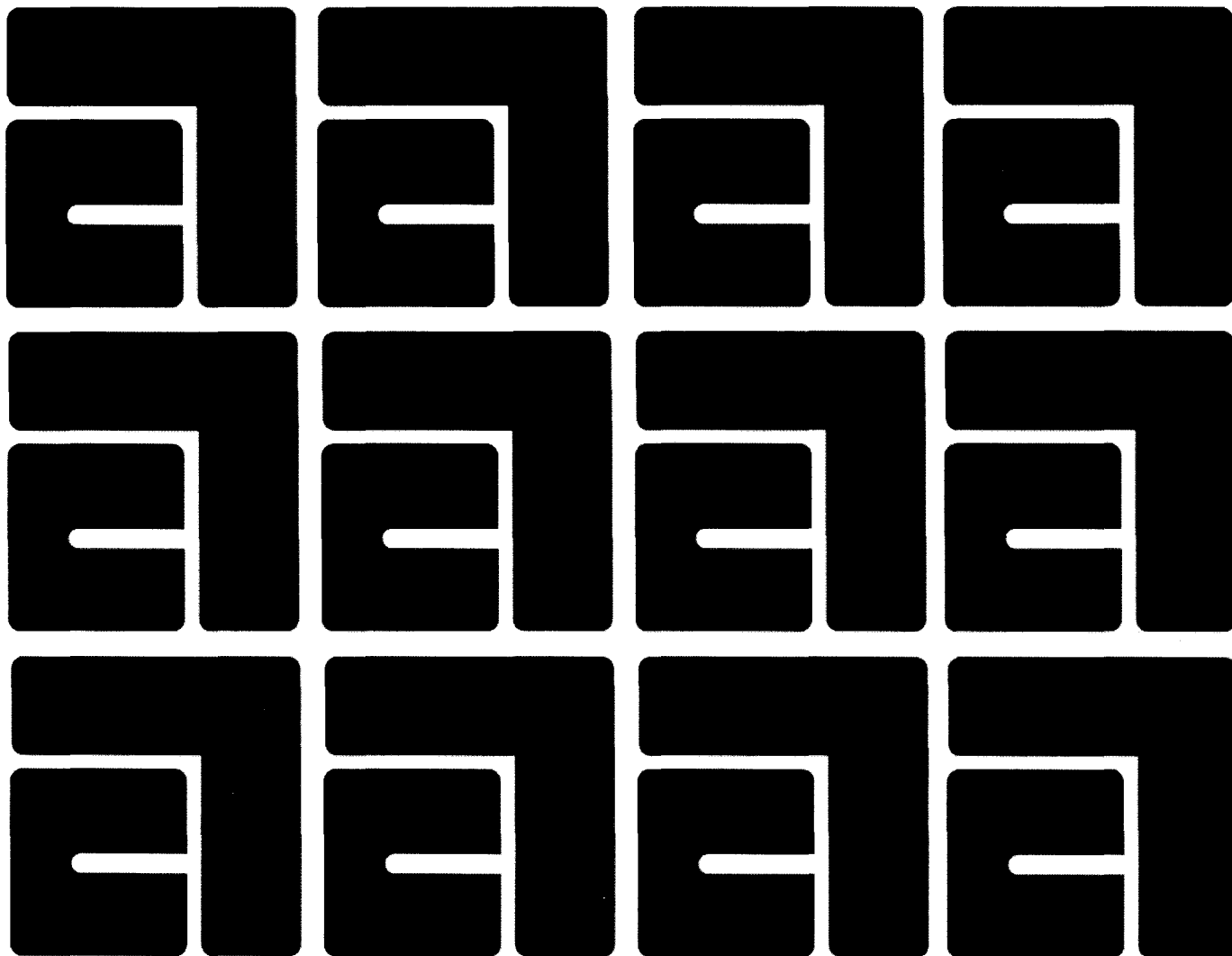


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FOUNDATIONS

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Editor's Notes

An unavoidable delay in the appointment of a new Editor for Foundations means that these introductory comments will be unusually brief – although this does provide me with a further opportunity to thank Ken Brownell, on behalf of the Editorial Board, for the superb job of work he has done for us over recent years. We very much hope Ken will continue to provide us with his excellent book reviews in subsequent issues.

The contents of this current edition reflect concerns familiar to any pastor, battling to feed, guide and protect his flock in the first decade of the 21st century. Stephen Clark brings his legally-trained mind to the 'The Doctrine of the Lesser Evil'. Pastoral problems are not solved simply by identifying relevant scriptural texts, nor by ticking the right boxes in a flow chart. Much prayer and heavenly wisdom are required as increasingly complex issues are faced on a regular basis. Biblical commands and principles need to be ranked in context if God-honouring answers are to emerge – and fragile human beings are not to be hurt without just cause. This article provokes much thought in a neglected area.

Most of us need to be more aware of popular Islamic apologetics and the ways in which they are employed to combat biblical truth. Anthony McRoy brings his considerable expertise to bear on this and related topics in the second part of his survey of 'The Theology of Arius'. Virtually every heresy and false teaching can trace its roots back to the first three centuries of the Christian era. Once again, we are shown the vital importance of a grasp of the struggles of the early Church for our contemporary situation. Ignorance here may easily force us to

concede ground which should never be given up. Mike Plant takes us back to the nineteenth century debate between two American Presbyterians on the nature of 'The Call to the Ministry', which was stimulated by a shortage of men coming forward for the work. Faced with a similar situation in the UK today, the radically differing views of Thornwell and Dabney are echoed in contemporary discussions. Affinity sponsored day conferences on the subject last year. The necessity of an 'immediate' call resonates more with traditional non-conformity, whereas the Anglican evangelical emphasis lies far more on the assessment of relevant gifting. How this historic difference is resolved must have an immense bearing on recruitment to univocational ministry in coming years.

Another issue that sometimes causes constituency divisions along the same kind of lines relates to the nature and delivery of preaching. In his article 'Preaching that Persuades', Kieran Beville argues that emotional engagement with a postmodern congregation is essential if what Aristotle called the *ethos*, the personal integrity, of the preacher is to be conveyed. The apostle Paul is constantly 'imploring' and 'beseeching' in his gospel preaching. Not much of that going on today in Reformed pulpits! Certainly, whether for cultural or other reasons, the art of holy persuasion is dying – if it's not dead already. Any articles that help us address such a crucial matter are gratefully received.

It is always good to welcome biblical studies to the pages of Foundations, and I found Chris Kelly's short outline of Mark's Gospel to be particularly fresh and stimulating. Anyone who has preached through any of the Gospels should have been struck

by their structural sophistication, often missed by the general reader. But it is perhaps surprising to find such apparently new and compelling insights, which beg much further study.

Alistair Wilson brings this edition of *Foundations* to a fitting close with a stimulating list of suggestions for further reading in New Testament studies. The *New Perspective on Paul* is ever with us and one or two of the useful titles reviewed might easily be otherwise missed. I like Dr Wilson's parting advice to spend our time and money wisely when it comes to Christian literature. I trust you will continue to consider *Foundations* a wise investment. And, if you do, why not recommend it to a friend?

Finally, it may still not be too late to book for the next Affinity Theological Study Conference, which will take place at High Leigh Conference Centre, just north of London, from 4th-6th February, 2009. The subject is 'The End of the Law?', and the effects of differing covenantal positions will be explored. Speakers include Bob Letham, Doug Moo, Paul Helm and Michael Horton. As always, the event is a true conference, with attendees reading the papers beforehand. Space is limited and there is already considerable take-up. You can find further details, and place your booking, on the Affinity website.

Jonathan Stephen
On behalf of the Editorial Board.

Introduction

The doctrine of the lesser evil deals with those situations where a moral agent is forced to choose between one of a number of competing claims to action, all of which involve breach of a moral principle or rule. Faced with this dilemma, the doctrine of the lesser evil states that one should do that which, in the circumstances, is the lesser of two or more evils.

Outside of the Judaeo-Christian tradition the doctrine was stated and approved by Aristotle² and endorsed by Cicero.³ Within the Christian Church the doctrine was officially stated at the 8th Council of Toledo in AD 653,⁴ as well as being the solution offered by numerous Christian writers when dealing with cases of conscience.⁵ The purpose of the present study is to ascertain the specifically biblical basis for such a doctrine. Before considering the biblical material, however, it will be useful to clarify the precise points which are at issue and to make some brief general observations concerning ethical matters.

I. The problem stated

The issue addressed in the present study concerns the choice which has to be made when moral principles or rules come into conflict. This type of situation needs to be distinguished from one to which it is closely related and with which it is frequently confused, namely, where circumstances are such that the honouring of a *moral principle* or obedience to a *moral rule* or *command* leads to evil consequences. Underlying this distinction is the fact that sin and *evil consequences* are not entirely congruent categories: while there may be

considerable overlap between the breaking of a moral rule or command and evil consequences, it is nevertheless the case that they are not synonymous. (I am using the term 'evil' as applied to 'evil consequence' as that which is not good, 'good' being defined here with reference to God's declaring that the original creation was 'good': Gen. 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31.) If we adopt, for working purposes, the definition of sin as being that which is contrary to God's law,⁶ in the sense that a personal agent contravenes God's law, it should be clear that 'sin' and 'evil consequences' do not have identical referents. Some examples should elucidate this point.

Nobody with a modicum of moral sensitivity would deny that war is a great evil. Furthermore, it is an evil which is occasioned by sin and is, therefore, an evil consequence of sin. Moreover, as has frequently been observed, morality is one of the first casualties in war: much sin is attendant upon and committed during war. It is equally true, however, that, unless one adopts the untenable position that Scripture absolutely forbids the waging of war (the pacifist position), there are situations where it would not be sin to fight in a war. The categories of sin and evil consequence are not entirely congruent.

A clearer example might be where a man drives in such a manner as to knock down and kill a child. Let us imagine two different scenarios. In the first, the man intentionally drives in a dangerous manner: that is to say, he does not care what injury he may cause to other people and drives accordingly, knowing that he may kill someone. His killing of the child is an evil act and the death of the child is an evil consequence. In the second scenario the

death results from a situation which is legally defined as *automatism*. The driver, through no fault of his own or of anyone else, loses control of his vehicle, thereby killing someone. This was because a swarm of bees flew into the vehicle, thereby leading the driver to lose control. He has committed no sin. The death of the child is a tragedy, or may be called *an evil*. Certainly death and suffering would not be in the earth had sin not entered in the first place. Here, then, is a case of an evil consequence (that is to say, something which is not good, in terms of God's pronouncement of the original creation as good), where no *specific sin* (that is, other than man's original sin which 'brought death into the world, and all our woe, with loss of Eden') has been committed.

The importance of the distinction between sin and evil consequence resides in the fact that the doctrine of the lesser evil is sometimes invoked to justify *sin* (the breaking of a command of God) in order to avoid an *evil consequence*. The following example illustrates this point. The intelligence service of a particular country gathers intelligence which indicates that a terrorist attack is imminent within its borders. It does not know the precise location of the attack nor the date of the attack. Furthermore, it is unable to identify those who will launch the attack. The information concerning these matters is in a code which it is unable to break. The intelligence service has discovered, however, that a twelve year old girl knows the code, although she is completely ignorant of any planned terrorist attack. When she was first taught the code, she took a vow never to disclose it to anyone. She has been taught that it pleases Allah that she keeps this code a secret

and that anyone who wants her to disclose the code does so for utterly malevolent reasons.

The girl is approached by the intelligence service but is unwilling to disclose the code. Attempts to persuade her to do so in order to save lives are unavailing *because she does not believe that there will be terrorist attacks*. She believes that those who want her to disclose the code do so for evil purposes. Consequently all attempts to get her to disclose the code fail. The intelligence service decides that the only way she will disclose the code is for her to be tortured. She proves to be extremely resilient and, eventually, the intelligence service resorts to extreme violence, permanently injuring and disfiguring her before she breaks. The code is disclosed, the terrorists are arrested, and an attack is averted. In fact, the attack would have been at a major sports event and would have led to the loss of about seventy five thousand lives. The intelligence service feels justified in its use of torture: although it has done something evil, it has saved lives.

This is not, however, strictly speaking an application of the doctrine of the lesser evil. An evil act (torture) has been committed (and, be it noted, against an utterly innocent person) in order to prevent an evil consequence (the loss of many lives). But the death of many people, though an evil, and an evil which would not have been in the world had sin not entered, is not sinful: people die every day and are not sinning by dying. It may, of course, be said that one has prevented the terrorists from sinning. This is true but is not the reason for the torture: the reason for resorting to torture is to prevent the *consequences of the terrorists' evil act*, a large number of deaths. (Let us assume that the terrorists

attempt to detonate their bombs but, for technical reasons, the bombs do not detonate and no one is injured. The terrorists have still performed an evil act but there are no evil consequences to that act. Were the intelligence service to know in advance that the bombs would not detonate and that there would be no injury, they would not intervene by torturing the girl: their focus of interest and concern is not the evil act per se but the evil consequences.) One may say that to save lives is a morally good act. Therefore, the torture of the child, while considered as an act-in-itself is evil, considered in the context in which it occurs it is morally good. It is, therefore, morally good as well as morally bad: it is a lesser evil. It is better to save lives than to allow them to be needlessly slaughtered. Is this so?

Let us change the example a little. Let us assume that the young girl dies as a result of the injuries which she has sustained while being tortured. Let us further assume that a terrorist attack has been averted, but the nature of the attack was that only one person would have been killed. Let us further assume that the intelligence service knew that the planned attack would result in the death of one person. They have committed an evil act (torture) to prevent an evil consequence (death of a person). They have indeed saved an innocent life but have had to take another innocent life to do so. It is difficult to see how this is a case of a lesser evil.

This last point requires elaboration. Let us assume another purely hypothetical type of situation. The police know that a criminal, C, is intent on travelling from point X, in the countryside, to point Y to murder V. C intends to walk two miles, where he will be taken by a taxi, which he has booked, to

his destination. The taxi driver, T, is unaware of C's plan to murder V. The only way in which C can undertake the journey is by T's taxi. The police learn of the plan at a time when it is too late to alert and protect V, or to travel to intercept C. However, one of the police, P, who has learned of the plan sees T speeding on his way to point X to collect C. P, we shall assume, is on foot and can do nothing to intercept T and alert him to what is afoot. He is, however, a police marksman and we shall assume that he has his gun with him. He shoots T in the belief that this will prevent him from reaching X, thereby giving the police time to intercept C. T dies from the gun shot wound. What has happened here is that one person, P, has committed an evil act (shooting an innocent person) in order to prevent another person, C, from killing another innocent person, V, and to prevent the evil consequence of V being killed. This, of course, would be regarded as an outrageous act: murdering one person to prevent another murder.

The foregoing is intended simply to illustrate the importance of the distinction between a sinful act and an evil consequence. It would not be difficult to think of some fairly emotive types of situation where lesser evil arguments are advanced in an inappropriate way: where one innocent life, which is regarded as of the same ontological and moral status as another innocent life, is taken for the sake of the other life. The present study will not address the question as to whether it is ever biblically permissible to commit sin in order to prevent evil consequences. Many complex issues arise in such a study, not the least of which is the problem of specifying exactly what is an evil consequence. It may, however, be worth

observing that Paul states that those who argue that evil should be committed that good may result are deserving of condemnation (Rom. 3:8). In this passage it is clear that when Paul refers to those who say, 'let us do evil', he is referring not to an evil consequence but to an evil deed, to sin, whereas good refers, in this passage, not to the doing of something which is good but to the opposite of an evil consequence, namely, a good consequence. Fundamental to biblical ethics is the fact that there is not complete congruence between sin and evil consequences, nor between obedience and good consequences. This naturally leads to the need to define some terms.

II. Definition of terms

1. *Deontological*: this is the approach to ethics which states that moral principles are to be adhered to regardless of consequences. Certain things are right and should be done and do not require justification in terms of the consequences.

2. *Consequentialism*: this is the approach to ethics which says that one determines what is the right course of action with reference to the consequences which follow. Of course, a consequentialist who assesses an action with reference to whether the consequence of the action is good or bad inevitably has a *prior* understanding of what is a *good* consequence or what is a *bad* consequence. And this means, of course, that the *nature* of what is good or bad cannot simply be determined with reference to the consequences of the action because one is assessing the consequences as *good* consequences or *bad* consequences. Some values are already operative, therefore, by which to evaluate the consequences. Thus utilitarianism, which is a consequentialist

approach to ethics, assesses a good consequence as that which will bring about the greatest happiness of the greatest number of people.

The example given by Quinton and cited in note 8, below, could be understood in terms of utilitarian philosophy. On the other hand, if the drowning person were a hermit, utterly self absorbed and without family or friends, and (though not committing suicide) not really valuing his life, it might be possible to argue that on the utilitarian calculus of happiness caused, greater happiness would be caused by keeping one's appointment at the tea party and leaving the hermit to his fate. Presumably Quinton would demur to such a position; if so, this would demonstrate that lying back of his assessment of the moral quality of an action with reference to its consequences would be a commitment to certain *values* by which consequences are assessed. The point which I am seeking to make is that consequentialism is a more complex approach to ethics than is sometimes realised.

Many philosophers hold that a deontological approach to ethics and a consequentialist approach are mutually exclusive.⁷ I have tried to demonstrate in the previous two paragraphs that this is an area which needs thorough exploration because important points and distinctions are frequently blurred by the statement that these two approaches to ethics are mutually exclusive.⁸ This, however, is also beyond the scope of the present study.

III. Biblical material

Observations on the teaching of Jesus and Paul
The Scriptures teach that some commands of God are of greater weight than others.

Jesus put this very clearly in Matthew 23:23. In speaking of 'weightier' or 'more important matters of the law', it is evident that Jesus did not regard each aspect of God's law as of equal importance. Care, of course, is needed in how one employs this distinction. In Matthew 23:23 Jesus makes it quite plain that the less important matters of the law should have been practised as well as the weightier matters. In Matthew 5:19 He speaks of 'the least of these commandments', again implying that He did not regard all divine commandments as being of equal importance; yet the same verse indicates that greatness in God's kingdom is as much to do with observing the least commandments as it is with observing the greatest commandments.

Jesus taught that the two greatest commandments were to love the Lord our God with all one's being and to love one's neighbour as oneself (Matt. 22: 34-40). He taught that these commandments were foundational. Since all the Law and the Prophets hang on these, it follows that to remove these or not to practise them will make it impossible to live the life which is laid down in the Law and the Prophets. The relative importance of different commandments underpins Jesus' graphic picture of those who strained at gnats but swallowed camels (Matt. 23:24). In other words, He was concerned that we have a due sense of proportion, something which was evidently lacking in the case of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law. How one grades different commandments is a huge subject and well beyond the scope of this study. All that is necessary for our present purposes is to note that a distinction exists in the commandments.⁹

It is clear that Jesus sometimes resorted to an *argumentum ad hominem* when engaged in controversy. The present writer takes the view that Jesus never broke the Sabbath commandment, though He broke with man-made traditions which had been added to that commandment. However, it is interesting to note that in some of the discussions with the Pharisees over the question of the Sabbath, Jesus did not defend Himself by distinguishing between God's Word and human tradition (as He did in Matt. 15: 1-9 over the issue of ceremonial hand washing) but by employing His opponents' arguments and demonstrating that they were double edged. This is what is really going on in Matthew 12:1-8. A superficial reading of this passage leaves one asking what is the relevance of David eating the consecrated bread reserved for the priests to the issue of the alleged Sabbath breaking on the part of Jesus' disciples. It is a question which has occupied commentators on this pericope. The point of Jesus' response, however, is that He is employing a well known type of rabbinical argument. It went something like this. Since the priests must work in the Temple on the Sabbath, the Temple is greater than the Sabbath. David ate the presence bread because the preservation of his life was more important than the Temple. Jesus' argument thus proceeds as follows: if the Temple is greater than the Sabbath and the preservation of life is greater than the Temple, then, a *fortiori*, the preservation of life is greater than the Sabbath. It was permissible, therefore, for Jesus' disciples to pluck corn on the Sabbath.¹⁰

Certain traditions of Christian thinking have distinguished three elements in the Mosaic Law:

moral, civil, and ceremonial.¹¹ Other scholars have pointed out that the New Testament always refers to 'the law', rather than to 'the laws'¹². While it is true that the New Testament routinely refers to the law as a complete package and does not neatly divide it into moral, ceremonial, and civil, it is nevertheless the case that Jesus distinguished between what are normally identified as the 'moral' aspects of the law and those which were 'ceremonial' or ritual and cultic. The following two passages clearly indicate this: Matt. 5:23-24; 9:13. Again in Matthew 15:3-9 Jesus appears to teach that it was a lesser evil to break a vow of dedicating one's substance to the Temple than to break the command to honour one's parents.¹³ Of course, there was nothing novel about this aspect of Jesus' teaching; it was entirely in line with that of the Old Testament prophets. They regularly inveighed against the LORD's people for being punctilious about matters concerned with the cultus while having hearts which were far from God and hard towards their fellow men and women: see, for example, Is. 29:13. This teaching was then reaffirmed by Paul: Rom. 2:27-29; 1 Cor. 7:19.

Three comments are in order at this point. First, we should not think that the Old Testament prophets or Jesus had a cavalier attitude towards cultic matters. Ps. 51:17,19 explain the perspectives of the prophets and of Jesus: cultic and ritual observance were worthless without a right heart and obedience. Secondly, it appears to be indisputable that cultic and ritual matters were regarded by Jesus and the prophets as less weighty than what may be called the 'moral' aspects of the law. Thirdly, by the time of Paul, the observance of physical circumcision can be set in contrast to keeping the law's requirements

and obeying God's commands: Rom. 2:25-29; 1 Cor. 7:19. This aspect of Paul's teaching is to be understood in terms of the history of salvation and the Bible's 'time line'. Significantly, physical circumcision predated the giving of the law; nevertheless, Paul is quite clear that physical circumcision was no longer mandatory.

In addition to what has been said thus far, one should also observe that there are situations where one is not in the realm of right and wrong but, rather, of good and better. This distinction runs through Paul's argument in 1 Cor. 7:25-39. Furthermore, Paul's counsel is heavily contextualised: what he says is in view of 'the present crisis' (v.26). From these data we may deduce the principle that certain situations require counsel which would not be needed in other situations. Furthermore, we must avoid reducing all situations, especially where Christians may feel in a dilemma, into those where a straight black or white choice is to be made.

Examples of biblical endorsement of 'lesser evil' choices

Old Testament

(1) Leviticus 10:16-20

Leviticus 10:1-2 records the offering by Nadab and Abihu, two of Aaron's sons, of 'strange' or unauthorised fire to the LORD and His consequent judgment upon them. In verse 3 Moses explains to Aaron that the LORD would show himself holy amongst his people and would be honoured by them: this was why He took action against Nadab and Abihu. In verses 4-5 Moses gives instructions for the removal of the dead bodies, while in verses

6-7 he stresses that neither Aaron nor his surviving sons were to let the mourning, which would have been natural, interfere with their continuing to fulfil their responsibilities as priests. If they did, they too would die, thus incurring a similar fate to Nadab and Abihu. Verses 8-11 prohibit the priests from drinking fermented beverages when going to minister in the Tent of Meeting and emphasise the importance of distinguishing the holy from the common. In verses 12-15 Moses gives Aaron and his remaining sons instructions concerning the eating of the grain offering and the wave offering.

In verse 16 Moses enquires about the sin offering and learns that it had been burned up rather than eaten. In 6:26, 29-30, we learn that a sin offering whose blood had not been taken into the Tent of Meeting to make atonement for the Holy Place was to be eaten by Aaron or his sons in the courtyard of the Tent of Meeting. In 10:17-18 Moses stresses to Aaron that it should have been eaten and not burned up. Understandably, he was angry: judgment had already fallen on the family of Aaron for failure in priestly duties. Might judgment now fall on Aaron and his remaining sons? Aaron answers that it would have been inappropriate to have eaten it in view of what he had experienced that day (v.19). As Matthew Poole comments, the sin offering was 'not to be eaten with sorrow, but with rejoicing and thanksgiving, as appears from Deut. 12:7; 26:14; Hos. ix:4; and I thought it fitter to burn it, as I did other sacred relics, than to profane it by eating it unworthily'.¹⁴ In other words, Aaron was faced with a dilemma: either eat the sin offering, but not do so in the way in which it was to be eaten (that is, with joy), or, since it could not be eaten with joy, not to

eat it at all but burn it up, in clear contravention of the LORD's command. Aaron chose the latter course of action and verse 20 informs us that Moses, as the divine representative, was satisfied.

Here, therefore, is a clear case of a lesser evil type situation. Evidently Aaron believed that it was better not to observe the outward form of the offering than to observe it in the wrong spirit.

2 Chronicles 30

Hezekiah's father was Ahaz and his had been something of a decadent reign. Hezekiah sought to reform and purify things. In 2 Chronicles 29 we read of his purifying of the temple. Chapter 30 records the great Passover which was celebrated during his reign. The books of Chronicles, written after the return from exile, have a particular interest and focus on cultic purity and the importance of Jerusalem as the central place for the worship of God. The Chronicler fastens attention on numerous deviations from the Mosaic law which led to the exile. Given his general emphasis, this makes the account of the great Passover in chapter 30 all the more significant.

First we learn that the king and his officials and the whole assembly decided to celebrate the Passover in the second month (v. 2). The Passover, of course, was to be celebrated in the first month: Exod. 12:1-3. However, 'case law' during Moses' life allowed for the celebration of the Passover in the second month in certain situations: Num. 9:9-11. This permission arose from the situation of some who were ceremonially unclean on account of a dead body (vv. 6-7). Therefore, the permission granted in vv. 9-11 is expressed to be applicable where someone is

unclean on account of a dead body or on account of having been away on a journey. The significant point in 2 Chronicles 30, therefore, is that while there was Mosaic permission for celebrating the Passover a month later, it is clear from v. 3 that Hezekiah's Passover did not come within the terms of the Mosaic permission: v.3 specifically states that not enough priests had consecrated themselves and the people had not assembled in Jerusalem. This was all part of the spiritual decline which Hezekiah had begun to address. Evidently, however, in the circumstances Hezekiah, his officials and the whole assembly thought that it was better to celebrate the Passover a month late, even though they did not, strictly speaking, come within the terms of the Mosaic permission, than not to celebrate it at all. Here was a clear irregularity.

Secondly, although the Mosaic law laid down that the worshippers were to kill the sacrificial lamb (Exod. 12:6), at Hezekiah's Passover many of the people had not consecrated themselves in accordance with the Mosaic law and were ceremonially unclean (v.17). Since this was so, the Levites slaughtered the lambs for those worshippers who were unclean (v.17). Verse 18 goes on to state that most of the people who came from Ephraim, Manasseh, Issachar, and Zebulun had not purified themselves, 'yet they ate the Passover, contrary to what was written'. This was, therefore, an extraordinarily irregular Passover, breaching a number of the provisions which the LORD had given through Moses. The significance of this Passover, however, was that, during the time of the divided kingdom Hezekiah sent a proclamation calling on all the tribes of Israel to celebrate the Passover (v.5) and many came (v.18).

In v.19 Hezekiah acknowledges that although there were those who were not clean according to the rules of the sanctuary, they may nevertheless have set their hearts on seeking God, the LORD, the God of their fathers. This fact, coupled with the truth that the LORD is good, was the basis of Hezekiah's prayer in vv.18-19 that the LORD would pardon them. Verse 20 informs us that the LORD heard Hezekiah and healed the people.

Matters did not rest there. Verse 23 tells us that the whole assembly then agreed to celebrate the festival seven more days, while v.26 states that there had been nothing like this since the days of Solomon – a reference to the high point of the kingdom, prior to its division during the time of Jeroboam son of Nebat. Verse 27 tells us that God heard the prayer of the priests.

Here, if anywhere in Scripture, is clear teaching that the spirit is more important than the letter, and that it can be a lesser evil to do something irregularly which God commands rather than not to do it at all. Here, then, is clear biblical teaching on the doctrine of the lesser evil. It was an evil not to have obeyed the letter of the law: hence Hezekiah had to pray for the people to be pardoned (v.18), something which was hardly necessary if no evil had been involved. But it would have been a greater evil not to have celebrated the Passover. This, too, would have involved disobedience to a clear command of the LORD. It is the point to which Jesus referred when He spoke of those who strained out gnats but swallowed camels (Matt. 23:24). Nobody particularly wants a gnat in his soup. But it is far less unpalatable to swallow a gnat than a camel, with its furry hump and knobbly legs.

Therefore, we may lay down the general principle: there is such a thing as a doctrine of a lesser evil; it arises when it is impossible to keep a command of the Lord without breaking another; in deciding which is the lesser evil, we shall need to consider which is the weightier commandment and which more honours the spirit of the Lord's teaching.

New Testament material

While there are numerous New Testament passages which touch on this subject (for example, our Lord's quoting of the words from Hosea, 'I desire mercy not sacrifice' and Paul's words in Romans 13:9-10), we shall limit our treatment of New Testament material to just two passages.

2 Corinthians 8:10-12

These verses occur in a section which spans the whole of chapters 8 and 9 and which is concerned with the collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem. 8:12 expresses an extremely important principle: there may be things which one wishes to do but which it is impossible for one to do. In its context this surely refers to the fact that the Corinthians might have wanted to have given more than they were physically able to do: they may not have had sufficient money to give all that they had wanted to give. The principle which Paul expounds is that it is the willingness to do something which God accepts. In other words, desire and motivation are relevant to the assessment of actions, as well as the actions themselves.

Matthew 15:1-9

In this passage Jesus contrasts the teaching of the word of God with that of the traditions of men. He fastens attention upon the way in which the

Pharisees and teachers of the law used the provisions with respect to gifts devoted to God to avoid honouring their parents (vv.3-6). He makes it clear that this was hypocritical (v.7); He also states that the Pharisees and teachers of the law were teaching rules taught by men. It is perfectly possible that under the influence of such a false teaching some might have devoted gifts not in a hypocritical way but have been left unable to provide help to their parents. In these circumstances if they were then made aware of the need to use the money thus vowed to God's service to help their parents, something of a dilemma of conscience would arise. To go back upon a vow is a serious matter (Eccl. 5:1-7). On the other hand to break the command to honour one's parents is also serious. Here, again, would be a situation where one obligation would come into conflict with another obligation. It seems clear from our Lord's teaching that this would be one of those situations where the vow would have to be broken.¹⁵

Practical applications

There are many situations where the doctrine of a lesser evil will be applicable. I shall briefly identify some which could well arise in pastoral life and church practice.

The first example concerns Paul's prohibition of women teaching or exercising authority over men in a church context.¹⁶ Let us imagine that a married couple are working in a pioneer missionary situation, the husband in church planting and the wife working with women. There are no other Christian workers in the whole of the region. A time of spiritual awakening occurs and hundreds are

suddenly brought into God's kingdom. News of this reaches the country where the missionary couple are from and the result is that workers arrive in the country who teach a deviant and distorted gospel, which is no gospel at all. It is imperative that the infant church is protected from these influences. However, at this precise point the husband is taken ill, needs surgery and will be some months convalescing. His wife is well taught in Scripture and has a good grasp of theology and how it is to be applied. Does she simply allow the false teachers to move in, hoping that some months later her husband will be able to undo the damage, or does she, rather, start herself to teach the young believers? While the present writer is fully committed to the position that the ruling and teaching office in Christ's church is confined to men, it is submitted that this would be a lesser evil type of situation. Commands to care for Christ's people and to love one another would, in these circumstances, in my view, override the prohibition of a woman to teach and to exercise authority over a man. Of course, the situation would be far from ideal and, hopefully, steps might be taken to ensure that this would be very much a 'holding situation' which would soon be replaced. Nevertheless it is the doctrine of the lesser evil which would allow for this course of action.

A second type of situation concerns unmarried women with children. In our present climate in the West it is far from uncommon for a woman who is in a stable relationship with a man and who has children by him to be converted and then to seek baptism and church membership. The proper thing to do, of course, is for the woman to marry the man.

But what if the man, for whatever reason, is unwilling to do so? The present writer has known of numerous situations of this type. The man is a good father to the children, in that he provides for them financially and provides emotional support to them and is interested in all their concerns. For their part the children are devoted to him, as well as to their mother. What are the options if the man is unwilling to marry the woman? Let us consider them one by one.

The first is for the woman to leave him. This immediately means that the children no longer live with their father and mother but only with one parent. One obeys one command (not to live with someone with whom one is not married) but upsets the biblical pattern of children having a mother and a father. In effect, such a decision will break up the home, with the inevitable emotional and psychological upheaval which are, alas, experienced by the children who are the innocent sufferers. This has to be set against the fact that the mother and father are husband and wife in all but name. Indeed, in one case known to the writer the mother had even taken the name of the father, and the children had the father's name. This is surely a lesser evil type of situation: it is submitted that it would be a lesser evil for the couple to continue to live together than for the home to be broken up simply because a marriage ceremony has not been gone through. To insist otherwise is to say that failure to go through a ceremony, which can be over and done with in a matter of minutes and which will be evidenced in a marriage register book, is a greater evil than to break up what may be a very happy, loving and caring home. This, it seems, is a classic case of

straining gnats and swallowing camels.

The objection might be made that the breaking up of the family is an evil consequence rather than an evil deed. The evil consequence is *occasioned* by a morally good deed (the woman refusing to continue to live with a man in an unmarried state) and is *caused by* the whole complex of events which included an evil deed in the first place (living together in an unmarried state).¹⁷ But this is a superficial analysis of the situation. Whatever be the case with respect to evil consequences, it can easily be argued that it is an evil act for a woman to leave her partner and thereby to break up the home and cause emotional suffering to her children. This is not to deny that she helped to create the complex situation in the first place by going to live with the man. It is to acknowledge, however, that there are situations which it was sinful to bring into being but which, having been brought into being, it would be more sinful to break. Furthermore, there may be situations which it was sinful to bring into being but which could be subsequently regularised. Where, however, it is not possible to regularise the state of affairs, it may still be more sinful to break the state of affairs than to allow them to continue.

The question may be raised as to why the man is unwilling to marry the woman. Strictly speaking, this is beside the point; it may, however, be worth pointing out that many men have come from broken homes and feel that since their parents were married and divorced, there is little point in getting married. I would, of course, disagree with a man who held such a view. Furthermore, it is surely a failure of love on his part to do that which his partner so desires. Nevertheless, while this may be

failure of love on his part, this does not mean that he does not love her at all and it certainly does not mean that he does not love his children. Pastoral practice requires that we deal with people in the situations in which they are, not in those in which we would like them to be.

It may not be amiss to point out that the situation is even more complex than might, at first, have been realised: for if she does marry the man, she is then marrying an unbeliever. The general tenor of Scripture, as well as 1 Cor. 7:39, would forbid such a marriage. Yet presumably those who think that she should marry the man and, if not, she should leave him, regard such a marriage as a lesser evil: it is a lesser evil to regulate an existing state of affairs by marrying than to refuse to marry because the man is an unbeliever.

Let us assume, however, that the woman stays with the man. Does this mean that she should not be baptized and accepted into membership? On what grounds would one refuse to baptize her and receive her into membership?¹⁸ Given the fact that the New Testament commands baptism for those who have repented and believed, and that the church is charged with the obligation to baptize those who have been made disciples, one can only conclude that the sole reason for refusing to baptize her would be the belief that her unwillingness to leave the man renders her profession of faith to be suspect or to be so inconsistent with a Christian profession that refusal of baptism is tantamount to an excluding act of church discipline. There is, however, surely a difference between a professing believer who refuses to render what the Puritans described as that 'universal obedience' which is an essential element of

true conversion and the conscientious decision of a vulnerable, young Christian to do that which, she believes, is best for her children in the circumstances. And once one accepts that she is truly converted and is rendering universal obedience, albeit that this necessitates her having to make a lesser evil choice, does this not mean that there is an obligation upon her to be baptized and upon the church to baptize her and to receive her into membership? Are not Paul's words in Rom. 15:7 supremely relevant here? Does not the fact that she has the desire to marry but is unable to do so bring her within the scope of the principle laid down in 2 Cor. 8:12, and does not this distinguish her from someone who adopts a cavalier attitude to marriage?

Another area where the doctrine of the lesser evil is applicable is with respect to inter church relationships. One may believe that a number of doctrines are taught in Scripture which another true gospel church may not hold. It may nevertheless be the case that the doctrine of the lesser evil is applicable: it would be a greater evil not to have fellowship with such a gospel church than it would be to hold that such fellowship might compromise one's doctrinal purity. This is an extraordinarily complex area: clearly there are situations where such fellowship might so compromise doctrinal purity that it would be a lesser evil not to have fellowship. What one cannot do is to legislate for every conceivable type of situation, since there will always be circumstances where one has to grade which principles apply in any given situation and which are the most important.

Conclusion

The Scriptures clearly teach a doctrine of the lesser evil. This doctrine has been recognized throughout the history of the church. The reason for such a doctrine is that there will frequently be less-than-ideal situations which are bound to arise in a fallen world. In particular, situations will arise where obedience to one biblical command will inevitably entail disobedience to another biblical command. In such circumstances a choice has to be made as to which command will be broken. Such a choice can only be made in a responsible way by assessing the relative weight of the commands in question. While this requires careful exegesis and an informed understanding of biblical ethics, this does not mean that this kind of issue is purely theoretical and academic, in the pejorative sense of that word. Quite the contrary! Pastoral practice and church life will regularly throw up these types of situation, and as society moves further away from God's standards made known both in general and special revelation these types of situation will become increasingly common. If pastors and preachers are to help the people of God whom it is their privilege to guide, teach, and help, then it is essential for them to understand the biblical basis of the lesser evil doctrine and the boundaries within which it operates.

References

1. I was first stimulated to think along these lines by a paper given by Graham Harrison at a BEC Study Conference on the subject, *What constitutes a New Testament Church*, which was subsequently published in *The Evangelical Magazine of Wales*. Some of the biblical material considered in the present study was touched on in that paper. Mr Harrison's paper was concerned with fellowship between gospel churches. Since he dealt with that subject so helpfully, I have only touched upon it briefly in this study.
2. *Nicomachean Ethics* ii.9.4
3. *de Off.* iii. 28 (102)
4. Can. 2
5. Gregory the Great stated it thus: 'He who is encircled by walls on every side and tries to escape, throws himself down where the wall is lowest,' *Mor. in Hiob.* xxxii. 20 (35). Thomas Aquinas adopts this approach in *Summa Theologiae* ii. 2, q. 104, a. 5 in corp. Richard Baxter gives an illustration of the doctrine from the marital and domestic sphere: *Christian Directory*, ii. c. 9. A brief reference to historical material, including that which is cited in this note, will be found in Kenneth E. Kirk *Conscience And Its Problems* (London) Longmans, Green and Co., 1936, p. 332, n. 2.
6. I shall not argue or develop this point. John defines sin as 'lawlessness' (anomia). Whether this denotes more than a breaking of the law is an important question but beyond the scope of the present study. Similarly, the question as to which law John is referring to is extremely important and has engendered considerable discussion. Consideration of that question is also beyond the scope of the present study.
7. This is the position taken by Julia Annas in her standard and justly praised introductory study to Plato's Republic: J. Annas *An Introduction to Plato's Republic* (Oxford), OUP, 1981.
8. A good example is provided by the philosopher Anthony Quinton. Writing in the context of political philosophy, he summarises a deontological approach in the following words: 'They' [i.e., moral principles] 'do not need justification in terms of the valuable results of general adherence to them and are only harmed and enfeebled if such justification is attempted. . . one should keep a promise even though no-one will be better off for one's doing so. . . But few deontologists are brazen enough to insist that a trivial promise should be kept whatever happens, that one should leave someone drowning in a lonely spot to his fate in order to make a promised appearance at a tea-party' (Anthony Quinton (Ed.) *Political Philosophy* (London) OUP, 1967, p.11). But three points are in order here. First, a deontologist might respond that this is a classic case of lesser evil. Two principles come into conflict: respect for truth and preservation of life. In such a situation one principle must be sacrificed for the other. Secondly, it is possible for a deontologist to argue that when two moral principles conflict, one way of resolving the issue is with reference to the consequences. In other words, a form of consequentialism comes into play in those situations where the deontologist is caught in a dilemma. Of course, as I have already indicated in the body of this article, this will inevitably mean that in the case of such a dilemma, one is operating with a certain set of values or principles by which to assess the goodness of consequences. Thirdly, Quinton is approaching the whole matter in merely human terms. The Christian's concern will be with what God requires of him/her in the situation.
9. This distinction is noted in Question 83 of *The Westminster Shorter Catechism*. The question asks, 'Are all transgressions of the law equally heinous?' The answer states: 'Some sins in themselves, and by reason of several aggravations, *are more heinous in the sight of God than others*' (emphasis mine). The italicised words indicate that some breaches of God's law are more heinous than others; it is not unwarrantable to infer that one reason for this might be that some commandments are of greater weight than others. Interestingly, the Catechism does not specify which sins are more heinous. Those who use this catechism to teach Christian people inevitably have to address this question; this being so, such Christians are likely to be well grounded in the truth of the fact that some commands are weightier than others.
10. The evidence for this line of reasoning will be found in Hilton and Marshall *The Gospels and Rabbinic Judaism: A Study Guide*, (London) SCM Press Ltd, 198
11. For example, *The Westminster Confession* ch.19.
12. For example, D.J. Moo "Law", "Works Of The Law" and "Legalism In Paul" in *Westminster Theological Journal* 45 (1983) pp. 73-100. While Moo's article deals with the teaching of Paul, the same argument applies to the teaching of Jesus, namely that He refers to 'the law' as a total 'package': e.g., Matt. 23:23.
13. Further discussion of this pericope will be found in note 15, below.
14. Matthew Poole *Commentary on the Holy Bible* Vol. 1 (London) The Banner of Truth Trust, 1962, p.220.
15. The issue of vows is one where entanglements of conscience can easily arise and where lesser evil choices have to be made. A Christian who has certain financial obligations to a number of creditors may be well able to meet those obligations as well as his obligations to his family. If he is easily influenced emotionally, he might attend a meeting where certain needs of the developing world or needs of gospel work are powerfully presented, leading him there and then to pledge money. The next morning he realises that he cannot honour his pledge and pay his creditors. He has, of course, done that which is wrong by pledging money to which others had a prior claim. He is now faced with the dilemma of honouring his pledge but not honouring his financial obligations to his creditors or, alternatively, of paying his creditors but dishonouring his pledge. In the circumstances the lesser evil, though evil it be, would be for him to pay his creditors but dishonour his pledge. The reason is as follows: his creditors have a prior claim on his money and, this being so, he was effectively pledging their money, rather than his own, to world mission or whatever. Clearly he should try to explain this rather than simply dishonour his pledge. In other words, even where one has to choose a lesser evil, the way in which one does so is all important. The question of vows became particularly acute at the time of the Reformation. In particular, could those who had taken a vow of celibacy break the vow in order to marry? While there is no

command to marry, there is biblical teaching to the effect that not everyone has the gift of continence (1 Cor. 7:8-9). Every Christian, of course, whether possessed of the gift of continence or not, is called to be chaste. However, in the case of those without the gift of continence, to persist in the single state may well lead to 'burning', and, as Paul says, it is better to marry than to 'burn' (v. 9). In such a situation to vow perpetual celibacy is to go against the biblical counsel which states that it is better to marry than to burn. This being so, it would, therefore, be a lesser evil to break such a vow than to honour it but thereby to give way to burning. Similarly, a couple who, through ignorance, vowed perpetually to refrain from sexual relations would be vowing something contrary to Paul's teaching in 1 Cor. 7:1-7. Again, such a vow would have to be broken.

16. 1 Tim. 2:11-12. These verses have, of course, been the subject of intense and sustained exegetical and theological debate. I shall not address those issues here since they are beyond the scope of the present study; rather, I shall simply assume, what has been cogently argued for by numerous scholars, that the prohibition is rooted in creation and fall and means exactly what it appears to mean.

17. The notions of causation and consequence are far from straightforward, and they raise profound and complex questions. David Hume gave detailed consideration to the whole notion of causation, arguing that there cannot be logically necessary connections between successive events (D. Hume *A Treatise of Human Nature*, vol. 1 (London, 1911), pp. 163-164). The notion of causation is one which has occupied the minds of lawyers and legal philosophers, particularly in the areas of criminal law and the law of torts. The notion of consequence has occupied philosophers, particularly with respect to the so called principle of 'double effect'. A stimulating treatment of the notion of causation in the legal realm, and which interacts with Hume's ideas, will be found in H.L.A. Hart and A.M. Honore *Causation in the Law* (Oxford) Clarendon Press, 1959. An exposition of the entailments of Hume's position with respect to induction will be found in Bertrand Russell *The Problems of Philosophy* (Oxford) OUP, 1967, ch. 6, while a critique of Hume's position is supplied by Nicholas Maxwell *Can There Be Necessary Connections Between Successive Events* in Richard Swinburne (Ed.) *The Justification of Induction* (London) OUP, 1974. For a criticism of the principle of double effect, see John Harris *On Cloning* (London) Routledge, 2004, pp. 130-131. I respond to Harris's arguments in a book which is still 'work in progress' on issues of life and death but which I hope will be completed within the next eighteen months.

18. Although the writer believes that only professing believers should be baptized, he realises that a powerful argument, based on covenant theology, can be advanced for the baptism of children of a believer and believes that a convinced paedo-baptist, who believes that he was validly baptized as a child, should be welcomed into membership of a church which does not practise infant baptism, provided that the paedo-baptist is aware of this and does not seek to overthrow the church's position. In the present example, however, I am assuming that the woman has not come from a believing family and has never been 'baptized'.

EXPLODING CONSPIRACY THEORIES ABOUT NICAËA

Introduction

In a previous article, examining the faith of Constantine, I observed that a frequent theme of Islamic polemics and of Dan Brown's bestseller *The Da Vinci Code* was that the Trinitarian faith of the Church and the Canon of the New Testament were supposedly decided at the Council of Nicæa. Brown's novel presents the villainous scholar called Teabing referring to the Nicene synod and claiming: '... until *that* moment in history, Jesus was viewed by His followers as a mortal prophet... a great and powerful man, but a man nevertheless. A mortal.' Teabing goes on to claim that the Council established Jesus' divinity and position as 'Son of God'. Since the principal cause of the synod was the controversy surrounding Arius' views, it is understandable that the average man in the street would conclude that Arius must have denied the divinity and divine Sonship of Jesus, believing that he was merely human.

Similarly, one work often utilised by Muslim polemicists is the book by Muhammad 'Ata ur-Rahim entitled *Jesus Prophet of Islam*. The book makes some ridiculous and false assertions about Arius:

The leader of the Apostolic Church [sic], which continued to affirm belief in One Reality, was at this time a presbyter known to history as Arius. He was a Libyan by birth. He gave new strength to the Apostolic Church. He followed the teaching of Jesus implicitly, and refused to accept the innovations introduced by Paul. 'Follow Jesus as he preached' was the motto of Arius. His importance can be gauged by the fact that his name has become a synonym for unitarianism today.

The author later claims: 'Arius' intention was solely to keep the teachings of Jesus pure and free from alteration...' By 'belief in One Reality', ur-Rahim is alleging that Arius had a unitarian concept of God equivalent to that held in Islam – that Arius was a kind of proto-Muslim. He presents no evidence in support of his claim as to Arius' motto (certainly, there is no such 'motto' in Arius' extant writings or in contemporary accounts), and as for Paul, we shall see that Arius quoted approvingly from the Apostle.

Sometimes analogies have been found between Arius' teaching and that of the Jehovah's Witnesses: 'Jesus clearly was a man, but he was unlike other men in that previously he had been a spirit person, known in heaven as the Word. Then his life was miraculously transferred by God to the womb of Mary.' However, there are important differences with Arius' position. It is also evident that the Unitarianism proposed by Socinian groupings was also at variance with Arius' teaching. Since *The Da Vinci Code* has enjoyed a wide readership, and as Muslim polemicists often attack Christians concerning the Nicene synod, the investigation of Arius' views is no longer an academic exercise, making an examination of the Heresiarch's position vital.

Arius and his attitude to Scripture

The principal reason for convening the synod of Nicæa was the challenge presented by the teaching of Arius (c. 256-336), a presbyter of Alexandria, though possibly originally from Libya. It is important to state that there was no *textual/canonical* issue at stake regarding his views: 'Arius was, by profession, a biblical exponent, at least in the sense

that he intends to be faithful in his theological reflections to the spirit of the scriptures, as he presents himself in his letters to Constantine and Alexander.' Kelly notes that the Arians supported their arguments by quoting various Scriptural texts. Rowan Williams (Archbishop of Canterbury and an acknowledged Arian scholar) declares that 'Arian was by profession an interpreter of the Scriptures'. Indeed, 'Arian and his supporters were interested in a large number of texts, from Old and New Testaments alike'.

This is an essential point: it clarifies that the issue at Nicaea was not over Biblical Canonicity. We see direct evidence from the quotes made by Arian and his supporters in regard to their faith in the canonical New Testament, for example in the letter Arian and his followers to Bishop Alexander of Alexandria, quoting (in the phrases in inverted commas) Romans 11:36; Psalm 109:3; and John 16:28:

But if the expressions 'from him' and 'from the womb' and 'I came out from the Father, and I am come here' are understood by certain people in terms of a portion of something consubstantial or in terms of an emanation, then, according to them, the Father is compound and divisible and changeable and material, as far as they are concerned, the God who is without a body is undergoing the experiences proper to a body.

Indeed, in the same declaration, Arian refers to his faith in the 'God of the Law and the prophets and the New Covenant' – i.e. the canonical Bible, since the 'Law and the prophets' referred to the Jewish division of the Old Testament, and 'New Covenant' is a synonym for 'New Testament'. The point at issue at the Council of Nicaea was not the *canon* of Scripture, but rather its proper interpretation.

Canonicity was not an issue at the synod, since both Arian and his opponents shared the same canon of Scripture.

Arian's Christological doctrine

It has been suggested that Arian was a pupil and disciple of Lucian of Antioch. In his letter to Eusebius of Nicomedia, Arian had even described himself as 'a true fellow-disciple of Lucian'. Williams is more cautious, since the expression *sulloukianista* ('fellow-Lucianist') may simply indicate that Arian claimed 'common ground with potential supporters' or that he merely studied under Lucian. Lucian was famous for his literalist approach to Scripture, in contrast to the allegorical hermeneutic of Alexandria.

The Christological attitude of the East was that it held in horror the doctrines of Sabellianism, the best known form of Modalistic Monarchianism. This held that God was unipersonal, and that the terms 'Father, Son and Holy Spirit' referred to differing, possibly successive *roles* of God (as opposed to 'Persons') – creation, redemption, sanctification. Sabellius was a third century Libyan who taught in Rome and whose heresy led to his being excommunicated. We will see that this is relevant to what ensued.

In regard to what Arian actually believed, we largely rely on extant material from his opponents, and in terms of complete texts, there are only three in number: the confession of faith presented to Alexander of Alexandria; Arian's letter to Eusebius of Nicomedia; the confession submitted by Arian and Euzosius to the Emperor in 337.

Arius' Letter to Eusebius

In Arius' letter to Eusebius, he complains about Bishop of Alexander harassing him because Arius denies what Alexander upheld, and so we can infer his theology as being the *opposite* of Alexander's Christology from this picture:

...the bishop greatly wastes and persecutes us, and leaves no stone unturned against us. He has driven us out of the city as atheists, because we do not concur in what he publicly preaches, namely, God always, the Son always; as the Father so the Son; the Son co-exists unbegotten with God; He is everlasting; neither by thought nor by any interval does God precede the Son; always God, always Son; he is begotten of the unbegotten; the Son is of God Himself.

From this we deduce that Arius opposed the ideas that the Son was always God, and that the Son had the same divine essence as the Father, that the Son was *eternally* generated by the Father, that the Son always existed. In Arius' mind, 'begotten' indicated the state of being *secondary* and was equivalent to 'created': 'But for him begetting and creation were identical, and both always meant dependence.'

Hence his insistence that if the Son was begotten – as Arius most definitely believed – then He was secondary in terms of time to God's eternal existence, and thus was a creature. In other words, God always existed; the Son did not always exist, but came into being at the will of God. In contrast, the orthodox position was that the Son was eternally begotten, not created, and His generation was *essential* in the sense of being necessary (i.e. not a choice), rather than being volitional (i.e. a matter of the Father's will).

It must be emphasised that Arius was not insisting

upon any idea that Jesus had only a *human* nature. Indeed, his theology had little to say about the Incarnation, virginal conception, etc.: Hanson refers to Arius' 'rare utterances about the Incarnation.' Arius' concerns focussed on the pre-existent origins of the Son, and more specifically, a defence of the position that controverted claims that the divine essence could be sundered, as with Monarchianism, as we can infer from what Arius goes on to say to Eusebius:

But we say and believe, and have taught, and do teach, that the Son is not unbegotten, nor in any way part of the unbegotten; and that He does not derive His subsistence from any matter; but that by His own will and counsel He has subsisted before time, and before ages, as perfect God, only begotten and unchangeable, and that before He was begotten, or created, or purposed, or established, He was not. For He was not unbegotten. We are persecuted, because we say that the Son has a beginning, but that God is without beginning. This is the cause of our persecution, and likewise, because we say that He is of the non-existent. And this we say, because He is neither part of God, nor of any essential being.

The phrase 'He is of the non-existent' means that Arius asserted that the Son came from 'non-being', i.e. that He was created out of nothing, that there was a time that He did not exist. He also denies the Monarchian idea of the Son being of one essence with the Father.

However, we can also see from the letter that Arius regarded the Son as *begotten*, and was even prepared to call Him 'God' in some sense. On all three counts – regarding Him as the 'Son', as being 'begotten' and being willing to call Him 'God', Arius' theology is totally at variance with Islamic doctrine concerning Allah: Surah Mumineen 23:91: 'No son did Allah beget nor is there any god along with

Him...' In Arius' theology, the begetting of the Son, though not eternal, precedes the general Creation – again, contradicting Islamic theology: Surah Al-Ikhlās 112:3 – 'He begets not nor is He begotten'. All these facts underline that Arius was not some kind of proto-Muslim.

Arius' Confession of Faith to Alexander of Alexandria

If we look at the Confession submitted to Alexander, we find an elaboration of what has been stated in Arius' letter to Eusebius. Firstly, we encounter the idea that God 'begat an Only-begotten Son before eternal times, through whom He has made both the ages and the universe'. This further demonstrates that in Arius' mind the Son, though not the eternal God, was begotten before the general Creation, and indeed, that the Son was in fact the *Agent* of Creation. Clearly, the Son was no ordinary creature, and this indicates that in Arius' estimation Jesus was not merely a man – 'perfect creature of God, but not as one of the creatures'. However, Arius later qualifies this by emphasising the Son's distinction from the Father:

...but the Son being begotten apart from time by the Father, and being created and founded before ages, was not before His generation, but being begotten apart from time before all things, alone was made to subsist by the Father. For He is not eternal or co-eternal or co-unoriginate with the Father, nor has He His being together with the Father, as some speak of relations, introducing two ingenerate beginnings, but God is before all things as being Monad and Beginning of all. Wherefore also He is before the Son...

The essential points which led to Arius being excommunicated by Alexander are that the heresiarch denied that the Son was co-eternal with

the Father, and that He shared the same divine essence. To a large extent it would seem that Arius' thought was propelled by concern that defining the relationship of Father and Son in any other way would be to give credence to the concepts of the Valentinian Gnostics or of the Sabellian Monarchians:

...offspring, but not as one of things begotten; nor as Valentinus pronounced that the offspring of the Father was an issue; nor as Manichæus taught that the offspring was a portion of the Father, one in essence; or as Sabellius, dividing the Monad, speaks of a Son-and-Father; nor as Hieracas, of one torch from another, or as a lamp divided into two; nor that He who was before, was afterwards generated or new-created into a Son.

Hence, when we read of Arius denying the consubstantiality of Father and Son (i.e. being of the same divine essence), or of being a 'portion' of God, we must not anachronistically imagine that he was reacting against the orthodox position of the Church as later detailed in the Nicene and Chalcedonian Definitions, but rather that he was concerned that certain concepts could give support to the heretical positions that he listed here.

For example, the Valentinians, holding to Gnostic beliefs, essentially held that the Supreme God 'emanated' what are called '*aeons*' from Himself – in layman's terms, lesser deities progressively projected out from the original divine essence and thereafter each other, continuing the process. This obviously involved a *division* of the divine substance, and so we must understand that when Arius denied that the Son was *eternally* divine, he was reacting to what he saw as the pitfalls in orthodox Christianity that could be read in a Valentinian way.

In regard to Mani, the third-century Persian who

produced a syncretistic quasi-Gnostic theological system, Hanson represents Arius' objections being towards 'Mani's idea that bits of God are to be encountered in all sorts of places, even in vegetables and food' and so Mani's Christology involved the Son being 'a broken-off piece of the Father'. We have already examined Sabellius' views. Given that Sabellius held to Modalistic Monarchianism, believing that there was only one Person in the Godhead who passed through successive modes, it is perhaps questionable to present him the way Arius does as 'dividing the Monad', but from his perspective it meant making 'two out of one'. Later in the Confession Arius returns to this concept, denouncing any idea that the texts from Romans 11:36; Psalm 110:3; John 16:28 could be understood in this way:

But if the terms 'from Him,' and 'from the womb,' and 'I came forth from the Father, and I am come' be understood by some to mean as if a part of Him, one in essence or as an issue, then the Father is according to them compounded and divisible and alterable and material, and, as far as their belief goes, has the circumstances of a body, Who is the Incorporeal God. 'One in essence' here translates *homoousios* ('same substance'), and Williams indicates that Arius' understanding of the term has reference to the sense of it 'designating a compound substance that can be resolved into its constituents'. Hanson observes that Arius disliked any statement that the Son is 'from' the Father because it implied that the Son was a 'consubstantial part of him and like an issue', which meant that God was 'composite and divisible and mutable and even corporeal'. Of course, orthodox advocates always rejected any idea of the unity of the divine essence connoting a compound structure: it

was never their position that the divine essence could be sundered, holding instead to what was later termed *perichoresis* (mutual indwelling and inter-penetration of the Three Persons in the Godhead), which totally undermines such a concept.

Hieracas was an insignificant late third to early fourth-century Egyptian heretic who 'questioned the resurrection of the body', demanded universal Christian celibacy, denied the salvation of infants, and had 'strange views on the Holy Spirit'. Whilst his Christological views do not appear to have been especially heterodox, Arius saw him as advocating a bifurcated divine essence by virtue of the analogies Hieracas employed, and thus he fitted in with the other heretics named. Moreover, since his other views were so blatantly heterodox, Arius probably utilised his name to defame majority Christological views – i.e. guilt by association.

Arius' denial of Co-eternality

Williams characterises Arius' essential thought as involving the denial that God and the Son 'co-exist'. What emerges from this is that Arius seems to have believed that if the Father and the Son were co-eternal, that proposition in some way implied that the divine essence had splintered, and thus the Father was somehow diminished in His deity, as implied by Arius comment in his Confession: 'For the Father did not, in giving to Him [*the Son*] the inheritance of all things, deprive Himself of what He has ingenerately in Himself'. Such a consequent position was clearly intolerable to Arius – as indeed it was to the orthodox party.

The difficulty for the majority of Church leaders at Nicæa was Arius' proposed solution: his idea that

the divine essence was never sundered because the Son was a *creature* of the Father, and thus temporally subsequent and of a different essence. The majority party at the Council of Nicæa likewise believed that the divine essence was never separated, but they held rather that Father and Son were of one substance and co-eternal, that the 'generation' of the Son was eternal, rather than temporal, and that therefore the Son was not a creature.

The consequent Christological and Theological doctrines with which these concerns left Arius amounted to the following:

Thus there are Three Subsistences. And God, being the cause of all things, is Unbegun and altogether Sole, but the Son being begotten apart from time by the Father, and being created and founded before ages, was not before His generation, but being begotten apart from time before all things, alone was made to subsist by the Father... So far then as from God He has being, and glories, and life, and all things are delivered unto Him, in such sense is God His origin. For He is above Him, as being His God and before Him.

Whilst acknowledging that the Son was brought into being 'before all ages', and that He is 'a perfect creature', Arius denied that He was 'timelessly self-subsistent'. Again, 'The Son did not always exist'. Thus, Arius believed that in some way the Son was a 'lesser' divinity – enough for Muslims to accuse him of Shirk ('associating beings with God' – i.e. polytheism). What is especially interesting is that Arius in some way acknowledged a Triadic relationship between Father, Son and Spirit: the 'substances... of Father, Son and Holy Spirit are separate in nature... having no participation ...with each other'. Incidentally, this indicates that Arius, unlike Jehovah's Witnesses, held to the personality

of the Spirit. It is doubtful that the Libyan Heresiarch would have found himself at home in either a Kingdom Hall or a mosque.

Arius' Letter to Constantine

Towards the end of 327, Arius and Euzoius issued a letter professing their faith, and loyalty to the catholic Church to Constantine, which, however, given its ambiguity, and failure to denounce their previous errors, can scarcely be designated as a 'recantation'. The relevant points are as follows:

We believe in one God the Father Almighty: and in the Lord Jesus Christ his Son, who was begotten of him before all ages, God the Word through whom all things were made, both those which are in the heavens and those upon the earth; who descended, and became incarnate, and suffered, and rose again, ascended into the heavens, and will again come to judge the living and the dead. {We believe} also in the Holy Spirit, and in the resurrection of the flesh, and in the life of the coming age, and in the kingdom of the heavens, and in one Catholic Church of God, extending from one end of the earth to the other.

'This faith we have received from the holy gospels, the Lord therein saying to his disciples: "Go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." If we do not so believe and truly receive the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, as the whole Catholic Church and the holy Scriptures teach (in which we believe in every respect), God is our judge both now, and in the coming judgment.

It can be seen from Arius' previous writings that everything he says here about the 'divinity' of the Son is wholly compatible with what he affirmed before the Council. That is, Arius does not avow here that the Son, though being 'God the Word', is of one essence with the Father. What is interesting is that Arius feels that he can state that the Son

'became incarnate, and suffered, and rose again, ascended into the heavens'. It follows therefore that Arius believed that the Son was somehow simultaneously 'divine' and human – implied in the comment that He 'became incarnate'. Clearly, this puts his position at odds with Islam. Further, the statement that Christ 'suffered, and rose again' implies that Arius believed that Jesus died on the Cross – a position Muslims generally deny.

Arius' *Thalia*

In his *De Synodis* ('*On the Councils*'), Athanasius, at first a young deacon at the break of the controversy, quoted from the poem *Thalia* by Arius where the latter outlined his beliefs. We must be more cautious about this than the preceding writings, although most commentators, such as Williams and Hanson, attribute more authenticity to this than to other quotations of *Thalia*, and at any rate, we shall see that the doctrines contained therein echo those we have already examined:

God Himself then, in His own nature, is ineffable by all men. Equal or like Himself He alone has none, or one in glory. And Ingenerate we call Him, because of Him who is generate by nature. We praise Him as without beginning because of Him who has a beginning. And adore Him as everlasting, because of Him who in time has come to be. The Unbegun made the Son a beginning of things originated; and advanced Him as a Son to Himself by adoption.

In this passage Arius describes the attributes of God with reference to the Son. Because the Son is generated or begotten (which in Arius' view amounted to 'created'), God is Ingenerate/Unbegotten – *agenētos*. This and the subsequent descriptions of the Son as having 'a beginning' demonstrate the temporal reference points for Arius'

Christology – that the Son was not eternal. Again, we note the fact that Arius presents this Being created by God as the pre-existent Son – which means that Arius' position on both counts contradicts Islam. 'The Son' is not so designated because He is a creature – i.e. He is not described in this way because all human beings can be characterised as 'sons of God' – but rather because He is a unique Being, specifically adopted as the Son. This is incompatible with Islam. The quote from the *Thalia* continues:

He has nothing proper to God in proper subsistence. For He is not equal, no, nor one in essence with Him. Wise is God, for He is the teacher of Wisdom. There is full proof that God is invisible to all beings; both to things which are through the Son, and to the Son He is invisible. I will say it expressly, how by the Son is seen the Invisible; by that power by which God sees, and in His own measure, the Son endures to see the Father, as is lawful.

From this we can see that Arius denied the full deity of the Son: He was not equal to God, nor was He of the same essence – *homoousios*. The Son did not have innate knowledge of the Father. It followed from this that Arius did not believe in the classic idea of the Trinity, although, and this must be emphasised, he did believe in some form of Triadic relationship between Father, Son and Spirit:

Thus there is a Triad, not in equal glories. Not intermingling with each other are their subsistences. One more glorious than the other in their glories unto immensity. Foreign from the Son in essence is the Father, for He is without beginning. Understand that the Monad was; but the Dyad was not, before it was in existence. It follows at once that, though the Son was not, the Father was God. Hence the Son, not being (for He existed at the will of the Father), is God Only-begotten, and He is alien from either. Wisdom existed as Wisdom by the will of the Wise God. Hence He is conceived in numberless

conceptions: Spirit, Power, Wisdom, God's glory, Truth, Image, and Word. Understand that He is conceived to be Radiance and Light.

Hence, there was first only God – the Monad, the single entity, but then through His generation/creation of the Son there came about a Dyad, and finally through the (implied) creation of the Spirit, a Triad was established. At this point we should note that Arius' theology is contrary to Islamic doctrine on the Trinity. This is what Islam states on the subject: Surah An-Nisa 4:171 '...say not "Three"... - Allah is only One Allah'; Surah Al-Maida 5:73 'They surely disbelieve who say: Lo! Allah is the third of three; when there is no Allah save the One Allah'; Surah al-Ikhlās 112:1 'Say: He is Allah, the One and Only'.

Yet Arius uses the word Trias (i.e. Triad) in regard to the relationship of Father, Son and Spirit. Thus, in Islamic terms, Arius was a heretic. Moreover, the usual Christian response to the Qur'anic portrayal of Christian Trinitarianism is to state that Christianity does not affirm belief in three gods, but rather in One God, consisting of Three Persons – not a compound unity, but rather a true unity of essence. Obviously if all Three Persons share the same divine essence, it then follows that God is numerically One – there is not a plurality of deities.

The latter proposition would only be true if the Three Persons had *distinct* divine essences. Yet this is exactly what Arius believed: 'the three existing realities are unlike in their substances (ousia). The union which makes them a Trinity is a purely moral one, a unity of will and disposition.' He denied that the Three had the same essence: Kelly comments that Arius was even willing to 'speak of the holy

Triad, in speciously Origenistic language, as consisting of three Persons', but the Three were 'entirely different beings, not sharing in any way the same nature or essence'. Arius also implicitly rejected what would become known as *perichoresis* – the mutual indwelling of the Persons. True, the Son and Spirit were *inferior* 'deities' to the Father, but Arius still designates the Son as 'God Only-begotten', *monogenēs* theos. It follows that essentially, Arius was advocating tritheism, belief in three deities, the very position that the Qur'an denounces.

Athanasius was to attack Arianism on this point, by claiming that to attribute some form of divinity to the Son if He were not of one essence with the Father led to belief in polytheism – a devastating argument in a pluralistic society. Prestige comments that Arius recognised 'the divine Son as an inferior deity... by allowing worship to be offered to the Christ whom he thus regarded as a demi-god, altogether separate from God the Father, he revived the spiritual errors of paganism.' Certainly, if he were around today Muslims would accuse Arius of the unpardonable sin of *Shirk* – associating a creature with God, and of claiming that in some sense at least God had a Son.

Arius concludes by reaffirming the inferiority of Son to Father, to the point that the Father is incomprehensible to the Son, and that the Son was created at the will of the Father, yet Arius can still speak of the Son as a 'strong God' (*ischyros theos*) or 'Mighty God', reflecting Isaiah 9:15:

One equal to the Son, the Superior is able to beget; but one more excellent, or superior, or greater, He is not able. At God's will the Son is what and whatsoever He is. And when and since He was, from that time He has subsisted

from God. He, being a strong God, praises in His degree the Superior. To speak in brief, God is ineffable to His Son. For He is to Himself what He is, that is, unspeakable. So that nothing which is called comprehensible does the Son know to speak about; for it is impossible for Him to investigate the Father, who is by Himself. For the Son does not know His own essence, For, being Son, He really existed, at the will of the Father. What argument then allows, that He who is from the Father should know His own parent by comprehension? For it is plain that for that which hath a beginning to conceive how the Unbegun is, or to grasp the idea, is not possible.

Thus, Arius' position, far from being consistently monotheistic, is in effect, and certainly by default, polytheistic. The Son and the Spirit are simply 'lesser' deities when compared to the Father, and unlike Him are not eternal beings. Hence, the orthodox party at the Council of Nicæa were not just fighting for the Scriptural position of the true Deity of Christ, they were actually battling for genuine monotheism against Arius' polytheistic tendencies.

Arius on the role of the Son in salvation

We have so far examined the *Ontological* character of Arius' Theology/Christology – the nature of the *Being* of God and Christ. However, it is important to also consider the consequences for the *Functional* aspect of Christology – what Christ does. This was also a crucial point for the Council of Nicæa, as can be seen from the Creed: 'true God from true God, begotten, not made, of the same being as the Father, through whom all things came to be, both the things in heaven and on earth, *who for us men and for our salvation* came down and was made flesh'. Arius, as we have seen, denied that the Son was 'true God from true God', but he agreed with the Creed that

the Son was the Agent of Creation – 'through whom all things came to be'. If Arius' theology of divine functionality necessitated that God the Father be distanced from the act of Creation, we should not be surprised that He would also be removed from direct involvement in Redemption. That is, whereas the orthodox majority party believed that God the Son ('true God') took human nature with a view to redeeming mankind, Arius' theology inevitably insisted that only a lesser 'God' could do so.

Hanson notes that 'almost all the actual words of Arius... are concerned with the Son's relationship to the Father', but 'two of the remarks attributed to Arius by Constantine in his letter to Arius... certainly refer to the incarnate Son, and the second... suggests that Arius' doctrine of the Incarnation was designed to protect God the Father from being exposed to human experiences.' This refers to a letter from the Emperor to Arius written some time after the Nicene synod, where Constantine quotes some of the Heresiarch's correspondence to him. The words in question are these: *apage ou boulomai ton Theon 'egô 'ubreôn pathei enegechesthai* – 'Away! I do not wish God to be subjected to the suffering of [*violent*] outrages'. Arius explicitly declared: *ho Christos... di hēmas peponthen* – 'Christ... suffered for us.' It should be noted that this means that Arius contradicted the majority Muslim view of Surah An-Nisa 4:157: 'they killed him not nor crucified him but so it was made to appear to them', which most Muslims take as denying the crucifixion of Jesus.

We should remember that Arius had a horror of Sabellianism, a consequence of which was *Patripassianism* – the idea that 'the Father suffered' (i.e. on the Cross). Sabellianism, of course, held to

the unipersonality of God – that there was only one Person in the Godhead, who experienced successive roles. The error of Arius was in the opposite direction – that there were three distinct divine essences. Thus, through his insistence of the different and inferior ‘divine’ essence of the Son from that of the Father, Arius sought to protect God the Father from the heresy he feared. Hanson comments about these quotes in Constantine’s letter to Arius: They must all be taken as warnings of the consequences of describing the Son as consubstantial (*homoousios*) with the Father; you are bound, if you do so, Arius thinks, to compromise God by exposing him to suffering in the Incarnation. The last quotation must refer to God the Father, not to the Son; so at least Constantine takes it when he replies to it in his letter.

Hanson later comments that these remarks suggest that ‘Arius’ doctrine of the Incarnation was designed to protect God the Father from being subject to human experiences.’ He goes on to observe that this intention ‘is certainly present in the theology of Arius’ early supporters. They regarded the Son as an instrument expressly designed to do the suffering that was necessary in order to carry out God’s plan for saving men.’ Hence, their views on divine ontology reflected their concerns for the Son’s functionality – the fact that He was to suffer on the Cross:

They achieved this position by constantly putting forward two doctrines. First, the human limitations and weaknesses of Jesus, the incarnate Son of God, were a sign of his divine inferiority; his divinity was reduced enough to be able to encounter suffering without ceasing to be divine. And secondly, they insisted that in becoming incarnate the Son had taken to himself, not a complete human individual, but what they called a *sōma apsychon* - a body without a soul. This meant not only a body without a human psychology or a human animating principle, but

also a body without a human mind. The Word directly animated and directed the body, dwelling in it (*katoikwn*).

It can be seen that not only did Arianism offer a reduced ‘God’ in regard to the Son, but also a Christ whose human nature was essentially a sham:

This doctrine is regularly characteristic of Arianism after Arius, and it is the logical outcome of the view which he and his followers held about the relation of the Son to the Father. They wanted to have a God who could suffer, but they could not fit this picture to their idea of God the Father. God the Son must therefore be the God who could suffer, whose divinity was reduced enough to endure suffering... A ‘mere man’ ... could not have redeemed us by his Passion. Somehow God must have suffered.

Hanson notes that Lucian of Antioch is said to have held these views about the *sōma apsychon* of Jesus, and he thinks it likely that Arius also held the same ideas as the early Arians in this respect. Perhaps we should add that the very fact that the synodal Creed has the clause ‘became man’ may reflect the concern to protect the true humanity of Christ from the consequences of Arius’ ideas, just as the affirmation of Christ’s true deity defends Him from the attacks on His genuine divinity. Hanson comments that Arians could only achieve their doctrine of the Incarnation through in effect proposing ‘two unequal gods, a High God incapable of human experiences, and a lesser God who, so to speak, did the dirty work for him.’ It need hardly be said that the Arian position on the humanity of Christ does not correspond with Islam any more than it does canonical Christianity.

It follows from all of this that it is wrong to view the Council of Nicæa as being held just to defend

(let alone to assert) the true deity of Christ: the orthodox party also had to protect His true humanity, not least for the sake of the salvation of mankind. Only a truly divine-human Being could be the Saviour. The Arian Christ was neither true God nor true Man. Likewise, Arius' God was not the unique deity of Biblical tradition.

Conclusion: A summary of Arius' heresy

Arius presents us with a Triad of gods, rather than the Triune God. The divinity of the Son is real, but inferior to that of the Father, who alone is uncreated and eternal. Arius speaks of the generation of the Son, but this generation is not eternal or necessary (the orthodox position was the reverse). The Son is at least potentially mutable, unlike the Father. The Son is the Agent of Creation and Redemption, whilst the Father is distinct and distant from the created order. It follows that the creation of the Son was really a necessary act, despite Arius presenting it as an act of the Father's will, displaying a contradiction in Arius' theology. Christ's humanity was as reduced as His divinity. However, Christ did actually suffer on the Cross. It can be seen that Arius contradicted Islam as much as he did orthodox Christianity.

Given texts such as John 1:1, where we read that the Word was God, and was with God at the beginning, and in Matthew 11:27 where we encounter the statement 'No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him' the reader may ask how Arius, who did not believe in a separate canon of Scripture, arrived at his position? It should be noted that Bishop Alexander made

this very point about the mutual knowledge of the Father and the Son – that Arius' position contradicted the New Testament, specifically John 10:15:

As to their blasphemous position that 'the Son knows not the Father perfectly,' we ought not to wonder at it; for having once set themselves to fight against Christ, they contradict even His express words, since He says, 'As the Father knoweth Me, even so know I the Father.' Now if the Father knows the Son but in part, then it is evident that the Son does not know the Father perfectly; but if it is not lawful to say this, but the Father does know the Son perfectly, then it is evident that as the Father knows His own Word, so also the Word knows His own Father Whose Word He is.

There are several aspects in the answer to this question. Firstly, we must remember that the East had a horror of Sabellianism. To Arius, it seemed that Bishop Alexander was guilty of this since he 'insisted on the unity of the Triad', conceived of the Word as a 'Person', and that the Son was 'co-eternal with the Father'. Secondly, Arianism offered a simple, rationalist answer to the question of the relationship between the Father and the Son, although the Arian solution was influenced by existing Greek philosophical concepts:

The views of Arius and his opponents were all partly shaped by continuing debates among philosophers, whose writings were known to some of the Christian theologians, about the eternity of the world and the relation between form and matter. Does the world have a beginning? Did God exist without a created universe? Can intelligible form exist apart from the material which embodies it? Origen had envisaged a world of created rational spirits coeternal with God (which corresponded to the Platonic realm of ideas or forms), and transient physical worlds in which they are embodied. So for him the eternity of the Son, as Logos, went with an eternal created universe of pure intelligence which could inform

matter. Like Origen's Christian critic Methodius, Arius cannot accept a created order sharing God's eternity. The universe and its time-spans exist only in the Son, who is brought into being absolutely as God wills: 'Wisdom existed as Wisdom at the will of a wise God' (Thalia II.24 [NE 331]); 'He made him to subsist at his own will' (*Letter to Alexander* [NE 326]). So for Arius what subsists before the Son and the creation is only the timeless God, whose will produces the Son, and with him all time and creation.

Hanson sees some influence from Aristotelian and Platonic philosophy, and also from the Christology of Origen (c. 185-254), an Egyptian theologian who held to the subordination of the Son to the Father (though not to distinct essences), but he views the use of these patterns of thought as tools to answer the theological issues he addresses. Most probably, Arius' position arose out of a concern to defend God from Sabellian-type ideas; unfortunately, his solution caused as many difficulties as the problem it sought to answer.

Perhaps the greatest lesson to learn from Arius' heresy is that when addressing the mystery of the eternal relationship of Father and Son, human reason has its limits, because we are dealing with transcendent phenomena. Certain points are not explained to us in Scripture, and any attempt to reduce the eternal mystery of the divine relationship to human terms will fail. In terms of the contemporary situation, we can say that Arius was not a precursor of Islam, Socinianism or the Jehovah's Witnesses, and neither did he hold the position that *The Da Vinci Code* indicates that the Nicene synod was called to confute, both in terms of Christology and Biblical Canonicity. Since Arius did not believe that Jesus was merely a mortal man, nor subscribe to a different canon of Scripture to that of his opponents, it follows that the Nicene Council did not establish the opposite at the synod. Conspiracy theorists will have to hunt elsewhere.

A CONTEMPORARY ISSUE AND A HISTORICAL SURVEY

INTRODUCTION

On becoming EFCC¹ General Secretary it has swiftly been made clear to me that one of the crisis points for us as a church group is the shortfall of people entering the ministry. This problem is not restricted to one evangelical church grouping but I am told is affecting other groups, evangelical and non-evangelical, as well. The FIEC² Pastors' Association report that there are three churches seeking a minister for every potential pastor seeking a church. Many factors have contributed to this growing crisis within UK non-conformity. However it is not my intention to focus on the reasons relating to our current situation but rather to try to take a broader view. By focusing on the nature of the call to the ministry, and seeing this in the light of a particular historical debate, we will be better equipped to respond biblically and responsibly to the current situation.

A HISTORICAL DEBATE – THORNWELL AND DABNEY ON THE CALL TO THE MINISTRY

It would be important to establish first that this debate was not one occurring in the abstract. It reflects a shortfall of ministers in the denominations that James Henley Thornwell and Robert Lewis Dabney were serving. The discussion is about the nature of the call to the ministry and inferences are then drawn about the best measures to take – or the validity of taking any measures at all – in order to stimulate recruitment to the ministry.

James Henley Thornwell (1812 – 1862) was a pastor and professor of theology serving latterly in the Theological Seminary in Columbia, South Carolina. The article on 'The Call of the Minister', which is on pages 14 – 42 in volume 4 of his writings, is an 1847 review article on an ordination sermon preached by Dr Robert Breckinridge. In the sermon Dr Breckinridge aims to: 'vindicate the Divine calling of the Pastors of the Christian Church, to illustrate the divinely-appointed evidence thereof, and to lift up a warning voice against prevailing errors.'

Robert L Dabney (1820 – 1898) was for forty years Professor of Union Seminary, Virginia. His article: 'What is a Call to the Ministry?' is found in volume 2 pages 26 – 46 of his: *Discussions – Evangelical and Theological*. Unhelpfully there is no record of the original date of the article in the book or of where the article was first published. So it is impossible to work out whether in any way the two articles directly relate to one another or whether it is simply true that both relate to an ongoing debate in Southern Presbyterianism in the mid-nineteenth century. It is helpful to compare the two because the abilities of the writers are such that they highlight very clearly a deep divide – a watershed in understanding the call to the ministry – and the consequences that will flow from such a divide.

First, I will show some of the superficial points in common between the two. I will then point out the deep underlying divide between them and look at its modern equivalents and at its consequences. We will consider these as they affect the response to individuals seeking ministry and in terms of possible responses we might make to a shortfall of ministers.

POINTS IN COMMON IN REGARD TO THE CALL TO THE MINISTRY

1. There is a great measure of theological and ecclesiastical consensus. Both Thornwell and Dabney are Presbyterians and strongly confessional in their outlook. They are both theologically conservative although not afraid of original thought or of controversy with those committed to the same theological standards. Predictably this means that they list similar points to be noted in connection with a call to the ministry. Independents may find that in some matters at least they do not have the same perspective.

2. Both hold that God alone can call to the ministry Dabney (page 26): 'The church has always held that none should preach the gospel but those who are called of God.' Thornwell (page 24): 'It is the prerogative of God, and of God alone, to select the men who shall be invested with authority in His Church.' That I think will cause none of us any problems, although we may feel that call to eldership and pastoral office are not biblically distinct.

3. Both hold similar views as to the true grounds of the call of a Christian Pastor By this I mean the requisites that are to be in place for a call to be recognised. Thornwell (page 24) approves of Dr Breckinridge's statement that the true grounds of the call of a Christian Pastor: 'have relation to 1. God himself; 2. To the man's own conscience; 3. To the Christian people; and 4. To those who bear office in the Church.' Dabney lists (page 97ff.), 'the man's conscience and understanding' and 'those of his Christian brethren.'

The reason I say that these points are of superficial

correspondence and resemblance is because there is a fundamental difference between Thornwell and Dabney in their understanding of the call to the ministry and this will affect dramatically how they understand the grounds of the call and how they approach the problem of shortfall in entrants to the ministry. These differences of approach are replicated in our own day and we might far better understand some of the differences that exist between us if we grasp what lies behind our attitudes to the problems that confront us.

AN UNDERLYING AND CRUCIAL DIFFERENCE IN REGARD TO THE CALL TO THE MINISTRY

We will just quote each writer on this subject:-

1. Thornwell (page 24): 'Conscience, the Church, the Presbytery – these do not call into the ministry, but only declare God's call; they are the forms in which the Divine designation is indicated-the scriptural evidences that he who possesses them is no intruder into the sacred ministry.' (Page 24 quoting Dr Breckinridge): 'At every period and under every dispensation God has been pleased to reserve to himself a great and direct agency in designating those who should minister to his people in holy things.' He later (page 25) refers to: 'the doctrine of an immediate call.' He sums up his position (page 41): 'the doctrine of a Divine, supernatural call to the ministry by the immediate agency of the Holy Ghost, evinced by the testimony of conscience, the approbation of God's people and the sanction of God's judicatories, we hold to be alike the doctrine of our Standards and of the sacred Scriptures.' So God's call to the Ministry is something that comes to us immediately from him and is confirmed by Scriptural criteria.

2. Dabney (page 27): 'The call to the ministry then, is to be found, like the call to every other duty, in the teachings of God's revealed word. The Holy Spirit has ceased to give direct revelations. He speaks to no rational adult now through any other medium than his word, applied by his gracious light to the understanding and conscience. ... While the call of prophets and apostles was by special revelation, that of the gospel minister may be termed a scriptural call.' Again: 'a call to preach is not complete until the Holy Spirit has uttered it, not only in the Christian judgment of the candidate himself, but in that of his brethren also.' He is insistent that our pattern is not to be (page 26): 'sought in those places of Scripture where a special divine call was given to Old Testament prophets and priests, or to apostles, although such passages have often been thus misapplied. ... The call of these peculiar classes was extraordinary and by special revelation, suited to those days of theophanies and inspiration. But those days have now ceased, and God governs his church exclusively by his providence, and the Holy Spirit applying the written Scriptures.' (Page 43): 'This Spirit will come, indeed, not through the medium of a voice, a vision, or an inspiration, but through the channels of the Christian's own conscience, judgment and sanctified affections.' In other words for Dabney the call is not immediate, rather God's call is mediated to the individual through the means of scripture and conscience.

Thornwell's doctrine of an immediate call seems to be equivalent to the 'call by ... special revelation' specifically rejected by Dabney. While we could quibble about this and make fine distinctions

between the two ideas, I think we may fairly conclude that the two concepts – rejected by one and accepted by the other – are strikingly similar.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF THIS DISAGREEMENT IN ASSESSING A CALL TO THE MINISTRY

Firstly: as regards the conscience and sense of call of the candidate

Thornwell (page 32): 'Men are not led to the pastoral office as they are induced to select other professions in life; they are drawn, as a sinner is drawn to Christ, by a mighty, invincible work of the Spirit. The call of God never fails to be convincing. Men are made to feel that a woe is on them if they preach not the gospel.' Again: 'it is not that upon a due estimate of their talents and acquirements they promise themselves more extended usefulness in this department than in any other, for no man is anything in the kingdom of heaven except as God makes him so: but it is that the Word of the Lord is like fire in their bones; they must preach it or die; they cannot escape from the awful impression, which haunts them night and day and banishes all peace from the soul until the will is bowed, that God has laid this work upon them at the hazard of their souls.'

Without this sense of call we would not conclude that people should have a bad conscience about withholding themselves from the ministry. Indeed without such a sense of call they should have a bad conscience about seeking to enter the ministry.

If you read Dr Lloyd-Jones': *Preaching and Preachers* you will find the same basic approach. (page 104): 'A call generally starts in the form of a consciousness

within one's own spirit, an awareness of a kind of pressure being brought to bear on one's spirit, some disturbance in the realm of the spirit, then that your mind is being directed to the whole question of preaching. You have not thought of it deliberately, you have not sat down in cold blood to consider possibilities, and then, having looked at several have decided to take this up. It is not that. This is something that happens to you; it is God dealing with you, and God acting upon you by his Spirit; it is something you become aware of rather than what you do. It is thrust upon you, it is presented to you and forced upon you constantly in this way.'

Typically, Dabney will urge consideration of the Ministry on men and is fairly dismissive of the dangers of people intruding themselves into it. (Page 44): 'To intrude into the pulpit without a call is doubtless a sin; for no man possessing such means of instruction and promises as the Bible affords him can make this mistake, except from the predominance of sinful motives or the neglect of prayer and enquiry. It is a sin which is likely to bring mischief upon the church and chastisement and repentance on the mistaken child of God. But to stay out of the pulpit when called to enter it is also a sin, a sin which can only proceed from evil motives, and which must naturally result in the damnation of souls which should have been saved through the disobedient Christian's preaching, but were not, and which must bring him under the frown and chastisement of an offended Saviour.' Dabney notes:

1. Scriptural arguments for the consecration of the believer (page 28ff.) 'These scriptures (general ones about Christian commitment), and a hundred others, plainly teach that the only condition of

discipleship permitted by Christ to any believer is complete self-consecration to his service.' Call to the ministry is: 'the relative (question) of his own capacities and the demands of God's cause at that time.'

2. Scripture texts where God defines the qualifications of a minister of the gospel (page 29): 'Let every reader consult, as the fullest specimens, 1 Timothy 3:1 – 7; Titus 1: 6 – 9. The inquirer is to study these passages, seeking the light of God's Spirit to purge his mind from all clouds of vanity, self-love, prejudice, in order to see whether he has or can possibly acquire the qualifications here set down.' (Page 31): 'He must have a hearty and healthy piety, a fair reputation for holiness of life, a respectable force of character, some Christian experience, and aptness to teach.' However with the obvious exception of: 'aptness to teach', and I guess the same could apply to force of character, failure to qualify is not a reason for concluding we have no call to the ministry due to lack of developed Christian character. (Page 32): 'Do not, indeed, enter the ministry with feeble piety, but at once seek and obtain a hearty piety, in order that you may properly enter the ministry, if it is God's will. In one word, the fact that one's piety is low cannot prove it is not his duty to preach, because he knows it is his immediate duty not to let his piety remain low.'

Dabney also argues very forcibly that inward desire for the work doesn't constitute a call and nor does its absence prove there is no call. (Page 34): 'Every true Christian on earth, young and old, male and female, ought to feel, with reference to the work of preaching that he would be glad to preach if God permitted him.' And 'Away with the notion that the young man is not called to preach unless he hath

fallen in love with this special work, in some senseless and unaccountable manner, as though pierced with the invisible arrow of some spiritual Eros, or Cupid!' Dabney also points out that as regards both the ability to speak in public and in regards to the learning and academic skills necessary for the ministry many people could by hard work attain all that is needed.

He makes a point, which looking back to my own college days seems to be justified, that those with the most evident 'preaching' gifts may in the long-term not achieve a great deal whereas those who are not highly thought of in college days may attain very considerable effectiveness as preachers. Some ministers also achieve considerable learning by sheer hard work and surpass those who would have been considered more naturally gifted.

The problem for Dabney is not that this call does not come to people but that people will not seek out God's will for their lives with fervent and incessant prayer and transparency before God. (Page 44): 'Woe to that man who, while he professes to submit the question to God's decision, mocks the Heart-searcher by bringing his own decision to the throne of grace, prejudicated in the secret places of a selfish heart! And the danger is not only on the side of running uncalled, but also of tarrying when he ought to run.'

Re-examining Gary Friessen's: *Decision making and the Will of God* I feel he has a not dissimilar approach. He summarises (page 317): 'According to the New Testament, a church leader must be a spiritually mature Christian man who desires a position of leadership in the church, and is able to lead God's people and teach God's word.' In his

words neither (page 315): 'bright light or mystical call' is required. A criticism I have is that a 'scriptural' call may by its nature and force be a very powerful experience and by the force of appeal to conscience bind one to the Ministry. I think Friessen, though not necessarily Dabney, overlooks this and it makes a weakness in the case he presents. It is important to note that the fact that a strong sense of call, which may sustain prior to a call from a particular church and in the inevitable testing that such a call brings, does not necessitate a doctrine of an 'immediate' call.

Secondly: as regards the approval of the church and its leaders

This creates less of a division although I think there are implications for what the person seeking the Ministry would be asked. I have some recent experience of this. In an interview I was told I wasn't called (to a particular situation) because I was unable to say that I would accept a call without knowing what the details of the call would be. From my perspective, my sense of call was real but I wasn't prepared to use it as a bargaining tool to convince others. Firstly, to my mind, that sense of inward call had to be confirmed by an outward call to the work. Secondly, realities of family situation etc. meant that I had to know what the details of the call involved so I could be sure that I could accept it.

Differences in viewpoint can be unfairly polarised. Thornwell is adamant that (page 35): 'The testimony of conscience, however, is not final and conclusive. We may deceive ourselves as well as be deceived by others; and to fortify our hearts and diminish the dangers of deception, God has appointed

the approbation of His own people and the concurrence of the courts of His house as additional links in the chain of evidence which, in all ordinary cases, is to authenticate a call from him.' He quotes Breckinridge very approvingly when he says that (page 35): 'beyond all controversy, the saints are the best of all judges whether the ministrations on which they wait fructify (meaning 'edify' and 'perfect') them or not.' Someone not called to a congregation may be called of God but: 'they want (lack) and the Church wants (lacks) a very important element of the proof that they are true Ministers'.

Concerning (page 40) 'the relation which the question of any man's call to the pastoral office bears to those who already hold office, of whatever kind in the Church of Christ,' Thornwell agrees with Dr Breckinridge. 'The final testimony that we have been divinely called to preach the everlasting Gospel is that of a divinely constituted spiritual court, met in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and acting by his authority.'

Dabney (page 27): 'A call to preach is not complete until the Holy Spirit has uttered it, not only in the Christian judgement of the candidate himself, but in that of his brethren also. Sometimes, as in the case of Knox, the brethren anticipate the candidate's own conclusion in uttering this call; usually they follow it by uttering it after he has acted so far on the probable evidence of a call found in his own Christian judgment as to prepare himself to preach.'

Concerning the qualities required in one called to preach, Dabney writes (page 32): 'As far as the church and its officers are concerned, it is perfectly just that they should refuse to call or ordain one

whose piety is not hearty.' Again (page 29): 'His brethren, under the influence of the same Spirit, must candidly decide by the same standard (that of the major passages of the ministry – I Timothy 3: 1 – 7 and Titus 1: 6 – 9) whether they shall call him to preach or not.'

Probably then, the major differences for the responses of others to someone's sense of call is whether the call is regarded as separate from the Scriptural qualifications or whether the Scriptural qualifications constitute the call. In other words do we interview someone directly about his sense of call as part of the evidence that he is called to the ministry?

TACKLING THE PROBLEM OF THE SHORTFALL OF MINISTERS

Here we have a plain and evident difference in approach as a consequence of the views outlined above.

Thornwell quotes Breckinridge (page 29): 'It is easy for us to multiply Ministers of the Gospel, but it is impossible for us to multiply such as are called of God.' That is the crux of his argument but he goes on to apply it to argue against the ways in which others (notably Dabney I suspect) are tackling the problem. Particularly he writes forcibly against the idea that the claims of the Ministry are to be presented to young men especially with a view to awakening their conscience as to the need and their duty in relation to it. This is on three grounds:

1. The nature of the call to the Ministry as being sovereign (page 29): 'It is a popular error, proceeding from defective views of a call to the ministry, and indicated in our prayers and our whole

theory of ministerial training, that we must look principally to young men as the persons whom God shall select to become the Pastors and Rulers of his people. These novices, thus early ascertained of their vocation, are to be trained and educated for the profession of a preacher, as other young men are trained and educated for the bar or the forum. We expect them to be called early, that they may go through the discipline which we conceive to be necessary, and hence we limit our prayers to this class of persons. But if the call be Divine, it must be sovereign; and it must impart a peculiar fitness, an unction of the Holy Ghost, which alone can adequately qualify for the duties of the office. If it be sovereign, it may extend to all classes and ages, to young and old, to rich and poor; to all professions and pursuits, to publicans at the receipt of custom, lawyers at the bar, merchants at the desk and physicians in their shops.'

2. The nature of the call to the Ministry as being immediate (page 30): 'To preach the gospel is a privilege, a distinction, and it has consequently claims on no-one until he possesses satisfactory evidence that he is entitled to the honour. It is the call which makes it his duty, and until the call is made known there can be no pressure of conscience about it.'

3. The different means to meeting the problem presented to us in Scripture (page 30/31): 'The effect of just views would be to make us pray more and contrive less, depend upon God and trust nothing in machinery. We should look to the Lord and not to societies, and we might consequently expect a ministry of power and not of caste. What we want is faith in God, and it simply because we are afraid

to confide in the Lord that we resort to manifold expedients of our own devising to supply the waste places of Zion. We apprehend that the ministry will die out unless we recruit it, and in our blindness and weakness and fear we take God's work into our own hands. The direction of our Saviour was plain and pointed: 'PRAY ye therefore the Lord of the harvest.' It was not to seek ministers here and there, to persuade this man, that man or the other to take the subject into serious consideration, not to offer bribes to enter the sacred office; it was not in any wise to look to ourselves or to depend upon man, but 'PRAY ye the LORD of the harvest.' It is His privilege to provide labourers. Our duty is to ask for them; it is His prerogative to give them.'

I rather suspect that this outlook characterises certain groupings amongst us – it certainly seems to be a characteristic of the Martyn Lloyd-Jones school of thought and that has been a very powerful school of thought amongst our brand of evangelicals. Its effect is to call to prayer, which cannot be wrong, but does encourage a kind of passivity as to actually doing anything besides praying. That is not the danger of the Christian world at large, certainly not of evangelicalism in the UK, but it does represent a considerable danger to us.

Dabney inhabits a completely different thought world. The whole tenor of his argument is to persuade young men that they ought to give earnest and prayerful consideration to entering the ministry. The crux of Dabney's thinking is not that: 'It is easy for us to multiply Ministers of the Gospel, but it is impossible for us to multiply such as are called by God.' Rather it is that (page 38): 'If God has made ten openings for useful ministerial labour for every

candidate who presents himself, the inference is very plain that there must be nine men to every ten of these fields, somewhere in the church, whom God calls to preach, but who refuse to go.' Our task is to lay this duty on the consciences of the nine out of ten men who are sinfully reluctant to acknowledge God's call.

Dabney puts forward reasons why people should not excuse themselves from the ministry and addresses these particularly to young men:

1. The excuse that 'I do not feel a call' is unscriptural and foolish (page 33): 'How foolish and mischievous is (it) ... to argue, as some have seemed to do, that, therefore, if a young Christian does not feel an abiding and strong desire for this special work, he ought to conclude that he is not called? It is so, forsooth, that a man, to whom God has given the capacity and opportunities to do a certain laborious work for His glory, feels himself sinfully reluctant to it, because of a selfish and cowardly fear of its toils and self-denials, or because of a false and wicked shame, or because ambition and covetousness rather impel him to a different calling, he may, therefore, conclude that he is exempt to all obligations to it? Nay, verily. It is that man's duty to repent immediately of this his reluctance, and to crucify it, for it is SIN.' (Page 41): 'We hesitate not to say, that while all Christians, of course, are not to be preachers, and while none should preach whom God does not call, in such a time as ours every Christian who can preach, should conclude that the a priori presumption is in favour of his doing so until the contrary is evinced; and he should approach the examination of his duty on this supposition.'

2. This is in line with the means for meeting the

need for Ministers taught by Jesus. It is interesting how Dabney uses the means of prayer taught by the Saviour to draw almost the opposite lesson to Thornwell. (Page 37ff.): 'The young Christian is bound to consider also the present wants of the church, and the relation of supply to demand. The propriety of taking all this into his account is not only obvious to common sense, but asserted by the fact that 'the harvest is plenteous, but the labourers few,' the ground of the prayer that God would 'send forth labourers into his harvest.' How can one answer the question aright, 'Where does God most need me?' without considering the necessities of his church? Christ has made it the duty of every Christian in the world to offer this prayer. Is not the pious young man mocking God when he offers it, if he is not willing that God shall send him into the harvest?'

3. A series of miscellaneous arguments:

From the analogy of the needs of the hour (page 89): If the country was invaded by enemies then every right thinking man would patriotically gird on his sword and fly to her aid. 'So in our generation, Jesus Christ is calling his church by the woes of a perishing world, and by the critical conjuncture of such opportunities for evangelising it as the world never saw before, and may never see again, for ten thousand volunteers; but only a few here and there sluggishly and dubiously respond. Should not every brave man, then, arise and fly to the front, that his gallant example may rebuke the fatal sloth of his comrades and teach them to be ashamed of their hesitation?'

From consideration of the alternatives (page 41): 'all other useful professions ... are full to overflowing. Merchants ... physicians ... lawyers ... Society has

enough of them – too many. But to supply all our home destitutions, to carry the gospel to every one of the eight hundred millions of pagans on our globe, the church needs a hundred times as many ministers. Now, what young Christian, qualified to preach, who asks in the spirit of the true convert, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” can say in view of these facts, that God and his fellow-men have more need for him at the bar, behind the counter, or in the physician’s calling, than in the pulpit? If he cannot, let him beware how he neglects the prayerful examination of the duty of preaching, at the peril of the wrath of his Saviour.’

From the serious danger of backsliding (page 45): ‘The claims of the ministry on Christian young men are so strong that in many cases the head cannot misunderstand them, though the reluctant heart may shrink from them.’ He then writes of the man who delays the decision and enters another profession while promising to look at the matter later: Under this deceitful plea, he plunges unnecessarily into secular business, till its trammels, or the new affections of married life, or some fancied necessity, settle the question and the man never preaches. Show us the case where such a retraction of the better resolution is not evidence of, yea, synonymous with, spiritual decline. ... Look, young, hesitating professor, at the dire fate of Balaam. He professed to seek the Lord’s will, and he received an impression of it which he dared not dispute. Well would it have been for him if he had then ceased enquiring and gone at once to obeying. To say that you will “consider further the matter”, after God has made an end of consideration by giving light enough to settle the question, is but

virtual disobedience. There is no time to consider; it is time to act. If you are prepared at present to preach, and God calls you to preach, then he calls you to preach now. If you have preparation to make, and God calls you to preach, he calls you to begin that preparation now; for a perishing world needs you now; while you causelessly hesitate souls drop into hell. ‘TODAY IF YOU WILL HEAR HIS VOICE, HARDEN NOT YOUR HEARTS’.

SUMMARY QUESTIONS

1. What is the call to the Ministry? Thornwell has it as ‘immediate’ and supported by conscience and the agreement of others. For Dabney it is ‘scriptural’ and expressed through conscience and the agreement of others.
2. What is it that the church is expected to discern in assessing a ‘call’? Is it the ‘call’ itself that is to be discerned or do we look for the Biblical evidence that supports such a claim or in which such a claim consists?
3. What are the Biblical means given to us to deal with a shortfall in the ministry? Are we limited to prayer because we cannot multiply those called to the ministry by any other means? Are we to challenge those who are sinfully ignoring the fact that according to Scripture they are those called to the ministry?
4. How do we counsel those in our churches who we judge have potential for the ministry? Should a man have a bad conscience about ignoring a Scriptural call to the ministry if he has no inward desire for the work?

1. Evangelical Fellowship of Congregational Churches.
2. Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches.

Mark is such an exciting, fast paced little book that some New Testament scholars think of it as a novel.¹ It is clearly not simply a biography of the Lord Jesus.² Mark is traditionally called a Gospel. However Mark is careful to title his work 'The beginning of the Gospel about Jesus Christ the Son of God' (1:1). Consequently Mark is not an exhaustive treatment of the Good News that Jesus is the Son of God.

Mark is not exhaustive, but he is orderly. He hasn't simply thrown together a few thrilling stories about Jesus. Rikki Watts has surveyed 61 different analyses of Mark's Gospel.³ I want to propose another! I was greatly helped in seeing this by Peter Bolt's work on Mark.⁴ Whether he disagrees with this outline I have no idea, but I found his book very stimulating.

If Mark's book is the beginning of the Gospel, then this article is the beginning of an outline. I hope that it will stimulate better minds than mine to build upon my thoughts and fill in the many gaps and discover greater and richer depths in the Gospel. However, my wish is that those coming to preach on Mark can have a clear outline to work with as they teach it to their congregations.

Overall Structure (The 5 Inclusio)

Mark has 5 sections of differing length. These are clearly identified by the use of inclusio.

1. 1:1 - 6:29 The Way prepared for the Lord
The first section is bracketed by the only two sections about John the Baptist in the whole Gospel. Just in case we missed that inclusion it is placed next to Jesus calling or sending his disciples. Just in case we missed that, this paragraph comes next to Jesus either doing many mighty deeds, or not doing many mighty deeds. So the structure looks like this:

1. John the Baptist prepares the way for the Lord (1:1-15)

2 Jesus calls his disciples (1:16-20)

3 Jesus does many mighty deeds (1:21-2:12)

3a Jesus does no mighty deeds (6:1-6a)

2a Jesus sends out his disciples (6:6b-13)

1a John the Baptist is taken out of the way (6:14-29)

2. 6:30 - 8:21 Jesus is for the whole world

The second section is bracketed by the feeding of the five thousand and the feeding of the four thousand. The first is very Jewish in its feel, the second is more global. Jesus moves from a ministry limited to the Jewish people into a ministry for the whole world.

1. Jesus feeds the 5000 (6:30-45)

2. Jesus feeds the 4000 (8:1-21)

3. 8:22 - 10:52 Jesus opens the eyes of the blind

This third section is bracketed by Jesus opening the eyes of a blind man. First the man needs a second touch because he can't see that clearly (a bit like the disciples at that time). The end story about Bartimaeus is exciting, not only because Bartimaeus can see clearly but because he follows Jesus along the way. This is very much the theme of this central section of Mark. This central section has the three Passion predictions (8:31, 9:31, 10:33-34) and the whole central section centres on the Transfiguration (9:2-14) which is the supreme revelation of the glory of Jesus in this Gospel.

1. Jesus heals the blind man (8:22-26)

2. Jesus heals the blind man (10:46-52)

4. 11:1 - 13:37 Jesus ends Temple-centred religion

The fourth section deals with the Temple in Jerusalem. This is the hub of the Jewish religion and is condemned by Jesus Christ. First he condemns it by his prophetic actions. At the end of this section he prophesies its destruction.

1. Jesus condemns the Temple (11:1-26)

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2. Jesus prophesies the destruction of the Temple (13:1-37)

5. 14:1 - 16:8 Jesus is the Anointed One

The fifth section deals with the rejection, execution and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. This is the hub of the Christian religion. First we have Jesus anointed for his burial, and this section and the whole Gospel ends with the women going to the grave to anoint Jesus' body and discovering that he was not there, he had risen, just as he said.

1. Jesus anointed for his burial (14:1-11)
2. Jesus not anointed at his burial site (16:1-8).

This seems to be a very clear and helpful outline which jumps from the page. I believe once you see it you can't forget it. It helps solve the problem of whether Mark's Gospel ends at 16:8. It also seems to disprove Tom Wright's conviction that both the start and end of Mark's Gospel are lost.⁵ Indeed this outline is so clear that it is obvious to me that Mark deliberately began and ended his Gospel just as we have it. This teaches us the beginning of the Gospel that Jesus Christ is the Lord presented by John the Baptist, who feeds all people, opens the eyes of the blind, replaces the temple worship and is the risen and anointed one.

1. 1:1-6:29 The Way prepared for the Lord
2. 6:30-8:21 Jesus is for the whole world
3. 8:22-10:52 Jesus opens the eyes of the blind
4. 11:1-13:37 Jesus ends Temple-centred religion
5. 14:1-16:8 Jesus is the Anointed One

Internal structure of the individual sections

Section 1. (1:1-6:29)

The Way prepared for the Lord

After the long inclusio (1:1-2:12) we have four sub-sections. Each seems to have a similar make-up.

First (2:13-3:6) The end of the Mosaic Law

This section begins "Jesus went out beside the lake." Notice the structure: one story, a second story and then a pair of two stories.

1. Calling of Levi(te) (2:13-17)
2. Question about fasting (2:18-22)
3. and 4. Two healings on the Sabbath (2:23-3:6)

Second (3:7-3:35) The 'followers' of Jesus Christ

This section begins "Jesus withdrew...to the lake"

Notice the structure again: one story, a second story and then a sandwich of two stories.

1. Crowds follow Jesus to the lake (3:7-12)
2. Twelve apostles come to Jesus on the mountain (3:13-19)
3. and 4. Hostile response from family and Scribes in the house (3:20-35)

Third (4:1-34) Jesus teaching on spiritual life

This section begins "They went across the lake"

Notice the structure: one story, a second story and then a pair of two stories. (Same as first sub-section).

1. Parable of the Sower (4:1-20)
2. The Lamp and Measure (4:21-25)
3. and 4. Two parables about seeds (4:26-34)

Fourth (4:35-5:43) Jesus demonstrates his power

This section begins "...Let us go over to the other side"

Notice the structure again: one story, a second story and then a sandwich of two stories. (Same as second sub-section).

1. Power over the storm (4:35-41)
2. Power over evil spirits (5:1-20)
3. and 4. Power over sickness and death (5:21-43)

Section 2. (6:30 - 8:21)

Jesus is for the whole world

This shorter section has a very similar structure to the previous sub-sections.

The inclusio of the Two Feedings is very instructive.

The Feeding of the 5000 is very Jewish, both in the baskets used and the symbolic numbers.

The Feeding of the 4000 is very global in the same respect.

We see Jesus moving from a ministry to the Jews into a ministry for the whole world.

This movement is fleshed out in the stories between these two miraculous feedings.

These stories also follow the structure of two stories and a pair of stories.

1. Jesus the I AM walks on the water (6:45-56)
2. Jesus has authority over the Law of Moses (7:1-23)
3. and 4. Jesus rescues Gentiles (7:24-37)

Section 3. (8:22-10:52)

Jesus opens the eyes of the blind

This is the central section of the whole Gospel, and its structure is very different.

It is well known to be the section about following Jesus 'in the way'.

It also has the three Passion Predictions. As we would expect, these control the three cycles in this section.

After the opening of the eyes of the blind man at Bethsaida we have the first cycle (8:27-9:1) which begins in the villages around Caesarea Philippi.

1. Peter confesses that Jesus is the Messiah (8:27-30)
2. Jesus predicts his death and resurrection (8:31)
3. Peter responds wrongly and is rebuked (8:32-33)
4. Jesus challenges his disciples to respond correctly (8:34-9:1)

The second cycle begins by Jesus leading 3 disciples up a high mountain, but ends in the house in Capernaum.

1. Two stories that reveal Jesus' supernatural authority (9:2-29)
 - a. Jesus is God's Son, to be listened to (9:2-13)
 - b. Jesus descends to defeat the demon possessed boy and raise him up (9:14-29)

2. Jesus again predicts his death and resurrection (9:30-32)

3. The Twelve respond wrongly and are rebuked (9:33-41)

4. Jesus challenges his disciples to respond correctly (9:42-50)

The third cycle begins in the region of Judea and across the Jordan, but ends up on the way to Jerusalem.

1. Three stories about the ethics of Jesus' Kingdom (10:1-31)

a. Towards disposable wives (10:1-12)

b. Towards insignificant children (10:13-16)

c. Towards self-sufficiency (10:17-31)

2. Jesus again predicts his death and resurrection (10:32-34)

3. James and John respond wrongly and are rebuked (10:35-40)

4. Jesus challenges his disciples to respond correctly (10:41-45)

Section 4. (11:1-13:37)

Jesus ends Temple-centred religion

The Temple was the heart and foundation of the Jewish religion in Jesus' day. Just as Jesus rejected the Sabbath restrictions in Section 1, and the food laws in Section 2, now he rejects the Temple and the Jewish authorities. In the five controversies in this fourth section, Jesus is in conflict with: the Sanhedrin (i.e. the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders (11:27), some Pharisees and Herodians (12:13), the Sadducees (12:18), one of the teachers of the law (12:28) and fifthly and finally Jesus asks his hearers about the teaching of the teachers of the law (12:35).

The inclusio has two extra stories joined to them, highlighting the judgement on the Temple.

1. Jesus condemns the Temple (11:1-26)

a. By faith this (Temple) mountain will be cast

into the sea (11:22-26)

b. This poor widow puts more into the temple treasury... (12:41-44)

2. Jesus prophesies the destruction of the Temple (13:1-37)

Between the inclusion of Jesus cleansing the Temple (which Tom Wright clearly shows is a symbolic action depicting the condemnation of the Temple [JVG]) (11:1-26) and Jesus' eschatological discourse explaining the destruction of the Temple (13:1-37) we have five controversies between Jesus and the religious authorities.

1. Jesus' authority (11:27-12:12, with a quote from Psalm 118)

2. Give to Caesar...give to God (12: 3-17)

3. The resurrection, know the Scriptures and the power of God (12:18-27)

2. Love God...love your neighbour (12: 28-34)

1. Jesus' authority (12:35-40, with a quote from Psalm 110)

Section 5. (14:1-16:8)

Jesus is the Anointed One

This final section sees the Passion Predictions fulfilled as the Son of Man is rejected and gives his life as a ransom for many. The drama moves to its climax by Jesus being rejected by disciples, Jews and Romans. Jesus accomplishes the work of redemption totally alone. He had Peter, James and John with him as he wrestled in prayer in Gethsemane. However, his disciples are conspicuously absent in Chapter 15. Jesus is flogged (15:15), mocked (15:16-20), crucified (15:21-32), dead (15:33-41) and buried (15:42-47). Some women were watching from a distance (15:40) but no disciples were anywhere to be seen! Yet he not only had predicted this in Section 3, but he had been anointed beforehand to prepare for his burial (14:8). The Gospel reaches its goal when the women go to anoint his body in chapter 16 and find that he is not there.

He is going ahead of his disciples to Galilee and they will see him there. He doesn't need to be anointed! He is the Risen Messiah.

1. Jesus is betrayed by Judas (14:10-26)

a. Judas went to betray Jesus to the chief priests (14:10-11)

b. The Lord's Supper prepared (14:12-16)

a1. One of you will betray me..., this is the blood of the covenant... (14:17-26)

2. Jesus is denied by Peter (14:27-72)

a. Peter says he won't deny Jesus (14:27-31)

b. Jesus' trial before the Jewish authorities (14:32-65)

a1. Peter denies Jesus, and the cock crows (14:66-72)

3. Jesus is handed over by Pilate (15:1-47)

a. Jesus handed over to be crucified (15:1-15)

b. Jesus execution by the Roman authorities (15:16-41)

a1. Jesus handed over to be buried (15:42-47)

Conclusion

So the Gospel of Mark does have a very clear structure. It is important we understand the structure so that we know what Mark is teaching us. I have found this insight into Mark thrilling and I hope others will take this further to fill in many gaps and help us to understand this 'beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ the Son of God'

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The notion of persuasion in postmodern culture has to be reconceived. It is not to be equated with the modernist notion where it is essentially about being intellectually convinced of the veracity of an argument. It should, rather, be understood in classical terms. Ancient Greek and Roman civilisation was devoted to the dynamics of public-speaking. Plato, Aristotle, Cicero and others contributed to the development of the rhetorical art form. Aristotle's seminal work, *Rhetoric*, was the standard text for the times. Aristotle had a particular genius for systematising knowledge and in this work he categorises the rhetorical art of persuasion in three divisions. Firstly, he deals with *ethos*, which focuses on the integrity of the speaker. Secondly, he deals with *logos*, which is about the inherent logic of the message itself. Thirdly, he deals with *pathos*, which is about the emotions evoked by the oration.

Ian Pitt-Watson points to a contemporary failure to address the emotional nature of people:

Unless there is some measure of emotional involvement on the part of the preacher and on the part of his hearers the *kerygma* cannot be heard in its fullness for the *kerygma* speaks to the whole man, emotions and all, and simply does not make sense to the intellect and the will alone.²

There are certain parallels between this and the Aristotelian contribution to rhetorical analysis. The integrity of the preacher, the authority of the Word and the appeal to emotions are all relevant factors in preaching. In modernism the stress was on the authority of the Word (*logos*) above the others (*ethos* and *pathos*). But in postmodernism there is an emphasis on emotions, where truth is seen as a matter of individual belief and morality is governed

by the principle, 'if it feels good it is good.' Donald McCullough asserts:

The vehemence of the debate over controversial issues – such as language about God, the inerrancy of Scripture, abortion, creation and evolution, the role of women in leadership, ordination of homosexuals, and others – too often breeds arrogant certainty. Instead of an enriching exchange leading to greater discernment, we have shouting matches that shut off dialogue and fragment the Christian community. One must ask: Who is being served in all this...God or the God of my understanding?³

The importance of the preacher's integrity cannot be underestimated. His moral character may influence how the message itself is perceived. Augustine said: The life of the speaker has greater weight in determining whether he is obediently heard than any grandness of eloquence.⁴

Certainly a lack of integrity undermines credibility. There is a connection between preaching and practice insofar as the moral stature of the messenger contributes to enhancing the reception of the message. Effectiveness in preaching is not ultimately determined by the eloquence of the preacher, the soundness of his logic, the virtue of the man or indeed all of these factors combined. George Whitefield's biographer comments:

Whitfield's...effectiveness lay not in his eloquence or zeal. As we look back from our present standpoint we see that God's chosen time to 'arise and have mercy upon Zion...yea, the set time had come,' and that in raising up Whitfield, He had granted upon him and his ministry 'a mighty effusion of the Holy Ghost': and it was this, the Divine power, which was the first secret of his success.⁵

The Christian preacher would assert that there is a supernatural element in the event or process of conversion. Oswald Sanders speaks of the herald of the gospel in these terms, '...he prepares the way, clears the way and gets out of the way.'⁶

Nevertheless, the elements listed above, at worst, cannot hinder the communication process and at best enhance it. Robinson comments:

In an earlier generation, it was enough for a preacher to announce the truth, and the congregation would ratify it. Today such pronouncements are met with resistance. Today, I have to persuade people, even in the church, of the gospel and its implications. I must respect the right of an audience to make up its own mind. Today's listeners can feel at a gut level the difference between persuading and pronouncing. They react to preaching that doesn't respect their freedom to make up their own minds.⁷

An examination of Paul's thinking and methods of communication provide insight into preaching in a postmodern context by showing that his success is never attributed to convincing people of the veracity of propositional truth claims. It was not 'enough' for Paul 'to announce the truth', either evangelistically, as revealed in the book of Acts, or pastorally as revealed in his epistles. Paul's preaching 'met with resistance' too. Paul had to 'persuade people' then, 'even in the church, of the gospel and its implications' (for example, Galatians). The key to understanding the above Robinson comment is to realise that there is a difference between 'persuading' and 'pronouncing'. It is a difference in attitude and tone that is almost intuitively conveyed, but it is an important difference in a world where style takes precedence over substance. John MacArthur put it cogently:

True biblical preaching ought to be a life-changing endeavour. The conscientious preacher does not merely seek to impart abstract doctrine or plain facts to his people; he also pleads with them for heartfelt and earnest obedience.⁸

Paul's approach to presenting the gospel involved reasoning, explaining and proving in an effort to see

people persuaded. He used his intellectual faculties and theological training to demonstrate the truth of his message by drawing on evidence from Old Testament Scripture. The Bereans⁹ tested the accuracy of his claims by searching the Scriptures in order to establish the validity of his assertions. A number of them found that there was sufficient evidence to warrant a verdict of proven and yielded to its consequential demand for faith.¹⁰

Paul lived in that world where rhetoric was revered. He was deemed to be a failure as an orator by some. He alludes to this issue in his second letter to the Corinthian church.¹¹ However, Paul did not merely employ the oratorical skill of the sophist in seeking to convey the gospel. Conscious of his limitations he asserts that it was the power of God that penetrated the hearts¹³ of the Corinthians.¹⁴

Nevertheless Paul did seek to persuade people of the truth of the gospel. This is clear in Acts chapters 17-19 in particular. It is revealed that in Thessalonica: '...as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he *reasoned* with them from the Scriptures, *explaining* and *proving* that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead...' (vs. 2-3. Emphasis added by italicization). Clearly Paul is engaged in expository preaching of the Old Testament in a reasonable, rational and persuasive manner. Then Paul travels to Athens and there, 'he *reasoned* in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there' (v.17. emphasis added by italicization). When he stood up at the meeting in the Areopagus and said: "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed

the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, 'To the unknown god'. What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you" (vs. 22-23).

This is a masterstroke of rhetoric in the service of the gospel. When in Corinth Paul continued with the same approach, 'And he *reasoned* in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to *persuade* Jews and Greeks' (Acts 18:4. Emphasis added by italicization). This chapter also highlights the fact that Paul's enemies knew him to be a person who sought to persuade others to convert from Judaism to Christianity:

But when Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him before the tribunal, saying, 'This man is persuading people to worship God contrary to the law.' (Acts 18:12-13. Emphasis added by italicization).

In Ephesus Paul is found arguing persuasively, 'And he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, *reasoning* and *persuading* them about the kingdom of God' (19:8. Emphasis added by italicization). He stayed in Ephesus for two years and had daily discussions in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. When Festus accused Paul of insanity Paul replied that what he was saying was true and reasonable, "I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking true and rational words" (Acts 26:25). Dabney exhorts preachers:

Let your aim be to persuade men in Christ's name, and not to be praised for skill in persuading... You must so hunger for the salvation of the souls before you, that you shall desire to make the effect of sacred truth fill them... He is not the true preacher who sends his hearers home exclaiming, 'How eloquent the minister today; how beautiful his imagery; how artful his arrangement; how

skilful his argument and persuasion!'¹⁵

This introduces the spiritual dimension to the activity of preaching. The great evangelistic apostle was very conscious that it was not enticing words or eloquence that prevailed upon people to be receptive and responsive to the message. He does not attribute their conversions to plausible argumentation. He attributes the 'success' of his preaching to the operation of the power of the Holy Spirit in stirring the minds and emotions of his hearers to persuade them to yield their wills to the will of God. Calvin said there is no benefit from preaching, 'except when God shines in us by the light of his Spirit...'¹⁶ Spurgeon referred to this work of the Spirit in preaching as, 'the sacred anointing'.¹⁷ Paul never set out to impress the Corinthians with semantics. He believed in the idea expressed by the writer to the Hebrews:

'For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.' (4:12).

Tony Sargent describes the sacred unction of the Spirit in these terms:

...the penetration and dominion of the personality by the Spirit... It is the preacher gliding on eagle's wings, soaring high, swooping low, carrying and being carried along by a dynamic other than his own. His consciousness of what is happening is not obliterated. He is not in a trance. He is being worked on but is aware that he is still working. He is being spoken through but he knows he is still speaking. The words are his but the facility with which they come compels him to realise that the source is beyond himself.¹⁸

Nevertheless Paul preached Christ with passion and

power and sought to be as persuasive as possible in the manner in which he presented his message. His discourse was rational and coherent and characterised by a fervent desire to see people coming to faith in Christ. It is obvious that others recognised this tone in his preaching. This is evident in the following words, 'And Agrippa said to Paul, "In a short time would you *persuade* me to be a Christian?"' (Acts 26:28. Emphasis added by italicisation). In his second letter to the Corinthians Paul explicitly states that he intentionally set about seeking to persuade people of the truth of the gospel, 'Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we *persuade* others' (5:11. Emphasis added by italicisation). Ajith Fernando points out that, 'The word *peitho* (persuade)¹⁹ is used at least eight times in Acts to refer to the evangelism of the early Christians'.²⁰ Fernando goes on to point out that 'when persuasion is used in connection with religious proclamation today it is often associated with arrogance and intolerance.'²¹ Fernando draws attention to how peculiar this is:

This is strange because persuasion is used daily in many spheres of life. Advertisers seek to persuade us to patronize certain products, and politicians seek to persuade us to accept their policies and vote for them. Yet when it comes to religion, this approach to communication is considered inappropriate.²²

He then identifies inappropriate kinds of persuasion such as 'imposition', 'manipulation'.²³

Paul was aware that the truth of the gospel is not discovered through deductive or inductive reasoning. He argued that fathoming the things of God is a matter of spiritual discernment. It is the Holy Spirit that enables the mind to apprehend truth and that intellectual comprehension stimulates impulses that

determine decisions. In the words of Calvin 'The effectual cause of faith is not the perspicacity of our mind, but the calling of God'. It is not, therefore, merely a mental matter. Paul was aware that coming to know divine truth was not the result of speculation but rather the result of revelation and illumination. He clearly communicated this to the Corinthians when he said:

'The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.' (1 Corinthians 2:14).

Nevertheless he did what he could to make the message clear and intelligible. Again the book of Acts confirms this. Whether it was the synagogue or the marketplace, Paul laboured day after day to present the gospel in as persuasive a manner as possible. This was also his typical approach in Thessalonica²⁴ and Ephesus.²⁵

There is evidence in Acts 17 of some degree of interaction with his listeners; his style had some discursive features. He was essentially handling an abstract idea in a pedagogical manner, but something of his passionate concern for his listeners must have been evident. Christ also taught pedagogically (Sermon on the Mount) but He was frequently questioned by either people who were looking for answers or looking to trip Him up. So Jesus had to deal not only with supportive questions but also with hostile ones.

In the postmodern climate the rules of engagement have changed. Argumentation in Paul's day was based on the refined outcome of centuries of Greek thought. There was an established framework for determining truth claims. Rules of logic may not be

perfect but to discard them altogether is absurd. D. A. Carson speaks of this revolt against absolutes: For the first time in the history of the church...the only heresy that's left is the view that there is such a thing as heresy...that is the one heretical view. And within this kind of framework to preach an unflinching truth, and to claim that apart from this truth men and women are eternally lost makes you not only sound 'nineteenth century' and bigoted, but irrelevant and hopelessly lost in an epistemology now dead just crying out for a decent burial.²⁶

According to Scripture, God reasons with sinners.²⁷ But God is not negotiating terms and conditions or conferring with man in order to reach a mutually satisfactory agreement. Nevertheless this text indicates that the revelation of the biblical God is of one who invites people to consider their condition in propositional terms that promises the prospect of forgiveness.

If Paul is taken to be a superior model of effective communication to which Christian preachers should aspire, then his style must be scrutinised to see what principles may be extrapolated from such a model. It is instructive to note, therefore, how frequently he uses the phrase 'I beseech you'. He is unashamed to implore, entreat and earnestly beg believers to become what God wants them to be. If this tone of urging and exhorting is absent from preaching it becomes less than what it ought to be. John MacArthur says:

After all, to be hearers of the Word without being doers is to be dangerously deceived (James 1:22). And one sure way for preachers to cultivate hearers-only is to deliver nothing more than dry, didactic lectures...dull performances for the intellectually curious. That is not biblical preaching, no matter how sound the teaching may be on an academic level.²⁸

Passion is an important element of preaching. If preaching is merely didactic and pedantic in seeking to convey information to the mind alone then people may understand the meaning of the message but fall short of undertaking its demands. Certainly, preaching is an exercise that has a pedagogical dimension but if a sermon is presented like a lecture or a dissertation on a theme, in a manner that is cold-blooded, detached and distant it may convince the intellect but not captivate the soul. Preaching to the soul not only engages the mind, emotions and will but also addresses the desires and moral inclinations of people. On the other hand a highly charged and histrionic harangue, however earnest it may be, might electrify the emotions without engaging the mind. Truth must be spoken to the mind with calculated intent to stir the emotions and engage the will. Preaching seeks to provoke a whole-soul response. A person may be convinced and yet not know a conviction of emotions and will that impel a response. When mind and emotions are engaged the will may be stimulated to action. Timothy Phillips and Denis Okholm state the idea like this:

Evangelical apologetics must attend to both reason and rhetoric, with as much emphasis on the latter as the former in order to make reason relevant and help people see the truth.²⁹

Proclamation that is unenthusiastic is not only uninteresting but pitiful and preaching that is uninterested in people is pathetic. If preaching is to be persuasive the preacher must be able to identify with the needs of the congregation. If a man is remote and aloof in pastoral ministry and if he is unaware or unconcerned about the welfare of the people then his preaching will have very little

impact. That kindred spirit where the man in the pulpit shares the concerns of the congregation in the pews is an important factor in determining how persuasive his preaching will be. If that note of empathy is absent then the majestic melody of preaching will become discordant and cacophonous. What is needed is well prepared sermons that exposit the text, delivered passionately by men of good moral character who identify with the people in the pews. The aim of preaching is not just to get people to comprehend the truth but to embrace it. Tozer makes this point forcefully:

Bible teaching without moral application could be worse than no teaching at all and could result in positive injury to the hearers. What is generally overlooked is that truth as set forth in the Christian Scriptures is a moral thing; it is not addressed to the intellect only, but to the will also. It addresses itself to the total man, and its obligations cannot be discharged by grasping it mentally. Truth engages the citadel of the human heart and is not satisfied until it has conquered everything there.³⁰

Truth and application are indivisible and Packer affirms this also, 'Preaching is essentially teaching plus application...where the plus is lacking something less than preaching takes place.'³¹

Broadus agrees, 'The application in a sermon is not merely an appendage to the discussion or a subordinate part of it, but is the main thing'.³²

Spurgeon was of the same opinion, 'Where the application begins, there the sermon begins'.³³

Christians cannot demonstrate with words alone that their faith is 'true', no matter how much apologetic emphasis is stressed. McGrath asserts:

When it comes to the big things of life, like believing in the Christian faith or believing in democracy, we live on the basis of probability, not certainty... Christian faith is a risk because it cannot be proven.³⁴

Nevertheless it is the preacher's task to present the Christian message as plausible. Postmodernism rejects the idea of absolute truth, dislikes authority and has cast off all meta-narratives, including Christianity, as exploitative. According to this way of thinking Christianity is perceived as a meta-narrative that is proclaimed authoritatively as the absolute truth. This leaves the preacher of Christ with the unenviable and daunting challenge of overcoming such obstacles.

In a postmodern world where the mission of Christianity is understood as cultural oppression and where uncertainty and doubt are characteristic traits of thinking, despair is preferable to the deception of worldviews that proselytise for their own self-serving purposes. Graham Johnston argues:

The issue surrounding the meta-narrative and preaching can come down to the speaker's ethos. Twenty-first-century listeners fear biblical communicator's motives and will question promotion of any particular worldview. Through humility, love and patience, though, preachers can take measures to dispel the concern of people who have witnessed atrocities and deception in the name of truth and the name of God.³⁵

This presents an ethical dimension to the issue of persuasion. The preacher of integrity will not seek to pressurise or manipulate people into making decisions that they do not fully understand. People are suspicious of preachers because they are perceived as silver-tongued orators who entice and entrap needy people to sign up before they develop a sense of scepticism. This wariness of the seductive charms of preachers is part of the cynicism of this generation and the problem is compounded by 'preachers' who delude and beguile, often with mesmerising methods, for the purpose of financial

gain. There is a moral obligation on those seeking to preach Christ to carefully explain the meaning and implications of faith. When this is done with passion, in the power of the Holy Spirit, by men of integrity who expect that Word to work efficaciously in the hearts of their hearers it can be very persuasive. The Christian communicator is not marketing a product or trying to soft-soap, sugar-coat or sell to potential consumers. Persuasive preaching is not about trying to clinch deals. Nevertheless it is as Christ's ambassadors that preachers implore others, on Christ's behalf, to be reconciled to God (2 Corinthians 5:20). Packer addresses this matter of importance:

Far too many pulpit discourses have been put together on wrong principles...Some have expounded biblical doctrine without applying it, thus qualifying as lectures rather than preachments (for lecturing aims only to clear the head, while preaching seeks to change the life); some have been no more than addresses focusing the present self-awareness of the listeners, but not at any stage confronting them with the Word of God...such discourses are less than preaching...but because they were announced as sermons they are treated as preaching and people's idea of preaching gets formed in terms of them, so that the true conception of preaching is forgotten.³⁶

The Christian message is perceived by post-modernists as another manipulative meta-narrative like Marxism, Capitalism, Islam, Judaism etc. If Christianity is different in some critical way then the postmodern perception may be disproved. At a superficial level Christianity may appear to be a conventional, controlling meta-narrative but the gospel has conspicuous characteristics that would appear to contradict the postmodern view that all meta-narratives involve dominance by a preferred group. Marxism, for instance, might be said to be an

attractive ideology for the oppressed worker toiling endlessly for the benefit of those who control economic resources. Although it is an ideology that might appeal to the factory worker and the supermarket employee it will repel the factory owner and the supermarket owner. It is essentially about shifting the balance of power, wealth and privilege and as such it is understood by the dominant economic group to be a threat. But Jesus does not merely present an alternative worldview to dispossess the controlling elite. Rather, his message offered a new paradigm to empower those on the fringes of society, the excluded and the rejected. He did confront the institutional authority of the religious elite with regard to their hypocrisy. Nevertheless He did not reject Nicodemus, a Pharisee and member of the Jewish ruling council, who came to Jesus at night.³⁷ It was not only members of the religious establishment that were received by Christ. Others such as the despised tax collectors were public officials working for the Roman oppressor and they too were received by Jesus. Christ did not stand for any particular class; rather, He included those at the core and those on the periphery. Middleton and Walsh say:

This radical embrace was vivid testimony to his trust in the Creator of both centre and margins, a Creator who is able to bring life out of even death. The person of Jesus and even his death on a cross, thus becomes in the New Testament a symbol of the counter-ideological intent of the metanarrative and the paradigm or model of ethical human action, even in the face of massive injustice.³⁸

But it is not possible to get away from the fact that preaching Christ involves conveying a message. The following list gives a broad outline of the scope of preaching themes: his deity, pre-existence,

Trinitarian nature, incarnation, sinless life, public ministry, teaching, death, atonement, resurrection, ascension, glorification, intercessory ministry on behalf of his followers. Then there are his attributes: humility, authority, holiness, power, immutability, transcendence, omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence and truth. Not only that, but there are a host of themes regarding Christian living and the moral implications and practical application of messages. From this brief glance it may be understood that preaching involves the communication of the central tenets of faith and cherished doctrines enshrined in constitutions and creeds. From this it is clear that, after all, preaching involves expositing Scripture. Kaiser quotes Bengel, who in 1742 observed:

Scripture is the foundation of the Church: the Church is the guardian of Scripture. When the Church is in strong health, the light of Scripture shines bright; when the Church is sick, Scripture is corroded by neglect; and thus it happens, that the outward form of Scripture and that of the Church, usually seem to exhibit simultaneously either health or else sickness; and as a rule the way in which Scripture is being treated is in exact correspondence with the condition of the Church.³⁹

Kaiser himself goes on to say:

After more than two centuries we can affirm the validity of Bengel's warning. The Church and the Scripture stand or fall together. Either the Church will be nourished and strengthened by the bold proclamation of her Biblical texts or her health will be severely impaired.⁴⁰

This is a point reinforced by one of today's greatest expository preachers, John Piper, who says:

'Where the Bible is esteemed as the inspired and inerrant Word of God, preaching can flourish. But where the Bible is treated merely as a record of valuable religious insight, preaching dies'.⁴¹

So the notion of persuasive preaching when reconceived in classical terms, as distinct from modernist terms, is germane in postmodern culture. Another crucial element in preaching Christ in a postmodern context is that of humility. In a culture where certitude is seen as arrogance, humility is attractive. But humility must be rightly understood.

Humility should be the hallmark of a preacher, as it was an essential element in the ministry of Christ.

Andrew Murray wrote:

If humility is the root of the tree, its nature must be seen in every branch, leaf and fruit. If humility is the first, the all-inclusive grace of the life of Jesus, the secret of his atonement— then the health and strength of our own spiritual life will entirely depend upon our putting this grace first, too. We must make humility the chief thing we admire in Him, the chief thing we ask of Him, the one thing for which we sacrifice all else.⁴²

Postmodernism is a profoundly complex 'philosophy' or 'mood' with significant implications for all religious thought processes including Christian theology. Still in emergent form it is not clear if the postmodern mentality will be more receptive (than the modern mentality) to the idea of preaching Christ. If there is greater optimism about receptivity to Christ in postmodern culture it is counterbalanced by less confidence in preaching as the primary method of reaching the un-churched.

When the apostle Paul spoke about the resurrection of the dead in Athens the text says that 'some of them sneered'.⁴³ This disdainful attitude was also a characteristic of the logical positivism that has dominated thought processes over the past three centuries. But this view has weakened significantly and postmodernity views the universe as a vast space where anything may be possible, including the

resurrection. There is a new humility in science. There is less arrogance and a greater hesitancy about making absolute scientific pronouncements. In the context of this new openness postmodern people no longer speak of the world as a self-regulating machine that is programmed to work in accordance with strict natural laws. There is a more humble acknowledgement that the universe is far more complex than previously understood by the scientific community and that it is more like a living organism than a machine. This recognition of the interconnectedness of all things is a feature of postmodernism and is a window of opportunity for the preacher.

For truth to be conveyed effectively there must be some connection between speaker and listener. In a postmodern culture it is better to move away from the term 'speaker and listener' because preaching in this context has to be a dialogue rather than a monologue and this 'dialogue' is likely to be more than the interchange of opinions at an intellectual or cognitive level. The biblical communicator needs humility (not the same as 'hesitancy') in communicating truth with authority. The Puritan, John Flavel said, 'a crucified style best suits the preacher of a crucified Christ'.⁴⁴ This sentiment is supported by John Piper:

...the cross is the power of God to crucify the pride of both the preacher and the congregation. In the New Testament the cross is not only a past place of objective substitution; it is also a present place of subjective execution...the execution of my self-reliance and love affair with the praise of men.⁴⁵

The Migliore phrase, 'Faith Seeking Understanding',⁴⁶ may be helpful in enabling the preacher to identify with non-believers who are also

engaged in the same activity. Graham Johnston notes:

The preacher who demonstrates humility with regard to his...own subjective foibles as human interpreter offers a reassuring message to those suspicious of demagoguery.⁴⁷

In preaching, frail, flawed and feeble people bear witness to the perfect deity. It is not an arrogant presumption on the part of the preacher to speak of a God who is almighty and perfectly holy, loving and just, because the preacher is called to the task by his people and commissioned by God to exercise the function of that office faithfully. As such, preaching is not an act of arrogance but of humility. This draws attention to the manner and practice of preaching which requires humility. But humility can be misplaced, as G. K. Chesterton observed: What we suffer from today is humility in the wrong place. Modesty has moved from the organ of ambition. Modesty has settled on the organ of conviction, where it was never meant to be. A man was meant to be doubtful about himself, but undoubting about the truth; this has been exactly reversed. We are on the road to producing a race of men too mentally modest to believe in the multiplication table.⁴⁸

The humility of the messenger is important but this does not necessitate humility regarding the message. The message of Scripture must be proclaimed with a confidence appropriate to its significance and magnitude. James Stewart says:

It is always thus in every age the ministers of the living Christ are made...the crushing, paralysing sense of abject worthlessness, the self-esteem broken and rolled in the dust, and then a man rising to his full stature as God's commissioned messenger. 'Chief of sinners', 'least of all saints'... such was Paul's self-estimate; yet with what royal, unqualified authority he proclaimed the word and the will of the Lord.⁴⁹

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10. See Acts 17:10-12.
11. 'For they say, "His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account."' (2 Corinthians 10:10).
12. Paul was perceived by some to be an inadequate public speaker but in reality he was a powerful orator. Nevertheless he did not depend merely on his own skill to bring about conviction and conversion.
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22. Fernando, Ajith. 'The Uniqueness of Jesus Christ', 127.
23. Fernando, Ajith. 'The Uniqueness of Jesus Christ', 127.
24. Acts 17:1-4
25. Acts 18:18-19
26. Carson, D. A. *The Primacy of Expository Preaching*, cassette.
27. "Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool." (Isaiah 1:18 emphasis added in italicisation).
28. MacArthur, John Jr. 'Foreword' to Fabarez, Michael. *Preaching That Changes Lives*, vii.
29. Phillips, Timothy and Denis. L. Okholm. *Christian Apologetics in a Postmodern World*, Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1995, 19.
30. Tozer, Aiden Wilson. *The Best of A. W. Tozer*, comp. Warren W. Wiersbe, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978, 140-141.
31. Packer, James Innell in: Lucas, Dick et. al. *Preaching the Living Word: Addresses from the Evangelical Ministry Assembly*, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 1999, 31.
32. Broadus, John A. *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, 4th. ed., revised by Vernon L. Stanfield, 165.
33. Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, revised by Vernon L. Stanfield, 165.
34. McGrath, Alister. *Bridge-Building: Effective Christian Apologetics*, Leicester, England: IVP, 1992, 81.
35. Johnston, Graham *Preaching To A Postmodern World*, Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 2001, 108.
36. Lucas, Dick. (ed. et. al.) *Preaching the Living Word: Addresses from the Evangelical Ministry Assembly*, 31.
37. Although he did not reject Nicodemus Jesus rebuked him for his ignorance of spiritual matters and classified him as part of a group blinded by prejudice rather than receptive to the New Covenant.
38. Middleton, Richard and Brian J. Walsh, *Truth is Stranger than it Used to Be: Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age*, 105.
39. Kaiser, Walter C. Jr. *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching*, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981, (twelfth printing 1996). Kaiser is quoting John Albert Bengel, *Gnomon of the New Testament*, ed. Andrew R. Fausset, 5 Vols., Edinburgh: Clark, 1857-1858, 1:7. He notes that the English translation has been modernised at one or two points.
40. Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching And Teaching*, 7.
41. Piper, John. *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*, 40.
42. Murray, Andrew. *Humility*, New Kensington: Pa.: Whitaker House, 1982, 19.
43. Acts 17:32.
44. Flavel, John. *The Works of John Flavel*, Reprinted, Banner of Truth Trust, 1968, Vol. 6, 562.
45. Piper, John. *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*, 33.
46. Migliore, Daniel L. *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*, Grand Rapids: Michigan, Eerdmans, 1991.
47. Johnston, Graham. *Preaching to a Postmodern World*, 105.
48. In: Stewart, James S. *Heralds of God: A Practical Book on Preaching*, Regent College Publishing, 1946, 210.
49. Stewart, James. *Heralds of God: A Practical Book on Preaching*, 212.

Introduction

In this article, I will highlight some recent literature of which serious students of the New Testament, whether college lecturers, students, or preachers, might wish to be aware. As in the case of previous surveys, my criteria for inclusion have been as follows: I have included those titles on the NT, and related subjects, which (a) have been available to me; (b) seem to me to be significant and worthy of note; (c) are primarily exegetical and theological, rather than homiletical; (d) I think could be of benefit to students and/or preachers as well as theological lecturers. Thus, I make no claim to be exhaustive in my survey, but I hope that my comments may still prove useful.

Introductory Issues

Interpreting the New Testament Text,¹ edited by D. L. Bock and B. M. Fanning, serves two functions: firstly, it is a collection of essays gathered to honour Professor Harold Hoehner and secondly it is intended to be a students' guide to 'the art and science of exegesis'. The fact that it manages to accomplish both of these rather different tasks so well is a tribute to the editors and their arrangement of the material. The book is divided into two distinct parts: Part 1 is a helpful analysis of the methods and procedures of exegesis. This has been written by members of the Dallas Theological Seminary NT faculty. Standard topics such as genre, word studies and background studies are covered. Some of the chapters assume a reasonable knowledge of Greek (e.g. on sentence diagramming) but most preachers and students will be able to profit from the chapters with some selective reading. Part two is

intended to show the various methods and procedures in action, and here an international group of scholars, including Howard Marshall, Joel Williams, David Catchpole, Helge Stadelmann and Earle Ellis write fairly short chapters on specific NT texts, illustrating one of the issues dealt with in Part 1. So, for example, Edwin Yamauchi illustrates the use of background material as he shows why the Ethiopian eunuch of Acts 8 was not from Ethiopia. Such guides can be daunting for busy preachers because they can give the impression that one would need to spend three weeks preparing for one sermon! But the editors of this guide recognize that a great deal depends on the student's developing experience as the 'art' of biblical exegesis is learned and they have presented an extremely valuable guide for all who wish to hone their skills.

Biblical Theology

Allen P. Ross has produced an important study of biblical worship called *Recalling the Hope of Glory: Biblical Worship from the Garden to the New Creation*.² The bulk of the book deals with the biblical presentation of worship in the various biblical documents, but there are also some concluding reflections on the way worship should be expressed in the church. Ross has clearly drawn on a significant body of scholarship in his research, but scholarship does not obscure the main points and this clearly written book would be of great benefit to any serious Christian reader who wishes to reflect on worship in the life of the church.

In the context of controversy regarding the nature of Jesus' death on the cross, S. Jeffrey, M. Ovey and A. Sach have written, *Pierced for our Transgressions*.³ This

book first addresses the key biblical texts which are relevant to the doctrine of penal substitution and also considers the way in which this doctrine has been presented throughout church history. In the second main part, the authors tackle particular objections to penal substitution, making this a useful tool for developing effective apologetics. This is an important contribution to our understanding of a central doctrine and is worth reading carefully.

Of a rather different nature is the volume of essays edited by C. Rowland and C. Tuckett, entitled *The Nature of New Testament Theology*.⁴ This book is a Festschrift for Robert Morgan. Although the contributors are key figures in modern academic New Testament studies, few hold a high view of the biblical text and this volume, though containing some stimulating studies, can be left to those who have a particular research interest in the area.

Gospel Studies

One of the most remarkable books of the last couple of years is R. Bauckham's major book, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*.⁵ Bauckham argues that the Gospels should be regarded as 'testimony' and that the idea that the canonical gospels are founded on eyewitness accounts should be treated much more seriously than it has been by academics. While many Christians may wonder why this should be startling news when they already accept this view, the fact that this thesis has been taken up in serious debate among scholars is a significant development which is to be welcomed.

Dale C. Allison has published a collection of *Studies in Matthew*.⁶ These were mainly written in the process of writing his major ICC commentary with

W. D. Davies. Subtitled 'Interpretation Past and Present', the most interesting section is the first part which is a collection of exegetical studies which draws heavily on the Church Fathers. This is primarily a book for postgraduate students working on Matthew's Gospel.

Hendrickson has issued (or reissued) four companion volumes on the four Gospels, each with the subtitle *Storyteller, Interpreter, Evangelist*. The authors are W. Carter (Matthew – a reissue of his earlier work and John); Francis J. Maloney (Mark) and Mikeal C. Parsons (Luke).⁷ These volumes pay particular attention to literary and theological issues and are useful in that respect. Parsons' volume is more disparate in its themes than the others.

Simon Gathercole has written a bold exegetical and theological work, *The Pre-existent Son: Recovering the Christologies of Matthew, Mark and Luke*.⁸ Gathercole takes on a significant academic perspective, not least that of the supervisor of his doctoral thesis, J. D. G. Dunn, that the NT does not teach the pre-existence of the Son. This is a demanding but important study with significant theological implications. Serious readers are encouraged to read it.

Pauline Studies

J. D. G. Dunn's, *The New Perspective on Paul*,⁹ is a collection of Dunn's essays on this controversial topic. Although many of the essays have been published previously, it is very useful for those who wish to understand the New Perspective on Paul to have this handy collection of one of the most significant figures in the debate, including the paper which introduced the terminology of the 'New Perspective' in the first place. The value of the

collection is further increased by a long essay which prefaces the collection which presents Dunn's reflections on the whole discussion.

In a debate which has great implications for the church, there can be a good deal of fiery rhetoric, so we can be grateful that C. Venema has authored *The Gospel of Free Acceptance in Christ*,¹⁰ in which he attempts to present a critical response to the New Perspective which is nonetheless measured in its tone and fair in its presentation of the views of those with whom he disagrees. He begins by outlining the classic Reformed view of the Gospel, with particular reference to justification. He then moves on to present the views of several key figures in recent Pauline studies: E. P. Sanders, J. D. G. Dunn and N. T. Wright. It is to Venema's credit that he does attempt to take account of different views among these authors and also that he recognises the significant contribution that N. T. Wright has made to conservative scholarship on the Gospels. In the final section, Venema attempts to address the concerns raised by the New Perspective with exegetical evidence and careful engagement with a variety of authors. In a number of places he recognises that there are valid points made by those he criticises and is willing to accept these contributions as well as challenge other points. It is unlikely that this will be the end of the discussion, but the irenic (and readable) nature of this book makes it an important contribution.

A revision of an older study by Francis Watson entitled, *Paul, Judaism and the Gentiles*,¹¹ Watson's is an interesting voice in the current debate regarding the New Perspective: he is a senior academic who has been quite outspoken in some of his criticisms of

this strand of biblical studies. This is mainly of interest to advanced theological students and lecturers.

Also relevant to this debate is Brian Vickers' doctoral thesis which has been published as *Jesus' Blood and Righteousness*.¹² Subtitled 'Paul's Theology of Imputation', it is highly relevant in the current discussion of this aspect of Paul's thought. Despite its origins as an academic thesis, the main body of the text is very readable and should not deter any serious reader. The occasional use of Greek and Hebrew terms in their original script can probably be worked round without difficulty. Although it is fundamentally an exegetical study, Vickers has included significant references to various confessional statements and also extensive footnotes which draw on ancient and modern theological reflections as well as recent NT scholarship. The tone is respectful but firm. As an aside, as a Scot, I was amused to read 'Carlisle, Scotland' in the bibliographical information for a book (page 74)!

Following on from his excellent study of the Spirit in Paul, Gordon Fee has now written a major study of *Pauline Christology*.¹³ The first part treats all the major passages in the NT letter by letter, while the second part is a group of synthetic studies: 'Christ, the Divine Savior', 'Jesus as Second Adam', etc. Throughout, Fee provides numerous exegetical insights and overall argues that Paul has a coherent Christology. Fee also has a delightful manner of expression and a level of credibility in the academy that allows him, at times, to make startling criticisms of the accepted methods and assumptions of academics which few could get away with! (See, for example, page 6 and footnote 16). This book also

contains some technical sections which assume a reasonable knowledge of Greek, but don't let that put you off reading this extremely important study.

Commentaries

One volume Bible commentaries have limitations and should not be regarded as the final authority in the process of doing exegesis, but they do have their value. This is particularly the case for preachers in situations where they cannot afford to have a full library. *The Africa Bible Commentary*¹⁴ is a new resource which has been written entirely by African scholars, taking account of the particular issues which face preachers and pastors in this great continent.

Although not a commentary proper, Charles H. Talbert has written a short study, *Reading the Sermon on the Mount*.¹⁵ Subtitled 'Character formation and ethical decision making in Matthew 5-7', one could expect a practically orientated study. The reality is that this short book is primarily an exegetical study. Particular attention is paid to issues of structure and comparative information from other ancient texts and there is a good deal of useful information presented in the concise comment. The 'ethical decision making' element is introduced in short sections at the end of the exegesis, headed '[chapter and verse reference] in Christian Decision Making'. These sections draw on the wider biblical canon for relevant material and provide some very brief (sometimes half a page) guidance on the use of the passage in question by a Christian. While Talbert is to be commended for seeking to apply the text, the main benefit of this study is in its exegetical gains and those who are seeking more

developed application will have to look elsewhere.

Craig Blomberg's, *From Pentecost to Patmos*.¹⁶ is a companion volume to his *Jesus and the Gospels* which is an excellent guide to the Gospels from an evangelical perspective. This volume shares many of the same qualities as the earlier one: a focus on what the biblical text says; measured and respectful evaluation of recent scholarship; helpful tables and other aids to understanding; graded bibliographies which will lead novices and more experienced readers into fresh reading materials. While Blomberg faced the challenge of dealing with a much greater variety of literature than in his earlier book, he has provided teachers and students with an excellent guide.

Ben Witherington has also attempted to introduce explicit contemporary application into his commentaries and his new 'socio-rhetorical' commentary on *1 and 2 Thessalonians*¹⁷ is no exception. Those who have used any of Witherington's many previous publications will know what to expect from this commentary: helpful, well-informed comment (with a particular emphasis on the background in ancient rhetoric); engagement with a good range of recent scholarly writings; imaginative section/chapter headings and a serious attempt to 'bridge the horizons' of the ancient text and the modern reader. On the latter score, Witherington provides much more substantial reflection than Talbert in his book mentioned above and, even where his view might not be shared, these sections provide a model and stimulus for personal application. While I find occasional points at which I would wish to differ from Witherington, I have never found reading his books to be without benefit

and I am happy to commend this commentary on demanding NT documents which have, until quite recently, been rather neglected by commentators. There have been two recent additions to the NICNT series by P. Towner and R. T. France.¹⁸ France's commentary on Matthew has all the qualities we have come to expect of his work: clear exposition with primary attention given to the meaning of the text, without neglecting reference to appropriate secondary literature. France has already written an excellent shorter commentary and an excellent introductory volume on Matthew, as well as a major commentary on Mark, so this really is his mature thought on the Gospel. It is well worth consulting. Also in the NICNT series, P. H. Towner has written a substantial commentary on *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*,¹⁹ having already written a shorter commentary and been a significant co-worker in the production of Howard Marshall's important ICC volume. The title of the commentary deliberately avoids the traditional 'Pastoral Epistles' description since Towner believes that this has hindered commentators from recognizing the distinctive contributions which each letter makes in its own right.

P. H. Davids provides a welcome new addition to the Pillar series with his volume on *The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude*.²⁰ This is a welcome addition to the relatively small range of resources on these letters. Unfortunately, many will regard Davids' decision on authorship to be the touchstone of this commentary's value. The generally excellent Word commentary by Richard Bauckham (published now some twenty-five years ago) was perhaps not given

the reception it deserved by evangelicals due to Bauckham's view that the letter is pseudepigraphical; a debatable decision which had little impact on Bauckham's treatment of the text itself. Davids recognizes that there are puzzling features in 2 Peter to the extent that Bauckham's decision is judged 'not unreasonable'. However, Davids believes that this is not the *only* reasonable position to take. He therefore adopts a cautious approach which does not seek to *prove* Petrine authorship, but recognizes that this is what the letter itself claims and argues that it is quite reasonable to accept this. The commentary itself is a valuable blend of background information, exegetical detail and theological reflection. There are also some occasional comments on practical application. It is good to see this helpful series progressing.

Ben Witherington, *Letters and Homilies for Hellenized Christians Vol 1*,²¹ has all the strengths you would expect. It is well worth reading. Two other companion volumes have appeared recently but I have not had an opportunity to see them yet.

A further two volumes in the Two Horizons commentary have been published: J. B. Green writes on 1 Peter and R. A. Reese writes on 2 Peter and Jude.²² These volumes continue to promote the aims of the series to provide both exegetical comment and theological reflection based on that exegesis in a single volume. They will be helpful for students and preachers as part of a wider range of resources.

General NT Studies

M. Bockmuehl, *Seeing the Word: Refocusing New Testament Study*.²³ This volume is part of a new series, *Studies in Theological Interpretation*. It includes various studies, several previously published, reflecting on the character of NT studies. It is a useful book for advanced students.

*The Bible and Homosexual Practice*²⁴ by Robert A. J. Gagnon, is an important resource for reflecting on contemporary ethics. Although it is now a few years old, I felt that it deserved inclusion in this article when I came across it. Gagnon provides extensive historical and exegetical foundations for upholding the traditional view that homosexual activity is not acceptable according to biblical teaching. Those who must deal with this important and sensitive pastoral issue should consult this valuable study.

David Crump has written a helpful blend of careful exegesis and pastoral insight in *Knocking on Heaven's Door: A New Testament Theology of Petitionary Prayer*.²⁵ This is a readable study which deserves to be read widely.

Conclusion

I leave my readers to consider how they should spend their time and their money in the face of an overwhelming array of literature. May the Lord grant that the books we read, whether in (reflective) agreement or (fair and loving) disagreement, press us to re-examine the authoritative texts of Scripture and may his Spirit lead us to viewpoints which may truly be described as biblical.

Recommendations:

For the teacher/student:

R. A. J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*;

G. D. Fee, *Pauline Christology*.

For the preacher/ pastor:

R. T. France, *Matthew (NICNT)*;

G. D. Fee, *Pauline Christology*.

For the interested general reader:

S. Jeffrey, M. Ovey and A. Sach, *Pierced for our Transgressions*;

D. Crump, *Knocking on Heaven's Door*.

1. Wheaton: Crossway, 2006.
2. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2006.
3. Leicester: IVP, 2007.
4. Oxford: Blackwell, 2006.
5. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006.
6. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005.
7. Peabody: Hendrickson, 2004-2007.
8. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006.
9. Revised edition. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008.
10. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2006.
11. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007.
12. Wheaton: Crossway, 2006.
13. Peabody: Hendrickson, 2007.
14. Nairobi: Word Alive, 2006.
15. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004.
16. Leicester: Apollos, 2006.
17. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006.
18. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006.
19. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006.
20. Grand Rapids/Leicester: Eerdmans/Apollos, 2006.
21. Leicester: Apollos, 2006.
22. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007.
23. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006.
24. Nashville: Abingdon, 2001.
25. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006.



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