we have upon the younger generation is how many of them have been retained as true believers when they become the older generation. However, the fact remains that the cultural *mores* of our present society are regarded by many in our churches as far more important than questions of truth and righteousness. Modern culture is seen as a friend, and we are expected to walk hand in hand with it as a means of obtaining a hearing for the gospel.

How ought we to respond to this pressure? Is this just a question of being up-to-date, as many would have us believe, or are there deeper issues involved? We need to consider why this crisis has arisen. Clearly, within the last twenty or thirty years considerable changes have taken place in our society. As a nation we are losing the past cultural character of our land, with its Christian assumptions, and what is taking its place is an expression of our pluralistic and multi-faith society with its amoral and secular bearing. Regrettably many of those who are urging us to accommodate ourselves to modern culture are doing it without much thought or sense of responsibility.

This is a vast subject, but I want to deal with it at a fairly popular level. Let me say at the outset that I believe no greater disservice can be rendered to the Christian faith than by giving the impression that the gospel is out of date. Some Christians are in danger of doing this by insisting upon religious traditions inherited from the past that are in no way essential to the faith. But let it be said that nothing is more relevant to the modern man than the Christian message. And it does not require modern culture to make it relevant. What we have to do is to demonstrate its relevance by striking a contemporary note; but we do not need to wear Bermuda shorts to do this.

I suppose Standard Strict Baptist churches could never be accused of trendiness; and yet one of their number received one of the warmest commendations from Ruth Gledhill, of *The Times*, of any of the many churches of all denominations she has evaluated. Some would accuse these churches, perhaps with some justification, of being stuck in a time warp; but the fact remains that the sermon, the people and the service of this particular church made a considerable impact upon that modern journalist, whereas

a representative of an organisation which exists to promote contemporary preaching left her singularly unimpressed. We shall be wise, therefore, not to respond too quickly to those who say that unless we adopt the quirks of modern culture we shall be in danger of dying out.

## Definition

No real consensus seems to exist, even in dictionaries, as to the meaning of the word 'culture'. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* defines it as 'improvement by training (mental or physical); intellectual development'. Sounds like a southern bias! The words 'improvement' and 'development' are the giveaway. *Chambers Dictionary* is better: 'the result of cultivation', 'the state of being cultivated' – whether biologically or socially. Whether or not this leads to improvement is not a necessary qualification in my view; it might lead to the opposite. *Chambers* continues by referring to the 'attitudes and values which inform a society'. They are expressed in conventions of behaviour and in popular beliefs, and in the language, literature, drama and music of a people. Prevailing culture is also reflected in art, design and architecture, and in what is called 'life-style'. A nation's marriage customs, patterns of family life and sexual practices are also part of culture. Philosophy, religion, magic, superstition and irreligion are all factors which shape culture. The interaction of religion, superstition and magic in shaping the culture of a people is surveyed in Keith Thomas' magisterial work, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*. The spread of Reformation doctrines in this country led to a decline of occult practices and superstitions. The various strands of New Age mentality are having the opposite effect today upon our culture. Mystical and Eastern religions, frequently popularised by figures from the pop scene, are having their effect upon the reshaping of our culture. These and other influences of a philosophical nature are daily changing the face of our nation through the modern media.

We can say of culture, in the words of the Lausanne Covenant of 1974, that 'Because man is God's creature some of his culture is rich in beauty and goodness. Because he is fallen, all of it is tainted with sin and some of it is demonic' (para.10). (*New Dictionary of Theology*, p.183i). Nothing is more dangerous and misleading, therefore, than to speak of culture as though it were a neutral and benign condition.

## Distinctions

I draw a distinction between culture and *civilisation*, though generally writers tend not to. The southerner may find the northerner a bit of a culture shock; but the northerner is not without culture. Refinement of speech and manners has more to do with civilisation than culture, though the southerner tends to confuse these things. The northerner, who eats his fish and chips in the street and bluntly tells you what he thinks of you, is not uncultured. He lacks refinement, maybe, but not culture. We can also draw a distinction between culture and *technology* which is really an aspect of civilisation. A new car at the Motor Show is the product of technology, part of civilisation. The styling of the car, to some extent, and the semi-naked woman lolling over its bonnet are expressions of modern culture, as is the value a person attaches to his car. The style may be a matter of moral indifference, but the use of a woman's sex appeal to stimulate interest and sales is not. Even cultural style can become an

expression of lewdness and wickedness as the ornamental artifacts of Pompeii – the fashionable holiday haunt of the Roman rich in the first century – vividly illustrate.

I regard central heating, washing machines, hi-fi centres and Jacuzzi baths as products of technology in our modern civilisation. But the styling of the clothes we wear, the variety of the food we eat and how it is cooked and when it is eaten, and the music we listen to and how often we take a bath are cultural expressions of our lives. Our love of luxury and comfort is cultural. A chair is a product of basic technology; its design is an aspect of culture. And if I were to ask you ‘Are you sitting comfortably?’ then I might be guilty of the modern obsession with comfort that makes it a standard by which the value of anything, including sermons and church services, is assessed. That is culture. And when people talk of ‘user-friendly’ services they are talking about culture.

I do not wish to make too much of these distinctions between culture and civilisation, since there is considerable overlapping of these things.

## **The Biblical Evaluation of Culture**

1 **In the Old Testament** Though the Scriptures do not use the word ‘culture’, as such, yet they have much to say about it. The teaching in the Pentateuch concerning clean and unclean animals, foods permitted and forbidden, the cleansing of leprous conditions, the laws of marriage and divorce and the treatment of slaves, of the poor and of strangers is all of cultural significance. What the Lord required of Israel in its religion, customs and morality was in striking contrast to ‘the nations’. Israel’s principles of conduct regulating their personal, family and commercial life were to mark them out as a distinct and separate people of God. The religion of Israel was intended to shape their social and cultural life. Their way of life was designed to project the only alternative society to be found – a counter-culture to that of the heathen nations. The laws God gave them underlined their distinctiveness. The Ten Commandments were a declaration of absolutes in their religious and social life.

The Lord frequently reprovved Israel for becoming culturally similar to the nations. In Ezekiel Chapter 5, for example, Israel ‘set in the midst of the nations and the countries all around her’ (v 5) to be a witness to them, is condemned for not only becoming like the nations in failing to observe God’s laws and statutes, but for far exceeding them in wickedness. The detestable practices and abominations associated with idolatry, such as child sacrifice, prostitution and homosexuality, had entered the life of Israel. Ezra, on returning to Jerusalem from the Exile, is horrified to discover that the Jews had ‘not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands’ with respect to marriage and their abominations. They had assimilated themselves to the culture of the heathen peoples. That was their condemnation, just as it had been in the Northern Kingdom in the days of Ahab.

What the Old Testament teaches us about the culture of a people is that it is intrinsically tied up with their religion or irreligion. Some speakers urge us to distinguish between doctrine and culture as though these things can be held apart. It is, in fact, quite impossible; the culture of a people is the expression of their religion, their idolatry, their superstition and their irreligion.

2. **In the New Testament** The Old Testament theme of the uniqueness and the separateness of God’s people is continued throughout the New Testament with respect

to the church and the world. Peter uses four phrases and designations, all taken from the Old Testament and there used of Israel, and applies them to the church as 'a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation and a special people' (1 Peter 2:9). They are all this so that they might proclaim to all around the praises of the living God who has called them 'out of darkness into his marvellous light'. And on account of this they are exhorted to 'abstain from fleshly lusts' that were characteristic of the world in their day and in ours. They were to be known among the Gentiles for honourable conduct and good works. As in the Old Testament, so in the New Testament the cultural life of God's people is expected to contrast with that of the world. Christians, as Jesus expressed it, are in the world, and yet not of the world (John 17); and the distinction is not merely that of spiritual nature and belief, but also of behaviour, and attitude and mind-set, and therefore, of culture.

But being 'in the world and not of it' gives rise to serious problems which are carefully dealt with in the New Testament. Such cultural problems as arose from the eating of meats offered to idols, and of living in a slave/master relationship, and of being part of a community subject to ungodly rulers. In the letters to the seven churches (Revelation 2&3) the Lord specifically deals with the dangers threatening the life of the churches arising from the pagan culture and the heathen society of the cities in which believers lived. The problem in Pergamos (2:12-17) was occasioned by the idolatry of the city and the sexual permissiveness associated with it. The situation was not unlike that of our own society. Before we start talking loosely about taking on board the culture of our day we need to evaluate it. We have come across university Christian Unions that have become religious versions of the world: same interests, same appetites, same pleasures, but baptised with religion and using evangelical terminology.

The New Testament phrase 'the world', in the sense of human society alienated from God and living in unbelief and hostility to God, is often used in a cultural sense, e.g. 1 John 2:15-16 '*Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life – is not of the Father but is of the world*'. Those phrases 'the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life' have a strong cultural reference. What is culture if it is not largely the spirit of the world and the way and fashion of the world? The call to believers in 2 Cor. 6:11-18 to avoid being unequally yoked together with unbelievers, and to be a separate people, is primarily an exhortation to reject those aspects of Corinthian culture in conflict with the mind and will of a holy God. Likewise in Romans 12:1-2 the exhortation to present our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, is accompanied by the instruction not to be conformed to this world but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. What is the 'conforming to this world' that the Apostle has in mind, if it is not an adoption of its ethos and culture?

We need to be on our guard, therefore, against those evangelical tendencies of our day, who rather unthinkingly urge us to accommodate ourselves to modern culture on the grounds that thereby we shall obtain a greater influence for the gospel within our modern society. Taken as a whole the biblical view of culture is not a favourable one; and if the church allows itself to be swamped by the ideals and ethos of modern culture, then we will discover that far from preserving the churches from dying out, this preoccupation with culture will have aided our extinction. David Wells comments, 'A

Christian faith that tries to adapt to this culture in order to win a 'hearing' is a Christian faith that will be left with nothing to say' (*Losing our Virtue*, p.191).

A number of aspects of modern culture are at strong variance with the Christian faith:

1. The rejection of any concept of absolute standards and the triumph of subjective relativism.
2. The supremacy of feeling as the measure of what is good and virtuous. The sentimentalism of modern society, which has led to a total distortion of traditional values.
3. The elevation of eroticism within every part of our society. Sexual expression has been legitimized as an end in itself and sexual enjoyment is regarded as justification for infidelity and forms of unrestrained and self-indulgent behaviour frequently condemned in the New Testament.
4. The prevalence of nudity throughout the media, seductive dress, erotic music and craving for subjective experience are all characteristic of modern culture. Taken as a whole, modern culture is strongly hostile to holiness of life understood in the biblical sense. The task of the church in our generation is not to mimic its culture but to confront it with the Word of God. We are called upon to produce a counter-culture as a challenge to the way of the world. And the church should embody that counter-culture as it did in Corinth.

## **Necessary Accommodation to Cultural Patterns of Life in Things Indifferent**

In the very epistles where Paul warns against the prevailing culture, he also favours accommodation when no essential truth or moral standard is compromised. He refers to his own practice in 1 Cor.9:19-23:

For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; and to those who are under the law as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law towards God, but under law towards Christ), that I might win those who are without law; to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means win some. Now this I do for the gospel's sake, that I might be partaker of it with you.

A spiritual concern for others should obligate the believer to accommodate to the ways and customs of others, if possible, in order to avoid creating unnecessary offence or hindrance for the gospel. The phrase in verse 21, 'not being without law toward God but under law toward Christ' sets the limit to such accommodation. So we need to draw a distinction between those elements of modern culture which are hostile to God, and such elements as are spiritually and morally unobjectionable. It would be foolish today, for example, to object to using Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday etc. because they were named after heathen deities: Sun, Moon, Tusco, Woden etc. Even meat that had been offered to idols, Paul considered permissible food unless it stumbled a brother (1 Cor. 8). But we are not to allow the consciences of others to rule the church (Rom. 14).

Some Christians still strongly object to Christian women wearing trousers or slacks, claiming that this is condemned in the Old Testament. What is condemned is the confusion of genders, and no such confusion is created by Western women doing what

Eastern women have done for centuries. Other Christians are concerned about how people dress for services of worship. Apart from the fact that God looks upon the heart and not the outward appearance, it is surely a part of modern culture to dress more informally than in the past. Even the vice-chairman of the Bank of England was recently pictured in shirt sleeves at a formal occasion. To make an issue of this is surely wrong, and yet in some congregations one is expected to appear formally and in others informally – the latter are often formally informal! But differences in outward appearance have always tended to distinguish Christian denominations. It is not a new phenomenon.

In a general sense, we are all children of our generation and reflect much of its culture already. The pressure being put upon us to conform to the cultural patterns of our times springs from an over-sensitivity as to how the unbeliever sees the Christian. We need to be ourselves, rather than somewhat artificially adopting different cultural postures in an anxiety to impress the world. But we do find some real problems that need addressing:

1. **The problem of the ‘post-Christian’ era.** Whereas in the past most of the customs and cultural expressions of British society were shaped by the impact of the Christian message and the influence of the Bible upon our land, our modern society has cut loose from that tradition and this confronts the church with new challenges. The precepts of Christian morality were once taken for granted in our so-called Christian nation. The Scriptures were taught in our schools and Christian ethics were woven into the fabric of our society. Our laws and conventions of behaviour reflected our Protestant tradition. The Christian Church was part of the Establishment and still is to a certain extent. Many evangelicals have rejoiced in this and taken advantage of it. Personally I have regarded this patronage of the Christian faith as inimical to the interests of true religion in our land. We have expected the State and its institutions to support the Christian religion. As Christian ministers we have regarded our ability to enter schools, hospitals and even homes as something of a right. We have looked to Parliament to uphold Sunday as a day of rest and to magistrates to establish and honour Christian traditions. For too long we have rested on the unspoken acceptance of Christian principles within our nation, and have become over-dependent upon established custom and statute laws to uphold our Christian life and testimony. The multi-faith society has come as something of a shock to us, and modern secularism with its irreverent disregard of our historic past has shaken us.

Christians and churches have got to learn to adjust to this new situation and not be intimidated by it, and part of the adjustment will mean a willingness to come to terms with new cultural patterns in our society. To some extent, therefore, what is being said about the need for cultural adjustment is of real importance, though it requires critical evaluation. There is an increasing similarity between the cultural climate of the first century and our present day. This does not dismay me, but actually gives me encouragement when I think of what the early church achieved in the face of such cultural hostility.

However, instead of coming to terms with the new situation, some Christians and churches are responding negatively by looking back nostalgically to ‘This England’ of a bygone age. They treasure memories of quiet Sabbath days, when people attended worship in their Sunday best, and most children went to Sunday school. This was an

England in which the minister, the teacher, the doctor and the policeman were accorded universal respect. Christianity had become institutionalised and respectability was the order of any day. In 'This England' women and children could walk safely through the countryside, picking wild flowers and chasing butterflies, without fear of sexual assault. That England will never come again, not even in days of revival. The desire for it, though understandable, is not really spiritual. It is a longing for an amenable cultural context that has now almost gone. But the nostalgia prevents many of our churches moving into the modern age with vision and a sense of opportunity. Some have become so insular that their impact upon the world is virtually nil. They advertise their services as 'Reformed, A.V. only, non-charismatic, formal service,' and one suspects they would like to add 'anti EU'! They are not really contending for the faith, but for the *status quo* as they have known it. The loss of a 'Christian culture' has filled many believers with a spirit of fear, and this fear prevents them from accepting needful changes. It produces reactionaries; and reactionaries are as dangerous as revolutionaries.

**2 The problem of the 'post-modern' Christian** The pressure of modern culture is impinging upon churches through those professing Christians who seem more concerned to be 'with it' than with spirituality. They are the expertise men eager to run the churches as they would run a business or a secular organisation. They are managers, who provided an 'office' for their minister, a comfortable church lounge for the church members and visitors, and counselling rooms for all manner of distress.

For the post-modern Christian the past is of no account, only the present matters. Old hymns, i.e. anything written before 1960, are 'boring' because they require thought. If you quote the great men and women of the past you are made to feel dated. Even the Scriptures are treated with a measure of condescension, and in some Christian meetings and services they are not even read.

The post-modern Christian lives on feelings and impulses. He believes in 'doing his own thing' and allowing others to act likewise. He wants to re-interpret the Scriptures so as to promote feminism and political correctness. He resents any expressions of authority and often refuses to recognise the divine calling of ministers of God's word. Every opinion is to be accorded equal validity irrespective of whether it has biblical authority. If he imagines that he has some 'gift', then he thinks the church should provide some opportunity for it to be expressed whether or not the church officers deem it to be appropriate. Above all, post-modern Christianity does not believe in disturbing anyone. The gospel must be a comforting one, leaving men as it finds them. All who come to the services of the church should be made to feel comfortable. For this reason preaching, or the declaration of the truth, is out; and a jokey, bland, chatty style is in. Churches are under increasing pressure to provide 'happy' services and to give way to the pressure for entertainment. This elevation of happiness, enjoyment or comfort as the great principles of well-being is a marked feature of modern culture, and is beginning to effect our evangelical churches.

Of course, we must recognise that new converts will bring with them into the churches some of the baggage of post-modern culture. Unfortunately, many of the people in our reactionary churches seem to expect of the converts all the stability and maturity of those brought up in Christian homes. What is required is patient instruction on matters such as submission, sexual morality, marriage bonds etc. – just as Paul gives in his first letter to the Corinthians.

## Some Final Conclusions

1. We must not just adopt prevailing culture because it is modern. We ought to act on the basis of biblical principle and obedience to the truth. If I am not mistaken, most pro and anti attitudes to modern culture are adopted out of thoughtlessness on the one hand and prejudice on the other.
2. We need to be critical of most culture in the light of God's Word and resist those elements that are hostile to biblical revelation. As regards worship and the ordering of our church life, the regulative principle of Scripture must surely direct us. Our concern should be to please God and not man.
3. On matters indifferent we should be willing to accommodate ourselves to existing and changing cultural patterns of life, so as to remove unnecessary obstacles to the spread of the gospel. This will include such things as language, music, desire for group participation and the place of women.

The English of the Authorised Version of the Bible is both superb and dated. The archaism is a great hindrance to effective communication with the modern generation, particularly the young. No one can defend the use of 'hath' instead of 'has' or 'cometh' instead of 'comes'. Likewise a delicate revision of hymns can only be advantageous; but the political correctness of the new hymnbook *Praise!* is worse than that of the media, and the heavy-handed editing of the older hymns, in an over-anxiety to be modern, has produced some alarming doggerel. There are pitfalls in adopting new terminology for the presentation of the truth. Some preachers are very dated in their style; but unless we adhere to biblical language and concepts the truth will gradually become distorted. We can retain biblical language without being dated in our style. The idea that distinctive Christian terminology, e.g. the use of such words as atonement, justification, sanctification etc. should be abandoned is basically flawed. Every interest has its distinctive terminology. You do not write to Lords protesting that the use of such terms as 'a square leg', 'a fine leg' etc. will put people off cricket. If someone becomes interested then he must learn the language. It is so in every part of life. Why should the Christian faith be any different? We need to explain our terms, but not abandon them.

If we accept that the regulative principle of worship permits the use of music, how can it be argued that only the organ or piano is permissible? Other instruments harmonising with the purpose of worship can surely be used. I get the impression that those who opposed the introduction of the organ into Brunswick Methodist Chapel, in Leeds in 1827, and so precipitated a new denomination, would just as strenuously oppose its removal were they alive today. Many of our attitudes are purely traditional and have nothing to do with biblical principle.

In this connection, can we object to other able people sharing in the conduct of worship? It was a synagogue practice. And should not more opportunity be given in our churches for meetings where believers share spiritual experiences and discuss biblical issues together? This would be more in line with modern culture.

And though we need to guard against the feminist lobby, it surely needs to be said that the Puritan view of the woman was much closer to the Bible than the Victorian tradition. You can make of that what you will!

We must not be ashamed of maintaining a different culture from that of the world; indeed, we are obligated by God's Word to do this. We must place a renewed confidence in the power of God's Word and in the power of preaching. The great preachers of Wales in the eighteenth century shaped the culture of the Welsh nation for almost two hundred years, and where the Word of God prevails there culture is changed in a God-honouring way.

### **Suggested literature:**

David F. Wells' trilogy: *No Place for Truth*, Eerdmans, 1993; *God in the Wasteland*, IVP, 1994; and *Losing our Virtue*, IVP, 1998.

*Faking It: the Sentimentalism of Modern Society*; Ed. by Digby Anderson and Peter Mullen; The Social Affairs Unit, 1998. The chapters on the sentimentalism of religion, 'All Feelings and no Doctrine' by Peter Mullen, and on the history and origins of sentimentality, 'The Corruption of Christianity' by Lucy Sullivan, are particularly relevant.

*Religion and the Decline of Magic*; Keith Thomas; London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971.

*The Calvinistic Concept of Culture*, Henry R Van Til, Philadelphia, P & R, 1959.

*The Evangelical Disaster*, Francis Schaeffer.

<sup>1</sup> Delivered as an address to the East Midlands Evangelical Ministers' Fraternal on 17 May 1999. The spoken format has been retained.

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'soul-care'. Venning's book is particularly helpful in understanding how to apply the truth to believers at different stages of spiritual development.

Preaching is central to pastoral care. **John Chapman's** *Setting Hearts on Fire* (Matthias 1999) is a very useful guide to preparing sermons in a way that is both faithful to the Scriptures and connects with people today. The book is intended to help in the preparation evangelistic talks, but in fact it is helpful in all sermon preparation. Surely our aim must be in dependence on God to see the hearts of people set on fire by the Holy Spirit. In *Apologetic Preaching – proclaiming Christ to a Post-modern World* (IVP-USA 2000), **Craig Loscalzo** has some helpful things to say about preaching in contemporary culture. At some points he has bought into the notion of a 'post-rational theology' as promoted of Stanley Grenz among others, but all in all a thought-provoking and useful book for pastors.

One of the most encouraging things for a pastor to do is to read biographies. There are three that have recently come to my attention. **William Baker's** biography of his father Daniel Baker, *Making Many Glad* (Banner of Truth 1999) is one of those biographies that reminds one of what God can do through the faithful but winsome preaching of his word. Baker was a 19th century Southern Presbyterian minister and evangelist. To make many rejoice in their salvation would not be a bad ambition for us to have in preaching the gospel. In *The Legacy of Sovereign Joy* (IVP 2000), **John Piper** profiles three of the giants of church history – Augustine, Luther and Calvin – and seeks to uncover the wellsprings of their effective ministries. Each of the chapters on these men is richly rewarding both for study and meditation, but it is the introduction, 'Savouring

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# The Humanity of Christ: Looking at Jesus, Ourselves, and Pastoral Ministry<sup>1</sup>

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Kelly M. Kapic

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## The Situation in Reformed Churches

How does the humanity of Christ inform and challenge our ministries? While we all will agree with the importance of a Christocentric ministry in general, I think in that affirmation we need to recapture a right emphasis on the humanity of Christ. Without doubt, in Jesus Christ we see God, the Word, the divine excellencies which are not as clearly communicated through anything else, including general revelation and even the visible institutions of worship. Just as importantly, however, is the reality that through Jesus Christ we meet humanity as it ought to be, seeking righteousness and continual communion with the Father through the Spirit.

Only by keeping the Incarnate Lord as the center of our ministries will we be able to hold together both the transcendence and immanence of God. While we might agree that for much of the evangelical world the great danger is that they are neglecting the transcendence of God, I am convinced that for the most part our struggle in the Reformed community is that we have neglected the immanence of God. A common misunderstanding of transcendence itself contributes to this problem, for it must be remembered that technically when speaking in biblical and theological terms transcendence conveys the idea of 'otherness,' rather than distance. When we speak of God as transcendent and holy, we tend to do so by painting a picture of a distant God that more resembles deism than Christianity, but this is a discussion for another time.<sup>2</sup> For the most part we are faithful to proclaim the transcendence of God, but what about his immanence?

It is only through a proper emphasis on the person of Christ, and particularly through a renewed emphasis on the humanity of Christ, that we will maintain both truths without undervaluing either of them. There is no clearer picture of the reality of both God's transcendence *and* immanence than in the Son's assumption of human nature.

I think Nigel M. De S. Cameron, in his little book *Complete in Christ*,<sup>3</sup> does a fair job critiquing evangelicals at the end of the nineteenth and into the twentieth century for failing on this very point. In their efforts to defend the deity of Jesus Christ against the rising powers of liberalism – a fight that was exceedingly important and needed to be waged – evangelicals ended up completely neglecting and often undervaluing the humanity of Christ. At times the neglect could be so serious that one could argue evangelicals were often on the edge of docetism: Jesus only *seeming* to be human, but not really so.

Sadly I'm not convinced that things have changed all that much when it comes to the average believer today, especially in our Reformed circles. From my experience and

conversations it appears that most people in our pews do not struggle with the idea that Jesus is God, especially those who have grown up in the church. What they do struggle with is firmly believing that he was really man!

I recently received a letter from a believer in her fifties who has been in Reformed Churches her entire life. Having previously written to her regarding some of my concerns about this apparent neglect in our tradition she responded enthusiastically. She described how she was brought up hearing about the 'transcendent Christ' but rarely ever heard about Jesus' true human struggles and identification with our broken world. This neglect has left her struggling, and she claims she can 'still feel the effects.' Then she perceptively adds, 'but if this glorious truth [i.e., the true humanity of Jesus] stays a matter to be debated and not a wonder to thrill us and move us to the core and send us out with a fresh sense of his identification with us, we've missed the blessing.'

Can you relate to her experience? What about your average congregation member? For example, when they hear that Jesus fasted for forty days does it strike them as extraordinary in any way, or do they simply think to themselves, 'of course he did, he was God.' Do they understand the weakness, frailty, and effort that went into his fasting which ultimately prepared him for some of his most intensified temptations? Do they believe that Jesus' temptations were real, or were the temptations just a game by which Jesus had to act like it was difficult? Were the tears of Jesus before his death a manifestation of sincere anguish and struggle, or was this simply the action of empty high drama?

What Reformed Christians often have trouble believing, at least with our hearts if not also with our minds, is that Jesus Christ is not only truly God but also really human. This is not a small matter, as John reminds us: 'Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the *flesh* is from God' (1 John 4:1-2). A full endorsement of the ancient creeds likewise requires affirming that Jesus Christ is truly God *and* truly man.<sup>4</sup> Denying one is as devastating to the faith as denying the other!

## **A Fresh look at Jesus**

Recapturing a right emphasis on the humanity of Jesus Christ is crucial in understanding and proclaiming redemption in the *imago Dei*. As Gregory of Nazianzen rightly said, 'only what is assumed may be healed.'<sup>5</sup> This statement reflects the truth that the Son assumed a real, finite, limited human nature, even taking upon himself our 'common infirmities.'<sup>6</sup> With this in mind, we need to make sure that in our efforts to protect the deity of our earthly Lord we do not end up defending unscriptural assertions which make Jesus immune to the realities of a true incarnation.

While Jesus was from birth without sin, he was also – and here he is different from the first Adam – born into a fallen world. The grief, pain, anguish, suffering, and groans of creation, those utterly unknown before the fall, were all elements of Jesus' earthly life. He experienced restless nights, weariness, belly laughter, hunger pains, a dry throat, and the need to relieve himself. I do not mention any of these to be humorous, nor to be controversial. Instead, I raise this simply to say that if we cannot agree about the reality of Jesus' bodily functions while he was on earth, then we are embracing a docetistic heresy which has always been fiercely rejected by the Church. It is a heresy that ultimately undermines not only Jesus' humanity, but also our own!

We do our Lord not more honor, *but less*, when we fail to portray him in his full humanity. As sand slipping through our hands, so does the significance of the incarnation lose its power over people's hearts when we let slip the realities of his human nature. Here we speak of the eternal Son of God, by whom the Universe was created, humbling himself – an absurd idea to the natural mind. How can the humiliation of the Son be true? It was no small matter for the second person of the Trinity to 'be made nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness, And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross!' (Philippians 2:7-8). Only by a robust emphasis on the complete *person* of Jesus Christ, who is both truly God and truly man, does this central truth of the Christian faith keep its power for the believer.<sup>7</sup>

Stephen Charnock, when reflecting on the Word made flesh and the union of the divine and human natures in the person of Christ captures the profundity of this great humiliation:

What greater distance can there be than between the Deity and humanity, between the Creator and a creature? A God of unmixed blessedness is linked personally with a man of perpetual sorrows; infinite purity with a reputed sinner; eternal blessedness with a cursed nature; almightiness with weakness; omniscience with ignorance; immutability with changeableness; incomprehensibility with comprehensibility; a holiness incapable of sinning made sin [a sin-offering]; a person possessed of all the perfections of the Godhead inheriting all the imperfections of the manhood in one person, sin only excepted.<sup>8</sup>

Our God is not a distant 'unmoved mover,' but a loving Father who sent forth his Son to bring reconciliation. Jesus does not stand far off, but came near, being born not in a sterilized time capsule dropped from space, but crying in a lowly manger. He was raised by humble parents in a dysfunctional family – since all families that include sinful people are somewhat dysfunctional. Jesus spent countless hours studying the scriptures, walked tiring miles on dusty roads, ate long meals with friends and strangers, wept with those who wept, and grew angry with those whose hearts were cold and hard.

Jesus Christ is our portrait of true humanity, and to him we look for our restoration. His life was one which sanctified the seasons of life, and ultimately his obedience allowed him to die in our stead: 'God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God' (2 Corinthians 5:21). The assumption of a true human nature secured each believer's union to Christ. Here is a powerful reminder that the kingdom was ushered in by humiliation, rather than by militarization!

## **Looking at Ourselves and our Churches**

It may be interesting to discuss these ideas in the abstract, but what does it mean for us? How might a renewed appreciation of the humanity of Christ apply to our ministries? In sum, I believe the truth of the Incarnation requires a call for a holistic ministry. Let us take a few minutes to explore creatively what this may mean for us on a practical level.

To begin, the ancient idea that the *imago Dei* is simply rationality must be rejected. This view has had devastating effects on the Church throughout its history, and even to this day persists in some theologies and pulpits. Yet we can reject this theory not simply based on exegesis of Genesis 1, but also for Christological reasons. By the Son's assumption of a true human nature he affirms and actually provides real dignity for every aspect of being made in the image of God. The Son did not assume some alien or

supernatural nature, but a real complete human nature, including body, mind, will, and affections.

When we study the earthly life of Jesus, we see that he did not view other humans as simply walking minds. Jesus affirms, both through his own true human nature and through his relationships with other humans, that to minister to others one must do so holistically and relationally. God does not simply send a proposition, but he sends his Son, a person who is also the Word. Furthermore, when Jesus interacts with others he inevitably tells stories, parables, and illustrations. This was not simply a show of effective rhetorical skills that kept people's attention, but rather a subtle affirmation of a holistic view of humanity. He knew that to touch people he needed to reach more than simply their minds, but also to challenge their wills and engage their affections, a feat most effectively accomplished through imagination, powerful illustrations, and creative expression. His willingness to apply physical touch alongside his message further testified to his holistic approach (e.g., Matthew 8:3, 15; 9:29; Mark 10:13,16). He did not need to communicate or act in these ways, but chose to, knowing that in so doing he engaged the whole person he was addressing. Which brings us to a neglected truth: Jesus was not simply the great exegete of scripture (e.g., Luke 24), but also the great exegete of the human heart.

Now we again face the temptation of neglecting Christ's humanity. How did Jesus know the human heart so well? Was it simply that he was God and so he knew everything? Or was it that he needed to be with others, listen to them, watch them, engage with them in his true humanity, and in so doing he *learned their* weaknesses, *their struggles, their pain*? These are not abstract syllogisms to him, but real people. For example, was it from omniscience or from his human experience that Jesus knew what the rich young man lacked? While we should avoid opposing the divine and human natures of Jesus, we need also to be careful not to subconsciously allow his divinity to swallow up his humanity. We fall into this danger when we neglect Jesus' human relational skills and instincts – points which can be overshadowed by too hastily pointing to divine omniscience. So how did Jesus know what would prick the heart of the self assured youth? While Jesus could have just said the easy Sunday school response: 'you are a sinner so turn to God,' instead he gives a personalized answer. Perhaps he is here skillfully applying his natural sensitivity to the circumstances. Jesus has been a student of humanity, interacting with various people who have diverse problems, and so he has the natural resources to draw from by which he can ask a particular question that applied to that specific situation. Mark's account of this exchange includes the moving detail that 'Jesus looked at him and loved him' (Mark 10:21).<sup>9</sup> Standing there was a lost and confused man, and yet it appears that Jesus loves him enough to find out his particular weaknesses; this enables Jesus to challenge him to become a true disciple who gives himself wholly to God. Jesus leaves him with a penetrating command that will linger in the man's soul until it finds resolution. In this story we may gain insight not only into Jesus' ability to exegete the human heart, but also his willingness to take seriously the humanity of his listener, demonstrated by his deliberateness to give such a thoughtful response to an apparent stranger.

Are we not tempted when we minister to people to simply enter a default mode and give them a standard answer for their problems? When we preach, are we not tempted to fall back on worn-out labels we assign to a few general sins, rather than creatively

probing the distinctive struggles of those living in a particular context? If we do this we subtly deny the listener's true humanity, inevitably causing our words to hit the floor without ever making it to the hearts of the parishioners.

Probing this idea further, was it from Jesus' divine nature or from his human history that he came to see how corrupted the Pharisees' hearts were, comparing them to whitewashed tombs? Remember, in Matthew 23 Jesus cites observable examples of their actions rather than supernatural knowledge: they tie up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders; everything is done for men to see; they travel over land and sea to make a convert, only in the end to make him also a son of bondage; they exalted rather than humbled themselves. In their assumed leadership over God's people Jesus saw that the Pharisees' actions only further distorted the people's image of God, instead of pointing faithfully to it. Jesus, as the great shepherd, felt compassion on those without a faithful guide. Here again Jesus reminds us of the importance of a holistic ministry. If we only speak of grace, forgiveness, love and freedom, but *our* lives reflect bondage, anger, fear, and resentment, then we ourselves need to see Jesus afresh.

Here we are personally confronted with a mirror. Before we can point others to Jesus, we need to ask some honest questions of ourselves. When was the last time we felt like we enjoyed God's presence? When was the last time we felt like our weak prayers made it beyond the confines of our skull? When was the last time that we wept for joy over the forgiveness of our own sins? Can we be honest with one another and ourselves about our own actual human struggles?

I have an older friend who has been involved in Reformed ministry and pastoral care for many years. In preparation for this presentation I wrote and asked for prayer about the BEC conference. I briefly explained that this was a pastors' conference in which six people would give short addresses on various elements of theological anthropology. Just last week I received a response which not only agreed to be in prayer, but also included the following personal challenge:

I just see a picture of hearts of the men you are to minister to next week. Some are bleeding to death with pain of rejection, weariness, hopelessness, despair. Others dare not even face the pain and have enclosed themselves with 12 inch thick and ten foot high concrete walls of protection. Some are like dried out mud cracking in the heat of relentless sun. Some may even prefer a safe 'out there' theological discussion which they can keep at arms length.

Such words are probing and uncomfortable. Does this person know us all? No! Rather, these emotions have been personally battled by my friend, added to also by the knowledge of countless friends who have likewise lived many years in the turmoil of a life in the ministry.

Is Jesus a distant God who seems unapproachable to you when you are alone? When you pray, do you feel a sense of shame and condemnation? Do the voices in the silence cry out 'failure, failure'? If so, don't just shove those emotions down deep and act like everything is okay. Don't just fill your time with more ministry activities, hoping that they will satisfy the void in your heart. When we deny our struggle we deny our humanity, and we deny the transforming power of the incarnation.

Many of us here need to experience Jesus' presence anew, being soaked in his love and acceptance. What is Jesus saying to you in your particular situation and struggle?

Be courageous next time you are in the silence, and don't be so quick to fill it with repetitious and empty words. Be patient, wait and let him come.

During the late sixties the 'God is dead' movement was at a popular level and creating all kinds of controversy. During that time Billy Graham came out with a statement in which he said, 'God is not dead, I know so because I spoke with him last night.' A skeptic reflecting on Graham's comment replied, 'but that is not the question. The question is, "did he speak back?"' When was the last time he spoke to you?<sup>10</sup>

We need to look afresh to Jesus Christ, being renewed in the reality of the incarnation so that we might continue to be transformed into his image. Only in this way will we be able to serve the Church effectively.

## **The Tension: Keeping Eyes on Both Images**

My challenge for us, for ourselves and for our congregations, is to keep our eyes consistently moving between the True Image of Jesus and the broken image of our humanity, for only by doing this can we communicate effectively the redemption found in Jesus Christ.

When John Owen was asked by the King why he ever listened to John Bunyan, that 'uneducated tinker,' Owen (at least as we have it recorded) gave a memorable response. 'Could I possess the tinker's abilities for preaching, please your majesty, I would gladly relinquish all my learning.'<sup>11</sup> Why would Owen respond by saying something so apparently outrageous? Owen believed Bunyan not only understood the reality of human suffering, temptations, and struggle in a profound way, but Bunyan also possessed the rare ability to powerfully communicate hope in the midst of these realities. This tinker had lived in the mire, had wrestled with the enemy, and had found his only hope in a vibrant communion with Jesus Christ. You would be amazed at the intimate language of lovers, almost embarrassing to read, which Bunyan sometimes used to describe some of his times of communion with Jesus.<sup>12</sup> This was no dry static relationship with his God, but a loving, vibrant, communion experienced with his whole soul as he wrestled with the Lord through difficult times. This tinker could tell a story that allowed people to know both themselves and God better (cf. Calvin's *duplex cognitio*), and for this gift Owen gave unreserved praise.

The humanity of Christ reminds us that we, like Bunyan, need to be students of both scripture and the human heart. Sure we all know everybody is a sinner, but what does that mean? Not just abstractly but experientially. Let us look to Jesus for a minute. Do you know what the number one general human emotion attributed to Jesus is in the scriptures? Compassion!<sup>13</sup> Why is it that he is consistently portrayed as expressing compassion? Was it simply because he was God and so was never tempted to blow up with anger and frustration? Or was it because Jesus was able to see in people the broken image, and it was painful for him to behold. Here were people suffering from the effects of the fall, both internally and externally. They abused one another, themselves, and ultimately showed alienation from their God. When Jesus looked on them he felt an emotion that moved his innermost soul, causing grief, anger, and sorrow. Jesus models for us the truth that to minister to others we need to incarnate their struggle, entering into their worlds rather than standing safely at a distance in our sterilized environments.

So how do we, like Bunyan, better learn to point broken images to the True image? How do we better reflect the real humanity of Christ in our ministries?

Let me give you some very bad news. The average congregation member's view of God is deeply shaped by the lives of three individuals: their father, their spouse, and their pastor. Just as the attributes of one's earthly father (both good and bad) are often subconsciously ascribed to the Heavenly Father, so the character of one's pastor is often deeply influential for how one views Jesus Christ. This is not universally the case, but it is more common than often acknowledged.

When I was in California this last winter I spent time with a dear Christian gentleman who has been at the same church for the last twenty years or so. We have prayed together on countless occasions over the years and I always noticed that he had a distinctive style in the way he prayed. However, it was not until this Christmas when I joined him at his normal worship service that I had a *deja va* experience. When I heard his pastor pray I heard my friend pray. They approached God with the same demeanor. It was like the strange impression one gets when meeting the father of a close friend. You instantly have an uncanny feeling when you realize that the son carries himself just like his father, has many of the same mannerisms, even using similar expressions. To see one is to see a reflection of the other. In similar fashion, congregation members often model themselves after the pastor in order to model their Lord Jesus Christ. Is this not what Paul encouraged when he said, 'Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ'? (1 Corinthians 11:1). In some way you are the human representation of Jesus to your congregation, like it or not.

When a believer tends to view the pastor as someone who is consistently angry and threatening, so Jesus appears to her to be of similar character. When the pastor seems to communicate that nothing matters and that your actions are not all that significant with God, then Jesus is often viewed as a happy go-lucky buddy. When pastors come and go every couple of years, a common problem in the States, then parishioners tend to question Jesus' commitment to them.

Likewise, when a pastor is consistently compassionate, patient, quick to listen and slow to speak, telling the truth *in love*, shepherding his flock by intimately knowing his flock, then they tend to view Jesus in that way. One of the most effective ways to communicate the true humanity of Jesus Christ is through your life of freedom in Christ. When we find our significance and worth in Christ we tend to demonstrate a loving acceptance of the broken images in the congregation. Such ministers reflect, though far from perfectly, the true humanity of Jesus Christ, our elder brother. He demonstrates to the parishioner that Jesus is approachable and gracious. This is a tall order, in fact an impossible commission, and yet it is the very reason ministers are considered shepherds modeling the true shepherd!

## **A Final Challenge**

Let me end with this final practical challenge: learn afresh to be exegetes of the human heart! Take practical steps to make it a priority to open your eyes and heart to the mass of humanity around you. If you live in London, once a month jump on the tube for a couple hours for the sole purpose of better understanding the human struggle in the city. When I first get onto the tube, especially at rush hour, the people I see annoy me. It is crowded, dirty, smells like urine, and I often end up leaving the station frustrated. Jesus, on the other hand, who looked upon the crowds and was moved with compassion, rides the tube with a different set of eyes. Riding the tube brings one face to face with humanity's loneliness,

addiction, alienation, anger, lust, religious zeal, and countless other expressions of a fallen world. These realities ought to melt rather than harden our hearts.

If you live outside of London use your imagination. Take walks in public areas, occasionally visit a busy park or pub for lunch, with the goal of better understanding various elements of human struggle. Take time to meet with congregation members, but make it your purpose to simply listen rather than offer answers. Help them feel they can become honest with you about their struggles, pain, hopes, and dreams. This may require you to become a bit vulnerable in the process, which is surely a risk, I admit. But the truth is, if ministry is not a risk then it is probably not ministry!

You can only exegete the human heart when you engage the human heart. When you do, you are allowed into people's lives in a unique way, and as such you are able to incarnate their trials, temptations, and suffering. You minister to their broken humanity by pointing them to Jesus, the true humanity. Such deep and humble involvement will inevitably influence your preaching and help you become not only better exegetes of scripture, but also of the human heart.

## References

- <sup>1</sup> Originally given at the BEC Theological Study Conference, March 2000, on 'Theological Anthropology – The Image of God in Man.' I thank the participants for their feedback.
- <sup>2</sup> For an important corrective for how people use the language of immanence and transcendence see Colin E. Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* (Edinburgh, T & T Clark, 1991), 170-71. Immanence (ie, *stressing God's relation*) and transcendence (i.e., *stressing God's otherness*) should not ultimately be viewed as opposites, since they are complimentary rather than contradictory.
- <sup>3</sup> Cameron, (Carlisle, Paternoster, 1989).
- <sup>4</sup> The clearest and most significant statement of this is found in the Chalcedonian definition of 451, which reads: 'We ... teach men to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man, of a reasonable soul and body ... consubstantial with us according to the Manhood; in all things like unto us, without sin.'
- <sup>5</sup> In context Gregory writes: 'If anyone has put his trust in [Jesus] as a Man without a human mind, he is really bereft of mind, and quite unworthy of salvation. For *that which He has not assumed He has not healed*; but that which is united to His Godhead is also saved. If only half Adam fell, then that which Christ assumes and saves may be half also; but if the whole of his nature fell, it must be united to the whole nature of Him that was begotten, and so be saved as a whole. Let them not, then, begrudge us our complete salvation, or clothe the Savior only with bones and nerves and the portraiture of humanity. ... But if He has a soul, and yet is without a mind, how is He man, for man is not a mindless animal,' *Epistolae*, 101, 'To Cledonius the Priest Against Apollinarius,' *NPNF*, Vol. 7. Here Gregory is rejecting Apollinarius' attempt to replace Jesus' human mind with the Logos. Apollinarius made this theological move in order to avoid claiming Christ was sinful, since it was commonly believed that sin resides in the mind. Gregory, however, argued such a move compromised Jesus' true humanity, thus making it impossible for him to secure redemption for humans. See J N D Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (San Francisco, HarperSanFrancisco, 1978), p 289-301.

In recent times there has been great debate – often arising out of how to understand Gregory and other Patristic writers – regarding whether or not it is appropriate to speak of the Son assuming a 'fallen' human nature. Great confusion has arisen from the careless use of the term 'fallen', often giving the impression that Jesus is personally sinful and in need of a redeemer. This debate originally surfaced with the writings of Edward Irving (1792-1834) who posited that Jesus took to himself a 'fallen' human nature. See his *The Doctrine of the*

*Incarnation Opened in Six Sermons* (London, 1828); *The Orthodox and Catholic Doctrine of our Lord's Human Nature* (London, 1830); *The Opinions Circulating Concerning our Lord's Human Nature* (London, 1830), and *Christ's Holiness in Flesh* (Edinburgh, 1831). Other prominent theologians to affirm a similar position include Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 1.2 (Edinburgh, T & T Clark, 1956), esp. 147-159. Cf. CD 2.1, 397-98; T F Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988), 161-68; Kallistos Ware, 'The Humanity of Christ: The Fourth Constantinople Lecture,' in *Anglican and Easter Churches Association* (1985). For an example of a theologian with strong objections to this viewpoint see Donald Macleod, *The Person of Christ*, ed. Gerald Bray, *Contours of Christian Theology* (Downers Grove, IVP, 1998), p 221-230.

A recent work by the Catholic theologian Thomas Weinandy, *In the Likeness of Sinful Flesh: An Essay on the Humanity of Christ* (Edinburgh, T & T Clark, 1993), attempts to give both historical and biblical reasons for affirming that Jesus assumed 'sinful flesh.' Interestingly, in the preface the Protestant theologian Colin Gunton recommends the book for the most part, with an intriguing qualification. 'A theologian of the Reformed tradition might well want to put some of this rather differently, and while welcoming the use made of the theology of the great Edward Irving – surely a modern pioneer of this approach – I would also point to its anticipation in the thought of the Puritan, John Owen,' p x.

While we do not have space to interact with this theological debate here, it seems that Owen's understanding and emphasis on the true humanity of Jesus Christ, combined with his much more careful language, may offer both accurate and creative insights into better appreciating this area of Christology. To date the closest Owen scholarship has come to addressing this contemporary problem in light of Owen's thought comes from Alan J Spence, 'Incarnation and Inspiration: John Owen and the Coherence of Christology' (PhD, King's College London, 1989). In my forthcoming thesis from King's College London I explore different elements of John Owen's anthropology. Chapter 3, which deals with the humanity of Christ, investigates these particular questions in more detail.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Westminster Confession of Faith, 8.2.

<sup>7</sup> Due to the limitations of this study we are unable to develop a fuller treatment of how the two natures relate in one person. For now it is sufficient to note that only by his unique Person can Jesus take on the sins of the world, securing redemption for those who believe.

<sup>8</sup> Charnock, *The Power of God*; cited by William G T Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, Vol. 3: Supplement (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1894), p 394.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Luke 18:24 and Matthew 19:21 which leave this detail out.

<sup>10</sup> When listening for God's 'voice' one is first of all directed to God's Word, but that does not mean that with the 'closing of the canon' the Spirit ceases to stir, challenge, convict, and comfort individual believers in their particular circumstances. We still listen for his 'voice,' though we always test such experiences against the Word of God.

<sup>11</sup> Peter Toon, *God's Statesman: The Life and Work of John Owen: Pastor, Educator, Theologian* (Exeter, The Paternoster Press, 1971), p 162.

<sup>12</sup> E.g., *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners: or, A Brief and faithful relation of the exceeding mercy of God in Christ, to his poor servant, John Bunyan* (London, 1688), p 172: 'Oh! 'tis a goodly thing to be on our knees with Christ in our Arms, before God.' Cf. the intimate spiritual experiences recorded by Samuel Rutherford in his 'Letters,' *passim*.

<sup>13</sup> This argument is made by B B Warfield, 'The Emotional Life of our Lord,' in *The Person and Work of Christ* (Philadelphia, Presbyterian and Reformed, 1950), p 93-145. Warfield's essay remains one of the best treatments on the subject of Jesus' emotions.

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# Medicine for the soul

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Eifion Evans

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One aspect of salvation is the restoration of spiritual health to the soul. It is one meaning of the word salvation, in words used in both Old and New Testaments. Using the health of the body as an analogy, the soul's deliverance from its diseased state because of sin, its health in godliness, and perfect prosperity in glory, may therefore be spoken of as a spiritual healing. This article is an attempt to explore further this understanding, and to draw from it some timely application for today in the realms of public worship and personal experience.

We begin by affirming that the soul's salvation, the true medicine for the recovery of the soul, is Christ alone. Calvin does as much in his *Institutes* by quoting Bernard to this purpose: 'The name of Jesus is not only light, but also food; it is also oil, without which all food of the soul is dry; it is salt, without whose seasoning whatever is set before us is insipid; finally, it is honey in the mouth, melody in the ear, rejoicing in the heart, and at the same time medicine. Every discourse in which His name is not spoken is without savour.' (II. xvi. 1). Christ's propitiation for our sin, Calvin urges in a sermon on Isaiah 53:4-6, is the only ground for the soul's healing: 'we must come to our Lord Jesus Christ, who was willing to be disfigured from the top of His head even to the sole of His feet and was a mass of wounds, flogged with many stripes and crowned with thorns, nailed and fastened to the cross and pierced through the side. This is how we are healed; here is our true medicine, with which we must be content, and which we must embrace whole-heartedly, knowing that otherwise we can never have inward peace, but must always be tormented and tortured to the extreme, unless Jesus Christ comforts us and appeases God's wrath against us.' (1956, p 75)

While the remedy is divinely sourced and vicariously procured, it must be personally appropriated. Listen to Paul Gerhardt in 1651 singing about it in a not so well-known verse of the hymn 'All my heart this night rejoices' (*Lyra Germanica* [1879 edn] Part II pp 14-15) :

Hither come, ye heavy-hearted,  
Who for sin, deep within,  
Long and sore have smarted;  
For the poisoned wounds you're feeling  
Help is near, One is here  
Mighty for their healing.

This divine remedy is even more vividly portrayed by William Williams in a verse from his long poem *Theomemphus*, written in 1764 (Eifion Evans, *Daniel Rowland*, 1985, pp. 377-8; and see *Pursued By God*, 1996, p 91) :

He came to heal the wounded,  
Being wounded in their stead;  
The heir of heaven was pierced  
For those through sin made dead;  
He sucked the awful poison

The serpent gave to me,  
And from that deadly venom  
He died on Calvary.

To this insight there are two practical implications. First, it means that the offer of a remedy can only be effectively made when the disease is exposed. The sinner's grasp of salvation is only convincing when there is an awareness of the danger of sin. Thus the right way of preaching, according to the Puritan George Swinnock, was to 'use the needle of the law to make way for the thread of the Gospel.' (*Works*.vol. i. 1992, p 326) Secondly, there should be a realisation that preaching falls short of its aim if there is no application made directly to the conscience. 'The right way to go to heaven is to sail by hell', said the English Reformer John Bradford. (quoted in Ian Brewer (ed.), *William Perkins*, 1970, pp 26-7.) An understanding of the Gospel remedy, however clear, will not save, unless there is a personal appropriation of the medicine. The Gospel call is to flee from wrath as well as to accept its reality, to seek God's kingdom and righteousness as well as to admire them. In this respect, the Puritans have much to teach us, as James I Packer comments, 'Truths obeyed, said the Puritans, will *heal*... All Christians need Scripture truth as medicine for their souls at every stage, and the making and accepting of applications is the administering and swallowing of it.' (*Among God's Giants*, 1991, p 85.)

So much for the soul's initial healing; what of its continued health? Inner corruption, outward trials, the opposition of the devil, the deceitfulness of this world are all injurious to the soul's health. 'Let every [one] of us mark to what vice he is inclined,' says John Calvin, 'that he may seek the remedy of it, as some be given to one affection, and some to another. And so when we once know our diseases, let us apply the fit medicine unto them. In God's Word we shall find enough of them wherewith to heal and cure us, so we be willing to use the good that is offered us there.' (Sermon on Deuteronomy 11:16-21, 1987, 473.b.22,ff.) In recommending a thorough acquaintance with the Psalms, Calvin urges in his 'Preface' that 'it is by perusing these inspired compositions, that men will be most effectually awakened to a sense of their maladies, and, at the same time, instructed in seeking remedies for their cure.'

For careful, godly living much depends on knowing our own flawed hearts, as well as on God's faithful dealings with His people. In this respect, Reformed and Puritan preachers exercised a pastoral as well as a prophetic ministry though their pulpit labours. Even a cursory glance at Puritan sermons will provide a picture of thorough, soul-searching, conscience-disturbing 'uses', 'exhortations', and 'applications'. God's people are to be brought by such means to an ever deeper work of grace in their hearts, to closer communion with God, to nearer resemblance to Christ. Another feature of the Puritan period was its casuistry, the method of resolving cases of conscience, for the same purpose. The most familiar and comprehensive example of this is Richard Baxter's *Christian Directory*.

The Methodists took this ministry a step further by their 'fellowship meetings', believing that they should be soul-physicians as well as teachers. Their close examination of the soul's state, and expertise in prescribing the appropriate remedy is illustrated by William Williams's description of the ideal counsellor. He is one who 'perceives what particular sin it is that keeps the man away from God; he can seek out those dark dens, where lurk sin and Satan, fleshly lusts and the lust of the world and its

idols. In the same way as a fisherman knows where the fish are, and the mole-catcher the runs of the moles, and the fowler where to find the partridge, so does the expert counsellor recognize the cause of every fall, so does he recognize the secret ways of the temptations of the world and of the flesh, and know of all the twists and turns of human nature.' (*The Experience Meeting*, translated by Mrs Lloyd-Jones, 1973, p 32.) By such means were they brought to strive for and expect an intimate, lively walk with God, expressed by Charles Wesley in the hymn 'Thou hidden source of calm repose':

Jesus, my all in all Thou art,  
My rest in toil, my ease in pain,  
The medicine of my broken heart,  
In war my peace, in loss my gain;  
My smile beneath the tyrant's frown,  
In shame my glory and my crown.

How starkly contrasting is such profound piety to what pass today as quick remedies for the ailments of believers! It is true that biblical methods and biblical remedies are not easily mastered or practiced. But for those who truly believe in the sufficiency and effectiveness of God's Word written, other, lesser remedies are recognised as harmful and spurious substitutes.

God's therapeutic activity for His people's health, however, is not confined to preaching and pastoral counsel. The great realm of providence is also the theatre of His sovereign, healing recovery of His people, as Job 5:18 makes clear: 'He bruises, but He binds up; He wounds, but His hands make whole.' On this passage Calvin comments: 'when we have found how our nature is inclined to all evil, let us confess ourselves to have need that God should use some sharp punishment to purge us withal, as we see physicians do, who now and then put some poison in medicines, after that they see the maladies to be great and deep-rooted.' (Sermons, 1993, 96.a.56) Preaching on Job 33:18-25, he says,

... let us learn to bear our afflictions patiently, since we see that they serve us for medicines and salves... let us not think it strange that God should increase His stripes. If He see that we cannot be won, but that there is such a sturdyness in us as He must be fain to correct us a long while, it behoveth Him to work more roughly. Like as when a disease is rooted, peradventure the diseased person will think himself to be rid of it as soon as he hath taken some syrup or some pill, or hath been let blood... but the root of the disease is not yet plucked up and therefore he must be fain to take some very harsh and bitter medicines, and be kept to a diet, and abide under the Physician's hand a month or two, yea or a whole year. Even after some manner must God purge us by diverse remedies and make it long ere he cure us, because this vice of pride is rooted overdeeply in us, and is entered even into the marrow of our bones, so that all is infected, and there is no soundness in us, but all is corrupted till God renew it again. (588.a.7; 589.a.48,ff.)

Such settled conviction of the therapeutic effect of adversity stem from an unquestioned belief in a heavenly Father's omniscience and sovereign disposal of all things for the good of His people. Some afflictions are warnings from God, intended to bring His child to submission, as Calvin observes in his sermon on Deuteronomy 31:17,ff. (1092.b.22,ff.): 'it is God's hand that smiteth us...if men could skill to profit

themselves by the afflictions that are sent them, they be all of them as medicines, and God's intent is to show Himself a father by warning them after that manner.' Others are Satan's buffetings, under God's control and for His sanctifying purpose in the believer's life: 'So then, when God giveth Satan leave to tempt faithful ones: ordinarily it is to make them to be served therewith as with medicine. And herein we see God's marvellous goodness, how He turneth the evil into good. For what can Satan bring but rank poison and vermin...? We see then how God turneth the evil into good, when He maketh all Satan's stings to serve as medicines, whereby He purgeth us of the vices that lie hid in us.' (John Calvin's sermon on Job 1:9-12, 23.a.3,ff., 47.) Thomas Manton summarises such dealings by saying that God's 'chastisements are purgative medicines, to prevent or cure some spiritual disease.' (Sermon on Psalm 119:50, vol. i, 1990, p. 489.) In the believer's daily experience of trial and triumph, of storm and sunshine, God's medicine is not always self-evident, and he constantly needs to have faith quickened and exercised upon the unchangeableness of God.

But God's providence is distinguishing as well as mysterious, as Samuel Bolton reminds his readers in *The True Bounds of Christian Freedom*, (1964, p. 25): 'Afflictions upon wicked men are penal, a part of the curse; there is nothing medicinal in them; they are the effects of vindictive justice and not of Fatherly mercy. But afflictions which come upon the godly are medicinal in purpose, and are intended to cure them of sin.' They are also distinguishing when applied to God's people, witness the section titled 'The cross as medicine' in Calvin's *Institutes* [in the sense of cross-bearing]: '... the Lord himself, according as He sees it expedient, comforts us and subjects and restrains our unrestrained flesh with the remedy of the cross. And this He does in various ways, in accordance with what is healthful for each man. For not all of us suffer in equal degree from the same diseases, or, on that account, need the same harsh cure. From this it is to be seen that some are tried by one kind of cross, others by another. But since the heavenly physician treats some more gently but cleanses others by harsher remedies, while he wills to provide for the health of all, yet he leaves no one free and untouched, because he knows that all, to a man, are diseased.' (III.viii.5.) With this in mind, even brotherly reproof can be borne as beneficial, as George Whitefield's future wife says to Howel Harris, 'Smite home, for I find that the bitterest physic makes the safest cure.' (*Presbyterian Church of Wales Historical Journal*, Manuscript Supplement, ii.70 [March 1952]). For the believer, it is Christ's endurance of suffering which motivates his submission under adversity. John Owen, in a chapter on 'The filth of sin purged by the Spirit and blood of Christ', can say that the 'tree of the cross being cast into the waters of affliction hath rendered them wholesome and medicinal.' (*Works*, vol. iii, 1988, p 447.)

With such assurance of God's unremitting determination to conform us to the image of His Son in holiness, the believer can sing with sincerity and conviction John Newton's hymn, 'Begone, unbelief':

Since all that I meet  
 Shall work for my good.  
 The bitter is sweet  
 The medicine is food;  
 Though painful at present  
 'Twill cease before long;

And then, O how pleasant  
The conqueror's song.

Spurgeon speaks for us, too, in his comments on Psalm 91:9-10 (*The Treasury of David*): 'It is impossible that any ill should happen to the man who is beloved of the Lord; the most crushing calamities can only shorten his journey and hasten him to his reward. Ill to him is no ill, but only good in a mysterious form. Losses enrich him, sickness is his medicine, reproach is his honour, death is his gain.' And the subjective experience of a child of God finds expression in the hymn, 'Whate'er my God ordains is right' by Samuel Rodigast:

Whate'er my God ordains is right,  
He taketh thought for me;  
The cup that my Physician gives  
No poisoned draught can be,  
But medicine due; For God is true,  
And on that changeless truth I build,  
And all my heart with hope is filled.

(*Lyra Germanica*, 1879, Pt II. pp. 196-7.)

John Bradford, the English Reformer and martyr, shall have the last word for us on the matter, advising us 'Against the fear of death', the last enemy: 'According to this ... do thou judge of death, and thou shalt thus be not afraid of it, but desire it as a most wholesome medicine, and a friendly messenger of the Lord's justice and mercy.' (*Writings*, vol. i, 1979, p. 345.)

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*Editor's Notes continued from page 12*

the Sovereignty of Grace in the Lives of Flawed Saints', that is so helpful for those of us in pastoral ministry. How we need reminding that in spite of faults and failings our sovereign God can use us for his glory. **James McGoldrick's** biography of Abraham Kuyper, *God's Renaissance Man* (Evangelical Press 2000), reminds us of one man's vision of seeing God glorified in every area of life. While containing much about Kuyper's life this book is really less a biography and more an exposition of Kuyper's Reformed Christian theology and world-view. McGoldrick is not uncritical of some points in Kuyper's theology, but nevertheless helpfully shows us the breadth, depth and relevance of his thinking for Christians today. This is a very good introduction to this remarkable Christian. Finally, **Geraint Fielder's** *Grace, Grit and Gumption* (Bryntirion 2000) is a delightful and moving account of the lives and ministries of John Pugh and Frank and Seth Joshua in late 19th and early 20th century Wales. The title is taken from a letter by Seth Joshua and summarises the spirit of these men and what is needed in preachers today. This book gives us an insight into the Welsh Revival, but even more is a reminder of what God can do in urban areas. Our culture is today even more secularised than the industrialised towns of South Wales in 1905, but the God of Pugh and the Joshua brothers is our God and our prayer is that he would pour out his Spirit on the dry ground of 21st century Britain. The those pastors who have gone out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with them.

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# The Image of God in Man: A Report of the BEC Theological Study Conference, 20-22 March 2000

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Paul Brown

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**B**EC Theological Study conferences are not unique, but they have features which set them apart from other conferences. They start and end with lunch, on Monday and Wednesday, but, except for meals and sleep, there is little time for any activity apart from discussion, the longest sessions lasting for two hours. The papers are distributed beforehand enabling the conferees to familiarise themselves with them and prepare questions and comments. In the discussions people inevitably think aloud, which sometimes makes for interesting cut and thrust in debate, but not everyone would want their contributions to be held against them later! A great responsibility falls on the shoulders of the chairman, Mark Johnston, which he carries out with considerable wisdom and aplomb.

**The first paper** was introduced by Ian Hamilton. This was a historical survey of the doctrine, beginning with an introduction which defined terms and focused on the interpretation and implications of Genesis 1:26-27. This paper established that it was more accurate to speak of man as the image of God: *God's image is not located somewhere in man; man, in all that he is, is God's image*. The conference seemed to be agreed that this was the correct way to look at the image. Ian spelled out the importance and relevance of this doctrine: *No biblical truth more confronts and challenges the naturalistic presuppositions and amoral values of our modern (or post-modern) world. It challenges the perceived autonomous character of man; it establishes an infallible bulwark against the trampling on and despising of the poor, the dispossessed, the infirm and the unborn; it speaks hope to the lonely; it challenges the rampant individualism that scars our world (and the Church); it condemns racism and anti-Semitism; and it clarifies the essential equality and dignity of men and women*. Discussion included the way this subject relates to the creation/theistic evolution debate (a point taken up in the second paper) and the importance of the corporate life of the church revealing the image of God, 'the reality of God triune'. The conclusion of the paper raised a problem that was to underlie a great deal of the discussion, *How then are we to take seriously the fact of total depravity and man continuing to be in the image of God?* All agreed that both facts must be taken seriously, but some seemed to want to stress the one, and some the other.

**Paper two** was introduced by Randal Macauley, *Twentieth Century Developments in the Discussion of the imago dei*. Not surprisingly this was set against the background of a culture in which man has lost all sense of his identity as man: *For to relinquish a world-view which begins with the God of the Bible and concludes with salvation through his Son is not simply to relinquish 'religion', it is to forfeit meaningful identity as man*. Randal pointed out that at the end of the nineteenth century this was not recognized as it should have been and since then evangelicals have consistently overlooked it: *Had evangelicals understood this they would have been less defensive... They would have regained the intellectual high ground by compelling their opponents to face 'the unflinching consistency' of their own presuppositions: not only is God obliterated by the new 'science', so also is mankind*. There was an interesting quotation from Moises Silva referring to biblical anthropomorphisms: *The notion that God*

*accommodates to our imperfect human understanding contains an element of truth, to be sure, but perhaps we are approaching the issue from the wrong end. Our use of this term reflects our human-centred perspective. Indeed, it is not altogether far-fetched to say that descriptions of what we are and do should be termed 'theomorphisms'! ... our human qualities are themselves but a reflection of God's person and attributes ... the real question is not 'How can God speak (since he does not have a body)?' but 'How can we speak?' The answer to this is: we are made in the image of a God who speaks.* This insight proved useful later in the conference. Ranald spoke of the problem posed by pietism and the way this had kept evangelicals from critiquing culture, and this was illustrated in the discussion which centred around evangelism and apologetics. There seemed to be some danger of developing an either/or. Should we be out to persuade by argument, or do we rely on preaching? And where does the Holy Spirit come into the picture? Somewhere there is a balance which we found hard to attain.

Geoff Thomas presented *The imago dei and the Fall*. This paper was illuminated by some striking illustrations. He began by demonstrating that all men today are in the image of God and that God continues to create every man in his image. He then moved on to show that as a result of the fall the image of God is corrupted in all men. He very ably pictured the contradiction that is man in sin; man is like a broken mirror, so the image it reflects is also broken. Nevertheless some questions seemed unanswered. If rationality is an aspect of the image, is that rationality itself damaged by sin, or is it that rationality is used for sinful ends – to deny the existence of the very God whose image is borne, for instance? To put it another way, what is inalienable and what has become fractured? Sin has affected the whole person, yet the image is still seen, sometimes strikingly, in unbelievers. One suggestion from the last paper which was not taken up in discussion was this, *Is it true to say that it is God's common grace which preserves the remnants of his image in human beings?*

Because of the illness of Bill James, Kelly Kapic stepped in at a comparatively late stage to provide the fourth paper, *The imago dei in Redemption*. This was a draft of a chapter of his thesis, which, while it fitted into the overall structure of the conference, in certain respects went beyond the conference remit. Kelly introduced the word *anthroposensitivity*: *For want of a better term, 'anthroposensitivity' signifies how Owen's anthropological methodology always kept his reader's longing heart for God at the front of his mind. For him, to speak of human being after the fall, void of the painful reality of existence in a sinful and dying world, neither satisfies the soul nor correctly presents true theology – which for Owen are directly linked.* This was a valuable reminder that all true theology should be anthroposensitive (this also, presumably, arises from man being made in God's image).

Because man is God's image, incarnation is possible, and it is only in the incarnate Jesus Christ that *the complete image and perfect representation of the Divine Being and excellencies* are found. The incarnation is the necessary foundation for redemption – *on the cross the unique theandric Jesus can now take on the sin of the world* – and thus the restoration of the image in those who are in Christ. In opening up his paper Kelly reflected on the humanity of Christ, something which evangelicals have neglected. He pointed out that many people in evangelical churches have no difficulty with Jesus as God, but they do struggle with him as human. He asked whether Jesus knew the human heart as God, or as a person in relationships with others. For example, how did Jesus know the hearts of the Pharisees? Was it by observation? Owen asserts the sinlessness of Jesus as human, but he also says, *he had the heart of a man, the affections of a man, and that in the highest degree of sense and tenderness. Whatever sufferings the soul of a man may be brought under, by grief, sorrow, shame, fear,*

*pain, danger, loss, by any afflictive passions within or impressions of force from without, he underwent, he felt it all.*

The fifth paper, by Alex MacDonald, brought us to practical application, *the imago dei in ethics and Mission*. The doctrine of the image of God gives a real basis for ethics. *Why is man a being that has ethical concepts, a moral sense, an appreciation of right and wrong?... We are creatures of a different order of being from animals. As God is rational and moral, so we were created rational and moral, capable of understanding and relating to moral commands.* Application was made to the sanctity of human life, ecology, equality and community. The final area of application was the consequences for mission. The concluding point here was the worth and dignity of the individual human being: *No matter how way-out or depraved or disabled or down and out people may be, they still have a worth and dignity as those who are the image of God. Jesus' story of the lost coin in Luke 15 illustrates this. The coin was really lost. It may have been covered in grime and dust. It may have been scratched and chipped. But it still retained its intrinsic value. It was no use to the woman it belonged to as long as it was lost, but it still did not cease to be a coin.*

Discussion ranged far and wide. What about cremation (most seemed to be against)? *in vitro* fertilisation and cloning? the just war? capital punishment? From marriage, singleness and equality the discussion moved to the church as the community where people of every sort and from every background should be welcome. The practical problems this presents were not overlooked, but here is the ideal which Scripture sets before us.

The final paper followed the usual pattern of summing up the others (in this case only three of them), and highlighting some of the issues they raise. This was in the hands of Stephen Rees and he also followed the tradition of reflecting (during the night!) on the whole conference up to that point and giving an almost *ad lib* address of some power on the doctrine of the Trinity. After setting out points of agreement, he elaborated on the importance of theomorphisms, giving several examples. His final section took up some hobby-horses (his word). He pointed out the importance of imitating God: *Paul appeals to the Ephesian Christians that they should consciously imitate God in his actions and attitudes. God's image-bearers are God's children, sharing the family likeness. And as devoted children, they are consciously to imitate their Father. It is as they imitate God that his image is renewed in them.* More controversially he considered the image of God and cultural confrontation. His final point related the *imago dei* to the doctrine of hell. Ian Hamilton had quoted John Murray, ... *it is the fact that man is in the image of God that constitutes the unspeakable horror of eternal perdition*. Stephen, however, argued that in hell the image is finally and completely lost, and thus also that those there have lost their humanity. *Evangelicals have sometimes objected that such a position mitigates the horrors of hell. To myself, the contrary appears to be true.* How far this view carried weight with the conference members is difficult to tell.

We finished, however, with the Trinity. Have we clearly understood the doctrine of God as triune; how many of us have an intellectually clear and emotionally vibrant doctrine of the trinity? This is crucial for man is to mirror the trinitarianism of God. We were not entirely agreed even about the trinity. Do we stick with the Nicene formulation or incorporate the refinements of Calvin and the Reformation? But it was a fine note to end on. The conference was tiring, but invigorating. The relevance of clear and accurate theology to modern life and witness was fully exhibited.

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# Annual New Testament Literature Survey (2000)

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Alistair I Wilson

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## Introduction

The year 1999/2000 has seen some excellent material published in the field of New Testament studies. I will make some brief comments on a selection of the material in this article. As with all reading, I urge readers to read any and all of the following works critically.

## Commentaries

After a pause in the publication schedule, the 'Pillar' series of commentaries from IVP has seen three new additions.<sup>1</sup> PT O'Brien has written on Ephesians, D Moo on James and C Kruse on the Johannine epistles. O'Brien's commentary is notable in several respects. Firstly it completes a trilogy of commentaries by the author on the 'prison epistles', O'Brien's previous commentaries on Colossians and Philemon (Word Biblical Commentary) and Philippians (New International Greek Testament Commentary) already having been warmly received. Secondly, it provides a contemporary and informed defence of Pauline authorship of Ephesians written by an able scholar who has maintained a consistent commitment to informed conservative exegesis in his scholarship. Moo has already written on James in the *Tyndale* series. In this new commentary he has been allowed to devote twice the amount of space to his exegesis, which has allowed him to argue clearly for his decisions and to update his engagement with secondary literature so that he now interacts with the important recent commentaries by Johnson and Martin. The commentary is non-technical and includes some brief but helpful comments on application. Kruse's introduction is notable for his extensive use of the early church fathers to reconstruct the historical context of the letters and to establish Johannine authorship of the letters. All three commentaries provide clear and helpful discussion of the biblical text from a position of confidence in its authority as Scripture.

The IVP Commentary series is further enhanced with a volume on *John* by R Whitacre. This series is generally pitched at a somewhat more academic level than the *Bible Speaks Today* series, but with more practical application than is usually found in the *Tyndale* commentaries. This particular volume is a substantial exposition of John, acquaint with recent secondary literature, but focussed on the theological message of the document. It will prove useful to preachers, though students will need to augment it with other more detailed commentaries.

Also on John, and essentially an extended introduction to John's Gospel, is the revised edition of S Smalley's *John – Evangelist & Interpreter*.<sup>2</sup> Smalley has enhanced his already valuable survey from 1978 with a heightened emphasis on the literary qualities of John's work. This book offers a helpful balance of discussion of the contemporary debates and discussion of the features of John's text. It will continue to aid interpreters in its new form.

Crossway continue to publish volumes in their 'Crossway Classic Commentaries' series. Calvin on *1 & 2 Thessalonians* will need no additional commendation to readers of this journal. It is to be hoped that this new edition will introduce new readers to Calvin's fine exegetical work, but at £9.99 for a slim paperback of 110 pages, it is rather expensive, and so those who do not possess the excellent series of hardback volumes published by Eerdmans may be well advised to look out for second-hand copies. For the same price, you can have twice the number of pages in *Jude* by Thomas Manton. This commentary is much more appropriate for devotional reading than exegetical work, but will no doubt serve a valuable purpose in that role.

The 'Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture' series is a valuable new venture intended to bring the voice of the early church fathers into contemporary exegesis of Scripture. My experience of this fledgling series has been with the volume on Mark,<sup>3</sup> although several other volumes, including one on the Corinthian letters, have been published more recently. Each verse of the scriptural document is glossed with selected quotations from a variety of ancient authors. These volumes will not replace the fundamental tools of exegesis, but they offer a rich resource for adding theological depth to exegetical study, and may prove to be an ideal entry point to the writings of the church fathers for those who are as yet unfamiliar with them. However, since many of the citations are brief, there is a real risk of an author's words being read out of context. The reader will gain most from this series if he or she bears in mind its limitations, and perhaps seeks some engagement with the full text of some of the Fathers. An alternative route into an appreciation of the early church fathers is offered by a devotional volume, *Day By Day With the Early Church Fathers*.<sup>4</sup> While the readings in this volume are even more detached from their context, they may still introduce readers to the theological riches in these writings. A much more intensive engagement with one of the Fathers, Augustine, is offered by my colleague Nick Needham in his recent volume, *The Triumph of Grace*.<sup>5</sup>

The new commentary on Hebrews in Sheffield Academic Press's 'Readings' series has a true claim to distinctiveness.<sup>6</sup> Its author is not a Professor of Hebrews but a Professor of *Hebrew* – the Regius Professor of Hebrew at the University of Cambridge, Robert P. Gordon. Gordon writes concisely and with theological sensitivity. The result is a brief commentary which is non-technical (though there are occasional awkward technical terms) and readable, written by one who appreciates more than most the significance of the Old Testament.

The *Interpretation* series of commentaries claims to be designed 'for teaching and preaching'. Richard B Hays' addition to this series on *First Corinthians*<sup>7</sup> is worthy of the preacher's attention. Hays has been steadily building a reputation as a sensitive and constructive interpreter of Scripture, and much of his work on Paul's use of the OT and on ethics comes together in this very readable commentary. Each exegetical section concludes with 'Reflections for Teachers and Preachers'. These reflect serious consideration both of Paul's thought and of the modern world and should stimulate the preacher to think even if he comes to different conclusions from Hays. Particularly good examples of Hays' robust theological and ethical thinking are found in the 'Reflections' on 1 Corinthians 7 (on male-female relationships) and on 1 Corinthians 15 (on the resurrection). I do not commend all of Hays' views but I warmly commend his commentary as an aid to good biblical interpretation.

The new ICC commentary by I Howard Marshall on *The Pastoral Epistles*<sup>8</sup> has been long-awaited and its appearance is to be welcomed. No doubt the first question in the minds of many will be 'What does he think about authorship?' It is true that this is an important subject, and it is true that Marshall takes a position that is somewhat distanced from traditional Pauline authorship (though he seeks to preserve strong continuity with Paul in his argument). However, although many readers may be uncomfortable with Marshall's conclusions, it would be deeply unjust to dismiss this commentary on this point alone. This is a rich exegetical and theological exposition, which deals with exegetical issues in such a way that the reader can gain a clear understanding of the arguments for and against a given view. The discussion may be too exhaustive for preachers under pressure in any given week, but this commentary will provide a reference tool on difficult issues when other brief books do not satisfy. Eleven excursuses deal in a more focussed manner with significant theological issues in the Pastoral Epistles such as 'Christology and the concept of "epiphany"'. Competence in Greek is required in order to gain full benefit from this commentary.

In mentioning one commentary of mammoth proportions, it is worth noting that readers who have appreciated previous volumes in the 'New International Greek Testament Commentary' series will want to look out for the substantial volume on 1 Corinthians by Anthony Thiselton due for imminent publication.

## Monographs

First of all in this category, I should mention additions to two valuable series published by Baker. The 'Encountering' series already includes excellent introductory volumes on both the Old Testament<sup>9</sup> and the New Testament.<sup>10</sup> To these has been added a volume on John's Gospel by AJ Köstenberger, who has already written or translated several books.<sup>11</sup> This book is presented in the form of a textbook, but it is written with clarity in language that conveys both learning and Christian conviction. While the working pastor may not find this volume as immediately accessible as a traditional commentary, careful reading of Köstenberger's work will provide a literary and theological perspective on the whole gospel that will enrich a teaching ministry.

At a completely different level are the dissertations by evangelical scholars Brian Rosner (*Paul, Scripture and Ethics*) and David Crump (*Jesus the Intercessor*).<sup>12</sup> Though originally published some years ago in very expensive hardback editions by European publishers, these books have now been republished in affordable paperback editions in Baker's 'Biblical Studies Library' series. While they exhibit all the drawbacks of a technical dissertation (frequent quotations in Hebrew, Greek and German, constant reference to inaccessible scholarly literature) they also exhibit great exegetical strengths, and are well worth the effort for the persevering reader who possesses the necessary linguistic skills. Look out for further important volumes in this promising series, including the recently published *Blasphemy and Exaltation in Judaism* by D Bock,<sup>13</sup> who seeks to provide background information to Jesus' declaration in Mark 14:62 and the resultant response of the high priest.

John D Harvey's book, *Listening to the Text*, is the first volume in a projected series to be published under the auspices of the Evangelical Theological Society.<sup>14</sup> This volume is a published dissertation and is *full* of Greek. No concessions are made for the reader without Greek. If you don't read Greek, you will find this book utterly incomprehensible! If on the other hand, you do have Greek Harvey provides a useful,

if demanding, discussion of features characteristic of oral rhetoric which he finds in the Pauline letters.

Paul is the focus of the large new volume from Robert L Reymond, *Paul, Missionary Theologian*.<sup>15</sup> The book is the fruit of many years of teaching, and it treats the letters of Paul and the accounts of Acts both thoroughly and with reverence. The first part of the book deals with Paul's life and travels, while the second part expounds the key elements of Paul's 'mission theology'. Sometimes the original lecture format shows itself clearly, leading to lists with numerous headings and very brief discussions, but overall this book provides a wealth of material in (generally) accessible form. (Greek text is used often, but it is normally translated in the main body of the text.)

Frank Thielman has contributed *The Law and the New Testament: The Question of Continuity to Herder's 'Companions to the New Testament'* series. Those who are familiar with Thielman's previous volume on Paul and the Law will not want to miss this more wide ranging study.

Also tracing a theme through the NT scriptures is *The Promise of the Father* by Marianne Meye Thompson.<sup>16</sup> Set against the backdrop of contemporary feminist challenges to the use of 'Father' as a designation for God, this is a careful study of the biblical material which presents God as father, either explicitly or by implication. Along the way, Thompson reconsiders Joachim Jeremias' famous views on Jesus' use of the Aramaic term *abba* and helpfully challenges the view that the concept of God taught by Jesus and developed in the NT is fundamentally different from that of the OT.

*Serve the Community of the Church*, subtitled 'Christians as Leaders and Ministers' sounds as if it should be required reading for every serving minister.<sup>17</sup> The news that this volume, written by Andrew D Clarke, comes within a series entitled 'First-Century Christians in the Graeco-Roman World' will no doubt crush the sense of expectation in some readers, but this would be a very unfortunate response. While the first six chapters do indeed focus primarily on background studies, these studies allow the modern reader to better understand important terms (for example, *ekklesia*) and patterns of behaviour in secular and religious leadership. The remaining chapters then interpret the Pauline letters in the light of the background studies, indicating the way in which Paul rejected authoritarian leadership in favour of presenting himself as a servant.

In my review of New Testament literature for 1999, I drew attention to several volumes from the 'New Studies in Biblical Theology' series.<sup>18</sup> The latest volume on justification, entitled *Christ, Our Righteousness*,<sup>19</sup> and written by Mark Seifrid of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, USA is bound to be of great interest to leaders in the church. Seifrid works carefully through substantial portions of Paul's letters, particularly Romans, interacting with important recent scholarship from Germany and from the so-called 'new perspective' on Paul.

At the slim end of the monograph scale come two contributions to the 'Didsbury Lecture Series' which includes volumes of published lectures by Professors FF Bruce, IH Marshall, JDG Dunn and MD Hooker among others. Professor Richard Bauckham of the University of St Andrews gave the 1996 lectures, which have been published under the provocative title, *God Crucified*.<sup>20</sup> This brief (79 pages) book is significant out of all proportion to its size, presenting in condensed form an important argument for understanding early Christology which Bauckham intends to develop in a longer volume. The 1999 Didsbury Lectures were given by Professor Larry Hurtado of the

University of Edinburgh. They have been printed as *At the Origins of Christian Worship*.<sup>21</sup> In many ways, Hurtado's book complements that of Bauckham as they both seek to establish the way in which Jesus was acknowledged to be worthy of worship. Both are historical studies, though Hurtado's book concludes with some reflections on worship in the contemporary church.

It is barely conceivable that an annual review of NT literature would fail to include a volume by Ben Witherington, III. True to form, Witherington has recently published *Jesus the Seer*, a study of prophecy from its earliest expressions in the Ancient Near East right through the canonical literature of the Old and New Testaments, Jewish literature such as I Enoch and the Dead Sea Scrolls and on to the Montanist movement in early Christianity. This is an absorbing study which is written with flair and supreme confidence in handling the diverse materials.

Taking a broad sweep through the history of the primitive church, while maintaining a decidedly theological perspective, Paul Barnett has written an excellent volume entitled *Jesus and the Rise of Early Christianity*.<sup>22</sup> An excellent text for gaining proper perspective on the historical development of the early Christian community.

### **Volumes of Essays**

Volumes of essays are frequently among the most interesting and yet the most disjointed of books, providing the reader with a rich menu of essays which probably relate to each other only very loosely. Among the most interesting are so-called *Festschriften* or celebratory volumes presented to distinguished scholars at particular milestones in their lives.

One such *Festschrift*, which does not suffer from the typical disjointed characteristics, is *Romans and the People of God*,<sup>23</sup> presented to Professor Gordon Fee on the occasion of his sixty-fifth birthday. Fee's name has become synonymous with respectful exegesis of Paul, and his works will bring benefit to the careful reader, even if he or she disagrees with some of Fee's views. This volume includes exegetical, theological and pastoral essays on Romans, largely, though not exclusively, by evangelical colleagues and former students of Fee. It has a balanced feel and will provide stimulating material to augment the standard commentaries for those who preach and teach from Romans.

As the title suggests, *Baptism, the New Testament and the Church* attempts to discuss an issue of great pastoral significance with reference to both pastoral ministry and the academic study of the New Testament. Presented to REO White, formerly Principal of the Scottish Baptist College in Glasgow, there is not surprisingly a substantial representation of contributors from the 'credobaptist' perspective. However, there is sufficient diversity in this volume to interest readers regardless of their convictions regarding baptism, and there is certainly the potential for richer understanding of the debate. In addition to a biographical sketch of the honouree, there are many interesting articles on biblical material by evangelical scholars such as John Nolland (on baptism in Matthew's gospel), Stanley Porter (on the translation of Mark 1:4), Joel Green (on baptism in Luke-Acts) and Matthew Brook O'Donnell (who provides a fascinating study of 1 Corinthians 12:13 which develops from a comparison of the views of John Stott and Martyn Lloyd-Jones on 'baptism in the Spirit'). In addition there are several excellent historical essays such as those by David Wright on 'Infant Dedication in the Early Church' and Geoffrey Bromiley on 'Baptism in the

Reformed Confessions and Catechisms'. Though several essays demand competence in Greek and or Hebrew, this volume will prove to be enjoyable and rewarding for pastors who wrestle with the exegetical, theological and pastoral issues relating to this subject.<sup>24</sup>

A third *Festschrift* of note has been published in honour of Jack Dean Kingsbury. *Who Do You Say That I Am? Essays on Christology*<sup>25</sup> is a collection of 17 essays by scholars such as Ben Witherington, III, Paul J Achtemeier and CK Barrett, primarily on the Christology of the NT documents. However, there are also some less predictable titles such as 'Christology and the Old Testament' and essays on the significance of NT Christology for Systematic Theology, for Pastoral Ministry and for Preaching. While many of the contributors are not evangelicals, there is a generally constructive approach to the biblical texts and the essays are written with a view to bringing benefit to the church as well as to the academy.

Any teacher, minister or serious student of theology who has not heard of NT Wright's exceptional volume, *Jesus and the Victory of God*<sup>26</sup> has clearly been on a different theological planet. Anyone who has not read and interacted with this book has missed a rich opportunity to learn, even if in disagreement. Such is the significance of this book that a volume of essays has been produced with the sole purpose of interacting with Wright's book. (Try to think of the last time *that* happened.) Thus, *Jesus and the Restoration of Israel*<sup>27</sup> draws together a group of distinguished scholars who evaluate Wright's work from a variety of angles and from varying degrees of sympathy. This book will be of limited value to those who have not read Wright first and indeed it would probably be unfair to Wright to hear the criticisms of his work before letting him speak for himself. However, for those who have read his book, this volume provides an opportunity to reflect on some of the important issues that are raised by Wright such as the significance of Jesus' death, the interpretation of 'apocalyptic' language in the gospels and Jesus' predictions about the future.

The high standard of the McMaster New Testament Studies series is continued by *The Challenge of Jesus' Parables*.<sup>28</sup> Containing clearly written essays on both the form and content of Jesus' parables, this book will provide stimulating material for teachers and preachers, as well as those who have not had formal theological training.

*The New Testament Today*<sup>29</sup> is a collection of short essays aimed at students or busy pastors who want to be aware of the current trends in NT scholarship. This is both its strength and its drawback. It certainly provides a representative selection of essays on all the NT literature written by scholars who are recognised as experts in their respective fields (such as James Dunn on Paul and Donald Hagner on Matthew). Some of the essays have good bibliographical information also. However, there is a tendency to give attention to trends in scholarship rather than to the biblical documents themselves, so that the title is somewhat misleading. While some of the authors are evangelicals or sympathetic to evangelical scholarship, others are not. This book will probably be of most use to the theological student who requires an orientation to the diverse world of contemporary NT scholarship.

*Between Two Horizons*<sup>30</sup> is boldly subtitled 'Spanning New Testament Studies and Systematic Theology'. Those who consider themselves advocates of the latter discipline may be somewhat sceptical of the success of the endeavour in the light of the fact that eight of the nine contributors are professional biblical scholars. In fact, the

theme of the volume is really hermeneutics, which of course remains a crucial issue for those who are charged with teaching the people of God. This book serves as an introduction to the forthcoming 'Two Horizons Commentary' series which has the potential to encourage fruitful interaction between New Testament studies and Systematic Theology. Whether it is able to realise that potential remains to be seen when the first volumes come off the press.

## Miscellaneous

There is really no way suitably to class *Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up?*,<sup>31</sup> which is accurately subtitled as 'A debate between William Lane Craig and John Dominic Crossan'. This book is essentially a transcript of a debate between the evangelical scholar and apologist William Lane Craig and the most celebrated representative of the American 'Jesus Seminar', John Dominic Crossan. Craig is a remarkable combination of brilliant academic and gifted apologist. It is the latter gift that comes through most clearly in this volume. Crossan is also widely regarded as a gifted communicator and so the scene is set for an illuminating exchange. At times readers will feel that the 'performance' setting leads to a measure of overstatement in views, and the chairman of the debate is rather intrusive. Readers will also, almost certainly, think of arguments that they would have presented had they been in the debate. However this book provides a useful and accessible insight into the fundamental points of contention between orthodox scholarship and 'the Jesus Seminar' as expressed by representatives of each position.

*The Historical Jesus Quest*<sup>32</sup> is a reader which includes short excerpts from some of the major figures in the history of study of Jesus including Reimarus, Strauss, Schweitzer and Bultmann. Though that group of names may sound rather forbidding, it is nonetheless useful to have access to a good range of sources which might otherwise be inaccessible so as to gain first-hand acquaintance with the views of these significant figures. This book will probably find its most ready market among students, though all who see the value of apologetics may wish to become familiar with such influential views.

A useful resource for students or others who want to re-visit their studies of the distinctive voices of the four gospels is *Portraits of Jesus: An Inductive Approach to the Gospels* by MR Cosby.<sup>33</sup> As the sub-title suggests, this volume is intended to provide a 'guided reading' resource to accompany reading of the gospels themselves rather than be a textbook about the gospels. As such it is admirable in its aim. Cosby provides comments which set each passage of each gospel in both literary and historical context, includes relevant selections of background materials, and then sets questions for reflection on the part of the student. The resultant text does not read like a typical textbook; it is much more like a workbook or exercise book. It will not be enjoyable to read unless the gospel passages are read thoroughly at the required points. Also, some readers may be put off by Cosby's apparent confidence in commenting on the synoptic relationships. However, this book has the potential to help careful readers find the riches of the gospels for themselves and so may be warmly welcomed.

## Conclusion

Not all readers will find each of the above books relevant to their own interests or needs. The wise reader will think carefully about what he or she needs to read and use

available time for the greatest benefit and will beware of allowing secondary reading to replace continual fresh exposure to the 'God-breathed' scriptures, which must remain a priority at all times. However, careful, thoughtful and prayerful use of some of the above volumes may help readers to be better informed as they interpret the New Testament scriptures for themselves, for teaching the people of God or for defending the faith in the modern world.

## References

- <sup>1</sup> Published by Eerdmans in the USA and IVP in the UK.
- <sup>2</sup> Carlisle, Paternoster, 1998.
- <sup>3</sup> Edited by TC Oden and C. A. Hall. IVP[USA], 1998.
- <sup>4</sup> Peabody Hendrickson, 2000.
- <sup>5</sup> Grace Publications, 2000.
- <sup>6</sup> Sheffield, Sheffield Academic Press, 1999.
- <sup>7</sup> Louisville, Westminster/John Knox Press, 1997.
- <sup>8</sup> Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1999.
- <sup>9</sup> B Beyer, *Encountering the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Baker, 1999).
- <sup>10</sup> Elwell and Yarbrough, *Encountering the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Baker, 1998).
- <sup>11</sup> Notably, he is responsible for the translation of Adolf Schlatter's two-volume *New Testament Theology*.
- <sup>12</sup> Grand Rapids, Baker, 1994 and 1992, respectively.
- <sup>13</sup> Grand Rapids, Baker, 2000.
- <sup>14</sup> Apollos, 1998. The series is published by Baker in the USA.
- <sup>15</sup> Fearn, Mentor, 2000.
- <sup>16</sup> Louisville, Westminster/John Knox Press, 2000.
- <sup>17</sup> Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2000.
- <sup>18</sup> Published by Eerdmans in the USA and IVP in the UK.
- <sup>19</sup> Leicester, Apollos, 2000.
- <sup>20</sup> Carlisle, Paternoster, 1998. Readers who are aware of Bauckham's expertise in the writings of Jürgen Moltmann will not be overly surprised at his choice of title.
- <sup>21</sup> Carlisle, Paternoster, 1999.
- <sup>22</sup> Downers Grove, IVP[USA], 1999.
- <sup>23</sup> S Soderlund and NT Wright (eds) Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1999.
- <sup>24</sup> The price tag of £50 may well put off many potential readers, but Sheffield Academic Press has a policy of making hardback volumes available to individual readers at 50% discount where there is no paperback edition. The price of £25, though not cheap, is not unreasonable for a finely produced book.
- <sup>25</sup> Louisville, Westminster/John Knox Press, 1999.
- <sup>26</sup> London, SPCK, 1996.
- <sup>27</sup> CC Newman (ed). Downers Grove, IVP[USA], 1999.
- <sup>28</sup> Edited by R N Longenecker. Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2000.
- <sup>29</sup> Edited by M. A. Powell. Louisville, Westminster/John Knox Press, 1999.
- <sup>30</sup> Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2000.
- <sup>31</sup> Grand Rapids, Baker, 1999.
- <sup>32</sup> GW Dawes (ed.). Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1999.
- <sup>33</sup> Louisville, Westminster/John Knox Press, 1999.

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## EDITORIAL POLICY

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