
The Gospel of God

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This is a summary of the contents of the five papers prepared for the BEC Study Conference, the theme of which was 'The Gospel of God'. This took place from 23rd to 25th March 1987 at High Leigh, Hoddesden, Herts.

The Context of the Gospel Rev. Sidney Garland

This paper deals with what has become known as **contextualization**.

We only really know what Scripture says when we relate it to our world. 'To fail to relate the Scriptures and the Gospel to our context is to fail in living out the Gospel and it is also to fail in communicating the Gospel to the multitudes of the lost in their particular contexts throughout the world.'

Three different contexts must be kept in mind. First, there must be a sensitivity to the history and culture of the biblical writers. Secondly, our own presuppositions influence the results of our exegesis. The third context arises when we communicate the message to a receptor in a different culture.

The concept of contextualization, which first came to the fore in 1972, takes further the previously gained insight with respect to the importance of developing indigenous local churches. For example, whereas indigenization views culture as static and unchanging, contextualization takes account of such factors as secularity, technology and 'The Marxist analysis of the struggles for human justice in many countries of the Third World'.

Some models of contextualization endanger the Gospel itself. The **Dialectic** model supposes that the historical document cannot provide universal truth but only the possibility of common experience. We must look for the Gospel behind the gospels and contextualization becomes a question of interacting with the present historical contexts to arrive at our Gospel. The authority of Scripture is lost and man becomes his own authority. The **Liberation** model arises from this dialectic approach and starts with a prior ideological commitment to the oppressed in their various contexts and struggles. This ideology (usually Marxism) becomes the hermeneutical key for understanding biblical texts and, again, the authority of Scripture is lost, the Bible being used merely as a book of illustrations of God's activity in history.

The approach of Liberation theology to Scripture is reflected in its use of the Exodus narrative. The exodus of Israel from Egypt is viewed as an example of what God is doing for all of humanity i.e. His 'universal salvific will'. Interpretation majors on the political activity of the people in achieving liberation and God is regarded as on the side of all oppressed peoples, inspiring movements of protest and violent revolution.

Such interpretation should alert evangelicals to their failure to do justice to

such factors as the political dimensions of the Gospel and corporate sin. However, the New Testament points to a new exodus fulfilled in the life and death of the Lamb (Luke 9:31), bringing in a new age which the original exodus from Egypt only foreshadowed (1 Cor. 10:11). Also, using the Exodus story to justify violent revolution fails to take account of 'the intrusion of judgement curse' which took place at that time and fails to note the NT stress on the inadequacy of that liberation. 'The Liberation view of sin is dangerously shallow.'

The **Accommodation** model of contextualization takes seriously the need for a missionary to accommodate to the people he is evangelizing and finds support for this in the approach of Paul (1 Cor. 9:20-22). However, the Roman Catholic policy of accommodation (embracing local religious practices) has led to syncretism. Conversely, the **Opposition** model has emphasised separation from the surrounding culture, leading to the loss of every effective channel of communication.

The **Transformation** model, pioneered by Charles Kraft, is based on developments in the field of Bible translation, where the aim is now 'dynamic equivalence' rather than formal correspondence. Kraft applies this to the contextualization debate, 'insisting that it is the message not the form which is important, and that in fact to preserve the message the form must change'. The problem is how do we separate form and content and how do we maintain the Scriptures as our only rule of faith and practice? Kraft has much to teach us but his approach to Scripture brings the danger of a relativism which undermines its authority.

The **Possessio** model advocated by J.H. Bavinck, warns us that, because of the all-prevailing nature of sin, many cultural practices are inseparably related to false religion. However, there is good in cultures as a result of God's common grace and, as the Gospel relates to each cultural context, it is to take possession of the entire life of the people and every area of their culture. Christ can renew and re-establish the distorted and the deteriorated, giving new meaning and direction. Whilst there are great dangers in the application of this model, it is very useful for developing a biblical contextualization.

Our task, then, is to be involved in the effort to contextualize. The apostles tailored the exact content of the message to the particular circumstances of their audience and the best preachers, such as Lloyd-Jones, have always engaged in such 'incarnational preaching'. We must not lose the Gospel in an effort to separate its content from its cultural forms but must regard it as a multi-faceted diamond, with different aspects relevant to different cultural situations. This raises the issue of **Multiperspectivalism**, delineated by Professor Harvie Conn, who argues that looking at more than one facet of the diamond helps us to see the whole all the better. In this connection, theology is a dynamic, not a completed process.

So then, the development of a contextual theology must include certain perspectives. The situational perspective views man as caught up in the history of Salvation and involves applying the Scriptures to the great variety of

cultures and situations experienced. The existential perspective takes account of the fact that our spiritual condition and maturity have a significant bearing upon our understanding and practice of the Gospel. Above all, the normative perspective brings before us the fundamental question of the role of the Bible in the contextualizing process. In this respect, we will ensure that our theology is a biblical theology, a covenant theology (involving covenant obedience) and an applied theology which avoids all unnecessary 'offence' (*skandalon*) whilst manifesting the true skandalon (Jesus Christ) which a person must overcome in order to come to faith. Furthermore, we will challenge men and women to submit to the Lordship of Christ, necessarily opposing certain cultural features, such as ritual prostitution in the Third World and sexual promiscuity in the West. We will also engage in 'incarnational witness' (John 20:21, 17:18). Finally, we will encourage the church in each culture of the world to work out (scripturally) its own theology, with a pattern of life which expresses itself in a 'contextualized form of worship' and meaningful social activity.

The Content of the Gospel Prof. Archie Boyd

This paper considers certain key Scriptures concerning the Gospel.

In **Mark 1:1**, the Gospel is described as 'the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God'. There are those who would understand the genitive ('of Jesus') as meaning that the reference is to the Gospel Jesus preached. Another possibility is that this is a genitive of origin, the reference being to 'the Gospel that originated with Jesus'. However, bearing in mind Mark's use of *arche* ('beginning'), and taking this verse as a title for the whole book, we are reminded of what Luke says in Acts 1:1, 'where he describes his first book (his Gospel) setting out what Jesus began to do and teach'. It is therefore appropriate to understand the phrase in Mark 1:1 as meaning, 'the Gospel **concerning** Jesus Christ, the Son of God'. Mark is in accord with Paul in Romans 1:1-3, who describes the Gospel as 'of God' in the sense of origin (cf. Mark 1:14, and 'concerning' (*peri*) His Son.

This is important, since this use of the objective genitive by Mark calls our attention to the content of the Gospel as summarised in the designations Jesus Christ, Son of God. The pages that follow (in Mark) give us 'a presentation that is an exposition of these titles, and an exposition that is indeed Gospel'.

In harmony with Mark 1:1 is Romans 1:1ff (see above). The two words *kata sarka* ('according to (the) flesh', v.4) set before us the weakness and humiliation involved in the fulfilment of the promises concerning the Son of David. However, Paul is saying that the Son of God who became the seed of David lost nothing by all that was involved in that but, without laying aside that nature, has been appointed (*horizo*, v.4) to the place of dominion exercised through the Holy Spirit. This is in complete harmony with Peter's preaching in Acts 2 (note verse 36). For Paul and Peter there is no Messiahship without humiliation and suffering. The name 'Jesus Christ' does the unthinkable and juxtaposes the cross and exalted Messiahship.

All the above indicates that the Gospel is not just the revelation of some eternal principle. Rather God himself in the person of his Son, incarnate as

Jesus, acted in history in fulfilment of his own promises. **Matthew 4:23** refers to 'the Gospel of the Kingdom' (cf. Matt. 9:35 and Luke 8:1). Through the parable of the sower it is clear that the word of God (Luke 8:11) is equivalent to the word of the Kingdom (Matt. 13:18). Philip is spoken of as 'preaching the things concerning the Kingdom of God' (Acts 8:31). In Acts we have witness from both Luke and Paul that Paul's Gospel was the Gospel of the Kingdom (see Acts 28:23-31). Throughout the New Testament the Gospel is presented as the Gospel of the Kingdom.

Jesus and the early preachers were obviously using language which had some meaning for the hearers. Although their conceptions of the Kingdom were wrong, Jesus was confirming that it was not wrong to expect a Kingdom. The Kingdom had drawn near or come in such a way that the appropriate response was repentance and belief. That was his Gospel.

The description of the Gospel as 'The Gospel of the Kingdom' is comprehensive. It points to **fulfilment**, indicating the coming to pass of what God promised, as a present reality (see Mark 1:15). It is **theocentric**. The Kingdom is what God himself has done. It speaks of the **exercise of God's authority and rule**. Primarily, the Kingdom of God is the divine kingly dominion exercising itself. Furthermore, **the Kingdom has come in the person of Jesus as the Messiah**. John the Baptist pointed away from himself (Matt. 3:11). Jesus points to himself (Matt. 12:28, see also Acts 8:12). It is because he is the Messiah that the Kingdom has come. The concepts of Kingdom of God and Messiah are inseparable.

Two further dimensions of 'the Gospel of the Kingdom' are important. There is **two-fold significance**. Isaiah 61 (cf. Luke 4:16-21) indicates that the year of the Lord's favour is the day of vengeance of our God. This two-fold note is found in the Baptist's preaching (Matt. 3:11,12). It is seen in Jesus' ministry. The coming of the Kingdom in Jesus marks the fulfilment of the promises of salvation and judgement for all who are the enemies of the King. Finally, the Kingdom is **present and future**. It is a present reality but not a perfected reality. The latter lies in the future. The same term *epiphaneia* is used of both the first coming and the second coming of Christ (2 Tim. 1:10 cf. 1 Tim. 6:14). It is more accurate to speak of one coming in two stages. At the consummation, the two-fold aspect of the Kingdom will be finally manifested, the redeemed will have resurrection bodies and these will be 'the transformation, renewal and bringing into harmony of all creation'. It is **this** coming of the Kingdom that Jesus taught us to pray for.

In **Acts 20:24,25** Paul speaks of 'testifying to the Gospel of God's grace' as one and the same with preaching the Kingdom. In testifying to this Gospel, Paul taught from the OT Scriptures. It is this Gospel of the **grace** of God that Jesus referred to when He spoke to the woman of Samaria of 'the gift (*ten dorean*) of God'. Luke uses the same terms for the Gospel in Acts 14:3. See also 1 Peter 1:13.

The description of the Gospel as 'the Gospel of God's grace' focusses attention on the sovereign initiative of love in answer to the sin situation. In this realm,

Scripture presents an antithesis between law and grace. On the other hand, the Gospel of God's grace honours the law and brings about a new obedience (Romans 8:3,4). The gift of grace is to be received by faith — faith in Jesus Christ, not in the abstract. It is in Jesus Christ that this grace has come (John 1:17), this grace being mightily at work in Jesus' obedience and atoning sacrifice. With Christ, as the fruits of his work, all the gifts that come together constitute the salvation of God.

In **1 Corinthians 15:1-4**, Paul states that the Gospel is the authoritative tradition. The verbs *paralambano* (to receive) and *paradidomi* (to deliver), with the *gnorizo* ('I make known') of verse 1, speak of what has been given and received as authoritative and so definable and unalterable. The Gospel, 'is a clearly delimited body of truth concerning the Christ and what he has accomplished and experienced and why'. Here, in counteracting error, Paul's emphasis is on Christ's resurrection. However, Paul's point is that Christ's resurrection on the third day was 'from the dead' and takes all its meaning and significance from what that death was. This Christ is the content of the Gospel, here and throughout Scripture.

The Authentication of the Gospel *Rev. Neil C. Richards*

This paper asks how God demonstrates the truth of the Gospel to people.

It is presupposed that fallen man is naturally hostile to the Gospel and only a sovereign omnipotent God can bring men and women to acknowledge its truth. The question arises — are miracles necessary today to authenticate the Gospel and does their presence assure its success?

Miracles involve an extraordinary intervention of God's power. Christ's miracles were signs of the inauguration of the Kingdom of God (Luke 11:20). They were also his credentials (Acts 2:22; John 20:30,31). They served to authenticate his person and claims. Such miracles did not of themselves produce faith. The Pharisees did not deny that Jesus worked miracles but attributed them to the devil (Mark 3:22). The miracles were effective signs only to those who had eyes to see and hearts to receive. Where faith is absent, miracles do not achieve their purpose.

Despite the miracles, our Lord's emphasis was on the preaching of the Word (Mark 1:38). At the close of his ministry, in John 14—17, Jesus emphasises the need to keep, and live by, his words. This is the focus of the ministry of the promised Holy Spirit. Then there is the reference to greater works in John 14:11,12. John Wimber thinks this means that we should all expect to work miracles — miracles greater than Christ's. The apostles did not perform wonders greater than those performed by Jesus. Rather, through the coming of the Holy Spirit, the newly-established church was equipped to spread the Gospel through the world. Now there were myriads of conversions instead of hundreds, pointing up the antithesis between the humbled and the exalted Christ. The endings of Matthew, Luke and John (there are special problems associated with the end of Mark's Gospel) indicate that the preaching of the Gospel, not healing, is the ongoing commission of the Church.

Miracles served to authenticate the apostles and their message (2 Cor. 12:12). The question is, do the miracles which authenticated Jesus and Gospel truth have the same value to us who did not see them take place? We cannot use them to prove the divine authority of the Scripture which records them. However, as we read the Scriptures, faith is confirmed by the miracles (John 20:30,31). If no other miracles ever took place than those recorded in the Scriptures, especially the resurrection of Christ, we would have abundant signs and wonders to confirm the Gospel to us.

Are contemporary miracles essential to the success of a Gospel ministry? John Wimber advocates 'power evangelism', that is, Gospel witness accompanied by miraculous signs. He sees the clashes between the Kingdom of God and Satan's Kingdom as 'power-encounters' which have the effect of opening unbelievers to the Gospel and so lead to church growth. He contrasts Paul's eloquent preaching at Athens, giving meagre results, with the successful 'power evangelism' engaged in at Corinth. He argues that miracles make evangelism more effective, often making persuasive arguments unnecessary.

An evaluation of Wimber's teaching is called for.

First, Christianity is supernatural through and through, quite apart from miracles. Paul speaks of the **Gospel** as 'the power of God' (Rom. 1:16 cf 1 Cor. 1:18,24). 'The Gospel is not simply a message about the power of God but to all who believe it is the mighty power of God at work delivering them from the guilt and power of sin and working mightily in them to sanctify and preserve them and bring them to glory.'

Secondly, the triumph of the Kingdom is primarily seen in the liberation and transformation of men and women by the power of the Gospel. It is not that healing miracles and exorcisms do not display the power of the Kingdom, but God's normal way with regard to bodily weakness, illness and death is to enable us to bear with them and to triumph over them by grace (2 Cor. 12:9). Furthermore, **thirdly**, the preacher must have the right role model. In certain senses of course — e.g. with respect to holiness and wisdom — Christ is the supreme model. However, there were unique aspects to his ministry. It led up to the cross and also gave a foretaste of the age to come. Miracles were an essential part of his Messianic mission. The lives and labours of the apostles also provide a pattern for us. However, as eye-witnesses of the resurrected Christ, exercising foundational ministries, they too were unique. We cannot argue from them for an ongoing 'signs and wonders' ministry. We find our role model in 2 Timothy 4, where Paul charges Timothy to 'preach the word ... in season and out of season'.

Fourthly, the Scripture possesses intrinsic divine authority simply because it is God's Word. Calvin described the Scripture as 'self-authenticating'. Despite this, an inward work of the Holy Spirit is necessary because of the blindness caused by sin, not to impart authority to Scripture, but to bring people to a persuasion of its truth and authority. The Gospel is 'the pure message of Scripture'. In it, God speaks (2 Cor. 5:20). What is needed for it to be received freely is not miracles but the inward renewing power of the Spirit. Similarly,

fifthly, miracles do not create faith nor do they necessarily signify grace. Faith results from this inward work of the Holy Spirit. The instrument the Spirit uses is the Word of God (Rom. 10:17). Miracles do not guarantee godliness (Matt. 7:21-23).

Sixthly, the greatest revivals in the history of the Church have not been characterised by an abundance of miracles. This is inconsistent with the idea that 'power evangelism' is normative and the means of rapid church growth. **Seventhly**, turning to the contemporary situation, most attempts to work miracles seem to fail and this 'hit and miss method' seems very different from the miracles recorded in the NT. Also, much that is called miraculous, such as a measure of restoration, is unworthy of the term 'miracle'. When God does indeed work in extraordinary ways let us not focus on such things but on Gospel living and on the Gospel's transforming power.

In conclusion, we must not lose sight of the greatness and power of the Gospel itself, as 'power evangelism' tends to do. The great works of the Holy Spirit are regeneration and sanctification. Holy lives are still the Gospel's greatest argument.

The Application of the Gospel *Mr. Paul Helm*

This paper discusses the way the Gospel is presented in preaching, with particular reference to the issue of the 'free offer'.

Two general comments need to be made. First, preaching and hearing both take place in the sight of God. We must not think of the presentation of the Gospel in terms of technique. Also, the central ideas of the Gospel presuppose human accountability. It is, largely the erosion of belief in these things that has made the application of the Gospel difficult in Britain today. Secondly, we must not think that, in presenting the Gospel, there is a 'mix' of duties which ensures success. Such success is in the hand of a sovereign Lord. Now certain theses can be considered.

First, Scripture indicates the necessity of a 'law-work' in sinners, producing conviction of sin, but it does not isolate it in a rigid way. Many have experienced a separate period of conviction of sin before penitence and faith but, in Scripture, there is considerable variety in preaching and conversion experience (cf. Lydia and the Philippian jailer). It is difficult, in practice, to separate law and Gospel in preaching and if a 'law-work' were clearly prescribed as necessary for conversion it would amount to an addition to the Gospel, undermining its freeness. However, **secondly**, a 'law-work' is necessary, not as a condition to be fulfilled, but because of what the Gospel is. The Gospel is for sinners and sin is lawlessness. Coming to Jesus is coming to him as the Saviour from sin.

Thirdly, conviction of sin may occur through aspects of divine truth which conceptually imply or are implied by the law. These include the sinless perfection of Christ, manifest when his person and work are preached, and the doctrine of the atonement.

Fourthly, Galatians 3:24 does not give even limited support to the idea of a

'law-work'. Paul is arguing historically, not experientially. Because the law came **after** the promise, it is impossible for the law to overturn or supercede the promise of grace in Christ given to Abraham. It served as a temporary schoolmaster for Israel and continues in force without this function.

Fifthly, the Gospel is to be presented with a view to bringing about a real change in the relation of the unconverted sinner to God. In this respect, the approach of those who hold to eternal justification is defective. Although God has eternally decreed the justification of the elect in Christ, Scripture presents the justification of believers as something which happens in time, involving a change in a person's relationship to God. Preaching aims to effect this change, through the Holy Spirit. If a preacher holds to eternal justification, his preaching becomes merely descriptive; the offer of the Gospel becomes impossible.

Sixthly, the Gospel is not to be presented as if the hearers have power to turn to God of their own accord. They are not 'in a position of equilibrium, poised to choose for Christ or against Him'. Divine power must accompany the preaching. From the above, the preacher of the Gospel must steer a middle course. Preaching must neither fall short of 'offering Christ' nor must it go beyond it. It is thus necessary to focus on the free offer.

Seventhly, the Gospel is to be offered freely in preaching. There are no conditions which a person has to fulfil before he comes to Christ. If the free offer is denied, people are inevitably turned away from Christ as the sole sufficient Saviour and want to mix Christ with something else. Of course, all the other chief elements of preaching the Gospel must be in their place and there must be a God-given recognition of need if a person is to come to Christ. However, to advocate that a person must be **aware** of such a change in order to come to Christ is to move in the direction of legalism. The free offer of the Gospel prevents the would-be believer looking to himself, instead of Christ, for salvation, and is the appropriate counterpart to the doctrine of justification by faith alone.

Eighthly, the offer of the Gospel does not imply that a person has the power to come to Christ by himself. Some object that the free offer implies that faith, God's gracious gift (Eph. 2:8), is a duty. But the antithesis between something being a gracious gift of God and something being a duty is a false one. More seriously, some object that calling men to come to Christ implies they have a natural ability to do so. However, the free offer is only one element in a total Gospel ministry which includes for example, teaching about the bondage of the will.

Ninthly, the offer of the Gospel is genuinely and sincerely made. 'How can God offer his grace sincerely to those whom he knows are destined never in fact to receive it?' Various responses to this have been made in Reformed circles. Some have recourse to the distinction between the secret and revealed will of God. Others suppose that God has real desires which may nevertheless be overridden in the divine mind by other considerations. J.I. Packer argues that, whilst it is the preacher's duty both to offer the Gospel and to believe in

divine sovereignty, it is not his duty to reconcile these duties. However, it is more satisfactory to argue that the free offer is necessary because of the necessary ignorance of both the preacher and his unbelieving hearers as to whether or not those hearers will be finally saved. God's will is that people are saved by the application of saving truth to mind and will, not by a direct revelation as to their election. Only preaching that offers the Gospel freely points the sinner unambiguously to Christ.

Lastly, there are differing degrees of freeness with which the Gospel may be offered. It is one thing to say, for example, 'All who are heavy-laden may come to Christ'. It is another thing to say, 'God desires your salvation'. It is one thing to say, for example, 'Christ died for the world'. It is another thing to say, 'Christ died for you'. The latter statements in both cases invite responses which might undermine true preaching. The more moderate statements can be justified readily from Scripture (e.g. Matt. 11:28).

The Response to the Gospel *Rev. Keith R. Walker*

This paper is concerned with the *ordo salutis* — the order of Salvation. In seeking to explore the response which the Gospel demands, certain matters may be highlighted.

First, **the Word of Life and Regeneration**. The Puritans usually stressed God's work in conversion, the soul remaining passive until regeneration. Others have argued that in conversion man is active but that the Spirit of God is the only active cause in regeneration. Some have distinguished regeneration from new birth.

In John 1:12,13, the verb '*gennao*' points to divine monergism in spiritual 'birth' or, rather, 'begetting'. The language of begetting again seems more to the fore in John 3:1-8. Perhaps the ambiguity present in '*anōthen*' v.3, (meaning 'anew' or 'from above') is deliberate. This begetting is also qualified, v.5, as 'of water and Spirit'. Some connect 'water' with purification, others with procreation — for example, the expression may mean 'spiritual seed'. Others link 'water' with Christian baptism. Water is a prominent theme early in John (1:33; 2:6; 4:13, etc.). From such references it appears that water may be used as a metaphor for the Spirit. The idea of purification is also present. The Holy Spirit begets to as new powerful and purified life. Turning to Paul, in Titus 3:5, all the features of Johannine regeneration seem to be present. In Ephesians 5:26, the reference is macrocosmic, but it points to the role of the Word.

Now the Puritans often regarded regeneration as a work of the Spirit without means. What is the place of the Word in regeneration? In James 1:18, the writer seems to be reflecting our Lord's teaching found in John (cf. John 1:13). Even more clearly, Peter has Johannine regeneration in mind. His use of '*gennao*' (James uses '*apokueo*') suggests begetting. In 1 Peter 1:23-2:3, Peter's point is that believers are to obey the truth of that Word through which they were born again — that Word which is imperishable.

From these Scriptures, we can relate the Word of the Gospel to regeneration.

Through the Holy Spirit, the Gospel is a creative fiat, working new life at the deepest level of man's being. There is an aspect of regeneration below the level of consciousness, but the preaching of the Word is indispensable to regeneration.

Secondly, **the Word of God and Conversion**. The Bible teaches us to view conversion as that response which a man makes inwardly and outwardly to the Gospel (Acts 3:19 et al). 'The Word of God having been spoken by the Spirit secretly, below the level of his self-awareness, this man is now both able and willing to respond to that Word.' Consider Acts 26:16-20. Here, illumination is achieved through the Word preached (linked with the inward call of the Spirit) resulting in **turning** and, in consequence, remission of sins. This conversion involves living repentance and faith in Christ (Acts 26:20 and 18).

Modern evangelism studies the relationship between the outward call and the human response. We are tempted to stress the necessity of regeneration. However, we are to look for a response from God which enables a response from man. We need to think not only of how we may bring men to God in our preaching but of how we may bring God to men.

We must consider the response we are to call for and look for. From Acts (2:38; 10:43 et al) two themes are prominent — repentance and faith. Prominence is given to faith (Acts 4:4 et al). There is a theological priority of faith. However, faith disassociated from repentance is not saving faith. Yet the necessity of repentance with faith can be preached in a 'legal' way. To prevent this, we need to realise that the crucial thing about faith is its **object** — Christ and him crucified. Galatians 3 is full of 'faith', as the means of justification — but it is equally full of **Christ**. Furthermore, the apostolic preaching of repentance was linked intrinsically to the preaching of Christ (e.g. Acts 2:36-38).

Confession must also be seen in relation to Christ and him crucified. See Romans 10:9ff and Matt. 10:32. In these passages the subject of confession is Christ and there is a high Christology. So, true confession expresses not so much 'my faith' as faith in terms of its object — a faith evidenced by the fact that confession is made in the context of the known risk of opposition. Despite this, confession arises from the heart as part of the dynamic of the Gospel, echoing the preaching which was heard, leading to the same Holy Spirit-initiated process in the hearts of new hearers.

Thirdly, **Preaching the Word for Decisions**. A deficient presentation of the Gospel leads to a deficient faith, repentance and confession. The question of how we preach with respect to man's response raises the issue of the 'altar call'.

There is a difference between preaching for decisions and decisionism. John 3:36 cries out for a **decision**. However, common to all **decisionism** is the conviction that it is man's act of faith which saves him.

We must ask whether a particular type of altar call tends to be decisionist or not. We must remember that works-salvation is 'the natural man's heresy', and be careful lest our practice does not counteract this. Equally, enquirers'

meetings may be a necessity, e.g. when there are large numbers to be counselled. We should bear in mind that Acts 8:4-25 appears to indicate that there was a deficiency in the response of Philip's hearers in Samaria (not only Simon). Simon had a mechanical view of religious merit and power. There was great religious excitement abroad, probably a counterpart to Jewish Apocalyptic expectation.

To be explicit, any call to an action, supposed to signify coming to Christ, can lead to decisionism. An invitation to an after-meeting may be valuable, but pressure must not be placed on the enquirer. What Dr. Kendall calls a 'public pledge' — making public one's conversion by some physical action — may not seem to be decisionism. However, people may mistake the nature of the appeal being made. The 'public pledge' lacks the content essential to confession and does not seem to fit the category of confession in which Dr. Kendall places it. He also argues that it allows many people to seek the Lord who aren't sure why they are 'going forward'. This sounds like a confession of confusion. Such a 'public pledge' does not have the stigma which baptism originally had. The potential risks are great.

Fourthly, **Preaching the Gospel in the Sacrament of Baptism.** Does the Bible prescribe a physical action which is significant of the individual having come to faith? Yes and No!

The Reformed view has been that the Sacraments are 'visible preaching'. The sacraments signify Christ crucified. They speak of his death and resurrection and only thus of ours (Rom. 6). Baptism speaks of atonement and only therefore, does it speak of regeneration and cleansing.

Baptism is the act of the Church. It is an affirmation by the Church through the one who baptises. Only because baptism is 'visible preaching' is it 'visible faith'. The Church and the one consciously submitting to baptism stand together to proclaim Christ. Baptism is therefore, a public recognition of the faith of the baptisand as a credible faith, pastorally discerned in a way which, though not infallible, is a long way from 'studied gullibility'. This may be contrasted with the 'public pledge'.

Baptism then, points to Christ and the atonement, the spring of regeneration. 'It points to Christ crucified, the object of faith, the pivot of repentance, the subject of confession'.

This summary was written before the conference itself took place and cannot reflect the supplementary development, the nuances and dimensions which emerged from the extended discussion which followed the presentation of the papers. Even the mere preparation of the summary however was a stimulating exercise. May we all, whether able to attend the conference or not, be fired with a new commitment to believe, live out and preach 'the Gospel of God'.

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